

TIME, MEMORY, AND JUSTICE IN CHILEAN AND ECUADORIAN  
DOCUMENTARY FILM

by

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Time, Memory, and Justice in Chilean and Ecuadorian Documentary Film

*Time, Memory, and Justice in Chilean and Ecuadorian Documentary Film* studies the relationship between a shift in temporality and emerging forms of political agency in Latin American documentary film. What became of the leftist New Latin American Cinema (1950s-80s) when repressive dictatorships, and then neoliberal politics, foreclosed the path to their alternative visions of the future? In this dissertation, I argue that for the generations of filmmakers working over the last 20 years, reassessment of the past—and the *telling* of the past—has become strategic ground to reclaim a sense of identity and the possibility of a future not over determined by earlier philosophical questions. While institutional measures paint the dictatorial past as distant, as if it had been replaced by neoliberal governments, documentary films *Nostalgia de la luz* (2010), *Abuelos* (2010), *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* (2013) and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* (2011) invite the spectator to see the disappeared, and the legacy of the dictatorships, as still very much present on ethical, emotional and material levels. Through cinematic reflexivity, archival remediation, embodied aesthetics, a focus on the material world, an appeal to affect, non-linear montage, and the incorporation of intimate family archives, these historical memory films move beyond the desire to prove the human rights violations.

Instead, they question a concept of history based on the event and offer a subjective perspective that engages the spectator in an ethical relationship with collective history. By bringing into conversation the Pinochet Dictatorship in Chile and the Cold War period in Ecuador, and by focusing on alternative constructions of time (cosmic, geologic and biological), this research provokes a rereading of the shift toward neoliberalism through repressive governments. In addition to contributing to an emerging environmental humanities discourse, engaging these narratives of time destabilizes the Cold War narratives of democracy as synonymous with justice, and dictatorship as justified by the threat of communism. In their place, these films, and my analysis of them, foregrounds the push for market society as a historic impetus for violence in the region.

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# CHAPTER I:

## INTRODUCTION—TIME, MEMORY, AND JUSTICE

“Life experience and really just learning to chill and take a look back. Think about what you are saying. Other people are more important than you ever could imagine.”  
—Charles Plescia

Documentary film can be a very powerful way to take a look back. As Chilean filmmaker Patricio Guzmán asserts, documentary is like the family photo album of the times: “Un país sin cine documental es como una familia sin álbum de fotografías”<sup>1</sup> (Ruffinelli *Patricio Guzmán*). Like a family photo album, documentary cinema can create a moment in which we recognize the innumerable traces of the past in our present, and at the same time, ask ourselves, what or who has been lost of those moments? Especially in the context of shared historical trauma these questions have major ethical significance. Cultural and historical accounts of state-sanctioned violence of the Cold War period are often restricted to the dictatorships of the Southern Cone context. Documentary films can extend discussions of this repressive period to a broader Latin American legacy of violence that includes the colonial period, the nation-building period, and the democratic governments that followed the Cold War dictatorships.

In this dissertation, I analyze documentary films from Ecuador and Chile made between 2010-2013. *Nostalgia de la Luz* (2010, Chilean dir. Patricio Guzmán), *Abuelos* (2010, Ecuadorian dir. Carla Dávila Valencia), *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* (2013,

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<sup>1</sup> “A country without documentary cinema is like a family without a family photo album.” (Patricio Guzmán)

Ecuadorian dir. Manolo Sarmiento and Puerto Rican dir. Lisandra Rivera) and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* (2011 Ecuadorian dir. María Fernanda Restrepo) contribute to historical memory of state-sponsored violence during the Cold War period and its contemporary legacy. In the case of the Ecuadorian films, Ecuadorian history is tied into a larger Latin American narrative that has tended to overlook the role of the country's politics in regional dynamics.

I argue that by broadening and deepening the lenses through which violence is analyzed, the films in this corpus establish a critique of the concept of history as progress. In each of the films, eco-critical aesthetics and self-reflexive remediation of archival documents construct memory of the disappeared of the Cold War period as a palimpsest of multiple spatiotemporal sites of violence. By adopting a social and environmental approach to contextualize a deep history of violence, along with more traditional approaches that consider trauma and mourning, these films strive to rebuild the connection between the individual and the collective past, as well as the connection between the individual and the environment. This approach to filmmaking reveals a shift in the experience of time and emerging forms of political agency in Latin America. In each of my chapters, through close readings and comparative analysis embedded within a detailed historical context, I argue that the filmic exercise of memory is an act of resistance to neoliberal forgetting and selective remembering. My research engages with debates in film theory that explore the ways audiovisual technologies both shape and reflect experiences of time. By connecting the representation of time to the ways in which U.S.-backed repressive dictatorships in Latin America opened the doors to a neoliberal

economy and abuse of the environment, my work extends these questions to pressing debates in contemporary politics and environmental humanism.

Three of the four films I analyze are made by victims of state-sponsored violence or family members of victims. Patricio Guzmán, director of *Nostalgia de la luz*, was detained and then forced into exile by the repressive Pinochet Dictatorship. He has dedicated his life to making films that contribute to historical memory of the Allende years and the dream that the Popular Unity project represented, as well as documenting and speaking out against the human rights violations committed under the dictatorship. *Nostalgia de la luz* is the first film in a poetic trilogy focused on memory, the natural world, and human rights violations in Chile. Carla Valencia's *Abuelos* is a poetic exercise of memory in honor of her grandfathers—Remo Dávila, a holistic doctor from Ecuador, and Juan Valencia, a committed member of the Popular Unity Party who was assassinated in the first months of the dictatorship. María Fernanda Restrepo, in her film *Con mi corazón en Yambo*, tells the story of her family's devastating loss when her two teenage brothers were murdered by the Ecuadorian police in 1988. The film documents the family's fight to speak out despite the government's disturbing coverup of the crime. Restrepo strives to do justice on behalf of the memory of her brothers by making known the Ecuadorian state's history of human rights violations. Lisandra Rivera and Manolo Sarmiento, the directors of the fourth film, *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* are friends of the victims of state-sponsored violence—the children of Jaime and Martha Roldós, the Ecuadorian president and first lady who died in a plane crash under highly tense and suspect circumstances in 1981. In the story of Roldós, Rivera and Sarmiento find an



unresolved loss that marks a family, a generation, a nation and an era. Each of the films in the corpus undertakes the task of keeping disappeared loved-ones and revered ideals from being folded into a historical discourse that erases them altogether or binds them within the narrative of progress by branding them as either criminal/s, unreasonable idealists, untouchable heroes or the victims of depoliticized accidents. While *Abuelos* and *Nostalgia de la luz*'s framing of the persistent legacy of the past through the natural world (the cosmos, the geological, the biological) politicizes the memory of the disappeared by rendering tangible the rippling effects of slow violence, the innovative uses of archival materials in *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* (Rivera and Sarmiento, 2013) and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* (Restrepo 2011) destabilizes the neoliberal narrative of democracy as synonymous with justice.

#### Contemporary Latin American Documentary Film and the Legacy of New Latin American Cinema

In Latin America, film has played a prominent role in national and pan-Latin American conversations around human rights and social justice since the 1950s. From the 1950s to 1980s, cinema was the eye and arm of the Latin American leftist movement. Latin American filmmakers and philosophers proposed a "New Cinema," one that rejected U.S. and European imperialism and responded with particularly Latin American content and form. The so-called "underdevelopment" of the region imposed by the colonial and neocolonial power dynamics would become their unique form of expression, valuable in and of itself instead of in comparison with Hollywood and European film (King 66). New Latin American Cinema questioned the persistence of poverty, the legacy

of colonialism and the imposition of a ruling class that looked to Europe and the United States for its vision of progress. Several instrumental NLAC filmmakers studied in Italy's Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in the early 1950s (Fernando Birri, Julio García Espinosa, among others). In fact, many film historians consider New Latin American Cinema an evolution of Italian neorealism in Latin American contexts (Schroeder 90). Latin American film scholar Paul Schroeder asserts that NLAC can be understood as "the unfolding of an extraordinary generation of filmmakers whose collective work became differentiated as circumstances changed: first under the influence of Italian neorealism, then by the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, and finally by their struggles (real and symbolic) against authoritarian fatherlands" (Schroeder 92, 93). This generation of filmmakers participated actively in revolutionary causes from the Cuban Revolution and the Popular Unity Party in Chile to the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua.

In the political stage of the Cold War that placed Latin American socialist projects at the center of the battlefield between U.S.-led capitalism and Soviet-led communism, these political projects were, in practical terms, defeated. Under the dictatorships of the 1970s and 80s, neoliberal projects gained a hegemonic status at the expense of the anti-imperialist ideals of New Latin American Cinema. Many of the New Latin American Cinema directors such as Patricio Guzmán, Ezequiel "Pino" Solanas, Miguel Littín, Raúl Ruiz, Marilú Mallet, Angelina Vásquez, Valeria Sarmiento and Mario Handler were exiled or forced to halt production. Others such as Raymundo Gleyzer, Jorge Müller and Carmen Bueno were assassinated by authoritarian governments. Therefore, within Latin American documentary film, the past represents not only disillusionment, but also

trauma. Some of the iconic films of New Latin American Cinema include *Hora de los hornos* (1968), *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968), *Me gustan los estudiantes* (1968), *Tire dié* (1960), *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (1964), *Batalla de Chile* (1975), *Yawar Mallku* (1969), *Chircales* (1972). Unlike the films I analyze, these New Latin American Cinema projects were often collective projects that aligned with specific political interests or movements (for example, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias*, made as part of Cuba's revolutionary cinema movement). Some of them, like *Batalla de Chile*, documented revolution as it was happening out on the streets. Others, like *Hora de los hornos* sought to provoke revolution through passionate dialectical montage. Either way, these films carried with them a horizon of futurity and investment in political movements of their times. With a heavy cost for human and non-human life, repressive authoritarian regimes quelled these political movements and their hopeful horizons.

Despite these defeats, the Latin American tradition of committed revolutionary film remains vibrant and dynamic. However, the Chilean and Ecuadorian documentary films I analyze differ from New Latin American Cinema in significant ways. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the wake of the foreclosure of Marxist revolutionary movements and the imposition of neoliberal policy, the modern experience of time underwent a rupture, unsettling the teleologic concept of time as unfolding from past to present to future. When authoritarian dictatorships and neoliberal politics foreclosed the path to New Latin American Cinema's alternative visions of society, the horizon of revolutionary future collapsed. Rather than looking forward to justice, filmmakers started looking back. Film and television producer and director Lisandra Rivera notes that making films like *La*

*muerte de Jaime Roldós* (2013), which engage historical memory, is “una manera de subsanar nuestras heridas, es decir como la historia tiene un peso en nosotros que es igual a como la historia familiar tiene un peso en quienes somos nosotros, lo mismo ocurre con los países” (Rivera 2015). *Nostalgia de la luz*, *Abuelos*, *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* confront the past that lingers—the stories of un-fulfilled revolutions, state-sponsored violence and neoliberal legacy. For the generations of filmmakers working over the last 20 years, reassessment of the past—and the *telling* of the past—is strategic ground to reclaim a sense of identity and the possibility of a future not over determined by the same philosophical questions. At stake in the writing of history and the building of the collective archive through documentary film is partial justice for the *desaparecidos latinoamericanos*, and the ideals and struggles that they represented. The disappeared are those who, based on their leftist political inclination were assassinated, and often tortured, by repressive dictatorial and democratic regimes that rose to power within the Cold War battlefield in Latin America. These regimes refused to account for the murders; the victims’ remains were hidden because they were evidence of state-sponsored violence. *Nostalgia de la Luz*, *Abuelos*, *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* contribute to justice for the disappeared by rendering visible the meaning of their deaths across multiple spatio-temporal scales and national contexts.

Cueva, Guzmán, Dávila Valencia, Sarmiento, Rivera and Restrepo all return to the physical spaces where acts of state-sponsored violence were committed; they interview individuals who give testimony of their experience of a haunting past and

confront perpetrators who continue to hold public posts. Under the rhetoric of transitional justice, governments in Chile, Argentina, Guatemala, Panamá, El Salvador, Colombia, Ecuador and Perú created truth commissions to document mass violence, especially state-sponsored violence. These institutional measures to recognize the path are extremely important, but the justice they provide is only partial. Often, governments have avoided prosecuting perpetrators in favor of national reconciliation. Perhaps most importantly, transitional governments in the wake of authoritarian governments of the Cold War period have maintained neoliberal economic policies that work against the goals of social equity that animated earlier generations of the left. So, while institutional measures paint the dictatorial past as distant, as if it had been replaced by neoliberal governments, the economic systems maintain many of the mechanisms of repression that were implemented by state in the struggle to eradicate the left and leftist ideals.

Representation of subjectivity is another central difference between New Latin American Cinema films from the sixties and seventies and the twenty-first century post-dictatorship documentaries I analyze. Unlike New Latin American Cinema, the contemporary films in my corpus privilege the voice of the individual, rather than the collective. It is not that the collective voice is not important. Rather, given the fragmentation of the collective imposed by neoliberal ideology and policies, the individual seeks a connection to the collective through their personal reflection on the shared past and through the material world. Like the directors of the films in my corpus, today many filmmakers work independently, rather than as political collectives, as was common in New Latin American Cinema. Instead of focusing on masses in action, these

films privilege familial relationships and everyday life. Additionally, their tactile aesthetics stress a sensual, embodied interaction with the world that creates a sense of identification with the spectator. Laura Marks outlines the concept of haptic looking as “[tending] to move over the surface of the object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze” (162). This holds true of this cinematography of my corpus. Not only does the camera move over landscapes and the surfaces of plants and water, but also over the surfaces of archival documents. By “grazing” over the archive, landscapes, plants and other aspects of the environment, the camera suggests that there is more than meets the eye in the material world. This approach alludes to the materialization of time and resists the fast-paced, abstract fleeting time of global capitalism.

In order to allow the spectator to see the past on an eye-to-eye level, these films expand the concept of the archival document to include unofficial archives that spectators might be more likely to relate to and be familiar with on a personal level. Among these unofficial archives are family photo albums and old clothing or personal items, oral testimonies, the material environment (from landscapes to water to domestic spaces), and the performance of cinematic reflexivity. Within the films in my corpus, collective historical trauma, as well as personal trauma, galvanizes a sense of urgency and responsibility. The stories they relate exercise a “weak Messianic power” that invite the viewer to perform an ethical coming to terms with the past. (Benjamin 254).

## History, Memory, and The Representation of the Disappeared

The filmmakers from Chile and Ecuador posit that at play in the representation of the disappeared is a conceptual terrain that steps outside the logic of progress. In the name of progress, authoritarian governments in Latin America, in collaboration with the United States, eliminated—“disappeared”—those individuals who represented a barrier to their capital and political gain. Within the neoliberal account of history, the disappeared are an unfortunate piece of the past that has been surpassed, or a necessary sacrifice in the march toward economic growth. The films in my corpus strive to contrast this narrative. They endeavor to make visible both the disappeared and the occult relationships between sites/legacies of violence across time and space. For example, Patricio Guzmán’s *Nostalgia de la luz* connects the 19<sup>th</sup> century Chilean history of nation-building, mining and the repression of indigenous populations with the repression of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Pinochet dictatorship. Similarly, Manolo Sarmiento and Lisandra Rivera’s *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* links the death of President Jaime Roldós with Operation Condor, the dictatorships of the Southern Cone and the political agenda of the United States.

These documentaries can be characterized as “judiciary” films; they reveal an alternative form of archive in the context of post-dictatorship Latin American countries. In her article “Documentary’s Labours of Law: The Television Journalism of Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis,” Gina Herrmann demonstrates that several key reports made by the Catalan television documentary program *30 minuts* not only unveil previously unknown information about the repressive Francoist dictatorship but also perform a

legalistic indicting role that puts the dictatorship on trial for human rights violations in a context in which “Spanish victims of the regime have been deprived of their day in court” (193). They carry out “Labours of Law” in a society where the judicial system—which makes impunity law—doesn’t. The contemporary Latin American documentary films I analyze also disclose the crimes of state-sponsored violence. However, in a post-colonial, post-dictatorship Latin American context, the judiciary element—justice—seems to be understood differently. In these films, the principle of absolute truth—the logic upon which the legal systems of modern nation-states are based—is recognized and then undermined or used against itself. *Nostalgia de la Luz*, *Abuelos*, *La muerte de Jaime* and *Con mi corazón* function as “Labours of Ethics” rather than “Labours of Law.” The ethical relationship that these films establish is based on the relationship that they create between the spectator’s present and the violence of the collective past that they represent. In the alternative experience of time these films construct, the past is not the succession of dots on the timeline that fall behind the present, but rather the intersection of multiple spatiotemporalities. Far from being truly “disappeared,” or “gone,” the dead remain present when history is understood across multiple scales, from the biological to the geological to the cosmic, as Patricio Guzmán proposes in *Nostalgia de la luz*. Death is a natural part of life, but not when it takes place as a state-sponsored “disappearance.” The disappeared have a haunting presence within the films, demonstrating that neoliberal society has yet to account for the dignity of their lives and the unjust ends they faced.

While the television documentary films Herrmann describes meet the need for “justice by trial and law,” these films respond to a search for a “salida” from the very



logic of the capitalist system. They express a longing for a temporality that embraces multiplicity, tense simultaneity and duration, rather than homogeneity, rupture and advancement. Within these films, the past cannot be *past* until it is confronted on ethical terms. In this way, they represent the story of the defeated by the dictatorships, but also by the vencidos of the colonial legacy. *Nostalgia de la luz*, *Abuelos*, *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* all embrace memory in a Benjaminian sense: memory functions as a revolutionary act, “a flash of a moment” that “blasts open the continuum of time” when that which is remembered is made alive in the present, creating a palimpsestic, crystalline vision of history. The reimaging of historical time serves to destabilize the neoliberal ideology, which perceives as “necessary waste” both the disappeared of Ecuador and Chile, and the oil spills caused by massive resource extraction projects.

Bolívar Echeverría describes the the influence of capitalist logic on contemporary lived experience: he states, “. . . en nuestros días, cuando la planetarización concreta de la vida es refuncionalizada y deformada por el capital bajo la forma de una globalización abstracta que uniformiza, en un grado cualitativo cercano al cero, hasta el más mínimo gesto humano, esa actitud barroca puede ser una buena puerta de salida, fuera del reino de la sumisión” (*La clave barroca de la América Latina* 11). In a context in which the experience of time has been deformed to fit the capitalist system---made abstract, homogenized, divisible into quantifiable units, time has near zero “qualitative” value. While the homogenization of time is nearly complete, Echeverría perceives the baroque ethos as a remaining possible exit or “puerta de salida” (11). Similar to Aníbal Quijano’s

concept of Latin American “simultaneity,” the baroque attitude entails the coexistence of two or more systems of logic/ways of being: in this case, the indigenous world views and the European colonizers’ world view (Echeverría 9, Quijano 49). Even while existing under the imposed European discourse and systems of power, he/she who maintains a baroque attitude can sustain the qualitative experience of life, despite the imposition of the monetarization of time. He states, “El ethos barroco promueve la reivindicación de la forma social-natural de la vida y su mundo de valores de uso, y lo hace incluso en medio del sacrificio del que ellos son objeto a manos del capital y su acumulación” (8). In *Hybrid Cultures: entering and leaving modernity*, Nestor García Canclini elaborates on this concept in slightly different terms. He claims that “Today we conceive of Latin America as a more complex articulation of traditions and modernities (diverse and unequal), a heterogeneous continent consisting of countries in each of which coexist multiple logics of development” (9). The unevenness of modernity in Latin America means that there are more cracks in its discourse. Echoing Echeverría’s concept of baroque ethos, Canclini signals that because the ideals of progress and modernity were imposed via “The Lettered City” (to use Angel Rama’s term) and have been perceived as a problematic and partially realized project, the discourse of modernity is more easily questioned and is “seen as a mask” or “simulacrum” (7). Echeverría is clear in stating that the baroque ethos is not particular to Latin America, or the only ethos within Latin American culture. However, the colonial legacy of mestizaje within Latin America makes it a prevalent aspect of Latin American society. The baroque ethos’ “puerta de salida” permits a non-capitalist embrace of time, which I argue is at play in the films I analyze.

For Benjamin and Echeverría, and in the films of this corpus, history told a contrapelo (against the grain, i.e. critique) and as experience, speaks to that which historicist concepts of time and accounts of history leave out. Documentary film is a privileged medium to make manifest the fragmentation of time because it works with fragments of the real--like the archival documents and biological, geological and cosmic reiterations—to signal the ineffable.

Benjamin insists that “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was.’ It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger” (Walter Benjamin, Thesis VI, *Theses on the Philosophy of History, Illuminations*). “The way it really was” refers to a particular concept of truth and reality. Hannah Arendt describes the role of truth in Benjamin’s approach to history, saying that similar to Kafka, he “relinquished truth in order to cling to its transmissibility” (*Hannah Arendt: On Walter Benjamin 45:43*). For Benjamin, one cannot account for history by representing it “the way it really was” because historical truth cannot connect with the present through realism, but instead through a “secret” disclosure that does the past justice within the context of the present. I argue that when you combine this “transmissibility” approach to a critique of progress, the “secret agreement” is based on ethics, a connection between multiple unique points that can only be created through the process of disclosure. Articulating the past historically means actively conceiving of the past’s constitutive relationship to the present. The “constellatory” connection between distinct spatiotemporal moments underlines a multi-temporal logic that strives for a tense sense of universality based on the particular.

Benjamin also argues that history is not propelled by solely material and logical forces; or rather, he argues that existence in the material world has a spiritual element based in an ethical relationship to other people, other living beings and the environment in which they live. “As flowers turn toward the sun,” states Benjamin, “by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history” (255). In fact, it is the “spiritual” side of life—the secret heliotropism—that allows the defeated, like those defeated by the dictatorships, to continue in their struggle, which Marxism describes as the propelling force of history. It is in honor of the dignity of those who came before, that the *vencidos* of history maintain the struggle, pushing against the rigged odds. In these films, the “retroactive” spirit manifests itself as an ethical and affective impulse, a desire not to forget loved ones and beloved ideals by remembering them incorrectly or incompletely, and yet also a desire to move on and search for new questions and new answers, to reach toward the sun in the sky of history. Remembering loved ones and loved ideals in the films is not, however, focused on the exact preservation of the facts of their lives. Rather, it is focused on creating a connection between the meanings of their memory to the present, the “graspable now” that is shaped by the neoliberal dynamics of power.

### The Aesthetics of Redemptive Memory

When I interviewed filmmaker María Fernanda Restrepo, director of *Con mi corazón en Yambo*, I inquired about her choice to represent the story of her disappeared brothers through documentary film. I was curious as to why she had chosen this particular medium. She responded, “. . . el documental es eso—está vivo, es activo y es

mucho más duro que la vida que uno puede imaginar-- la vida real es así. . .”<sup>2</sup> (María Fernando Restrepo). Real life is harder than anything you could imagine, and documentary, as the medium of the real, she explains, allows the filmmaker to express the sordid nature that reality can assume. In her response, Restrepo underlines the consensus that films in the documentary mode “refer directly to the historical world” (Nichols 2017 5, 8). In *Introduction to Documentary*, Bill Nichols asserts, “The bond between documentary and the historical world is deep and profound. Documentary adds a new dimension to popular memory and social history” (23). Significantly, Nichols clarifies that while documentaries refer to history, they do not reproduce it, but rather interpret or tell a story about history “from the perspective of the filmmaker in a form and style of his or her choosing” (Nichols 2017 5, 8). This approach to understanding the relationship between documentary film and history works especially well in my analysis of the films’ Benjaminean embrace of the history. Rather than analyzing the films as mediums to capture the reality of the past, I focus on the stories that they tell about the present. Nichols’ elaboration on documentary modes (poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive, performative), voice and rhetoric prove key to my close readings of the films; they allow me to refer to the historical events/dynamics portrayed in the films while focusing primarily on the construction of meaning within the spectator’s present (Nichols *Introduction to Documentary* 99). In this way, “la vida real” to which Restrepo refers assumes a complexity that surpasses historicism’s quest to pin the past down on a timeline.

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<sup>2</sup> “. . . documentary is just that—it’s alive, it’s active and its much harder than the life that one could imagine—real life is like that . . .” (María Fernando Restrepo)

I have identified several key concepts and cinematic tropes at play in the alternative construction of time in the films I analyze. One of the concepts utilized in all the films is the construction of memory as palimpsest. In his text *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film*, Max Silverman demonstrates how in spite of the academic and societal tendency in the past fifty years to compartmentalize histories of violence along ethno-cultural lines, art often manifests Benjamin's constellationary vision of history in the form of "palimpsestic memory," which demonstrates "the history which returns" or a present "contaminated by multiple elsewhere" (Silverman 5). The films I analyze perform similar labors, connecting, as mentioned above, the violence of the dictatorships in the Southern Cone to repression in Ecuador, for example, or elaborating on the way that the concentration camps of Pinochet are haunted by the layers of nationalized violence that came before, from the genocide and marginalization of the indigenous population to the near slavery-like conditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saltpeter mining camps. I do not consider the concept of palimpsest to be restricted to a 2-D layering, but instead an approach to memory that can encompass multi-scalar constructions like a crystalline or rhizomal shape.

Memory as palimpsest in *Nostalgia*, *Abuelos*, *Roldós* and *Yambo* allows for the films to intervene in public dialogue about the past without pitting the memory of one group against the other. Because palimpsestic constructions of memory highlight their own layered and imperfect nature, they recognize memory as a constantly changing performative and malleable process that "fundamentally works according to the principal of transversal connections across time and space which disrupt essentialist readings of

cultural identity and ethnic and national belonging” (22). The hybrid and multiplicitous nature of memory as palimpsest denotes a dynamic process that flows between individuals and communities (5). Memory can be triggered by an object, but memory itself is not an object transported from the past and brought into the present; instead, it is a relationship, a connection. In making present a distinct spatiotemporal site, one acts out the past’s relationship to the present, one acts out a non-linear temporal logic. The act of making the connection with that spatiotemporal elsewhere is performative: “while concerned with the past, [memory] happens in the present” (23).

All the films in my corpus include cinematic self-reflexivity that underline the performative nature of memory. The directors appear on screen and/or are heard conspicuously within the film, reflecting on their own process of narration. Nichols’ focus on reflexive documentary mode in which the filmmaker appears in the film as “authoring agent” proves particularly useful to analyze this metatextual and performative element (*Representing Reality* 58). For instance, the reflexive mode helps me unpack the questioning of historical discourse that is central to all the films. The director of *Con mi corazón en Yambo*, for example, appears on screen reviewing VHS cassettes from her brothers’ legal case. The tapes were part of the government coverup claiming the boys had driven their jeep over a cliff and fallen to the river below. She views the footage, which contains only shots of running water, stopping and rewinding several times to watch the cascade of the waterfall in reverse, falling upwards. The extra-diegetic sound repeatedly plays the familiar sound of a VHS stopping and rewinding, but the timing is off from the action we see in the shot. Each of these elements reinforces the concept of

the manipulatable nature of archival documents (especially film/video) and establishes a reflection about the role of technology/media in (the director's) memory. Similarly, the director of *Roldós* not only appears on screen working in the archives, but he also reflects explicitly in voice-over on how to best narrate the film's story.

Because the directors are so closely related to the subject matter and social subjects at hand and have a strong onscreen presence, these film projects are characterized by a very personal nature. Michael Renov's modalities of desire (record/reveal/preserve; persuade/promote; analyze/interrogate; and express) serve to unpack the kinds of work these films do in understanding the relationship between individual and collective history. Often, the films reveal several modalities of desire at once (Renov 1993 22, 23). For example, *Abuelos* employs the expressive modality of desire by representing the affective nature of her grandfathers' memory through nature. Extreme longshots of the Chilean desert horizon represent the director's emotional distance in relation to the grandfather who she never met (Juan Valencia). Extreme close-ups of green leaves represent the intimacy of her relationship to her Ecuadorian grandfather (Remo Dávila). On the other hand, the record/reveal/preserve modality is unmistakably at work in the incorporation of multiple newspaper clippings portraying Juan Valencia's political achievements, including a photograph in which he shakes Allende's hand at a political gathering. Similarly, the film includes an audio recording of Juan from the days after Allende's electoral triumph. Juan made the recording to send to his son (the director's father), who was studying in Russia at the time. Juan and the other family members share the news of the triumph and the elation they all feel. Juan



comes to tears as he expresses their profound commitment to this shared journey to work for equality and solidarity, transforming life for el pueblo chileno. These archival documents preserve Valencia's memory as a Popular Unity leader and contest his erasure from history as un desaparecido. They also capture the collective passion and whole-being commitment to social change that characterized the Popular Unity period. For younger generations of the neoliberal moment this fervor and sense of belonging to a revolutionary movement may seem foreign. The record/reveal/preserve mode captures aspects of the collective historical past (the Cold War period) and the expressive mode constructs an individual experience of the past (the perspective of the filmmaker and the memories of her family members). The intertwining of the two modes, as seen in the above examples, demonstrates the important role documentary film can play in navigating the fluid relationship between the individual and the collective in the narration of history. Unique, overlapping motivations animate the films' navigation of the fragments of the past. Together, Renov's different modalities of desire allow me to analyze the performative nature of memory in the films.

In addition to highlighting performativity, palimpsestic representations of memory constructs a present that "contains traces of the past" (23). These traces "could be anywhere"; they are triggers that "release us from the constraints of clock time and social spacing . . . and re-enchant our world" (Silverman 23). In his chapter on Alain Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard*, Silverman identifies some characteristics of "concentrationary art," which expresses a present haunted by the unbelievable, nearly impossible to express horror of the camps, a world that will never be the same. The term

‘concentrationary art’ is particular to post Holocaust concentration camp history, but the larger idea that it espouses is that of a haunting past that makes ethical demands on the present. In the films I analyze, the labors of rendering the ‘disappeared’ visible/present highlight a similar haunting and horror. Just as Resnais films from behind barbed wire, Restrepo films a sky obstructed by tangled and intersecting power lines as she introduces the story of her brothers’ disappearance. Similarly, when returning to the place where her grandfather was detained, Valencia films from a distance, observing the wall around the regiment from the opposite side of the street and from behind sagging electric lines that cut through the frame. These obstructions function as visual metaphors for the sense of near impossibility of representing trauma and the emphasis on “repetitions and similarities that cut across demarcated temporal, spatial and scopic regimes” (Silverman 43). This includes explicitly filming material traces as well as mimicking camera movement, speed, angle, and depth of field of archival footage. For example, the introductory tracking shot of *Nuit et brouillard* lays out the now empty but still intact concentration camp Birkenau with long horizontal panning shots that mimic those of Nazi archival footage that appears later in the film. *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* takes a similar approach to representing a space charged with the violence of the past. The film intersplices archival footage of an Argentine military junta gala that takes place in large ceremonial hall with contemporary shots of the same hall, this time empty of guests. The original footage portrays the rigid festivity of mingling uniformed military personnel and their wives. Among the guest are some of the most infamous architects of the repressive Argentine dictatorships, including Admiral Lambruschini and General Roberto Viola.

Their banal conversations and the tense, contrived nature of their interactions captured by the archival footage seem to echo in the contemporary tracking shot that observes the wide open, empty space. This repetition creates a sense of doubling, “hauntings and contaminations in which the filmic representations of people, object, places and times are forever shadowed by their ghosts from elsewhere” (42). In this way, Rivera and Sarmiento, like Resnais, emphasize the fact that the portrayed spatiotemporal moment is latent with the past, blurring the line between past and present.

Exploring this blurred line between temporalities, *Nostalgia de la luz* uses nature to create a masterful, multi-scalar palimpsest that prompts complex reflections on time and history. Traces of the past—both recent and distant—are everywhere in the film. The film’s montage uses slow-fading dissolves to layer images of the cosmos onto desert landscapes and closeups of human bones, often creating a true palimpsest between the images. The long cosmic temporality intersects with the deep geologic and embodied human temporalities, all while the viewer inevitably experiences them in the linear, diachronic temporality of film viewing. Throughout the film, NASA shots of galaxies are interspliced into sequences focused on the desert, and interviews with family members of the disappeared. Additionally, disunited voice over narration generates the sense of a present permeated by the residual past. For example, the voice over narration reveals that close to the observatory in the Atacama Desert are the ruins of the Chacabuco Concentration Camp, the largest concentration camp from the Pinochet Dictatorship. Black and white archival video gives an aerial shot of a camp complex. Later, the director explains in voice over that before the complex was a concentration camp, it was a nitrate

mining camp. Those images portrayed earlier were in reality shots of the ruins of the mining camp, before it was transformed by the Pinochet dictatorship. By speaking about the concentration camp while showing the mining camp, the film suggests that the violence of the Dictatorship's camp is haunted by the violence of the mining industry. The picture of the concentration camp that the viewer imagines (as prompted by the voice over description) is understood through the images of the ruins of the mining camp portrayed on screen. Describing the exploitative nature of the mining industry the voice over narration notes, "los militares solo tuvieron que poner el alambre de púa." I read the mention of "alambre de púa" as a reference to the violence of the Holocaust concentration camps. Through this reference, the film suggests a tense connection between the violence of the concentration camps of the Pinochet dictatorship, the mining industry camps of 19th century Chile, and the Holocaust camps. In another example, as a hand-held camera observes the rocky, red desert floor, which is covered with pockets of white salt, the director comments in voice over that he believes that humans will reach mars soon. Before he comments on the similarity between the desert floor and the barren surface of mars, it is already evident that there is a tense connection between the two. Humankind's future walk on mars is already always informed by the existence of this similarly rocky earthly surface. Other techniques *Nostalgia* uses to create a multi-scalar representation of time are a combination of horizontal and vertical pans, close-ups, medium and long shots, and penetrating traveling shots that move toward a focal point in the center of the screen, all to represent the same physical space on different scales of legibility.

*Nostalgia*, *Yambo*, *Roldós* and *Abuelos* all include a considerable number of landscape shots. Similar to the 1960s Marxist Japanese filmmaking practice of *fūkeiron*, or theory of landscape, slow pans of the physical spaces where state-sponsored violence occurred contrast a sensationalist media approach (and a historicist view of history) that focuses on the event (Furuhata 117). Like the films Yuriko Furuhashi describes in her book *Cinema of Actuality*, these landscape shots have no human subjects and appear “utterly ordinary, eventless and devoid of any visible conflict” (117). *Roldós* includes several landscape shots from the site of the 1981 plane crash that killed President Jaime Roldós. *Yambo* incorporates numerous observational shots, characterized by slow camera movement, along the highway where the police allege her brothers’ car went over a ravine. Both *Abuelos* and *Nostalgia* foreground landscape shots of the Chilean Desert, where family members search for the remains of their disappeared loved ones. Paused pans over land devoid of human subjects create a poignant sense of a present frozen in time, where the material space reflects the unresolved ideological problems of the past. The lingering past may be made undetectable for many by the capitalist cycle of repetition and distraction, but it is painfully present for those whose family member, leaders, and friends were the collateral damage of the onset of neoliberalism. Landscape theory, Rob Nixon’s notion of slow violence and Deborah Bird Rose’s multispecies ethical time—all non-anthropocentric concepts—allow me to demonstrate the how the films’ construction of time contribute to emerging eco-critical discourses.

In addition to the specific approach of landscape theory, the films in my corpus emphasize materiality more broadly in their construction of time and memory. They

create an alternative archive of environmental rhythms, textures and sounds that contest capitalism's abstract, homogenous and divisible logic of time. *Nostalgia de la luz*, for example, turns the camera into a telescope that observes the physical world from the cosmic to the geological and human. The sounds, movements and objects the film uses to narrate the relationship between the stars and the remains of the disappeared in the Atacama Desert speak to the viewer of physics—matter and energy and the interaction between the two. Like the telescope-camera, the film emphasizes the distinct scales at which the materiality of the universe can be engaged. For example, the opening sequence of *Nostalgia* focuses on the old German telescope that the director tells us inspired his passion for astronomy. The camera observes mechanical parts that spin, speed up, slow down, and perform functions within a larger system of operations. Sunlight inundates the screen, as if indicating the opening eye of the telescope. Majestic still shots of mercury's surface fill the frame. Returning to the old telescope, turning dials tensely recall the image of a planet spinning on its axis. Rather than the neat inward and outward expansion of micro to macro, *Nostalgia* develops tense relationships that place the viewer in a multi-scalar figure that emphasizes a totality whose nature and form remain cloaked in mystery and the limits of human understanding. *Nostalgia de la luz* also utilizes the sounds of the desert wind to create this sense of tense totality. The sound of the unforgiving wind is layered over portrayals of Pinochet concentration camp ruins as well as distant galaxies. The sounds of space, unfamiliar to most, are tensely related to the familiar, though harsh, Earthly desert. In another example of mysterious multi-scalar unity, a scientist in the film explains that the calcium in human bones dates from the time

of the big boom. Directly following this explanation, an image from space registers bodies of stars against the dark emptiness, the camera seemingly plunging inward. Next, an extremely closed frame portrays a rocky surface that mimics the play of light and darkness in the earlier shot. It is difficult to tell the size of the object due to the closed frame. It is either a planet, or an extreme close up of a rocky mass. Only when a slow downward pan reveals the empty space of eye sockets does the viewer understand that this is not a planetary body but a human body—the skull of a disappeared individual whose remains have been recovered.

*Abuelos* also emphasizes embodiment, but in a different way. The camera often focuses on the director's hands and feet, provoking a heightened sense of the interaction between the body and its environment. Additionally, the film privileges water, foliage, dessert and the sky as not only material archives of her grandfathers, but as the connection between the two of them and the director. For example, throughout the film, the desert of Iquique stands in for her disappeared Chilean grandfather, who lived and died at the arid Chilean coast. Similarly, the dense, succulent forests and rivers of Cuenca are the touchable remains of her Ecuadorian grandfather after he dies. Water serves as the film's primary editing trope to connect the stories of the two grandfathers. When her Ecuadorian grandfather begins to lose his sight and experiences ringing in his ears due to a brain tumor, the camera is submerged in the bubbling river water of Cuenca, Ecuador. Diegetic sounds of rushing water inundate the soundtrack. When the story transitions to Juan's story, the camera moves through the water, until the shot transitions to waves along the Chilean coast. Additionally, as the film comes to a close, the camera observes a

small desert flower as it withstands the blowing wind. The director explains in voice over that her Ecuadorian grandfather, Remo, had made it rain in the desert of Juan, allowing a dormant seed to finally grow. The director, not altogether unlike the flower, is the link between the two.

Water also plays a central role in *Con mi corazón en Yambo*. Here, too, water moves across moments and spaces, functioning as an editing trope. But perhaps more noticeably, a poetics of water communicates the complexity of feelings associated with loss and memory; and the delicate balance between life and death. The camera swims like a free, gliding fish in Lake Yambo, at first with the intention of searching for their bodies and then simply dancing, giving itself to the movement of the water like the director must do in order to continue on. Images of the family pool provide an allegory for the way in which their life was changed forever when Santiago and Andrés were disappeared. A home video that the director recuperates while making the film shows her brothers splashing and playing in a glistening pool illuminated by bright equatorial sun. When the boys are disappeared and the government infiltrates the family life in order to keep them quiet about the disappearance, the water in the pool is stagnant and dark, seemingly stained by falling raindrops. Light is also key in this use of filmic language, marking both the hopeful source of life for leaves and the fading of day as she waits for her brothers to return the night of their disappearance.

The emphasis on the senses in the films fosters identification with the spectator, inviting the spectator to touch and feel the past through their own knowledge and experience of the material world of water, earth, leaves, sky and wind. By creating a



sense of mutuality across time and space, and by developing an affective connection between the viewer and the depicted past, the ethical force of the disappeared is rendered visible, audible, touchable, emotionally accessible, for the spectator. Accessing the spectators' sense of "now" through the natural world has important implications for emerging ecological criticism, which I will discuss in detail in all of my chapters, but especially in my analysis of *Abuelos* and *Nostalgia de la luz*.

While the landscape theory approach is a key aspect of the commentary on time and history in *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*, this film incorporates less of an environmental aesthetic than the others. Rather, the focus on materiality and the re-writing of history is grounded in its remediation of archival documents. *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*, for example, manipulates archival documents in order to make them more easily legible for spectators and to fit them into the narrative the film constructs. In official correspondence from the Ecuadorian ambassador to Argentina, the phrase "EVITE DETERIO" is highlighted and slightly magnified. A close up of the document allows the viewer to identify key phrases like this one that reveal the political tension around Roldós' policies on human rights, which were unpopular with Ronald Reagan's administration in the U.S. and neighboring Latin American dictatorships. Shots like this one simultaneously reveal the document's original purpose within a bureaucratic narrative of progress, while also portraying its incorporation into the new discourse of the film. Similar to Laura Marks' description of haptic visuality as "grazing" over "gazing," in *Roldós*, the camera often moves over archival documents in a way that emphasizes their materiality and the director's interaction with them. Additionally, *Roldós* portrays one of the film's directors,

Manolo Sarmiento, visiting several official archives—libraries, Ministry of Defense in Argentina and a private film archive in Ecuador, among others. In each archive, he faces the power dynamics that control their contents. For example, at the Ministry of Defense in Argentina, Sarmiento has the document he needs in front of him, but he must wait to open it until he is granted permission from higher ups at the Ministry. Much of the film is dedicated to reflection on the silences in the archive and the film’s own process of construction as a new archival document. For example, in voice-over, Sarmiento contemplates multiple possible beginnings that could articulate most fully the story of Roldós’ death. Non-linear montage of archival documents layers those “beginnings” so that each respond to the other. All of these techniques serve the film’s philosophical preoccupation with the telling of history. Official history has silenced Roldós’ death, summing up his presidency in textbooks with a few lines noting that he was the first democratic president in the country after a decade of dictatorships. The suspect conditions of his death were accepted, rather than contested because the theory of the accident served the discourse of progress upheld by Roldós’ political opponents, the same circles who supported the dictatorships in Argentina and Chile at the time. The film utilizes archival materials creatively to seize up the memory of Roldós, rescuing it from the neoliberal narrative of the accident.

While all the films employ both eco-aesthetics and remediation of the archive, I divide the dissertation into two parts to focus on the unique political potential of each concept with the films that embrace it most explicitly. Part 1, “Flowers That Turn,” has two chapters that examine the eco-critical aesthetics of memory in *Nostalgia de la luz*.

(2010) and *Abuelos* (2010), and Part 2, “Archives That Burn,” explores thoroughly in its two chapters the concept of the archive in *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* (2013) and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* (2011). The environmental crisis and the hegemonic discourse about the Cold War Era are both symptoms of the imbalances of global capitalism and are deeply connected, so eco-aesthetics and a critical view on the construction of the Archive complement one another in a productive way. On one hand, countries in Latin America face air pollution, erosion, extinction of plant and animal species, oil spills and deforestation driven by the neoliberal extractive economy; on the other hand, official histories continue to preserve the image of the perpetrators of state-sponsored violence as the architects of the economic “miracle” (like in the context of Chile). Despite its portrayal as the sure path to economic growth, the neoliberal system has exacerbated inequity, which both drives and is amplified by climate change. By focusing on the aesthetics of eco-critical memory and the construction of an alternative archive, my analysis highlights temporalities of displacement, of long-term side effects, haunting and extinction, alongside temporalities of biological rebirth, and geological and cosmic preservation. Temporal displacement, the accumulation of incremental violence and the exponential rate of extinction are some of the temporalities associated with the effects of climate chaos, the byproducts of a capitalist system cannot see beyond the short-term. Rebirth and the extended temporalities of the cosmic and biological refer to resilience and mystery in the natural world, the rippling repercussions of actions, and the tense unity among the scales that characterize the known universe. The second group of temporalities also refers to creative process—that of remediation—which is regenerative,

creating something new (like a film) from existing elements (a shared past). Even where they do not directly address environmental politics explicitly, these narratives of time help contribute to an emerging ecological discourse that allows for new forms of relationality that contest capitalist individualism.

In part one, I perform an eco-critical reading of Benjamin's concept of historical materialism. I argue that Benjamin develops a non-anthropocentric vision of time. A crystalline vision of history accounts for multiple spatiotemporalities that tensely coexist, like different organisms within an ecosystem. According to this logic, the past is never truly "over" or "gone". In the introduction to part one, I ask what does this concept of the persisting past mean in the context of neoliberal democratic Chile? I give a detailed account of how the laws and economy established during the Pinochet Dictatorship have resulted in human and environmental destruction. In much the same way that the Dictatorship treated political opponents as disposable obstacles, the economic architects of the dictatorship's neoliberal economy saw restrictions on resource extraction as barriers to a free market. I argue that it is essential to extend the connection these films establish between the natural world and the disappeared, to the environmental degradation Chile has experienced under neoliberal economy. I identify two environmental temporalities at play in the aesthetics of *Nostalgia de la luz* and *Abuelos*. The first is slow violence, a term coined by Rob Nixon to indicate the way in which capitalism displaces violence both spatially onto the geographically and temporally distant. The consequences of the extractivist neoliberal model are pushed onto marginalized populations and future generations. The other is Deborah Bird Rose's

concept of multispecies knots of ethical time, which emphasizes the body as the site of intersection between synchronous and sequential time. Ethical time is based on connectivity between bodies across time and space. By placing the stories of the disappeared within geological, cosmic and biological scales of space and time, the directors do important work in bridging political and cultural history to environmental history in Chile. I argue that the development of an eco-critical approach to memory is particularly relevant to the contemporary struggle to respond to the status quo of capitalism in the context of climate crisis.

My chapter on *Nostalgia de la luz* proposes that the nostalgia the film references is not so much a longing for the Allende years, but rather for a way of experiencing time that can make whole what has been lost under the dictatorship and other repressive regimes. Closed framing that disorients the scale of that which is being viewed, mise-en-scène that stresses tense similarities between human subjects and their geological background, and the use of interspliced editing and slow dissolves are some of the techniques the film uses to generate the intersection and mutual permeation of atomic, geological and cosmic scales. The strained totality of these scales results in the materialization of time. In this way, *Nostalgia* reminds viewers that while institutions of power try to erase the records of their violent crimes, the past cannot be eliminated from the material world. Some critics have pointed out the film's non-anthropocentric construction of memory; yet no one has explored the significance of this approach to an environmental critique of progress. Given the connections the film makes between the Chilean context of conquest, nation-building and dictatorship, and given the intrinsic

value assigned to the environment in the film, I argue that it is critical to analyze this multi-scalar approach to memory as a process of attunement to the extended horizons of slow violence.

My chapter on *Abuelos* argues that the film generates a relationship of dialogue and community with the spectator based on an appeal to affect and an aesthetics of nature and embodiment. *Abuelos* presents a highly personal story about the memory of the director's grandfathers and her own identity as the granddaughter of a disappeared Popular Unity leader from Chile and a holistic doctor from Ecuador. Speaking from the first person through voice over narration, her intimate ("confessional" to use Renov's term) reflections on the lives of her grandfathers establish a relationship of trust and affective identification with the spectator. The use of the reflexive mode contributes to an eye-to-eye relationship. The director appears on screen interviewing her family members, traveling to Chile to connect with her father's family, looking through her grandfathers' things, and making phone calls to gather more information about them. She has nothing to hide about her process, opening herself up to the audience without hesitation. Because it is her personal story, the director's truth is relieved of societal expectations of historicism. In the place of a historicist account, the film invites empathy and grants legitimacy to truth based on individual experience (Aufderheide 105). Much like the films Laura Podalsky analyzes in *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema*, *Abuelos* "[invites] audiences to feel and experience a different way of knowing" (57). The film's focus on embodiment also contributes to this alternative approach to history. The consistent return to images of her hands, feet and

eyes reminds the viewer that the story Valencia tells is one she experiences with her body. Rather than the recall of events, memory is presented as a reflexive process that takes place repeatedly within the body and in relation to the material world. Ecological memory, staged by mise-en-scène and editing tropes that emphasizes the colors, rhythms and sounds of the ocean, desert, trees, rivers, and wind, generates relationality, with the natural world and with the viewer. I argue that by sewing the director's own sense-based experience of memory into the world around her, the film challenges viewers to ask themselves, "What history do *I* bring with me in my body?" The film suggests that responding ethically to the losses of the dictatorship entails reestablishing a connection with the natural world and with a sense of collective solidarity, both of which were victims to the productivist Neoliberal economic progress that the Pinochet dictatorship embraced. *Abuelos* speaks from the individual subjectivity central to the neoliberal order, but the meaning of the film is constructed through affect and ecology, the sidelined realities of neoliberalism that contest individualistic culture and historicist narratives.

In Part II, I discuss the political potential of Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history in the contemporary Latin American context, and its relevance to the Ecuadorian documentaries *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* and *Con mi corazón en Yambo*. Drawing from Bolívar Echeverría's reading of Benjamin, I demonstrate that in the wake of the downfall of Marxist movements and the hegemonization of neoliberal ideology in Latin America, Benjamin's materialist critique of progress offers a particularly useful tool of cultural analysis. Bolívar Echeverría outlines the Latin American baroque ethos. In the multicultural, mestizo societies of Latin America, the dominant discourse of power is

simultaneously recognized and undermined by a secondary value system. The secondary, non-dominant value system privileges use value over exchange value. He correlates the baroque ethos with Benjamin's critique of progress and call for the recuperation of a history of experience. With the defeat of Marxist discourse in Latin America, and the imposition of a neoliberal discourse, which preached progress and democracy while hypocritically enforcing policies that furthered inequality, the sense of distrust of discourse gains increasing force.

Benjamin famously argues that "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'" (Benjamin 255). Instead, for Benjamin, historical articulation is the act of seizing "hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger" (255). *Con mi corazón en Yambo* and *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* seize hold of the archival materials they incorporate by destabilizing their place within official historical narrative, which designates them to a place of oblivion or misrepresentation in collective memory. In her text *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History*, Jaimie Baron calls for an understanding of appropriation films as "a matter of reception, dependent on the effects the film produces, namely the archive effect" (9). Baron outlines the archive effect as a perception of temporal disparity between different images and sounds within an appropriation film (11). I argue that within *Roldós* and *Yambo*, the creative use of archives draws attention not so much to temporal disparity between sounds and images but rather to the ways that a discourse of progress manipulates archives. Through techniques of archival remediation, cinematic reflexivity and editing patterns that highlight contradictions between lived experience and



official history, these films engage their viewers in an epistemology of doubt. In this case, doubt is directed toward the concept of democracy as it pertains to the contemporary neoliberal context. While the post-Cold War “transition to democracy” period in Latin America was linked to a human rights agenda, these films offer a distinct, critical reading of the transition period and of the meaning of democracy, especially within the Ecuadorian context.

Before my close readings of *Roldós* and *Yambo*, I give a historical account of the Cold War period in Ecuadorian politics and how these politics both shaped and were shaped by the larger Latin American context. Ecuador, surrounded by dictatorships across the continent, was the first country to return to democracy with the election of Jaime Roldós as president in 1979. In 1981, President Roldós dies under tense and unclear circumstances less than two years into his presidency, and within the first few months of Reagan’s 1<sup>st</sup> term as President of the U.S. In the wake of Roldós’ death, democratic governments in Ecuador opened the country to neoliberal policies that promoted international investment in resource extraction. These “democratic” administrations did not always operate democratically. León Febres Cordero, for example, built up repressive bodies like the police unit that killed the Restrepo brothers. SIC-10 was part of Febres Cordero’s “anti-subversive” campaign aimed at repressing leftist groups. By remediating official archival documents regarding state-sponsored violence and placing them in dialogue with family archives and a self-reflexive cinematic narrative, *Yambo* and *Roldós* make the archive burn with relevance for the present. In fact, as I indicate in the introduction to Part 2, both of the films resulted in the reopening

of the cases they represent, and both have made significant interventions in public discourse regarding human rights violations in Ecuador.

In my chapter on *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*, I argue that the film invites the viewer to co-construct a new interpretive framework for the past. I analyze the ways in which *Roldós* utilizes reflexive filmmaking to engage the viewer in a series of questions about the death of President Jaime Roldós, and more generally about the telling of history. None of these questions that can ever be fully answered through the archive. I claim that the use of landscape shots taken at the scene of the plane crash that killed Roldós suggests that while silence blankets the story around his death, the truth is preserved in the physical world, lingering beyond the reach of discourse. Similarly, I propose that a haptic engagement with archival documents, where the camera moves over and around files or old photos, suggests simultaneously hidden meaning and misplaced expectations of historicist truth that govern our understanding of the archive. Made by Lisandra Rivera and Manolo Sarmiento, filmmakers who followed in the footsteps of Guzmán and other New Latin American Cinema cineastes, I suggest that *Roldós* oscillates between the militant approach of the previous generation and the tendency toward reflexivity in contemporary documentary. Through voice over commentary and a documentation of its own research process, the film self-consciously reflects on the desire to prove the case of assassination of the president. Sarmiento, one of the two directors, appears on screen, searching in the archives, interviewing those who knew Roldós, and returning to the places he inhabited. Partway through the film, Sarmiento comments in voice over that he must relinquish the desire to prove in favor of a larger goal—that of

generating a productive sense of doubt and communicating the ethical weight of Roldós' death for the Ecuadorian and international community. The film intervenes in collective memory of the Cold War context in Ecuador by constructing an image of Roldós as a leader who spoke out against human rights violations in the Southern Cone and in Central America. It becomes clear that this stance pitted him against the interests of the conservative right in Ecuador and in Latin America, placing his government on the list of countries targeted by the U.S.-led "anti-subversive" intelligence operation—Operation Condor. Under this context, the viewer wonders whether it was democracy in and of itself, or the preservation of democratic candidates who would protect capitalist interests and the status quo, that gained favor in the transition to democracy in Latin America. Together, the film's inquisitory framing of narrative, its focus on a past that lingers in landscapes and its haptic engagement with archival documents immerse the viewer in an epistemology of doubt.

In my chapter on *Con mi corazón en Yambo*, I explore the way in which intimate archival documents—family photographs and home videos, footage of the Restrepo family home and one-on-one conversations between family members—offer an affective testimony of state-sponsored violence. *Con mi corazón en Yambo* was extremely popular in Ecuador and achieved significant public impact. The film continues to play an important role in the discussion of human rights in Ecuador. In *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema*, Laura Podalsky describes the work of films like *Chile, la memoria obstinada*, that "reanimate the traumatic past and replay affective legacies deemed 'excessive' by neoliberalism's regimes of rationality" (20). It is

precisely the neoliberal containment of “excessiveness” that *Yambo* contests. I argue that its appeal to affect the viewer and its ability to convey a portrait of family life are what has made this film so popular. The film encourages the viewer to experience that which official discourse has kept hidden through the familiar realm of emotional family life. Whereas the Ecuadorian government refuses to recognize the state-sponsored policies that led to the death of Santiago and Andrés Restrepo at the hands of the police, the film shows how her family’s grief is overflowing. Whereas the ex-Presidents and policemen she interviews are evasive and blatantly dishonest, the director, her father and aunt are straight forward about their devastation. *Yambo* materializes the grief they feel in its portrayal of the spaces they inhabit—the camera lingers on the old couch where the director’s mother used to cry, the stagnant family swimming pool, and the olive tree in their yard, given to them by an infiltrated police lieutenant. So, too, does the film make present their love and determination to fight for justice in the material world around them—low angle shots marvel at the sunshine of Quito’s magnificent sky, a submerged camera moves through the water of Lake Yambo and extreme closeups marvel at green leaves. I argue that film reflects on its own status as part of the transformation it observes in the natural world. In a reflexive gesture, the camera pauses first on images of Santiago and Andrés in framed family photographs, then on an artistic rendition of the photos as serigraphs, and finally, it documents young people spray painting a stencil of the image on a city wall. Like the succession of images it portrays, from family photo to street art, the film labors to make this private world of grief and love a public matter, standing up to the government’s efforts to silence their case. The Restrepo family’s private life was

forced into the collective political realm by state-sponsored violence. The documentary turns their personal experiences into a collective ethical affair that questions the national narrative of democracy as synonymous with the protection of human rights.

Finally, in my conclusion, I reflect on the ways in which the aesthetic and philosophical approaches to memory in *Nostalgia*, *Abuelos*, *Roldós* and *Yambo* form part of an international dialogue facilitated by the Encuentros del Otro Cine International Documentary Film Festival in Ecuador. In this section, I establish some of the connections between the films in my corpus and the festival, noting for example, that all were screened at EDOC and *Yambo*, *Roldós* and *Abuelos* premiered there. The directors of *La Muerte de Jaime Roldós* (Lisandra Rivera, Manolo Sarmiento) are part of the group of cineastes and cultural advocates who founded the non-profit organization Cinememoria, which hosts EDOC. According to Sarmiento, Patricio Guzmán's film *Chile, la memoria obstinada* was the inaugural film for the festival, representing a manifesto for the power of memory and its connection to documentary cinema (Sarmiento 2015). Guzmán has participated in several editions of the festival, giving master classes and sharing retrospectives of his work. EDOC also played an important role in the formation of filmmakers Carla Valencia and María Fernanda Restrepo and offered key support for their films. Restrepo, for example, makes note of the impact EDOC has had on filmmakers like herself: "ha impulsado, ha motivado a nuevos realizadores, jóvenes realizadores, a realizar sus propias películas documentales gracias a esa ventana de traer los mejores documentales a nivel internacional . . ." (Restrepo 2015). Encuentros del Otro Cine Festival functions as an important space to talk about national

issues and to showcase national films, but also as a point of encounter between filmmakers, histories and philosophies from all over the world. Drawing connections with the aesthetic approaches of other films that have been screened at the festival, I demonstrate the ways *Nostalgia*, *Abuelos*, *Yambo*, and *Roldós* participate in a global political dialogue.

I was first drawn to the topic of documentary film and memory when I took a history course on human rights and state-sponsored violence in Cold War-era Latin America, with a focus on the Pinochet dictatorship and the Civil War in Guatemala. The more I learned about these recent cases of widespread human rights violations, and the more I became aware of U.S. involvement in the repression, the more called I felt to address these issues in my work. When the class watched *Chile, la memoria obstinada* (1997), I was moved by the film and by the authentic conversation it produced among the students. My interest in documentary film really took off, however, when I had the opportunity to work at the EDOC film festival in Quito, Ecuador, in 2014-2015. While working as the festival's programming assistant, I had the opportunity to meet and interview the filmmakers of all the Ecuadorian films I study, along with many other filmmakers and cultural advocates. I also made a short film, *El otro cine*, about the role the festival plays in creating space for public dialogue around historical memory. This was a transformative period for me in terms of my interest in film and in activism. The festival opened windows to many different ways of seeing the world, to new and pressing realities and experiences, and to the power of documentary to ignite conversations across borders, ages, and points of view. I see this power in each of the films I analyze.

## CHAPTER II:

### PART ONE — FLOWERS THAT TURN

#### Theoretical Introduction

Time, Memory and Eco-criticism in Documentary Films *Abuelos* and *Nostalgia de la luz*

“As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history.”

----Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*

Similar to Benjamin’s notion of the past turning toward the sun, documentary films *Nostalgia de la luz* (2010) and *Abuelos* (2010) turn toward the environment (the cosmos; the geological; the biological) to meditate on the relationship between the past, present and future; to process the losses brought on by the repressive Pinochet dictatorship; and to honor lost loved ones and lost ideals. Carla Valencia’s 2010 opera prima, *Abuelos*, is a personal meditation on the memory of her grandfathers staged through the natural environments where they lived. The director interviews the friends, family and acquaintances of her Ecuadorian grandfather Remo Dávila, a self-taught doctor of alternative medicine, and of her Chilean grandfather Juan Valencia, a committed member of the Chilean Popular Unity who was assassinated in the first months of the Pinochet dictatorship. In the film, Valencia remarks: “Yo crecí creyendo en la inmortalidad de Remo y me encontré con la muerte de Juan. Me fraccioné. Mientras una parte de mi avanzaba y se fortalecía, la otra estaba enterrada en el desierto” (Valencia 2010). By recuperating these fragmented memories and exploring their relationship to one another, Valencia forges a sense of personal identity and direction.

She uses nature (specifically water, desert, forest and sky) to contemplate the meanings of and connections between these memories. The film also creates collective historical memory of the human rights violations committed under the Pinochet dictatorship and preserves important archives that document the work of the Popular Unity coalition in Chile.

Patricio Guzmán's *Nostalgia de la luz* also stages the relationship between distinct but related pasts through nature. *Nostalgia de la luz* assumes the Atacama Desert as its memory grounds. Through his interviews with astronomer Gaspar Galaz and archeologist Lautaro Núñez, Guzmán presents the desert as a privileged space from which to meditate on history, time and memory because, as the driest place on Earth, it offers one of the most accessible views of the cosmos while also preserving the rubble of human history. For Victoria Saavedra, Violeta Berríos and the other women of Calama who Guzmán interviews, the desert of Atacama is the site of a now nearly lifelong search for the bones of disappeared loved ones; for Chile's national collective, it is a privileged site to observe the material remnants of the process of modernization and more generally to understand the flawed and unethical logic behind the discourse of progress that served to legitimate the nation-building process and later the Pinochet dictatorship. In a process similar to that of Valencia, only larger in scope, Guzmán works through his own memory knots and those of Chile while searching for an alternative philosophical approach to time and history. By combining collective memory of human rights violations under the Pinochet dictatorship, and the personal, reflective process of the filmmaker through a poetics of nature, *Abuelos* and *Nostalgia*<sup>i</sup> generate an eco-critical reading of history.



These films invite their viewers to *see, hear, touch* the past through the light of the sun, the sound of the wind and the texture of the desert. Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, which generates a materialist, constellationary concept of history based on the ethical claim the past has on the present, helps to unpack the relationship between the material world, the concept of ethical memory, and a critique of progress in the two films (254).

What does it mean for the past to turn toward the sun, as Benjamin suggests? In the fourth thesis of the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Walter Benjamin refers to the retroactive force that the vanquished of the past exert on the present moment. For Benjamin, the driving force of history is not solely “a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist” (254). He states, “. . . it is not in the form of spoils which fall to the victor that the [refined and spiritual things] make their presence felt in the class struggle” (254). Rather, “They manifest themselves in this struggle as courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude. They have retroactive force and will constantly call into question every victory, past and present, of the rulers. As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history” (255). Through the concept of “secret heliotropism,” Benjamin maps the biological impulse of the flower to search out the light, onto the human struggle to live and persevere. However, as he asserts, this struggle is not strictly in terms of the search for food and shelter, but also in terms of the impulse to honor the dignity of those who came before them. As the inherited memory of all sunflowers before informs the flower's stretch toward the sun, so too does the memory

of the vanquished inform humans' path toward a more sustainable future. A broad definition of sustainability is that which . . . “meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Karvonen and Brand 215). Especially given Benjamin's critique of progress on the basis of its constant amassing of “wreckage upon wreckage,” I believe it is reasonable to relate this concept of sustainability with his idea of the struggle for a more just future (257). By interweaving the flower and human history, I suggest that Benjamin develops a non-anthropocentric vision of time in which memory plays a central role in the shift away from the status quo of capitalism.<sup>ii</sup>

I argue that Benjamin advocates for a shift in the way humans conceive of themselves in the material world and in time. First, as mentioned above, this thesis underlines the connection between plants' struggle to live and humans' struggle to live: both are ultimately dependent on and intricately connected to the physical world around them. In this sense, through the image of the flowers, Benjamin ecologizes human history by calling attention to the human species' place within a larger biological and material history.<sup>iii</sup> In thesis XVIII, Benjamin once again refers to ecological history, quoting a biologist who noted that “in relation to the history of organic life on earth . . . the paltry fifty millennia of homo sapiens constitute something like two seconds at the close of a twenty-four hour day. On this scale, the history of civilized mankind would fill one fifth of the last second of the last hour” (263). Just like the image of the past striving to turn toward the sun recalls Earth spinning toward the sun, the deep and distant temporal scale of the biological that Benjamin references here also evokes a universe-al scale. These

images recall non-human universe-history with a duration that escapes anthropocentric capitalist time. They also generate a concept of time in which the past is embedded within the physical world, not independent of it. In contrast with homogeneous empty time's substance-less emplotment along a vector; here the past is not physically absent from the present, but instead the past, and time more generally, is embedded in the actual physical world. A universal scale, like a biotic scale, makes legible the fact that when it comes to the material world, nothing disappears. Time is not fleeting, abstract and quantifiable, as it is under the temporality of capitalist modernity, but instead contained within the physical world. Within these scales, memory can provoke "this most inconspicuous of all transformations"—a physical transformation of the plant and the planet *turning toward* the sun, motivated by the "secret heliotropism"—to which the historical materialist must pay close attention. Finally, in contrast to the utilitarian value capitalist concepts of history assign to the material world, this thesis grants a spiritual value to the laws of nature ("by dint of a *secret* heliotropism") that extend to human affective life.<sup>iv</sup> By overlaying the characteristics and impulses of the biological and planetary onto the human moral-affective realm ("courage, humor, cunning and fortitude"), Benjamin defines redemptive memory as an ethical commitment to the dignity of the vanquished, human and non-human. This ethical relationship (much like that of the commitment to the memory of the disappeared in the films) is portrayed as an instinctive impulse proper to existence within the ecology of the universe. Through the tense relationship between the image of the flower turning toward the sun and the past turning toward the sun on behalf of the particular character qualities of the vanquished, Benjamin associates non-

material qualities of a spiritual nature with ecology. According to this formulation, the universe itself and all that exists therein has a value beyond its utilitarian purposes, held in its mystery, beauty and authenticity. I argue that this thesis is particularly relevant to the contemporary struggle to respond to the status quo of capitalism in the context of climate crisis. In order for individuals and societies to conceive of new sociopolitical orders capable of responding to capitalism's Anthropocentric short-sightedness (incapable of seeing beyond the time span of human existence) and narrow-mindedness (incapable of seeing the human species as interconnected with other species and with the material world, and therefore characterized by limited agency), much work is yet to be done in bridging political and cultural history to environmental history. For example, a representation shift is necessary to make legible the multiple temporal-sensual levels of connection between environmental degradation and the neoliberal economy established by the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile.

*Nostalgia de la luz* and *Abuelos*, I propose, ask these very questions in the context of post-dictatorial Chile: What retroactive force do the stories of her grandfathers have on the filmmaker in *Abuelos* and how can the plants, skies and rivers in her surroundings help her to understand them? What retroactive force do 19<sup>th</sup> century miners and disappeared loved ones have on the work of geologists, astronomers and the filmmaker in *Nostalgia de la luz*? What retroactive force do the disappeared have on neoliberal democratic Chile and the larger international community in both films? The temporalities of the natural world, articulated through cinematic means, express an experience of the past as inevitably fleeting yet stubbornly lingering. This concept proves inconvenient for

contemporary governments and corporations, and provocative for contemporary viewers. While not explicitly addressing the effects of human-induced climate change, by framing the meaning of memory through the environment, *Nostalgia de la luz* and *Abuelos* provide an aesthetic experience necessary to apprehend non-anthropocentric temporalities and therefore to begin to take accountability for the harm done to the environment, to marginalized groups most acutely affected by this harm, and to future generations.

### **Historical Context**

#### The Chilean Context: State-sponsored Violence, Neoliberalism and the Environment

These films bridge the human rights violations of the Pinochet dictatorship with the neoliberal economy and environmental degradation in Chile. Historian Steve Stern, using information from the two official Chilean Truth Commissions asserts the following regarding repression in Pinochet's Chile:

Even using a conservative methodology, a reasonable estimated toll for deaths and disappearances by state agents is 3,500-4,500, for political detentions 150,000-200,000. Some credible torture estimates surpass 100,000 threshold, some credible exile estimates reach 400,000. (*Reckoning with Pinochet* xxiii, xxiv)

The Valech Report (Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura) with its two parts (one in 2005 and a second in 2010-2011) took on the objective of determining the number of detained and tortured, including victims who survived torture, who were not included in the earlier Rettig Report. The Valech Report determined the disturbing methods of torture and its widespread use as part of a state-sponsored mechanism.

Incorporating the findings of the second part of the Valech Report, the Chilean State “reconoce un total de 38.254 víctimas de prisión política y tortura” (“Comisiones de verdad”). It is important to take into account that the above statistics took place in a country with a population of roughly 10,000,000 (Stern xxiii). The terror was widespread and invasive.

The state-sponsored violence of Pinochet’s dictatorship was carried out on an international scene of Cold War tensions between capitalist and socialist state and economic interests. In the year 2000, the U.S. government declassified 24,000 state documents (C.I.A, State Department, White House, Defense and Justice Department records) that prove U.S. complicity with human rights violations in Chile during the dictatorship, as well as direct involvement in efforts to prevent Allende from taking power, to destabilize his government and then to facilitate the 1973 coup (Stern and Winn 228; Kornbluh 207). The U.S. government feared that Allende’s model of democratic socialism could take off in other countries in Latin America (Barder 113). The legitimacy of Allende’s rise to power through democratic means proved a blow to the discourse of ‘anti-democratic’ socialism/communism that had helped the U.S. delegitimize the Cuban Revolution. Therefore, as Barder argues, the Pinochet dictatorship, the neoliberalization of Chile and the reassertion of U.S. hegemony go hand in hand.

Transitional justice, or the “collective reckoning with the legacies of human rights abuse after dictatorship or violent conflict,” has also been a national and an international affair (Bervernage 111). The process in Chile has been partial and inconsistent, but has been characterized by a sustained demand for official documentation of crimes and the

pursuit of justice from survivors of state-sponsored violence, family members of the disappeared, NGOs, human rights activists and artists like Patricio Guzmán who continue to stimulate discussion about the persistence of this painful past in the present (Stern and Winn 278, 279). Despite these efforts to bring perpetrators to justice and to create historical memory of the repression of the dictatorship, survivors of state-sponsored violence still find themselves face to face with their torturers, or the torturers of their family members, as they go about their daily lives. The neoliberal economy that Pinochet, in consortium with state leaders and corporations from the United States, Britain and other Latin American nations, orchestrated in the years following the coup and that the government of the Concertación maintained, continues to operate and serve as a model. Chilean historian Gabriel Salazar asserts that “La Concertación . . . tomó prestado para sí, en 1990, el extremista modelo neoliberal que dejó como herencia la brutal dictadura del General Pinochet . . . desde la perspectiva del hegemónico capital financiero mundial, los cuatro gobiernos de la Concertación fueron, sin lugar a dudas, ‘satisfactoriamente’ neoliberales” (Salazar 81). Still today, Chile is widely regarded as an example of “economic miracle.” The economy the dictatorship established has been referred to as the “Chilean Laboratory” for neoliberalism, and as “a blueprint for the region’s future” (Barder 104, Carruthers 343, Clark 1351). In a 2010 interview, prominent Chilean sociologist Tomás Moulián commented that “En Chile, diremos que la dictadura es una condición esencial en el desarrollo capitalista neoliberal, ésta genera las condiciones políticas, lo cual no es una regla general, sino una regla que valió para Chile . . .” (Carrillo Nieto 149). The detention, torture and forced disappearances were instruments

of state repression used to annihilate the persons, social relationships and sense of agency that had established a socialist government democratically. In their place, the dictatorship worked to establish a market society that served the institutionalization of market rule as a means of accumulating capital (Carrillo Nieto 145).

This shift in Chile's state and economy was not merely technical. As Timothy Clark asserts, the neoliberal shift Chile experienced under the dictatorship "radically transformed the material and ideological foundations of the nation" (Clark 1350). Market relations took the place of social relations and transnational companies looking to make a profit determined the actions of the state, rather than the other way around. Juan Poblete describes the neoliberal social and economic project that moved into place as ". . . a predatory capitalism whose only horizon is the short-term and whose results are the proliferation of so-called externalities (from human to ecological consequences) and the incapacity to think an intergenerational horizon. . ." (99). Poblete's observations prove fruitful in understanding the connection that neoliberalism has with time, relationality and the environment. Not only does late capitalism, determined by finance and speculation, have a very short time/attention span (willingly oblivious to 'slow violence' against the environment and the fare of future generations), it also 'innovatively' destroys at any cost (Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* 8, 17, 41). The neoliberal project frames the elimination of social actors like the supporters of the Popular Unity party (or any socialist-leaning group) as necessary waste in the battle to save the country from communism. In much the same way, the tolls on the health of sea life are seen as a byproduct of a healthy fishing export industry; the destruction of an Andean glacier,



accompanied by habitat destruction and water pollution, are necessary side effects of the profitable mining export sector ((Latta and Cid 165, Rivera 237, Carruthers 347). Just as social relations are privatized in a market economy, so too is the relationship between humans and the Earth a matter of the market. In his analysis of the “memory dynamics” surrounding the Chilean transition from “the social to that of the post-social; i.e. a transition from a welfare state-centered form of the nation to its neoliberal competitive state counterpart,” Poblete asserts that the human rights-focused memory framework, while highly productive in many ways, has favored a view of Chile as an example of a Southern Cone military dictatorship, obscuring another process of a global nature in which Chile served as a periphery experiment for the model of neoliberalism and disaster capitalism under which public disorientation and crisis facilitated a major economic overhaul (96). Notably, he signals that following the neoliberal model in Chile, across the board, the post-social fostered a “libidinal economy that regulates both production and consumption, generating a series of negative externalities (from the destruction of nature to the disarticulation of the social environment, both the basic conditions of forms of individuation and sociality that are truly productive and sustainable) . . .” (100). My reading of *Nostalgia* and *Abuelos* works to respond to Poblete’s call to see Chile not only as a Southern Cone case study for human rights violations, but also as an important example of how, across the board, human rights violations are integrally connected to the destruction of nature under the *unsustainable* neoliberal system.

In their article “Neoliberal Ecologies from Pinochet to Bachelet,” Alex Latta and Beatriz Cid Aguayo specify that “the implementation of this [neoliberal] model during

the 1973-1990 military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet set the state for a frontier-style ‘open-season’ on Chile’s natural wealth, giving rise to a host of ecological impacts” (Latta and Cid 165). Their research, as well as that of David Carruthers, identifies this model as disastrous for “the land itself”: The boom of the Chilean ‘miracle’ and its export platform (of minerals, lumber, fish, and agricultural products) has eliminated massive areas of native forests, permanently harmed the animal populations of Chile’s shorelines and fisheries, and polluted both soil and air (Carruthers 347; Latta and Cid 165). Chilean ecologist and activist Juan Pablo Orrego, winner of the 1998 Right Livelihood Award for his work on sustainable development in Chile, notes that, “el sistema constitucional creado en dictadura es algo muy, muy bien hecho. . . . Se ha creado y justificado un sistema totalmente blindado para desempoderar a la gente y empoderar a las corporaciones” (López). Chilean ecologist and politician Sara Larraín reaffirms this point, noting that:

La Ley de Servicios Eléctricos y el Código de Aguas, entre otras tantas normativas, se hicieron en un momento en que Chile no tenía parlamento, lleva en la actualidad al país a una situación donde el diseño que se hizo en Dictadura repercute en la crisis que hoy estamos viviendo. No es casualidad que en todas las áreas tengamos mucha concentración del sector empresarial y no solo en las farmacias, sino que en las sanitarias, las eléctricas, las pesqueras, y un largo etcétera (Hermosilla).

The legal actions of the dictatorship cemented into place the privilege of corporations in the fishing sector, energy production, pharmaceuticals and more. Orrego notes that one result of the dictatorship’s market-driven policy was the forfeit of a national energy production plan, as the government handed the management of energy production over to private electric companies “cuyo objetivo es vender electricidad como una mercancía y punto” (Redbioética/UNESCO). The government, and society as a whole, has been short-

sighted and blind, he says, in its disinterest in energy efficiency and in renewable resources, which Chile has a great deal of (Redbioética/UNESCO). The country's role as provider of raw export material under Pinochet is neither entirely new (as it is party of the legacy of coloniality/modernity), nor has it come to pass under the Concertación and contemporary governments, which have only further solidified the neoliberal project, maintaining its status quo even when professing to hold environmental interests as a key priority (Latta and Cid 2012: 165, Redbioética/UNESCO). Orrego criticizes the country's development model, which he says, "está atascado, de los tiempos coloniales en realidad, en una fase productiva primaria, que nosotros llamamos primitiva" (Redbioética/UNESCO). He identifies three principal industries--mining, fishing and forestry—that are all raw export industries:

Chile vende el 70% de su cobre en forma de concentrado -tierra chancada con cobre adentro- para que otros lo refinan y después nos vendan el cobre en muchas aplicaciones. ¿Cuál es el segundo pilar de la economía chilena? La harina de pescado; la gran pesca industrial que está diezmando las especies de nuestros mares. Y el tercer pilar *brillante* es el forestal: millones de hectáreas de plantaciones de pino y eucalipto -con los cuales se ha sustituido el bosque nativo- que Chile exporta sea como astillas o pulpa de celulosa, particularmente a Japón - que nos vende el papel con todo el valor agregado. El problema de fondo, que nos tiene como estamos, es que las industrias primarias son las que más consumen energía, las que más consumen agua, las que más contaminan y sólo generan empleo bruto, no te genera desarrollo humano. (Redbioética/UNESCO).

Not only did the dictatorship—through constitutional changes—disempower its citizens through repression and the de-nationalization of these industries; it also empowered private companies like those that took control of the above industries, as well as the energy companies that powered them (Redbioética/UNESCO). 1980 constitutional changes established these priorities, and in 1981, the Chilean Código de Aguas allows for the privatization of water:

Justamente el Código de Aguas de 1981 crea esta figura nueva para Chile, que se llama Derechos de Agua no consuntivos, que es un derecho específicamente inventado para el desarrollo hidroeléctrico. *No consuntivo* significa, teóricamente, que tú puedes usar esas aguas al pasar, sin consumirla, como la consume la bebida o la agricultura. Pero en la práctica es de los derechos de propiedad más poderosos que tenemos en nuestro país y te dan un poder de ocupación de las cuencas (Redbioética/UNESCO).

This code especially effected indigenous communities, as companies with privileged information regarding the implementation of the regulations gained access to indigenous lands in order to build hydroelectric power stations. Similar regulations in the following years (1982 Ley General de Servicios Eléctricos DFL1 de Minería, among others) allow companies to expropriate land and resources while limiting workers' rights, leading up to the complete privatization of the energy sector in 1989 (Redbioética/UNESCO, Hermosilla). In relation to this process, Orrego comments,

“El primer robo es chileno, empresarios de ultraderecha, funcionarios del gobierno de [el dictador Augusto] Pinochet. Una operación oscurísima que nunca ha sido investigada porque es parte de los acuerdos que se suscribieron entre la Concertación y los militares, acuerdos de cosas que no se tocaban. . . Chile perdió como mil millones de dólares de la época por la forma en que fueron privatizadas estas empresas a precio vil” (Redbioética/UNESCO)

The first loss (by way of robbery) is a Chilean loss, he says. When the far right privatized the energy sector, national companies were sold at very low prices and Chile lost a lot of money. The agreements between the Concertación government and the military around this process have yet to be thoroughly investigated. Modifications to the constitutions and the Códigos de Aguas in the years since have been merely “cosmetic,” according to Orrego.

In light of the social and political unrest in Chile that gained momentum in the fall of 2019 and continues to the present, Larraín stated that “la crisis social es también

ecológica. La apuesta de los gobiernos de distinto sello ideológico por el extractivismo, además de generar una riqueza que no se distribuyó, ha implicado una carga ambiental insostenible para comunidades y territorios que sostienen dicho modelo” (Larraín). She mentions “zonas de sacrificio”—those where polluting industries are concentrated, where resident’s health suffers and mortality rates rise above the national average, due to drought and a shortage of potable water (Larraín; Acosta). According to the 2019 Chilean State of the Environment Report, produced by the National Environmental Ministry (part of the State Department), some of the key environmental concerns the country faces are the endangerment of close to 2.6% of the country’s species. This is especially alarming considering that only a small fraction of the species have been classified; air pollution, which affects more than 9 million citizens each year and leads to higher rates of premature death, is another prime concern (*Quinto Reporte del Estado del Medio Ambiente 2019* 6,7). Increasing temperatures due to global warming, drought and soil erosion are some of the other principal challenges:

Con motivo del cambio climático, los suelos chilenos están hoy, más que nunca, sometidos a un estrés hídrico, incrementando la cantidad de superficies con algún grado de desertificación, principalmente en las zonas extremas y centro del país. Como parte del desarrollo económico y crecimiento poblacional, algunas actividades antropogénicas, como la minería, la disposición de residuos, y la industria-manufactura, pueden contaminar los suelos afectando la calidad del suelo y la salud humana (*Quinto Reporte* 190).

Desertification affects 21.7% of the country’s land and 37.9% of the population, according to the report, which also notes that soil, due to its extremely slow process of formation, is considered a non-renewable recourse (*Quinto Reporte* 190, 191). Water shortages have been a severe problem for more or less the past 12 years, the report

asserts, due to “factores antrópicos como la sobreexplotación de acuíferos, el uso intensivo de agua por parte de los sectores productivos y la contaminación del agua, han potenciado la escasez del recurso” (*Quinto Reporte* 82). Today, Chile is among the countries with the highest level of hydric stress in the world, ranking number 18 in a 2019 report by the World Resources Institute (“Ranking of Countries”; “17 Countries”). It does not take much effort to draw correlations between the dictatorship’s legacy of neoliberal policies and social and environmental suffering, which as Poblete signals, are not unique to this Southern Cone country, but proper to the post-social model that Chile exemplified. Under a development discourse (“economic miracle”) that shares the logic of progress proper to coloniality/modernity, the dictatorship legally, socially and ideologically disarmed Chile’s citizens while opening up its natural resources to national and transnational private companies. While the transition to democracy reinstated some of the citizens’ rights, it did not leave the post-social neoliberal model and the violence continues to play out among Chile’s human population, non-human population, and land. There are precisely the complex political and ecological connections that *Abuelos* and *Nostalgia de la luz* address in their poetic engagement with time and the material world.

In his book, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon analyzes the temporal externalities of neoliberalism, or how an extractivist economy and society displaces violence over time, pushing it onto “the unborn” (35). He argues that in order to respond to the climate crisis, which disproportionately affects the poor, and future generations, we must attune ourselves to slow violence, or “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time

and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* 2). As an environmental humanities scholar who focuses on environmental justice, Nixon’s work crosses the fields of fiction and nonfiction literature, environmental studies, and postcolonial studies (“Rob Nixon”). He emphasizes that destruction of the natural world, like habitat destruction and species endangerment from overfishing, or water and soil contamination from the toxic byproducts of open pit mining like in the case of Chile, unfolds more slowly than the explosive and immediate event-based violence that is part of a tradition of mainstream media representation. These disasters do not make it into the collective consciousness of a globalized media climate driven by star texts, spectacle and sensationalism. (*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* 3).

Nixon explicitly mentions the affinities between the destructive afterlife of industrial particulates that “live on in the environmental elements we inhabit and in our very bodies” and “postconflict societies whose leaders may annually commemorate . . . the official cessation of hostilities, while ongoing intergenerational slow violence . . . may continue hostilities by other means” (*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* 8). The relationship between slow environmental violence and “postconflict” societies like that of Chile is not gratuitous, given that, as I have explained above, the violent repression of the dictatorship created the conditions for neoliberal capitalist development and an “open-season” on Chile’s natural resources. “Delayed”; “dispersed across time and space”; “attritional”; “Typically not viewed as violence at all”—the terms with which Nixon describes slow violence—apply to the way violence in Chile was

applied to the bodies of the tortured and disappeared, and rippled outward through the social and environmental attrition caused by privatization policies. Under a discourse of progress—“economic miracle”—the official history doesn’t account for the break-down of the collective or the increasingly extractivist economy “as violence at all” but instead as development. In his book, Nixon analyzes the representation of slow violence in authors from the Caribbean, India, Middle East, U.S., Britain and different parts of the African continent. He advocates for a bridge between environmentalist and postcolonial creators and thinkers and demonstrates the power of looking to writers from the global south who give “imaginative definition to catastrophes that often remain imperceptible to the senses, catastrophes that unfold across a time span that exceeds the instance of observation or even the life of the human observer” (Nixon “Slow Violence”). Creativity, he argues, is an essential tool to sensitize the larger public to slow violence.

Deborah Bird Rose, environmental humanities scholar and ethnographer whose work focuses on multispecies ethnography and the aboriginal peoples of Australia, shares this sentiment about the importance of writing to the environmental struggle against climate crisis. She states that in facing the “vortex” of multispecies aenocide, “Writing is an act of witness: it is an effort not only to testify to the lives of others but to do so in ways that bring into our ken the entanglements that hold the lives of all of us within the skein of life” (139). Coming from a related but distinct perspective to that of slow violence, which accounts for the effects of violence over a minute and expansive scale, Rose notes that in writing about the environment and its multiple temporalities, humans can become more aware of the “entanglements” that unite all living beings.



In other words, Rose identifies the ethical lessons of biological temporalities, those which define the dynamics of the living and dying; she works with the concepts of sequential time, synchronous time, and the multispecies knot of ethical time. On the concept of sequence, she writes, “The death narrative concept evokes the temporal pattern of sequence; it is accomplished through the transmission of wisdom, memory, and traditions from generation to generation” (130). In her explanation of sequential time, Rose appeals to James Hatley’s work on death narrative and ethical time, where “the narrative breathed across generations arrives unasked for and carries an obligation,” like the messianic index to which Benjamin refers (130). The ethical commitment is not restricted to those of future generations, however. Rose’s concept of synchrony in nature describes the ethical relationships all individuals share with their mutualists, or organisms of different species that mutually benefit from their interaction: “Synchrony intersects with sequential time, and involves flows among individuals, often members of different species, as they seek to sustain their individual lives” (129). She develops this idea by explaining that “All living things owe their lives not only to their forebears but also to all the other others that have nourished them again and again, that nourish each living creature during the duration of its life” (131). Using the case study of Australian flying foxes, who feed on eucalyptus trees that bloom at different times and in different regions depending on the heat and rainfall, she explains that the lives of flying foxes are found in the trees, the rain and soil, even the air (138). Growing evidence is emerging about mutualism’s “utterly fundamental” role in life as we know it, and that it complements competition: “There is no way to determine where connectivity and responsibility stop”

(138). What Rose calls multispecies knots of ethical time are the embodied interface of synchronous time and sequential time, where “Each individual is both itself in the present, and the history of its forebears and mutualists” (128, 130, 136). Recuperating this connection to the elements and other living creatures through writing allows for an awareness of diverse temporalities and experiences that are displaced within the capitalist system, which is defined by the “abstracted, disembedded, disembodied absolute time posited by Newton” (128, 130). Awareness of diverse biological temporalities comes with an ethical commitment, because it emphasizes connectivity to others, even within the body of the individual. Attention to the attritional violence of neoliberalism made invisible by the logic of progress, combined with a recovery of the temporalities of nature is precisely the concept of history—and redemptive memory—that Benjamin proposes.

The representational challenges that Nixon and Rose outline are similar to those that films like *Nostalgia de la luz* and *Abuelos* face. How to render visible the connection between colonization, the 19<sup>th</sup> century violence against Chile’s indigenous peoples, the violence of the dictatorship and its intergenerational legacy? How to represent the intimate and national sense of a past that won’t recede when the official discourse claims the past over and gone; the dictatorship over and gone? How to represent the absence of the disappeared, their bodies purposefully displaced? How to see this violence as part of a faulty logic of progress when neoliberalism continues to be the mode of operation of corporations, politicians and market society? The use of an ecological aesthetics allows for the viewer to perceive a connection between politics and economy, the dictatorship as part of a larger capitalist project defined by exploitation and expropriation. Nixon states

that “To confront slow violence is to take up, in all its temporal complexity, the politics of the visible and the invisible” (“Slow Violence”). In *Nostalgia* and *Abuelos*, the stars, geological layers and living organisms represent a recycling of energy and matter, allowing the filmmakers to make present the disappeared despite the political context that *disappears* their bodies on material and ideological levels. Through their representations of nature, *Nostalgia de la luz* and *Abuelos* offer a vision of memory that allows the viewer to recover a sense of ecological collectivity and make the connections between politics and ecology.<sup>vi</sup> While neither film explicitly addresses the ecological repercussions of free market capitalism—they do *not*, for example, touch on the devastating effects of deforestation or mining,—they *do* render apprehensible slow violence and the ecological temporalities that contest neoliberal time. They provide an aesthetic experience that attunes the viewer to slow violence. In tune with Nixon’s call to engage the distinct sensorial experiences of slow violence, the films construct temporality through visual cues, sonic cues and montage. The long slow pans over the sandy slopes and jagged rocks situate one in the environment and temporality of the Chilean desert. In this sense, the film responds to Nixon’s explanation of the need “to confront layered predicaments of apprehension: to apprehend—to arrest, or at least mitigate—often imperceptible threats requires rendering them apprehensible to the senses through the work of scientific and imaginative testimony” (*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* 14). By negotiating memory on so many different temporal scales, the film renders a more complex understanding of violence and redemption “apprehensible.” Given the focus on contesting the erasure of human rights violations, and given the

emphasis on collectivity, there is a strong ethical component to the function of memory in both films. A comparative analysis of the films highlights aesthetic resources the filmmakers employ to make lingering violence of the dictatorship apprehensible.

### *Nostalgia de la luz*

#### Scale, the Stars, the Desert and Slow Violence

“...she, dissolved into I don't know what kind of energy-light-heat, she, Mrs. Ph(i)Nk<sub>0</sub>, she who in the midst of our closed, petty world had been capable of a generous impulse, 'Boys, the noodles I would make for you!', a true outburst of general love, initiating at the same moment the concept of space and, properly speaking, space itself, and time, and universal gravitation, and the gravitating universe, making possible billions and billions of suns, and of planets, and fields of wheat, and Mrs. Ph(i)Nk<sub>0</sub>s, scattered through the continents of the planets, kneading with floury, oil-shiny, generous arms, and she lost at that very moment, and we, mourning her loss....”

(Italo Calvino, “All at One Point,” *Cosmicomics*)

*Nostalgia de la luz* can be read like an afterward to “All at One Point,” Italo Calvino’s magical rendition of the moment of the Big Bang. In this short story, an act of love initiates the expansion of the universe. Mrs. Ph(i)Nk<sub>0</sub>’s initiative to make pasta for the other beings living on the single point of pre-Big Bang time and space sets in motion the creation of the universe. The protagonist of the story longs not only for Mrs. Ph(i)Nk<sub>0</sub>, who was scattered among the billions and billions of suns and planets, but also for the unity that that pre-expansion existence represented, in which time and space were one. Guzmán’s film speaks to a similar longing for distant origins from a place of scattered bones. In an interview with Guzmán, Violeta Berríos, one of the women of Calama,<sup>vii</sup> explains that when a specialist confirmed that a piece of her husband Mario’s jaw bone had been found, she responded that she didn’t want it; she wanted him whole,

she said; they took him away whole. Almost as if defending herself before the documentary film's future viewers, Violeta admits, "Tal vez muchos dirán para qué queremos huesos. Yo los quiero, yo los quiero y muchas de las mujeres los quieren" (Guzmán 2010). The hope of finding closure has kept Violeta and the other women of Calama searching the desert for over thirty years. They must keep processing this loss to incorporate the meaning of their loved ones' forced disappearance into the present moment. It is a similar sense of loss and longing for closure that drives Guzmán to keep making films about the dictatorship, and this one in particular. As Violeta Berríos wants to have the bones of her loved one whole, Guzmán wants people to see the bones of the dead in whole, as part of the present they inhabit, as part of the universe to which they belong. He wants to reveal their disappearance as the willful negligence of a system that perceives them, and the pain of their family members, as the "necessary waste" of an economic "miracle." Like the residual byproducts of saltpeter mines, the disappeared speak to the unaccounted-for violence of perceived progress. I argue that the nostalgia the film references is less a longing for a specific moment in the past—the Allende years—than for a way of experiencing time that steps outside the neoliberal logic of progress that has resulted in such human and environmental catastrophe.

Several critical readings of *Nostalgia* have successfully focused on the importance of cinema as a "time machine" that materializes memory for the viewer across temporalities, returning affect and physicality to the telling of history in the context of human rights violations in Chile. Kaitlin Murphy, for example, argues that "Guzmán [uses] the objects in the film, and, in turn, the film itself to create ... public memory"

(275). For example, outside the Chacabuco Concentration Camp (which was previously a mining camp), he portrays wooden crosses with colorful plastic flowers, old light bulbs, tarnished spoons and decayed shoes. “These material objects,” she explains, “when understood within the context of their usage, become the physical remnants of the live bodies—not as a *proxy* for the real bodies, but haunted by them. They function as a way to rouse the past and make it part of the public sphere in the present” (276). Materiality functions to make the past both accessible and a matter of ethics. In her analysis of *Nostalgia* and *Botón de nácar*, María Emilia Zarini focuses on the power of film to connect the past and the present through creative memory. She claims that “los hechos de cada película imantan nuestro presente y van produciendo pequeñas dislocaciones que nos ponen a gravitar, finalmente, en torno a la memoria . . .” (78). As her phrase “gravitar” “en torno a la memoria” suggests, engagement with the histories in each film, through what Zarini refers to as “imágenes de lo real” grounds the viewer by connecting them to the past, but it also destabilizes their understanding of the present by interjecting it with connections to multiple temporalities. Zarini emphasizes the mystery and magnitude of images of the material world and how they signal a tense unity in both films: “Nuestra realidad más íntima, lejos de ser un Todo, es una hendidura por la que las imágenes de Guzmán ingresan y fuerzan al pensamiento hacia ese Todo que no puede pensarse, hacia lo inevocable, hacia lo inefable, hacia lo infinito” (78). Confronted by the ineffable, Zarini proposes, the viewer takes a creative, imaginative position of *belief* over rational knowing. The emotional and relational connections that one can make from the position of *belief* represent “*vectores de memoria*” that tie together the first person

singular, the first person plural, the past and the present, time and space, to create grounded social memory that is capable of “holding space” within the present for the past. Memory vectors informed by the mystery and hope of the infinite permit this co-presence with the past without being consumed by the black hole of disbelief which, “quizá, la crueldad despiadada de nuestra barbarie civilización tenga mucho que ver” (Zarini 79, 89).

Brad Epps similarly signals the political and pedagogical power of affect in *Nostalgia de la luz* and *Memoria Obstinada*, specifically within the context of “un orden económico en el que capitalistas de riesgo y emprendedores ávidos dominan cada vez más las universidades del mundo entero y acaban naturalizando y convalidando el carácter neoliberal que está en el centro de los debates en el Chile post-dictatorial” (343). Epps, referencing Nelly Richards and Ernesto Laclau, argues that in post-dictatorship Chile, “[social] objectivity” has defined itself through the repression of that which it excludes: the economic and social justice project of Unidad Popular and the emotional baggage associated with a legacy of state-sponsored violence and terror (344). *Nostalgia de la luz*, Epps notes, “con sus grandiosos gestos metafísicos, panoramas cósmicos y paisajes sublimes, está saturada de emoción—de modo más memorable en la presencia de las mujeres que escarban el desierto buscando los huesos de sus seres queridos” (342). For Epps, affect facilitates “post-postmemoria” (dialoguing with Marianne Hirsch’s *post-memory*) whereby the viewer connects with the memories and feelings of social subjects in the film beyond the typical familial or national ties. Epps asserts: “Tentativa, ecléctica y elíptica, la post-postmemoria invita a pensar, acaso a vivir, las grandes dicotomías de lo

público y lo privado, lo colectivo y lo individual, lo foráneo y lo familiar como aspectos de un proceso dialéctico envolvente y no teleológico en cual el ser se pliega sobre sí mismo y fuera de sí mismo, parcialmente alterado, desplazado y re-membrado” (348). In this way, Epps argues, the film has been successful in reaching international audiences like those of his university students in the United States and England in communicating the pain associated with the repression of the Pinochet dictatorship. Post-postmemory facilitated through empathy is an important pedagogical and political tool that the film employs to reach beyond the public-private dichotomy that the neoliberal regime (including that of academia) has enforced on memory politics. The Chilean national policy and discourse has relegated the emotional experience of the disappeared, tortured and repressed (and the legacy of trauma that follows in its wake, from generation to generation) to silence in the public realm. The public political discourse frames this emotion as appropriate only in the private realm, and as illegitimate and unproductive to the collective process of “moving forward.” *Nostalgia*, in contrast, makes the emotional baggage of this recent history a necessarily shared part of coming to terms with the violent past.

David Martin-Jones, in his article “Archival Landscapes and a Non-Anthropocentric ‘Universe Memory’” also references the importance of both the physical archive and affect in creating a universe-history that interweaves the national (Chilean), regional (Latin America colonial context) and material world. In his careful and comprehensive analysis of the film, Martin-Jones approaches the philosophical claims *Nostalgia* posits through Gilles Deleuze’s “crystal of time” and “any-space-wherever.” In



regards to Deleuze's "crystal of time" concept, and its connection to *Nostalgia*, he states: "In *Nostalgia for the Light* . . . the crystal of Earth (Chile, Atacama Desert, Santiago de Chile) and the cosmos emphasizes that the nation's history exists at the meeting point of the two, the layers of history it archives in the Atacama Desert belonging as much to the universe as they do the nation" (716). Each temporality the film explores is pierced through with another, similar to Deleuze's crystal of time, wherein "times splits perpetually into a present that passes and a past that is preserved, thereby creating the stored layers of the virtual past" (713). Guzmán's filmmaking, Martin-Jones proposes, creates crystal images (single images and/or series of shots) that allow him to explore the ways in which history "is created in contexts where various virtual layers of the past have been forgotten or deliberately obscured" (714). On the other hand, in his construction of "any-spaces-wherever," or "affective spaces that provide the entrances to time," images take on the power to look, become *faceified* (718). These images are also abstracted from the clues that specify their designation to a particular place or time, hence the term "any-space-wherever" (719). Describing the testimony of Violeta Berríos, one of the women of Calama, who is framed within a desert landscape in such a way that the subject and the *mise-en-scène* blend together with tense reverberations of color, texture and shape, Martin-Jones explains how the landscape appears to speak through her of its secrets and its desire to give testimony to shared histories (720). Berríos looks like part of the desert and through her, the desert looks out and speaks out to the viewer. All of the analyses reviewed here draw meaningful conclusions about materiality, affect and emerging ontologies that contest neoliberal discourse in Chile and Latin America; Martin-Jones,

here, brings those two points together with a focus on landscape in a highly productive way.

These analyses dialogue with Benjamin's concept of history, which seeks to criticize the concept of historical progress by challenging the temporal and spatial premises on which it is based—"the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time" (Benjamin 261). Yet, I wish to suggest that these conclusions regarding the philosophical import of the crystalline intersection of temporalities, and the deep, collective voices of spaces—all through landscape—can and should be extended to our understanding of the connections between the state of the environment and the history of cultural and economic systems. Martin-Jones includes the term "non-Anthropocentric" in his title, but neither develops the concept fully nor explores its significance to the logic of progress that informs the Chilean context of conquest, nation-building, dictatorship, and contemporary neoliberal policy. The fact that the film, through Berríos, "[gives] a voice to the landscape" is not insignificant when we consider that it is a human-centered logic—wherein nature has no intrinsic value but is instead a resource to be extracted for human purposes—that underlies the epistemological and ontological projects of each of the aforementioned sociohistorical processes (Martin-Jones 720). While Martin-Jones signals both points (the voice of the landscape as connected to the voice of the disappeared), he does not draw the connection between how this non-anthropocentric 'universe memory' offers an environmental critique of the logic of progress. Similarly, Nilo Couret, in his extensive analysis of *Nostalgia*, establishes the importance of scale in the film, where "the image becomes a site not for discovering the past but instead for

emplotting ourselves through scalar conversion along spatio-temporal coordinates belonging elsewhere” (70). The scalar conversion Couret describes is similar to the work of the time-images in *Nostalgia* that Martin-Jones analyses, whereby “the crystal of Earth/cosmos is the foundation of a gigantic universe memory” (716). Although Couret argues that “Martin-Jones reads the Bergsonian model of time as one that moves from linearity to multilayering”—contrasting multilayering with scale—, my reading of Martin-Jones’ concept of the crystal of Earth refers back to his emphasis on Deleuze’s crystal of time. While Martin-Jones does refer repeatedly to layering, they are not layers neatly placed one over the other, but instead “far messier,” “forever shifting,” “virtual”...crystalline, like Deleuze’s crystal of time. He states, “In such a crystalline structure, the virtual and the actual facets of the crystal are either cosmos and Earth, or Earth and the cosmos, depending on how you conceive of it” (715). I suggest that we could replace “conceive of” in this statement with “measure” and understand Martin-Jones’ tense layering as in fact the same as scale. Through the concept of tense layering or scale, both Martin-Jones and Couret suggest that the film’s construction of time rejects the teleological approach to time underpinning the logic of progress. They do not, however, explore the ways in which the film’s alternative spatiotemporal logic sets the premise for Eco-critique, for an acute understanding of the direct connection between the human and non-human catastrophes of progress, precisely by foregrounding the landscape and material world as the medium of scalar conversion. Perhaps in part reflecting the film’s lack of commentary on the modernizing tendencies of the Allende government and therefore a contradictory maintenance of progressive thought on one

level, these criticisms hesitate to bring the materialist approach to collective memory one step further by relating human rights violations and exploitation to the destruction and exploitation of the environment. Benjamin criticizes what he calls a “vulgar-Marxist conception of the nature of labor” because it, “amounts to the exploitation of nature, which with naive complacency is contrasted with the exploitation of the proletariat” (259). If we as spectators and critics relate the philosophical import of Guzmán’s film only to human rights violations, or only to highly academic audiovisual concepts, we run the risk of missing the connection between the exploitation (and torture) of humans with the exploitation and destruction of the environment under the discourse of progress, similar to the “conformism” of “vulgar-Marxists” that Benjamin warns against, whereby the exploitation of nature is considered secondary or separate from human exploitation (258, 259).

In his description of slow violence, Rob Nixon notes the importance of slow violence and scale in “[perceiving] and [responding] to a variety of social crises, like domestic abuse or post-traumatic stress, but it is particularly pertinent to the strategic challenges of environmental calamities.” (“Slow Violence”). He states, “among the decisive challenges such critical initiatives [of slow violence] face is that of scale: how can we imaginatively and strategically render visible vast force fields of interconnectedness against the attenuating effects of temporal and geographical distance?” (*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* 38). The tense relationship between the scales of stars, the desert, and bones offers the viewer physical and affective connection to temporal and spatial-others from within their present. By

switching between the scales and sensorial experiences of the cosmic, geologic and embodied experience in order to engage viewers in the story of the disappeared, Guzmán draws the spectator into an ecological ethical disposition that relates the amnesia surrounding the violation of human rights in Chile with the blind eye that neoliberal society gives to the exploitation and destruction of the natural world. Especially given Guzmán’s focus on connecting with the environment in all three of the films that form part of his most recent trilogy on Chilean history, memory and human rights violations—*Nostalgia de la luz* (cosmos, desert, 2010), *El botón de nácar* (water, the sea, 2015) and *La cordillera de los sueños* (mountains, 2019)—, I argue that it is valid and important to consider Guzmán’s memory project from the perspective of ecocriticism. Through each of these films, the director seems to be imploring his audiences to connect with the living and non-living physical world around them in order to, one on one hand account for the violence of the past, and on the other hand to move forward in a way that does not perpetuate the violence in which the logic of progress has resulted.

Guzmán’s focus on the environment is not a surprising development as it grows out of the importance he places on “Marxist analyses of reality” and the material world in his earlier films. *Batalla de Chile: la lucha de un pueblo sin armas* is Guzmán’s three-part film documenting the sociopolitical movement of the Popular Unity coalition, the conservative forces’ ideological and economic measures to derail the movement, the coup d’état and the dynamics of class struggle more broadly. Patrick Blaine, in dialogue with Ana López, notes that the film utilizes various documentary modes to create “una combinación dialéctica de todos estos sistemas” (206). So, a Marxist reading of history,

which has been one of the most salient sources of ecocriticism, is at the heart of Guzmán's oeuvre. Guzmán himself (cited within Blaine) sums up the uniting factor of *Batalla de Chile* as “un análisis marxista de la realidad” (207). The post-dictatorial trilogy comprised of *Chile, la memoria obstinada* (1997), *El caso Pinochet* (2001) and *Salvador Allende* (2004) is also grounded in a Marxist reading of reality, not only in the films' labor to protect the dignity of the Marxist social movement of the Popular Unity coalition, but also in terms of the use of material objects, especially in *Salvador Allende*. This trilogy shares with *Batalla* and with the *Nostalgia-Botón-Cordillera* trilogy, an effort to “crear una nueva, más completa y más verídica historia nacional” at the same time as it also criticizes the silences and “ausencia de referentes” in Chilean memory (207). Blaine, among other critics, notes the use of “marcadores físicas” in *Salvador Allende* to present different aspects of the president's past, but also to underline his absence, the erasure of a persecuted man (215, 216). Blaine explains, “en *Salvador Allende*, uno de los mecanismos claves para acceder a la memoria y recrear la narrativa histórica es buscar las pocas huellas materiales que quedan-casi como huesos santos-enfatizando la ausencia de tanta historia a través de la escasez de vínculos físicos a la memoria” (216). Here, physical, material objects serve as proof of a history of the Popular Unity coalition and Allende that persists despite so many forces to erase it. The material world in *Nostalgia* serves a purpose not altogether different than the material objects in *Salvador Allende*, only this time, the scale is much, much larger. Additionally, the material world here is a reminder of human-kind's limited agency within the universe. Try as they might to erase the inconvenient truths of the past or designate them as

necessary inconveniences, the institutions and individuals of the dictatorship (and the history of colonization) can never eliminate the past from the material world. This perspective is of course pertinent to memory politics in terms of the legacy of the disappeared, but it is also extremely relevant to the environmental legacy of the neoliberal policy that the dictatorship ushered in. Neoliberalism understands the environment as a resource to be used to generate maximum profit and views environmental protections as a limit on progress. The Pinochet dictatorship, for example, put into place the Código de Agua de 1980, which establishes non-consumptive water rights that allowed private companies to both use water and build hydroelectric dams on indigenous lands sustaining cultural traditions and great biodiversity. Seeing the human as protagonist of history, this socioeconomic system does not recognize humans' limited agency on the planet and in the universe. Guzmán understands the environment as a source of beauty and mystery, something much larger and more powerful than humans. Neoliberalism, based on individualism in theory and privatization in practice, fails to see humans ecologically, as part of a human and non-human collective. *Nostalgia* portrays the collective past and present is in our bones. While neoliberalism would like to displace violence onto the poor and future generations, the film reiterates that in fact the past will not go away. For this reason, I argue that *Nostalgia de la luz*, (the focus of this essay) and the other films of the trilogy, demonstrate an emerging focus on a recuperation of the human relationship to the natural world and an eco-critical approach to the telling of history as a key aspect of Patricio Guzmán's memory project.

Let us take the introductory sequences of the film as an example of the environmental importance of scale. A brief series of shots establish the camera as Guzmán's telescope, his instrument of scalar conversion between the cosmic and earthly. A low angle shot frames the telescope under the closed dome, which, like an eye or a flower or a camera shutter, slowly opens, the bright white light of the sun flooding the screen. Through an extended dissolve transition, the telescope and the light are superimposed by a series of resplendent close-up black and white images of what looks like the cratered surface of the moon. The dissolve allows the spectator to see the astronomical body literally *through* (on the other side of) the image of the telescope. The sunshine, telescope and moon all appear on screen at the same time for about 4 seconds. Like the sunlight in the previous frame, bright light illuminates the surface of the cosmic object. It is light that connects them and allows for sight along both scales. Similarly, just as gears moving the telescope turn on multiple axis in the first sequence, so too does the camera move over the still shots of the unidentified bodies in space. Light and movement create connections that stress both continuity and loss, a tense sort of totality where one scale cannot be divorced from the other.

This opening sequence is full of mechanical parts that spin, that speed up and slow down, that perform functions within a larger system of operations. Combined with the impact of the light of the sun filling the screen, the foregrounding of the perspective of the telescope, and the shots of mercury's surface that appear shortly after, the images and sounds of the turning dials tensely recall the image of a planet spinning on its axis and following its course in orbit around the sun. These sounds, movements and objects



speak to the viewer of physics—matter and energy and their interaction—and the distinct scales at which the materiality of the universe can be engaged. Like Charles and Ray Eames’ 1977 short film *Powers of Ten and the Relative Size of Things in the Universe*, *Nostalgia* constructs for the viewer an experience of the material world at different scales of measurement. Moving first outward and then inward by powers of ten from the surface of a Chicago picnicker’s, the Eames’ short film creates a neat visualization of scale that highlights the similarity between the emptiness that characterizes the fringes of the known universe and the most miniscule subatomic particles known at that time—quarks. Guzmán’s construction of scale is not nearly as clear cut. As Nilo Couret establishes in his article, “Scale as Nostalgic Form,” this opening scene of *Nostalgia* “establishes the scalar structure of nostalgia” that “unmoors synechdochic signification because the part never quite corresponds to the whole” (Couret 73, 74). Rather than the neat and didactic inward and outward expansion of *Powers of Ten*, *Nostalgia* develops tense relationships that place the viewer in a multi-scalar figure<sup>viii</sup> that emphasizes a totality whose nature and form remain cloaked in mystery and the limits of human understanding.

Hymn-like nostalgic music gradually gives way to the sound of birds, wind, and rustling trees as the contrast of the craters and smooth spaces dissolves into the playful movement of light and shadow on the window of an old home. In this sequence, Guzmán turns the telescope-camera toward the Earth, toward his own personal story and the story of Chile’s shift from great social change to dictatorship. Yet here too the spectator sees the same light, the same contrast, the same movement. Not only does the connection between the cosmic and the human scale create “a logic of interconnected systems of

human and nonhuman relations” or “eco-logic”; it also emphasizes light and movement as the viewer’s means to creating meaning (Llamas-Rodríguez 31). Where capitalism sees the natural world as having value insofar as it serves to accumulate capital, this approach recovers use value, in which the natural world is the basic building block of any meaning or value. While Benjamin’s layered image of flowers turning toward the sun and the past—“by dint of a secret heliotropism”—turning to the sun in the sky of history, does not explicitly address ecology, it *does* bring a material, physical element to his concept of history. Later, in Thesis XI, he imagines “. . . a kind of labor which, far from exploiting nature, is capable of delivering her of the creations which lie dormant in her womb as potentials” (259). He imagines a logic based on use value, rather than capital value. Criticizing both capitalism and the conformist Social Democracy, Benjamin states that a concept of nature that “‘existe gratis,’ is a complement to the corrupted conception of labor” (259). By maintaining a concept of development that distances the human from their ecosystem by viewing the material world as an endless resource, conformist Social Democracy functions on the same underlying extractive logic of capitalism. Benjamin criticizes this conception of labor which, he explains, “amounts to the exploitation of nature, which with naive complacency is contrasted with the exploitation of the proletariat” (259). By framing memory through the natural world, *Nostalgia* refutes the concept of nature as a resource to be exploited. The environment has value—in the form of beauty, mystery, and physical, material existence that lasts longer and stretches beyond the span of an individual or a generation, beyond the discourse of development and progress and beyond the Anthropocene. Not only are the shots of the telescope, the moon

and the dancing light on the window awe-inspiring in and of themselves, with their precise lighting, low-angle shots and paused camera movements, but accompanied by hymn-like music, the composition takes on the reverence of an elegy. In *Nostalgia*, as in *El botón de nácar* and *La cordillera de los sueños*, the environment and its components are treated with admiration and careful attention: the viewer has something to learn from the environment in and of itself. In fact, as I mentioned above, it is through light, movement and the textures of the physical world that meaning—here the idea of a tense totality defined by intersecting scales—can be produced. The value of the natural world exceeds that of exchange value and expands the concept of use value: it has dignity in and of itself. In this way, Guzmán, like Benjamin, clearly opposes capitalism, which seeks to dominate nature in order to accumulate capital, but in the philosophical premise of his film, proposes an alternative theory of Marxism to that which was put into practice in most places, including the deeply modernist project of the Unidad Popular, where for the most part, the productive apparatus remained the same, but at the service of the workers.

Within the film, Guzmán’s voice-over narration is a prominent source of tone and tempo. Resonating with the direct environmental sounds of desert wind, and the epic, at times strained string composition of Chilean musicians Miranda y Tobar (José Miguel Miranda and José Miguel Tobar), Guzmán’s voice ebbs and flows in tension. It almost always has a paused, poetic intentional character, at times seeming as if he were speaking from a place deep inside the earth or from distant space. In his poetic voice-over narration, Guzmán relates “el viejo telescopio alemán” of the earlier shots to his passion

for astronomy and an idyllic period of his childhood, as well as a period when “Chile era un remanso de paz aislado del mundo” (Guzmán 2010). If the introductory sequence immerses the viewer in an interconnected system of non-anthropocentric spatiotemporalities, the next set of sequences serve to establish an affective connection to those scales through the concept of innocence. A picturesque household is portrayed through detail shots of an old radio, a carefully set table, embroidered curtains, peaches lined up on an old-fashioned kitchen cabinet; the bright light dancing on a white bedspread and rustic wooden floors recall mid-morning light of a day spent at home. Guzmán explains that these objects “que podrían haber sido los mismos que había en mi casa me recuerdan ese momento lejano cuando uno cree que deja de ser niño” (Guzmán 2010). This childhood nostalgia mixes together with a national period of peace in the director’s personal memory: just as the objects shown here appear both historic and performed, both document and set, this period in his life and in national history are a memory produced from a romantic vision of the past. The domestic set, filled with objects that could have been those from his childhood home, have a timeless, idealized air. In a way, this representation of the past is a deviation from the film’s own philosophical premise, given that the period of the 1940s and 1950s, the time of Guzmán’s childhood, nor any other era in national history was truly characterized by peace and innocence for all in Chile. In fact, this time, like those before and to follow, was strife with inequality, racism and the expansion of the very mining industry that Guzmán critiques. Guzmán asserts that his portrayal comes from his personal memories,

but given the national (collective) framing of this scene and the whole film, this portrayal of Chile's mythic period of innocence seems contradictory.

The director's representation of the Allende period, in contrast, denotes a rupture from this mythic, almost sleepy past. The world suddenly burst out of the continuum into revolution. *Nostalgia* connects an increase in the prominence of astronomy in Chile to the revolutionary social and political change that characterized the period before and during the presidency of Salvador Allende. Stardust slowly begins to fill the frame and the stationary shot of a doorway and tree (presumably outside the picturesque provincial home) fade as the sounds of the wind pick up. In voice-over, Guzmán explains that a revolutionary wind “nos despertó a todos” (Guzmán 2010). Around the same time, he narrates, “la ciencia se enamoró del cielo de Chile. Un grupo de astrónomos descubrió que las estrellas se podían tocar con la mano en el desierto de Atacama. Envueltos por el polvo estelar, los científicos de todo el mundo construyeron aquí los telescopios más grandes de la tierra” (Guzmán 2010). The connection between Allende's Popular Unity government and astronomical research is not developed significantly in the film in historical terms, but it is important that Guzmán makes this distinction, establishing astronomy and scientific investigation more generally, with a vision of progress that he considers noble—“[una] ilusión [que] quedó grabada en mi alma para siempre”—and that represents an alternative to the dictatorship's neoliberal vision of progress (Guzmán 2010). It is not surprising that Guzmán makes this connection with Chilean history early on in the film. Guzmán's many works document and contribute to the historical memory of the Popular Unity project and the violent repression of the dictatorship, an open wound

that represents a larger ethical debt the present holds with the past. The support for astronomy under Allende's government is directly contrasted with the military coup, which, "barrió con la democracia, los sueños y la ciencia" (Guzmán 2010). The stardust transitions to dust coating a junk pile of scientific equipment that appears to have been frozen in time, abandoned. Guzmán clarifies that despite living in "campo de ruinas," Chilean astronomers did not put an end to their work, but instead continued with the support of an international support system, much like Guzmán himself, who has continued to make films about his country from exile (Guzmán 2010). In voice-over, Guzmán shares, as noted above, that the sense of hope and possibility that the Allende period represented "quedó grabada en mi alma para siempre." The ideals and socio-economic model that the Popular Unity coalition represented professed a different sort of progress. However, theirs was also a deeply modernizing project in which the state nationalized industry, appropriating for the national collective the capitalist productive apparatus. Although more amiable and attuned to the collective (both human and non-human), the economy of the Allende period was still built primarily around resource extraction and a progressive concept of time<sup>ix</sup>.

As if in a gesture of defiance toward the closed dome of the previous sequence—representative of the dictatorship's end to astronomical innovation and intellectualism more broadly—*Nostalgia* chooses a satellite view for the establishing shot of the next sequence. Using the camera as a tool to reach beyond the limits placed by the dictatorship, and foreshadowing the power of freedom that observing the sky will represent for those incarcerated in Pinochet's concentration camps, the film transitions to

a still of the earth, the whole planet captured within the frame. *Nostalgia* layers the scale of the cosmic onto the intimate, and this time also the geologic.<sup>x</sup> The sound of the wind intensifies and through a zoom, the frame doubles in on a brown patch of land, the driest on Earth—the Atacama Desert. The wind remains constant as the still shot of the Earth from space transitions to a hand-held shot of feet walking over the salty, crunchy desert floor. The continuity of the sound of the wind creates a tense connection between the distant barren landscape of outer space and the barren-ness of the desert. Is that wind a simulation of outer space, or can the viewer somehow hear the Atacama wind as they observe it from way up above? The pockets of white salt contrast with the rocky red earth of the desert, resonating with the afterimage of the dark and light spots of the porous body of mercury. In a similar gesture, Guzmán immediately remarks in voice-over that he imagines that man (humankind) will soon reach Mars, and that the desert floor bears close resemblance to that far off world. As if in an Escher painting,<sup>xi</sup> the tense sonorous and tactile links form a stairway that simultaneously lead from the contemporary desert to the distant surface of Mars and back in time 10,000 years ago, when the riverbeds of rocks served as natural passage ways for nomadic peoples. In voice-over, Guzmán explains that the area is a sort of portal between spaces and times, a multitude of stationary shots from varying distances give the viewer a visual representation of the desert that recalls the earlier reference to Mars. The film gestures toward the scales that are beyond the reach of human lifetimes while also introducing sounds and textures that seem to tensely recalculate those scales for human understanding. In this way, *Nostalgia* does the work of making the temporally and geographically distant *touchable*,

apprehensible through the senses. Because he also makes evident the multiple histories of violence, the bodies, that the desert holds, he is setting up viewing practices that make “slow violence” perceptible.

Grounded Memory: The Face of the Atacama Desert

“El desierto chileno es un océano de minerales enterrados” (Guzmán 2010)

Moving the camera in a downward tilt from the telescope towers to pre-Columbian drawings on a rock, Guzmán transitions from the concept of origins in the cosmos back to the desert: the mystery of science crosses the ages, he states, and here in Atacama, the desert reveals a secret. With the shot still lingering momentarily on the drawings, Galaz goes on to state, “Todas las experiencias que uno tiene en la vida, digamos sensoriales, incluso esta conversación, ocurren en el pasado” (Guzmán 2010). As Lautaro Núñez affirms in the next sequence, the work of an astronomer and an archeologist are integrally united in that both recreate the past from its traces (“leves señales”) in the present. The pre-Colombian faces inscribed on the red rocks of the desert fade slowly as the hymn-like music picks up and a stellar image takes its place. The images form a palimpsest very briefly before the faces fade and the camera seemingly travels deeper and deeper into a body of stars. The procession of galaxies allows the viewer a moment to meditate on the relationship between the face of human existence—the drawings—and the face of the stars, to see the one through the other. Núñez mentions that there are likely other places beside the Atacama Desert that are “puertas” to this understanding, but that humans simply have not come to recognize or understand them, to *apprehend* them.



As Núñez shows Guzmán around the site of pre-Colombian faces etched into a rock wall in the Atacama desert, the camera moves over sections of the red, dusty earth in slow horizontal and vertical pans. Núñez' tan skin reverberates the color of the rock and his white hair resonates with the crystalline salt deposits tucked into the rough surface. The extremely closed frame of the pans over the earth creates the sense of gaining a new horizon constantly. Because a stable horizon is not established, the viewer cannot easily place the scale of the image and is left to wonder if this is an extreme close-up or a landscape shot and the sensation that there is much to discover. Without a clear establishing shot, the scale of the image is unclear: the white could be snowy peaks, or a small granule of petrified salt seen from very close. Another pan over the desert floor sweeps gradually from left to right. The viewer expects this brown-red surface to be the desert, but this time, as the camera shifts directions and pans upward, it becomes evident that the object being studied is a human arm, preserved in one last gesture. The physicality of the desert resonates with bodies of stars, with the faces of the pre-Colombian drawings, even with the body of Núñez. It is a kind of body with its own voice and meaning that contains other bodies.

In voice-over, Guzmán states at the end of the film that memory has a force of gravity. In this section, I will explore the ethical nature of that grounding force. The earth, the desert, and the bodies it contains, have a lot to tell the viewer about the ethical nature of memory. Núñez reflects for some time on how the Atacama desert represents an “enigma,” an incredible, awe-inspiring “puerta hacia el pasado” for both astronomers and archeologists, “los orígenes del todo y el pasado de todo lo que hoy somos” (Guzmán

2010). Guzmán can be heard off screen cutting in almost impatiently to exclaim that despite the fact that Chile's land represents an exceptional archive of the past, the country does not confront its past, that it remains demobilized by the coup d'état that it refuses to confront. Núñez agrees, explaining,

Es una paradoja: el pasado más cercano a nosotros lo tenemos encapsulado. Es una paradoja enorme. ¡Fíjate qué poco sabemos del siglo XIX! ¡Cuántos secretos guardamos del siglo XIX! Nunca hemos dicho por qué arrinconamos a nuestros indígenas. Es casi un secreto de estado. No hemos hecho absolutamente nada para entender porque en siglo XIX se generaron estos modelos económicos vertiginosos como el salitre y después no quedó en nada...

As he makes this statement, unidentified black and white still shots appear inserted within the interview (where Núñez appears in an office, with boxes of archives surrounding him). The images portray massive industrial projects, machines in dusty fields, miners sitting among the rocks, trains and railroad ties, workers in uniform, masses in the streets. While they are not marked or contextualized, the photographs can loosely be understood to represent industrialization, particularly the establishment of mining industry and the construction of the railroad in order to facilitate the transport of mineral extracts. Similar to the images of the telescope pieces at the beginning of the film, these archival stills allude to technological innovation. Núñez connects the 19th century images of industrial progress with the mistreatment of the indigenous of Chile: 'Nunca hemos dicho por qué arrinconamos a nuestros indígenas. Es casi un secreto de estado.' He goes on to relate these unethical practices with the modes of production on

which they were based: ‘No hemos hecho absolutamente nada para entender porque en siglo XIX se generaron estos modelos económicos vertiginosos como el salitre y después no quedó en nada . . .’ Implicit in his reference to an economy based on resource extraction (saltpeter) as ‘vertiginous’—meaning hurried, hasty, and causing imbalance—is a critique of the logic of a progress as unsustainable (‘no quedó nada’/ ‘nothing was left’) and resulting in both human and ecological exploitation. The connection between indigenous marginalization and a loss of appreciation for the environment is developed in Guzmán’s second film in the trilogy, *Botón de nácar*, which focuses on water as a medium of memory and collectivity.

Just as Núñez’ statement lands on the phrase ‘no quedó nada’(‘nothing was left’), a still shot of a train with men in front of it appears and lingers. The men are small in comparison to the machine and nearly faceless. In the wake of Núñez’ assertion, the pause on the image of the train, built to transport the saltpeter being extracted in Chile, and the great symbol of 19th century modernity, asks the viewer to consider what has become of this model of progress today. It perhaps calls to mind what has and will continue to result from the resource extraction fueling global capitalism: climate change, displacement, mass extinction, increasing inequality. This image, together with Núñez’ comments, provides not only a critique of an unsustainable model of progress, but also an explanation of how the telling of history plays a key role in upholding this model. Avoiding the accusatory past—archeologist Núñez asserts—helps no one. These are the pasts that point to the crimes and mistakes of the pasts, that demand accountability from those in power. Just as resource extraction like that of the saltpeter industry is

unsustainable and contributed to the marginalization of indigenous peoples and the exploitation of workers both indigenous and non-indigenous, it also doesn't make sense ("no sirve a nadie") to treat the recent past as a threat. Núñez' assertion that such a cultural practice is unsustainable and allows for the persistence of catastrophe is based on a collective concept of the greater good that directly contrasts with the narrative of progress. Those who prefer to look away from such human rights and environmental violations, focusing instead on progress, are the very individuals whose interests are compromised by the "accusatory past." While the temporality of modernity, defined by progress, mistakenly sees these ruins as a 'chain of events,' Guzmán, with his camera and editing tools, demonstrates instead 'one single catastrophe' which hurls us forwards in the name of progress while the pile of 'wreckage' grows higher and higher (Benjamin 257). Especially when one focuses on the connection between mining as the principal image of a faulty "progress" and the way a disregard for the past is related to the demobilizing effects of the unaddressed memory of coup d'état, this critique, and the idea of "one single catastrophe" go hand in hand with the concept of slow violence. The gravitational force of memory is that which tensely ties together the wreckage across spatiotemporalities, that secret agreement between the past and present that finds its weight in connectivity and forms the basis for ethics.

"El desierto chileno, como todos los desiertos del mundo, es un océano de minerales," Guzmán reflects in voice-over as the camera moves over a sea of wooden crosses that tremble in the desert wind. The Chilean flag, worn and fragmented, flaps frantically. Exposed to the open sky, are the bodies of men who died working, Guzmán

reveals. Similar to the closed-frame pans over the desert floor, the camera moves over small portions of the shaking crosses, settling on shriveled human remains, bones still cloaked in bits of worn fabric. With this scene following in the wake of Núñez' assertion that the narrative of progress—afraid to look at its accusatory past—serves no one, the crosses seem to give voice and face to the dead-end of progress. The Atacama is an ocean of minerals and a sea of bones. “Como las capas geológicas, hay capas de mineros y de indígenas, que mueve el viento, que no termina nunca. Eran familias errantes, sus cosas sus recuerdos están cerca” (Guzmán 2010). Just as the miners died here as part of the “vertiginous” economy of the saltpeter industry, so too did indigenous peoples face extermination and marginalization as European colonizers, the Chilean government and private companies moved onto their land or exploited their water sources. The bodies of earlier nomadic peoples, too, form part of the Atacama Desert, where for the past 10,000 years “los ríos de piedra servían como caminos naturales” (Guzmán 2010). The camera, like a reluctant observer, moves slowly over the shriveled objects that remain of the people who once inhabited the space. Using the recurring closed-frame, the camera looks at one tiny piece at a time, reminding the viewer of the vastness, infinity of the stories embodied by this place. The camera follows the way the light falls on old shoes, a hanging dusty light bulb, soda bottles, medicine jars, miners' jackets and dozens of calcified metal spoons hanging from the ceiling of what looks like an abandoned mess hall. All the objects are covered with a thick layer of dust and appear to be petrified to stiffness. The eerie sound of the rushing wind and the clanging of silver-spoon chimes seems to give voice to the whispers of the desert and all the bodies it holds: their subtle

presence contests the “vertiginous” pace of capitalist resource extraction. On one hand it becomes clear through this cemetery that all that is left of the industry that promised future and fortune to Chile is a mass grave. On the other hand, despite the fact that the mine closed up and new industries have taken the spotlight; despite the fact that these bodies are so far from the public’s eye; despite the fact that society refuses to see them or hear them, the wind will tell their stories; the sand and stone contain their bones. In addition to the explicit portrayal of resource extraction (saltpeter mining) as destructive, the enduring nature of physical matter (the sediment and minerals) and energy (the wind) within Guzmán’s composition contest the future-oriented narrative of neoliberalism that operates under the assumption that the past is behind us.

One of the most poignant ways the film communicates the concept of “one single catastrophe” is his portrayal of Chacabuco Concentration Camp. According to *Memoria Viva*, a digital archive of human rights violations under the military dictatorship in Chile (1973-1990) initiated by El Proyecto Internacional de Derechos Humanos, El Campo de Prisioneros Chacabuco was one of the country’s largest concentration camps and more than 1000 political prisoners were held there, all of them men (“Campamento de Prisioneros Chacabuco”). Just as Guzmán demonstrates in the film, *Memoria Viva* asserts that, “El sector de prisioneros fue delimitado con alambradas de púas, minas antipersonales y torres de vigilancia con personal armado de metralletas” (“Campamento de Prisioneros Chacabuco”). Guzmán and Núñez’ reading of the accusatory past, which connects colonization, modernization, mining and the camps, still resonates in the background as the camera shows a man observing the night sky. His dark silhouette

contrasts with the deep bright blue of the night sky as he peers through a homemade device similar to a scope and looks out at a multitude of stars. Later we learn that the man is Luis Henríquez, an ex-prisoner of Chabuco and that the device he uses here is the same tool that he and his fellow camp prisoners used to observe the stars. In the sequence following the establishing nighttime shot of Henríquez looking through scope, an old, grainy aerial shot of Chacabuco takes the screen. In voice-over, Guzmán states: “Cerca de los observatorios, en medio de este inmenso vacío, están las ruinas de Chacabuco, el campo de concentración más grande de la dictadura de Pinochet” (Guzmán 2010). It’s as if Guzmán, through the perspective of the ex-prisoner, (the camera) has turned the lens toward history in order to dig up the ‘accusatory’ past. As still shots of the camp continue, portraying aerial shots that reveal a small city of warehouse-like buildings, miners beside a giant heap of white minerals, a truck full of rocks, workers’ faces, Guzmán reveals that in fact the Chacabuco we see in the photos is the same geographic space and structure, but nearly fifty years before the dictatorship, when it was still functioning as a mining town. He explains, “los militares no tuvieron que construir un campo, pues las celdas eran las mismas casas de los trabajadores del siglo 19, cuando la explotación minera se parecía a la esclavitud. Los militares solo tuvieron que poner el alambre de púas” (Guzmán 2010). The reference to barbed wire and the black and white aerial shots of the camp layout create an echo with images of the Holocaust concentration. This series of images, therefore, not only crosses several historical moments and spaces, it also links sites of violence. The train, the indigenous gravesite, the exploitive mining practices, and the camps are posed not as a series of separate

catastrophes, but as “one single catastrophe,” an open wound in national history (Benjamin 257). Just like Nixon’s description of slow violence, which “is dispersed across time and space,” and is “typically not viewed as violence at all,” the violence behind the nation-building projects, modernizing projects and then the dictatorship’s “war against communism” were portrayed as forces of progress, rather than violence (*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* 2). The camps, the wars against the indigenous were pushed onto the fringes of society, waged against the marginalized populations over all these years and in geographically removed areas like the Atacama Desert. Today, the world’s largest open pit copper mine, Chuquicamata, continues to operate in Atacama. While Henríquez relates his experience as a political prisoner in Chacabuco, the camera observes the empty camp in the contemporary moment. We see through his expression that the slow violence of this catastrophe is not only contained in the physical ruins of the camp, but in his own body as well. Like many of the other social actors in the film, the lighting creates a similarity between the color and texture of Luis Henríquez’ skin and the earthy tones and weathered surfaces of the desert around him. His expression as he looks through the scope of his homemade telescope is serious and concentrated. His pace walking through the camp (his back to the camera) is steady and full of resolve in spite of the heaviness of the scene. He is not victimized, as he is not seen only through his experience of “los cables electrificados y las torres de vigilancia,” but also through his resilience in looking to the stars for freedom and his “nobleza” as “un transmisor de la historia.” As the camera follows him through the camp, Luis is framed by the buildings. Their structures outline and close-in the edges of the image. And



yet, layered over a take observing the camp buildings, he remarks that while watching the stars, the prisoners felt ‘absolutamente libres.’ If the camp around him is a pile of ruins, loose boards swaying in the wind, Henríquez’ memory is firm and determined. In an extreme close-up, the camera observes his hand moving over the chipped surface of a sandy wall where the names of political prisoners are scribbled and worn away, leaving only fragments of names. He reads, “En esta casa vivieron los presos políticos ... Víctor Astudillo, Luis Henríquez, René Olivares, Enrique, está la pura ‘e’, Enrique Pastorellia, que me acuerdo bien, y acá abajo...Federico Quilodrán Chavéz.” So, in the Chacabuco sequences, the desert reveals how, by resisting a reckoning with the past, the logic of progress displaces the ethical commitment to those who came before us onto future generations, which inevitably deal with inherited structures of destruction and consumption (colonization-modernization-dictatorship-neoliberal model). Due in part to the mineral richness of the land, and its displacement from highly populated areas, the Atacama Desert is a site full of atrocities whose past is yet to be faced. Yet, despite it all, Atacama is also a site of resilience and memory, because the dry air and high altitude preserve “los leves señales” of the past more thoroughly here than in any other part of the world, at least in a way that humans can understand.

As a place full of signals from multiple pasts, the desert, Guzmán asserts, provides a lesson in active listening. The film returns to shots of the observatories, where countries from around the world are working together to build “ALMA,” or *Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array* (ALMA), an international astronomic installation in the Desert of Atacama. ALMA, when completely installed, will have 60 antennas, or

“60 orejas para escuchar las hondas del cielo. Podrá escuchar los cuerpos cuya luz no llega a la tierra, registrará la energía que se produjo en el Big Bang,” as Guzmán explains (Guzmán 2010).<sup>xii</sup> Víctor, a young Chilean engineer who was born in Germany due to his mother’s forced exile during the dictatorship, works with ESO, Observatorio Europeo Austral and participates in the ALMA Project. He is portrayed in extreme longshots, so distant that his figure, with his back to the camera, looks like a spec among the vast desert horizon of rolling Sandy slopes. The repetition of this framing size creates a sense of distance around Víctor, who is “hijo del exilio,” “hijo de ninguna parte en cierto sentido . . .” (Guzmán 2010). It is his mother who grounds him in the film. She was forcibly exiled during the dictatorship and today heals ex-prisoners through massage. In the principal sequence in which she appears, the camera is close to her face, observing her from just a couple of feet away as she cuts vegetables, Víctor standing on the other side of her, leaning against the refrigerator. Unlike the majority of the other spaces portrayed in the film, this one is very intimate in terms of mise en scène, framing and camera angle. The space itself is visibly tight, and the camera reflects the proximity to each other and to the director: literally their faces fill the screen and you can see everyday kitchen items around them. The majority of the other takes are vast horizons or detail shots that defy a clear scalar measurement, but in this moment, the sense of intimacy communicates the grounding nature of Víctor’s mother. Guzmán states that official reports have documented 30,000 extorturados en Chile, but estimates suggest there are 30,000 more who never reported the violations perpetrated against them. Víctor’s mother (her name is never mentioned) tells him, “las mujeres que buscan a sus muertos exigen

respuestas de los que hicieron desaparecer a sus muertos. Esta gente se encuentra con los que participaron en la desaparición de sus familiares en las calles de su pueblo, con los torturadores que están libres y caminan por las calles” (Guzmán 2010). It’s that kind of thing that retraumatizes people, she says, “ese tipo de cosa son lo que retraumatiza a la gente,” explaining that “eso quizás sea una diferencia entre las dos búsquedas del pasado...” (Guzmán 2010). Víctor is visibly focused on his mother’s explanation, as if he were soaking up the information for the first time, as if beginning to understand something that had been distant to him before. This scene portrays listening as a subtle but important form of active, political memory.

Víctor’s mother brings him, and the viewers, in closer, corporally and affectively, preparing them to understand the “Women of Calama,” who enter into the film in the next shot. These women afford another dimension to the atrocities and resilience of the desert, adding to the perspective of archeologist Lautaro Núñez, who lays out the connections between the different “accusatory pasts” (of colonization and mining and the disappeared) preserved in the layers of the desert; to that of Luis Henriquez, a political prisoner who bravely shares his story and that of his fellow prisoners; and Gaspar Galaz or Víctor, the astronomers who contemplate the universe from the dry Atacama Desert. All of these social subjects are “transmisores del pasado” in one form or another. The women of Calama are the family members of the disappeared and the demanders of memory and justice that has yet to be granted. They represent the desire to have the bones of their loved ones in whole, a desire that Guzmán shares and that pulses through the film itself. The film represents the efforts of the women of Calama as part of the desert that

speaks to the ethical weight that memory carries. They remind the viewer that the violence of the past is not over and done with, and that it is ethically essential that Chilean society confront the past on affective and corporal levels.

The sequences portraying the Women of Calama include extreme long shots, closed frame close-ups, handheld and stationary shots, compositions made of one single woman or groups of women. But in all the shots, the women are working, looking at the ground as they walk, sitting in the dry dirt, sifting sand through their fingers, concentrated, and slowly trudging through the immensity of the desert. Even when the sequence is interspliced with landscapes of the vast Atacama horizon, the sound of their shovels scraping and their footsteps crunching over the ground gives testament to their perseverance in searching for traces of their loved ones. They work mostly in silence and are dressed in clothing that seems ordinary; they have no uniform or special archeological gear, just tennis shoes and shovels. One long shot portrays one of the women walking farther and farther away from the camera. Her stride demonstrates the aches and pains and accommodations of old age, and yet she continues, slowly but surely. Their quiet and persistent search gives a sense of uncanny that emphasizes the magnitude of their gesture and the weight of their longing. There is something striking about these older women performing this kind of work because traditional gender roles designate older women as members of society who should be protected and who operate within domestic spaces. Within hegemonic gender norms, these “abuelitas” look out of place. In her article “Subjetividad y esfera pública: el género y los sentidos de familia en las memorias de la represión,” Elizabeth Jelin explains that under the Argentine military dictatorship, the

concept of the “traditional family” and hypermasculinity was central to the military’s narrative of saving the nation from the immoral chaos and breakdown of the family under communism (560). Within this context, “el uso que el discurso dictatorial hacia de la familia como unidad natural de la organización social tuvo entonces su imagen en espejo en parte del movimiento de derechos humanos—la denuncia y protesta de los familiares era, de hecho, la única que podía ser expresada. Después de todo, eran madres que buscaban a sus hijos” (561, 562). While Jelin described the Argentine context, to a large degree, the Chilean context, and in particular the image of the women of Calama, maintained this dynamic. Mothers, sisters, wives searching for their lost loved ones are particularly potent because the rhetoric of the dictatorship emphasized the family nucleus, patriarchy, hyper masculinity and submissive femininity. The image of the group of women from Calama still searching for their loved ones’ remains after all this time highlights the hypocrisy of the discourse, which destroyed rather than protected families. In this way, he confronts the logic of the dictatorship while working within the framework of traditional gender roles.

Guzmán gives a bit more context to understand their search, stating that, “Durante 17 años, Pinochet asesinó y enterró los cuerpos de miles de prisioneros políticos. Para impedir que alguien los encontrara, la dictadura desenterró los cuerpos, trasladó los restos a otros lugares o bien los lanzó al mar” (Guzmán 2010). Laurato Núñez explains that the women of Calama gave the team of archeologist he worked with data about the tiny bones they were finding in different parts of the desert.<sup>xiii</sup> This led the team to determine

that the bodies had been dug up and moved. Núñez explains the institutionalization of this process:

los cuerpos de Calama fueron extraídos por una máquina . . . estos cuerpos, por una orden por su puesto de alto mando militar fueron sacados . . . esos cuerpos fueron puestos en un camión...desde ese camión fueron trasladados a un lugar que hasta el día de hoy no se sabe dónde están. Ese camión tuvo un chofer, ese camión tuvo soldados para descargar esos cuerpos y lo que es más importante, ese camión era parte de un destacamento de un departamento militar con una autoridad.

The process behind the cover-up of the murders--the planning, the many people involved and the use of equipment—resonates with the rhetoric of development and progress, focused on moving “forward” at any cost, without looking back. It also speaks to human agency, in this case aimed at erasing the physical evidence of a crime committed. But, as Núñez asserts, there is not getting around the trail left behind by the institutionalization (national and international) of state-sponsored violence. He states, “hay que vivir en estado de búsqueda. Si fueron lanzados al mar . . . si fueron puestos en alguna mina en algún lugar abandonado, en algún momento van a aparecer” (Guzmán 2010). The women of Calama have dedicated their lives to searching. Victoria Saveedra, whose brother was killed during the dictatorship, holds fragments of bones in her hand and demonstrates this kind of embodied memory and ethical commitment. As a close up shot details her hands moving over the bones, which blend with the color of her skin and the desert ground behind her, one appreciates that she has become an expert on bones,

able to determine what kind of bone each fragment comes from based on its texture and density. The next sequence, in which Saveedra converses with the director (who is off screen), the viewer comes to understand the weight of these tiny fragments. A medium close shot places Saveedra against the sandy dunes, similar to Berríos in the scene Martin-Jones analyses, in such a way that she appears as part of the desert. Her white hair matches the color of the sky, and the warm color of her skin and sweater blend with the hues of the desert, so that her shape flows into the lines of the horizon. Building off of Martin-Jones' analysis of Violeta Berríos' testimony in the film as an example of "*faceified* landscape," I suggest that Saveedra also represents a face and voice of the desert as she tells about the day she finally recovered part of her brother's remains. According to the fractures in the bones of his skull, the cause of death was determined to be a gun shot through the back of the head, with "un tiro de gracia" in the forehead. As the emotion sets in and Saveedra's voice begins to shake, the framing opens up to give her space, to be respectful of her emotion, but also to place her grief within the collective, material space of the desert. Saveedra sits among a sea of rocky shards, her lower body also blending into her surroundings. The day the mass grave was opened, she recognized her brother's foot: "sabía que era el zapato de Pepe, sabía que era el pie de Pepe" (Guzmán 2010). This small detail speaks to the way one loves another person in the flesh. When their body is gone, the familiar corporal presence—the way they stood, or smiled, their eyebrows or arm, their foot in their favorite pair of shoes—is an irrecoverable absence of the particular, the unique biological organization of the chaotic world into the particular beating heart of the individual. Despite everything the dictatorship did to hide

the evidence of their crimes by disposing of his body in the most remote place possible, the tiny shards of Pepe's bones remain, preserved by the dry air. Similarly, the dry air of the desert allows the astronomers to determine, as Guzmán asserts in voice-over, that “la materia era la misma en todos los rincones del cosmos” (Guzmán 2010). A photograph of Pepe is placed among the rocks, perhaps gesturing toward his presence among a multitude of other bodies.

### The Face of the Stars: The Ethics of Cosmic Memory

“Las estrellas nos observan” —Patricio Guzmán (*Nostalgia de la luz*)

“. . . the reason I really love the stars is that we cannot hurt them. We can't burn them or melt them or make them overflow. We can't flood them or blow them up or turn them out. But we are reaching for them” —Laurie Anderson (“Another Day in America” 2010)

“I believe in mystery.”—Charlie Plescia

Another strategic way *Nostalgia* contests the concept of temporal rupture is through its representation of cosmic scale. In a conversation with Stephen Colbert on *The Late Show*, astrophysicist Neil de Grasse Tyson talks about how space travel to the moon granted humans a new perspective: “We go to the moon to explore the moon and we turn around and discover Earth for the first time” (“Neil deGrasse Tyson On Coronavirus: Will People Listen To Science?”). This shift in perspective, he explains, inspired environmental protections and awareness ranging from the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, the foundation of Earth Day, the banning of leaded gasses, the passage of the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. De Grasse Tyson focuses on the U.S. context, but his idea extends itself to the larger question of scale,



perspective, and environmental consciousness. He states, “A cosmic perspective can descend upon you so that you are realigned with your own survival and the survival of others in such a way that maybe you’re going to do something about it” (Neil deGrasse Tyson on Coronavirus: Will People Listen To Science?). The cosmos offers a non-anthropocentric perspective that places the human within a material reality that is so much larger in scope that we cannot entirely understand it or control it.<sup>xiv</sup> And yet, at the same time, we are *part of it*. Early in the film, Guzmán develops the conversation between the stars and humans in a way that at once recalls the shared weight of human suffering and the limits of human agency. As noted above, Martin-Jones mentions the importance of faceified landscape in *Nostalgia* and analyzes the scene in which Violeta Berríos appears to give voice to the desert. Through the blending of a social subject and the mise-en-scène of the landscape, the landscape appears to assume a gaze, to take on its own face. There are also several examples of faceified star scapes in the film. Early on, *Nostalgia* portrays giant telescopes in a mix of shots including both video and stills. First, from within the telescope, the camera moves in a circular motion, observing the other telescopes below. Next, low angle shots look up the enormous and pristine white structures that look like synthetic eyes scattered throughout the desert in constellationary patterns. The stationary camera hangs on just a little longer and stiller than you would expect, capturing the large white cylindrical structures. There is no movement within the frame, just the telescopes that are placed at different depths on the plane of red desert ground. High angle shots reveal the round tops, the surface of the eyeballs. A man’s small figure contrasts with the size of the telescope. The telescope fills the majority of the space

of the frame. The man enters the giant telescope through a small door. In voice-over, Guzmán utters in a paused voice, “En el brillo de la noche, las estrellas nos observan” (Guzmán 2010). *The stars are watching us*. As the door shutters closed in the diegetic sound, tense extradiegetic string music swells as stunning footage of a camera seemingly moving through the depth of space as glowing groups of stars come closer. It is hard to tell whether the telescope-camera moves further and further away or if the stars approach the camera, or both. The tense but sweet violin resonates as the center of the celestial body fills more and more of the screen, approaching as if to lean closer and closer to look the viewer in the eye. The next bit of footage, which looks like it could be the birth of a star, is a splash of bright white light with pink, violet and blue light bursting around the sides. The image turns in a circular motion clockwise in the frame as the body of light slowly draws away, until, turned at just the right angle, it looks like a profile shot of a human skull and brain, a light with electric pulses. A series of beautiful images of stars and galaxies gives way to a low angle shot of the telescope in the first plane and the starry, early morning or late evening sky. After the series of intimate close-ups, the stars twinkle from a distance, and the telescope/camera looks back reflectively. This shot insinuates the gaze of the stars; it humanizes the stars at the same time as it reminds that humans are a tiny part of a much vaster cosmic body. The human-stellar connection is not exact, not legible in an entirely precise way for the scope of human understanding; but the connection is undeniable. By developing this strong sense of mutual belonging, the film contests both the ruptured concept of time and the utilitarian view of nature inherent to capitalist logic.

In an interview Guzmán responds to a question about the relationship between memory and history: “I think that life is memory, everything is memory. . . I’m not simply me—I’m my father and all that came before me, who are millions. Nostalgia for the Light sprung from this concept. It involves body and soul but also matter, the earth, the cosmos, all combined” (White 2012). The film not only brings out the stars’ gaze, constructing the sense of the presence of an other—granting a perspective to the physical world—; it also weaves that cosmic other into the viewer, making the scale of the cosmos an intimate matter both affectively and materially. Astronomer George Preston asserts this point when he states the calcium in our bones was made shortly after the big bang and comes from the stars: “We live among the trees; we also live among the stars; we live among the galaxies; we are part of the universe.” Guzmán reaffirms this idea visually by alternating images of the surface of the moon, asteroids, desert rock and human bone. He presents the images in such a way that it is difficult to identify which rock comes from which kind of body. In a particularly stunning shot, the camera slowly pans down the top of a skull bone—it could be the skull of a pre-historic person, an indigenous person killed by the Spaniards in the conquest, a mineworker from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or the body of a desaparecido. The surface of the skull is lit with a direct light that mimics the intensity and tone of the sun on a rocky solid body of matter; the angle and distance of the camera are such that until the eye sockets appear, the surface of the skull appears to have the shape and texture of a giant body of matter in space. If one even just begins to look around him/herself he/she will begin to realize that the past is all around us; corporally, the past exists within us, in our bones.

To complete this play of perspectives, the camera shifts from distant shots of the sky and desert to an extreme close-up of grains of sand. The shiny granules look like a sea of fallen stars shaking in the howling desert wind. In voice-over, Guzmán reflects, “Alguien me dice que hay meteoritos de bajo de las rocas que alteran la brújula. Siempre he creído que nuestro origen está en el suelo, enterrado bajo la tierra o en el fondo del mar, pero ahora pienso que nuestras raíces pueden estar arriba, más allá de la luz” (Guzmán 2010). This statement comes as the hand-held camera peruses the extremely dry ground of the desert, observing in close-proximity the surface cracked into a million puzzle-like pieces. Guzmán helps the viewer to note that perspective and scale can shift what is visible or apprehensible, and that there is much that escapes human understanding. He establishes the connection between the earth and the Cosmos, finding each body in the matter of the other through the guidance of scientists and through aesthetics. Our relationship with the stars reminds human beings that all life, which depends on light from the sun, comes from a very distant past and that even the present “ocurre en el pasado;” the present is a line so fine that it is destroyed by just one breath (Guzmán 2010). As archeologist Lautaro Núñez astronomers asserts, the work of an astronomer and an archeologist are integrally united. Both recreate the past from its traces in the present.

In his interview with Guzmán, astronomer Gaspar Galaz comments that the search of the women of Calama searching in the immense desert is similar to the search of astronomers among the stars, but notes that unlike the astronomers, the women of Calama cannot sleep peacefully after their day of work is done. Society should have more

understanding for the women of Calama, he notes, but most sympathize more with the astronomers, casting aside the women. This comment speaks to the imposition of highly individualized social relationship under the dictatorship and its neoliberal agenda. Juan Poblete explains, “under conditions of neoliberal globalization the economy has seemingly phagocytized society,” “transformed its values in the fusion of society and economy in so-called market societies” (98). Gabriel Salazar reaffirms this analysis, stating “. . . si antes se ofrecía como utopía a bajo precio una revolución completa, hoy se ofrece como utopía a elevadas tasas de interés una alienación sin término, sobre cuya neurosis . . . se construye el imperio globalizado del capital financiero” (75). Society does not understand the women searching for their loved ones’ remains because in an individualized market society, emotion is relegated to the private realm; their collective tears are taboo. Their search, too, takes place in a displaced space—the desert, where the dictatorship dumped their loved ones’ bodies, and where the majority of the country’s mining sector operates. Finally, as “la lepra de Chile,” the story of violent repression that the searching mothers, sisters, spouses represent is not comprehensible by society because it is an inconvenient past that won’t recede; it does not fit within the national and international image of progress of economic growth. Through his representation of the cosmos, Guzmán works to create an imaginative bridge so that society may connect with the struggle of the women through the environment. When the stars have a gaze, the desert horizons a face and voice, emotion and the capacity for empathy is pried from the private realm and becomes possible to find everywhere. It also serves to remind the public that whether distant and out of sight and mind or not, what happened in the desert

(indigenous massacred, workers enslaved, political prisoners tortured, bodies dumped), and what continues to happen in the desert (family members searching for the remains of their loved ones, mining) is connected to each of us. Finally, the stars reveal that no past is over and done with: observing the light from the stars, which takes time to travel to Earth, time to enter your eye, time for the signal to reach your brain, one becomes aware that the past is in fact all around us.

Valentina Rodríguez, one of the astronomers that Guzmán interviews, gives a moving account of the power of a cosmic scale in coping with trauma. In voice-over, Rodríguez shares her family's story. Pinochet's police forced her grandparents to reveal the location of Valentina's parents, or face the disappearance of their granddaughter, Valentina, who was one year old. The military disappeared her parents. As she tells her story in voice-over, Valentina's grandparents sit next to one another on the couch, in silence and stillness. The camera lingers and the grandparents look at the camera, at the viewer, in much the same way the stars silently looked out over the desert. Their stillness and silence speak to that which is perhaps un-speakable, pain and resilience together.

Valentina explains:

La astronomía me ha ayudado de alguna manera a darle otra dimensión al tema del dolor, de la ausencia, de la pérdida . . . pensar que todo es parte de un ciclo que no comenzó ni va a terminar en mí ni en mis padres ni mis hijos tal vez, sino que todos somos parte de una corriente, de una energía o de materia que se recicla, como ocurre con las estrellas.

Her testimony summarizes the premise of *Nostalgia de la luz* from the most personal level, a loved one who looks to the light to make peace with their loss. Directly addressing scale, she says that when one approaches the past from a cosmic dimension, it becomes clear that the universe is constituted by the flow of energy through material,

which is recycled again and again, in a cycle of return. The pain is not as heavy when one remembers that they are part of something larger, and that they carry the past within.

Guzmán also looks to the stars to come to terms with his loss, and his film is his way of giving another dimension to Chile's history of violence. Through his film, Guzmán connects the individual neoliberal subject (his viewer) with the collective. Valentina's testimony is one example of how he manages to do this. The camera approaches her from a respectful distance in a wide shot in which Valentina is seated at a desk with her back to the camera. Using a close-up over the shoulder shot, the camera looks on at the computer screen as she clicks on images of stars. In voice-over, Guzmán introduces Valentina as an astronomer, a mother and wife, and as the daughter of disappeared parents. Not yet having seen her face, the viewer then hears her paused and thoughtful voice as she shares her experience. Meanwhile, a long take from a stationary camera portrays her grandparents sitting silently on the couch, no movement except for the slight rise and fall of their bodies as they breathe. In the next shot, we see Valentina sitting in a wooden chair, in a medium close up shot. The camera angle is at her eye level, as if positioned on the director's shoulder while he interviewed her. The framing, the angles, the stationary camera all create the portrait of an individual being listened to and observed by another individual. As Valentina describes how astronomy has allowed her to approach her pain through a different dimension, the image of the time-lapsed stars that shine and move around a stationary earth appears. The image reflects the meaning of her spoken testimony: seeing from another perspective, on another scale, the absent become present. Her feelings are mapped onto the stars and the stars onto her feelings. In reference to the

“stars that seem to dance in real time,” Nilo Couret notes that “In this awesome long take, time-lapse images are projected at a normal frame rate, allowing the cosmic scale to be perceptible to the human eye” (81). Here, Valentina’s words invite the viewer to connect to the stars, to see themselves in the collective cosmic dimension. But they are also a generous personal act, an offering of her story and emotion to others. While neoliberal memory dynamics have relegated the emotional legacy of trauma to the private realm, proper to the individual, here Valentina and the film itself invite the viewer connect with both the individual and universe-al collective.

Like the skull/celestial body image, this sequence also speaks to deep embodied memory. Valentina (and her baby, who appears with her later in the sequence) represents life, resilience, the next generation. But her quiet and reflective tone and her serious expressions also speak to pain that remains. For those who have a disappeared father, brother, husband or child, or who were imprisoned and tortured during the dictatorship, the past cannot recede or be separated from the present. For the women of Calama (Victoria Saavedra, disappeared brother, Violeta Berríos, disappeared husband), for Valentina Rodríguez (disappeared parents), or for Miguel Lawner (survivor of five sites of detention and torture), memory cannot simply go away; loss and trauma are a sort of skin that cannot be shed (Delbo 2). For this reason, as she talks about her search to find her husband’s remains in a nearly infinite abyss of rocks, Violeta Berríos, sitting among/in the dry rocks of the desert background, becomes a *human ‘rubble’* (a term from Gordon Gordillo’s text *Rubble: the afterlife of destruction*). Her skin takes on the texture of the desert as she inhabits the space of her loss. Like the natural area that withstands the



dry air, Violeta appears as a symbol of resistance to forgetting, a visual manifestation of the persistence of the past. Similarly, Miguel, ‘arquitecto de la memoria,’ demonstrates deep memory as he creates the space of his camp experience by physically mapping out, through his steps, the dimensions of the camp site, which he ‘stored’ in his memory. As he redraws the dimensions of his memory with his body, Miguel’s face takes on a completely concentrated, absent expression. He looks away from the camera and stares off while walking stiffly, as if attempting to mentally, spatially place himself in the camp.

Guzmán’s toggling between the unshakeable skin of traumatic memory, stellar memory and geological memory leave the viewer with what he calls the gravitational force of memory. Rather than being anchored only to the ground, to the Earth, this form of gravity pulls one in many directions, suspending the viewer in a delicate present that exists at the tense crossroads of an infinite number of scales. Guzmán’s is a philosophical approach that proposes questions to the scale of the cosmos. Chile’s stories are not devoid of meaning because of their smallness on a universal scale; rather, Chile’s stories are integrally connected to multiple other systems of power and places and times. The viewer is left to reflect on those connections. Though *Nostalgia* does not explicitly reference the environmental devastation tied to the dictatorship’s radical amplification of the capitalist model through neoliberalism, his non-anthropocentric philosophy and aesthetics incite the viewer to think differently about the socio-economic system that has come to define the global mechanisms of power.

## *Abuelos*

### Embodied Memory, Ecology and Ethical Time

“Organisms die, but new non-copy organisms are brought into being (Margulis and Sagan 2000, 91). Life, therefore, is an extension of itself into new generations and new species (144). And from an ecological point of view, death is a return.”

—Deborah Bird Rose

(127).

“This is day one for me now. If only there was a tarp large enough for us all to hide and stay dry and warm inside. Shield me from the elements, that’s what makes it all so beautiful. Hangin’ on by a thread, the same thread that weaves the most intricate quilts. Another sip of beer and a lip of tobacco helps me through. I wish I could get by on less. Stranded in the wild we can all die in the light of a match kept dry. Living and coinciding.”

—Charlie Plescia

If *Nostalgia* reaches out to the cosmos with a telescope and then gazes at the earth with distant eyes, Carla Valencia’s *Abuelos* takes a more microscopic view, looking inward in both a personal and biological sense. *Abuelos* opens with the camera amidst vegetation in a forest in Cuenca, Ecuador. In low angle shots, the camera looks up at canopy of leaves, surrounded by green; extreme close-ups focus on moss-covered twigs. These techniques create the sense of intimacy and vitality as the director describes her maternal grandfather, Remo Dávila, whom she knew well. When the director introduces her paternal grandfather, Juan Valencia, the camera pans left to right in an extreme long shot of the horizon of the Atacama Desert, characterized by burnt earthy tones. The remote and sweeping observatory glance establish the distance she feels from the story of Juan, and her desire to learn more about him. The poetic use of the camera in these two shots clearly denotes an expressive rhetorical desire, where the “documenting eye is necessarily transformational” (33). The camerawork and mise-en-scène speak to

Valencia's emotional and physical proximity to her grandfathers. Often throughout the film, the camera is an extension of her own body, acting as the medium through which she explores her feelings and reflections by observing the natural world of the places her grandfathers inhabited. The camera returns to the river site in Cuenca and in voice-over, the director explains: "Este abuelo chileno que no pude conocer vivió mirando el océano pacífico en donde este río de mi abuelo ecuatoriano va a desembocar" (Valencia 2010). Not only is *Abuelos* the director's journey to understand herself better by reflecting on her grandfathers' life stories, but also a meditation on the biological circumstance that unites all life at the most basic level, where energy flows between life and death. At the end of the film, the camera returns to the Atacama Desert, this time from ground level, in a close-up of a desert flower moving in the wind. The sun breaks through the clouds and in voice-over, Valencia reflects, "El agua dulce ha llegado a desempolvar las arenas de este lugar que parecía estéril, semillas que permanecían inmóviles, adormecidas. Me gusta imaginar que mi abuelo Remo ha hecho llover en el desierto de mi abuelo Juan" (Valencia 2010). Just as *Nostalgia* emphasizes the connection between the calcium in human bodies and the calcium in bodies of stars, *Abuelos* emphasizes the connection between bodies across space and time through water. The elements, and the energy flowing between them weave together the lives of Juan, Remo, and the director. This ecological connection is articulated in terms of sequence (generation) and synchrony ("flows among individuals, often members of different species") through "a temporal site of embodied interface"—a body in time. (Rose 128, 130). Like the desert flower looking toward the sun in the example above, Valencia attunes herself to the cadences of

biological life to remember her grandfathers and reflect on the balance between immortality and death. While the use of scale in *Nostalgia* allows for the apprehension of slow violence, I argue that memory based on ecology in *Abuelos* allows the spectator to signal the inherently ethical connection one has to other living organisms and the abiotic environment, past, present and future. In this way, *Abuelos* politicizes the first-person narrative by reflecting on the individual as part of a larger whole that extends across generations (grandfathers-granddaughter) and the material world (the places the grandfathers inhabited and the interaction between the director and her environment). The poetics of ecology and the appeal to affect allow the film to offer a critique of the dictatorial past, materialize time, and empower the individual to move forward in honor of the many pasts they contain.

#### First-Person Narrative and the Politics of Contemporary Latin American Documentary Film

Unlike Patricio Guzmán, Carla Valencia grew up *hearing about* the utopias of collective socialist movements like that of the Popular Unity coalition under Allende, but not living them, not participating in them. When Valencia was born, her grandfather Juan had already been assassinated. The Pinochet dictatorship in Chile prompted her parents to abandon their plan to move to Chile to help Juan Valencia and the Popular Unity cause, and to move instead to Ecuador, close to Remo and the director's maternal family. The sweeping changes that the 1973 coup d'état and the dictatorship's neoliberal project incited shaped her life precisely by foreclosing the kind of collective efforts that the Popular Unity party represented.

The dictatorship dissolved the legal, institutional and cultural sense of collective to privilege the interests of private companies under the rhetoric of free trade and trickle-down economics. Juan Poblete describes the socio-economic reorganization imposed by the dictatorship as “post-social”:

a social configuration that results from the transformation of the welfare state, with the end of its ethos of the social as a solidarity-based commitment administered by the state and its replacement by a competitive state whose rationality derives from the neoliberal version of the economy and whose ethos, instead of socializing and distributing risk in solidarity, individualizes and privatizes it. (Poblete 96).

Poblete also notes that while Chile functioned as a sort of laboratory for the neoliberal project, the reach of this project extends beyond Chile. The shift toward privatization and the deterioration of social collectives occurred throughout Latin America, including Ecuador.

Michael Lazzara describes how one can perceive the effects of this process on Guzmán’s approach to filmmaking: he states, “. . . if we look at Guzmán's filmic trajectory holistically, it seems possible to posit a move from the primacy of the *pueblo* as protagonists to an emphasis on individual bodies set adrift on neoliberalism's tides, people struggling to recover or assimilate a lost dream” (Lazzara 50). *Nostalgia*, like the other films in the trilogy (*Botón de nácar* and *Cordillera de los sueños*) strives to break free the “private utopia constructed in the face of a hostile present”—from the neoliberal present that holds it captive (Lazzara 53). The personal nature of his filmmaking addresses the ways in which the repression of the dictatorship forced his collective utopia—his active participation in the Popular Unity coalition—into a private memory.

The driving force behind Guzmán's films seems to remain grounded in the collective, revolutionary project of cinema with which he began his work.

Valencia's experience of the dictatorship and her micro-historical approach to filmmaking are quite different. The loss of that utopia and the violent repression of the dictatorship most certainly affect Valencia's generation, but it is not the same total unhooking that Guzmán captures in his films. Her memory of the Allende years is second-hand, rooted in her father's stories. She explains, "la imagen que yo tenía de [Chile] siempre fue completamente diferente al Chile que me encontré, o sea lo que me contaban de la época antes del golpe es lo vivió mi papá y esa es la referencia que yo tenía de ese país" (Valencia 2015). She continues, "mi memoria son recuerdos de cosas que a mí me contaron . . . son parte de la memoria general de un país que no tiene que ver necesariamente conmigo" (Valencia 2015). In this way, her memories of the Popular Unity period and the Pinochet dictatorship are "postmemory," which Marianne Hirsch describes as "the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (106). The generational distance from the Popular Unity period and its downfall, and perhaps also the fact that she grew up in Ecuador, and not Chile, influence the director's relationship to the revolutionary impulse of the Popular Unity project. *Abuelos* demonstrates a desire to confront her family and national pasts, but it is not animated by the collective revolutionary agenda of the Popular Unity project in the way that Guzmán's films are. Rather, the film prioritizes a more local, family-based memory

project focused on the meaning of those memories for the director in the present. For example, Valencia describes *Abuelos* as “un ejercicio de memoria, un ejercicio de memoria de toda mi familia, de confrontarme con los recuerdos de cada uno de ellos” (Valencia 2015). This approach to memory as the exploration and recuperation of a family legacy, rather than a frustrated revolutionary project, are of course also connected to the social fragmentation Poblete and Lazzara describe. The privileging of the first-person perspective and personal memory project in *Abuelos* are common traits of Latin American documentary films of the 1990s and 2000s. Speaking broadly about contemporary Ecuadorian documentary film, but also referencing her own work, Valencia states: “. . . los temas o el vínculo político que tienen los realizadores en su gran mayoría son relacionadas con su propia historia, con su propia vida, con sus propios referentes que tienen que ver con su familia” (Valencia 2015). *Abuelos*, *Con mi corazón en Yambo*, *El grill de César*, *La abuela tiene alzheimer*, and *El lugar donde se juntan los polos* are some of the recent Ecuadorian films that highlight the director’s familial connection to the subject matter. *Abuelos*, like these other films, takes its place among the “‘boom’ of first-person, reflexive filmmaking” that gained force among documentarians in the 1970s and 1980s as a part of the postmodern crisis of representation and “took off in Latin America as of the 1990s” (Arenillas and Lazzara 5). Patricia Aufderheide notes that this surge in “the memoir or personal film” that contributes to historical documentary through individual memory occurs with the emergence of increasingly accessible and easy to use cameras (100). Valencia verifies the importance of affordable and easily transportable equipment to the viability of her project. She states, “Todas las entrevistas,

toda la parte de la investigación que yo pensaba no incluir en la película pero que finalmente decidí incluir, hice sola. . . Tuve la posibilidad. Se pueden hacer cosas solo o con un equipo muy chiquito” (Valencia 2015). In a Postcolonial and post-dictatorship context, the autobiographical documentary has been a significant avenue to challenge official history, as well as an important tool for the questions and topics embraced by identity politics of the 80s and 90s (Aufderheide 101, 102). Arenillas and Lazzara also note that the boom of the “I” in cinema over this period “[tells] us something important about the nature of the globalized, neoliberal era . . . in which individualism is rampant, and social media or reality TV, among other media, bombard us daily with first-person constructs” (5). Antonio Gómez also describes how prominent the larger “subjective turn” in culture has been in Latin American societies and demonstrates the important role of documentary in working through the turn to first-person narrative. Gómez questions those who paint the first-person autobiographical documentary as necessarily representative of “the bourgeois ‘I’” or “subaltern ‘I’” (66). He argues that some first-person documentary films “transcend the hegemony of the ‘I’” and focuses on films that portray a “peripheral ‘I’ who is invested in recentering the other and in rescuing certain countercultural figures” (75). He analyzes, for example, a director/-on screen narrator in *La peli de Batato* (2011) whose egocentrism ends up taking over the portrayal of the film’s subject (countercultural icon Batato Barea), thereby making explicit the role of the “witnessing ‘I’” in the writing of history while at the same time questioning a historicist account (69). My analysis of *Abuelos* does something similar, but through very different resources and points of focus. *Abuelos* “transcends the hegemony of the ‘I’” as a source



of historicist truth by generating a sense of trust with the spectator through affect. It also breaks down the individual ‘I’ by developing the embodied ‘I’ as an extension of multiple other ‘I’s’ past and present, an ecological collective. In this way, the film reflects the reality of the post-social (the individual as the privileged subject to narrate history), at the same time as it contests the underlying logic and ethos that sustains it (the individualization and privatization of society in function of neoliberal economy). Finally, I concur with Michael Renov in his assertion that in addition to the shift from social movements to identity politics, the work of the feminist movement has been instrumental in the trend toward “a more personalist perspective” in documentary (*The Subject of Documentary* 176, 177). He draws attention to the women’s movements emphasis on the interpersonal, process over product and familial and domestic issues as importance impulses for the “personal is political” approach to filmmaking (*The Subject of Documentary* 177). These are all issues at play in *Abuelos* and I perceive her work on these issues as particularly transgressive.

The autobiographical nature of the film is established immediately. In voice-over, the director remembers when her grandfather Remo told her that she would never die; he assured her that with his alternative medicine he was discovering the key to immortality. “*Me dejó flotando con esa idea,*” she says, “*Yo le creí*” (Valencia 2010). This memory establishes the film’s poetic tone and first-person perspective. While we do not yet see her eyes, the camera assumes her gaze, observing drops of water hanging from a jungle plant in an extreme closeup. The light shines through the drops of water and the camera slowly shifts the focus from the plant to the moss growing on a tree root, the racking

focus mimicking eyes squinting to look very closely at an object of study. In voice-over, she states: “En este lugar, él debe haber caminado y respirado este mismo aire que yo respiro, un aire de humedad, de agua dulce, de insecto escondido” (Valencia 2010). The director continues the narration, revealing that Remo was born and grew up in Cuenca, Ecuador. By stating that in this place her grandfather must have breathed the same air that she breathes, the narration confirms that the place we see is the area where Remo lived. It also confirms the gaze of the camera as that of the director and insinuates her physical, embodied presence in this place. As the director makes this statement, the direct sound captures the sounds of the river, birds chirping and the shaking of the canopy’s leaves. Combined with the voice-over, which mentions breathing, humidity, and fresh water, the focus on the tiny green hairs of moss, and the water droplet hanging from the slick surface of a vine appeal to touch and smell. The whole scene affirms the sense of intimacy and mystery with which she describes her grandfather. It is as if the display of biological life, full of repetition and flow, hints at his immortality. Remo’s continued presence seems to wink at the viewer. From this very first scene, the director’s body is presented interacting with the continued presence of her grandfather through the natural world. In *The Skin of the Film*, Laura Marks notes that “Mimesis, in which one calls up the presence of the other materially, is an indexical, rather than iconic, relation of similarity” (138). In this scene, memory is presented in a tactile way, occurring through the director’s physical contact with the world around her. Through the director’s “grazing” gaze, the viewer is invited to experience this contact (162). Marks notes the relationship between mimesis in The Frankfurt School of thought (for Benjamin, mimetic

faculty) and a contestation of the concept of domination over nature inherent to capitalism and Enlightenment thought (139, 140). For the philosophers of the Frankfurt School, mimesis—with its emphasis on sensuous reenactment through the body and its “[calling] up [of ] the presence of the other materially”—represented an embrace of the environment in place of domination (139, 140). The attention she draws here to mimesis, sensuality and the Frankfurt School of thought resonates with my earlier reading of Benjamin’s concept of historical materialism and secret heliotropism. Like sunflowers’ memory, contained within the seeds and plant body are activated by the sun, so too is human memory, contained within the body, activated by the physical world around them. By appealing to the mimetic in the construction of memory, *Abuelos* foregrounds an alternative way of understanding the past that inherently questions the capitalist (and Enlightenment) desire to dominate the environment.

As she reflects on Juan, the camera pan left to right over a distant horizon of arid mountains in Iquique, “en el norte de Chile...una ciudad que nace del desierto y llega hasta el mar, un lugar en que nunca llueve” (Valencia 2010). The sequence shifts to a stationary shot of dunes with shadows over them. The sound of wind dominates and the stillness of the camera communicates a determined stare. The director remarks in a somewhat more reserved, almost accusatory tone, “yo nunca lo conocí porque fue asesinado en un campo de concentración de Pisagua en la dictadura militar chilena. De esa muerte nunca se habló. De ese abuelo supe muy poco” (Valencia 2010). The heavy words project against the image of the natural world, as if asking “why?” and “what other secrets about death do you hold?” of the dry horizon and late afternoon light. There seem

to be two sorts of death at play in these scenes. One which leads toward continuance, that like a gift blooms onward; and another that fractures and atrophies. Before I move onto the aesthetic treatment of these two temporalities and their relationship to the director's critique of the dictatorship and the political commentary of her film, I want to elaborate on the relationship between embodiment and affect in the film.

### Embodiment, Affect, and Ecology

Following the two establishing scenes that introduce the characters of Remo and Juan through their respective natural environments, the director films her own feet as she walks, holding the camera above her black tennis shoes as they carry her forward over the dry, rocky ground. The bright greens and dripping water of Ecuador and the dry, dignified, silent horizon of Chilean desert are projected onto her body; they come together through her footsteps. In addition to the generational significance, her presence on screen, here and throughout the film, contributes to a "making-of" quality that emphasizes the film-making process. Bill Nichols notes that many reflexive texts "present the filmmaker him-or herself—on screen, in frame—less as a participant-observer than as an authoring agent, opening this very function to examination" (58). Valencia most certainly emphasizes her role as "authoring agent." In *Abuelos*, this meta-textual and performative gesture serves more to underline the proximity of the project as a personal exercise of memory and less to doubt the possibility of historical narrative. She is literally retracing the footsteps of her grandfathers, returning to the places where they lived. Throughout the film, the director will continue to look closely at these lands as she strives to understand how these places, people and stories inform her past.

The focus on the director's eyes, hands and feet, and the use of the first-person voice-over emphasize the deeply personal nature of her film in one of the most emotionally charged scenes in the film. A close-up of the director's eyes begins a point of view shot sequence between her eyes and the computer screen (specifically the search engine box in which she is typing). Through this sequence, the camera is established as Valencia's gaze for the remainder of the sequence. Her subjectivity, as Michael Renov signals, "is the filter through which the real enters discourse, as well as a kind of experiential compass guiding the work toward its goal as embodied knowledge" (*The Subject of Documentary* 176). A detail shot portrays her hand on the mouse, followed by a close-up of the computer screen with Wikipedia's "Caravana de la Muerte" article. Valencia, in voice-over, states, "Cuando leo o escucho sobre la Caravana de la Muerte, imagino el terror y la impotencia que debía haber sentido mi familia con este ejército que se convirtió en un monstruo represor..." (Valencia 2010). "La Caravana de la muerte" was ordered by Pinochet in the weeks after the coup and carried out by General Sergio Arellano Stark (Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura (Valech I) 179; Roht-Arriaza 74-77). The Valech Report states the following about the "Caravana de la Muerte":

Entre septiembre y octubre de 1973, la "caravana de la muerte", una misión a cargo de oficiales del Ejército enviada por el Presidente de la Junta Militar al norte y sur del país, alecciona con ejemplos brutales los grados de radical ensañamiento que debían prevalecer en el trato deparado a los prisioneros (Informe Valech 193).

The brutality of the mission was to be a message of terror to anyone who opposed the dictatorship and an establishment of the hardline military's power (Roht-Arriaza 74). The mission resulted in the death of 75 prisoners from different cities in the north and south of the country (Roht-Arriaza 74, 75). Roht-Arriaza establishes that the assassination procedure followed a pattern: Stark would descend upon a military base in his helicopter, announce himself as Pinochet's representative, allowing him to assume power at the local institution, look over the files of the detained, and determine who would die (75). Those under Stark's commands would then assassinate the designated individuals, often with disturbing brutality, as in the case of Calama, where "the bodies were hacked apart" (75). As indicated by the Rettig Report, Juan Valencia was illegally sentenced to be executed as part of the "Primer Consejo de Guerra" on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973, along with four others from the Campamento de Prisioneros de Pisagua (238). By demonstrating the director researching this topic, the film establishes the record/reveal/preserve impulse to communicate for younger generations or non-Chileans the Pinochet Dictatorship's crimes against its citizens. The shot also establishes the film as part of the director's larger project to recover for herself and her family her grandfathers' stories. At heart, this is a personal exercise of memory. When the film moves to the interview with Dr. Neuman, fellow political prisoner, the camera maintains the gaze and perspective of the director. Although she does not appear on screen, and does not speak, one understands the camera's perspective, which faces Neuman at an eye level, to be that of the director. Like Juan Valencia, Dr. Alberto Neuman was a political prisoner in the Pisagua Concentration Camp. In fact, the director tells us, Neuman is the only living civilian who was present at

her grandfather's death. He was assigned the task of checking that the bodies were completely dead before they were thrown into mass graves. Neuman, in a state of deep vulnerability in which he returns to the traumatic memory, tells how he was called out of his cell, forced to get in a jeep and drive north from the camp in Pisagua to the cemetery. The men, including Juan and others of Dr. Neuman's friends, were marched in blindfolded and with their hands tied. They were lined up. The official lowered his hand and the soldiers shot them all. As the Dr. relates his experience, high angle shots of waves against the rocks at Pisagua alternate with shots of worn crosses in the sand. The sequence of the director filming her own footsteps connect this testimony and a long moment of reflection looking out over the waves. Archival video portrays the doors of the prison in black and white and then gives way to a contemporary color shot of the same doors, in video. The director is standing at the very door from which her grandfather marched for the last time. Returning to the site of the prison, the film creates a context for the viewer to place the violence described in Neuman's testimony, and in this way incorporate it within their imaginary of the "real" world. The doubling of the image also denotes the unresolved nature of the violence that occurred there, its persistence across both sequential and synchronic times. The director's feet, accompanied by a tense harp and violin track, lead the viewer to the sea, as if this story has taken her directly there, to meditate, to stop, think and observe, looking for a way to release her feelings and try to make sense of this death. In voice-over, the director solemnly recites:

“Frente a kilómetros de viento azul y salado, sobre rocas como sangre de volcán, espesa, sangre negra, me quedo en silencio, inmóvil. Frente al mismo mar que

escuchó mi abuelo desde su trabajo, desde su casa, desde la celda en la cárcel de Pisagua. Este mar que lo vio crecer, enamorarse, jugar con sus hijos y que fue el único testigo que estuvo a su favor el día de su fusilamiento” (Valencia 2010).

In her physical presence and the revelation of a great sense of loss through her spoken words—“me quedo en silencio, inmóvil”—, the director allows herself to be *seen* in a moment of pain. Arenillas and Lazzara quote Argentine filmmaker Andres Di Tella on the ethics of first-person documentaries: “ ‘ . . . to sacrifice one’s own family, to expose intimacies of experience, all that is a kind of public offering’ ” (7). He also refers to the form as a “curious act of responsibility” (Arenillas and Lazzara 7). Where neoliberal discourse has made the affective aftermath of human rights violations ahistorical and undesirable, Valencia processes loss before the camera. She offers it up to her viewers, makes it visible, palpable, within reach. Brad Epps, in his article about *Nostalgia*, refers to the exclusion in post-dictatorship Chile of “la turbia y recalcitrante carga emocional de un pasado de terror y violencia del estado, toda aquella emoción a la vez popular y personal, colectiva e individual, que no se deja cohesionar ni mucho menos “desaparecer” como *pasado*” (344). Rob Nixon similarly notes the slow violence that persists in post-conflict societies where “leaders may annually commemorate, as marked on the calendar, the official cessation of hostilities, while ongoing intergenerational slow violence . . . may continue hostilities by other means” (*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* 8). By bringing the topic of the Pinochet dictatorship’s violent repression to the table through her own voice and story, Valencia carries out an intergenerational emotional and ethical labor, one of memory, a “curious act of responsibility,” as



filmmaker Andres Di Tella describes personal documentary (Arenillas and Lazzara 7). The director uses similar words to Di Tella in describing her filmmaking process. She explains that her father almost never talked about what happened to his dad, presumably because it was too painful. She states, “. . . no sé si era mi responsabilidad específicamente hacer eso, pero mi interés era más fuerte de alguna manera acercarme a la familia chilena, en conocer esta historia, al ver que es lo que había pasado en ese país” (Valencia 2015). By confronting the story of her grandfather Juan and speaking in the first-person about her emotional experience of the past, Valencia makes a public offering that reaches across cultures and places. The political meaning the film takes on because of this, however, is not uniform, but instead unique to the unique sensibility and history of each place. Valencia notes that, for example, audiences in Colombia paid close attention to the portrayal of mass graves, while audiences in Europe were more interested in Remo’s story of holistic medicine (Valencia 2015). Reaching a broad audience through the affective connection with the first-person narrator is one of the ways the film connects to the collective. Through this approach, the film makes a political statement about the intergenerational legacy of state-sponsored violence and combats the short-termism and presentism that sustain capitalist economy and society. Arenillas and Lazzara recognize the ethical clout that such an approach carries with it: “Because the “I” exists in a social relationship to the other, it becomes clear that first-person documentaries have everything to do with the notion of community, with creating regimes of affect, identification and connection in times when inequality reigns; exclusion is rampant; and people are starved for meaningful social relations” (Arenillas

and Lazzara 7). While some critics, including Beatriz Sarlo, have signaled an overuse of the first person in documentary films about the human rights violations of the dictatorship period, I think it is important to pay attention to the ways that individual filmmakers work within the (inherited) neoliberal circumstances they inhabit to shift contemporary understandings of the relationship between the individual and the collective.

Not only does neoliberal discourse do away with affective legacies that don't serve the purpose of the narrative of progress, but it also brings to the extreme the abstraction and disembodiment of time. Juan Poblete (in dialogue with Bernard Stiegler) references the way in which contemporary capitalism reduces economy from "an exchange of life and creative materialized ideas" into a series of monetary transactions (99, 100).

Technology becomes ever more important in these transactions and increasingly human memory is transferred to machines (Poblete 100). In the post-social neoliberal era in which the economy has phagocytized society, therefore, another negative externality (in addition to the environment and social society) is the individual's embodied experience and memory (Poblete 98, 100). Stiegler refers to the "bodily and muscular, nervous, cerebral, and biogenetic forms of "grammaticalization" by which workers are alienated from their own experience (Poblete 100). The director's emphasis on weaving together memory and the body/senses, therefore, has a political dimension. It is not affect alone that makes this film so powerful for a broad audience. Rather, the connections between emotion and the body, and body and nature through ecological aesthetics, provide the viewer a collective context for emotion, recovering the social and embodied memory which neoliberalism has externalized. As indicated thus far, the director focuses on both

sequential and synchronous temporalities in the environment. Where these two temporalities come together is a “temporal site of embodied interface”— the director’s own embodied experience (Rose 128, 130). Not only is she the genetic interface of her mother’s (Remo’s) and father’s (Juan’s) pasts, but she is also the agent that keeps their memory “alive” through her film and the conversations it provokes. She appears throughout the film, researching, interviewing, travelling to the different places her grandfathers inhabited as she processes their loss and makes the film. She holds Nicolás Kingman’s novel *Dioses, semidioses y astronautas* and Francisco Lillo’s testimony *Fragmentos de Pisagua*, both texts that portray her grandfathers as characters, in her hands<sup>xv</sup>. The director’s fingers shuffle through old photographs and her hands moves over the mouse as she navigates the Wikipedia page about the Caravan of Death. More than a metonym or synecdoche in which her hands represent the director, I argue these shots function to remind the viewer of the materiality of the director’s body, of her sense-based experience of memory and life. Recuperating this experience and its link to the elements and other living creatures allows for an awareness of diverse temporalities and experiences that are displaced within the capitalist system. This awareness comes with an ethical commitment. As Rose explains, “The world of life is a world of connectivity; where ethical time entangles us all, death doubles back to claim us too. Multispecies genocide opens an entropic vortex into which we are pushing life, and into which we too are being drawn” (139). The neoliberal order that found one of its beginnings as a periphery experiment under Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile today is a global reality. The results of the environmental and social externalities of this system have further

entrenched the entropic vortex of death for human and non-human species. While the impact of film aesthetics and microhistorical accounts on this vortex are certainly extremely limited, I coincide with Deborah Bird Rose in her assertion of writing/creating stories “that awaken ethical sensibility” as a valid and valuable act of witness: “if no stories are told, if all the violence goes unremarked, then we are thrust into the world of the doubly violated” (“Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time” 139). What becomes of the stories of Remo and Juan is in fact dependent in part upon the director, and by way of affective and ecological connection, also upon the viewer. Through both our affective lives and our physical bodies, *Abuelos* claims, we have an ethical relationship with our forebears, contemporaries and future generations (“Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time”).

#### The Aesthetics of Ecological Time

At one level, *Abuelos* is about the generational legacy of trauma. The director states at the beginning of the film that she was paralyzed by the senseless and absolute nature of death in her grandfather Juan’s story, his memory atrophied by the forces of history. On the other hand, she faced the death of her grandfather Remo, who had promised her immortality. *Abuelos* demonstrates a clear impulse to bring to light the story of human rights violations that frames Juan’s life. The film, however, avoids a traditional treatment focusing only on the political context of the dictatorship and/or the personal context of trauma. Regarding her non-traditional approach to the topic, the director states, “. . . historias políticas hay un montón, documentales sobre este tema hay un montón— [traté] de mezclar estos dos mundos, porque finalmente las dos historias suceden paralelamente, estos dos personajes existen paralelamente en la historia” (Valencia 2015).

The director signals the importance of the connections between her grandfathers—their mutual and simultaneous existence within time and space—as the key element to giving the political story of human rights violations a new perspective. *Abuelos* offers a poetic vision of history that vindicates the memory of her grandfathers through the characteristics and temporalities of the environments where they lived. Similar to the faceified landscapes and starscapes of *Nostalgia de la luz*, but on a much smaller and more personal scale, the film animates Juan through the desert and Chilean coast and Remo through the forests, skies and rivers of Ecuador. First, I will analyze the environmental implications of the representation of the life of Juan, and the director's connection to him, through the Chilean landscape. Next, I will study the temporalities associated with the portrait of Remo and his relationship to the director, through the Ecuadorian landscape. Finally, I will develop my argument regarding the director's use of the cyclical temporality of water and the concept of metamorphosis to reflect on the relationship between her grandfathers and herself. Not only do their stories come together in the person of the director, their granddaughter, but they represent different faces of an interconnected material and biological reality. Similar to the way in which *Nostalgia* expands the story of the disappeared to a cosmic, universe level, Valencia politicizes the ethics of post-dictatorship memory by placing the disappeared within the biotic and abiotic context: the flow of life that connects living beings and the constantly cycling elements around them.

The introduction of Juan within the film portrays sequences of the desert coastal area, specifically Iquique and Pisagua. Over an extreme long shot of the massive rolling

dunes of the Chilean desert, the director states, “Norte de Chile el 11 de septiembre de 1973 fue el golpe militar. Ese mismo día detienen a mi abuelo Juan en la intendencia de Iquique donde se había convocado una reunión de dirigentes políticos de la Unidad Popular. . . A todas las personas que detuvieron en Iquique esos primeros días los encerraron en el regimiento de telecomunicaciones” (Valencia 2010). The blue sky contrasts starkly with the sandy browns and reds of the massive dunes. Like a Rothko painting, the contrast of colors along a horizon creates a sense of confrontation. Given the absence of principal subjects, the one-dimensionality of the image, and the stillness of the horizon line, this contrast suggests a sense of hidden hostility that lingers. The whirling sound of the wind also contrasts with the stillness of the image, amplifying the silence of the land. The haunting tone of this image sets the scene for the upcoming scenes that introduce Juan’s story.

A second establishing shot portrays the dunes on one side of the frame, the Iquique cityscape in the middle and the Pacific Ocean on the other. This shot situates the viewer in Juan’s context and leads into his daughter’s testimony of the occasions on which she visited him at the Telecommunications Regiment, which functioned as a detention center during the Pinochet Dictatorship. It was the last place she ever saw him. As Lily (Juan’s daughter, the director’s aunt) recounts the sound of machine guns on the street at night, the camera portrays shots of the regiment. Tangled power lines cross the frame, which is filled with a seemingly endless graveyard of junked automobiles, piled on top of one another several layers deep. In the next sequence, the director (though not on screen) accompanies Lily when she approaches the Regiment. The camera is

positioned behind Lily, who looks across the street. It shows the regiment with cars both parked outside and traffic coming and going in both directions. Lily comments, “Esa era la entrada ahí . . . los mismos árboles, las mismas palmas, lo mismo, lo mismo” (Valencia 2010). As she stands with her back to the camera and falls quiet, it’s obvious that she is lost in memory. The sameness and repetition to which Lily refer actually denote difference. Time has gone on and today there is traffic zooming by. How can it be that those same trees from that traumatic memory are still there and yet he no longer is? Like the one-dimensional landscape of the desert, the stationary camera and the fixed frame with cars rushing through it, register the hidden, haunting difference of the seemingly same. As if not wanting to get too close, recognizing the difficulty of this place for the interviewee, the camera stays back and observes from the opposite side of low-lying electric lines that partially obstruct the view, from the opposite side of the street, from the other side of a fence, giving her aunt plenty of space as she confronts her memory.

The regiment building is there, but the field where the prisoners were held is now an auto graveyard. Pointing to the wall surrounding the Regiment, Lily comments, “Las murallas eran así como lo que está abajo, después pusieron las piedras arriba” (Valencia 2010). Exemplified by the layering of bricks, time seems to have accumulated rather than progressed. The electric lines, the rusted cars and the new layer of rocks on the regiment wall clutter the space, eating away at the beauty of the dunes that are still visible in the background. Juan’s story, interrupted by the coup and the repression that followed, is one of fracture, of erasure (exemplified by the emphasis on layering—or covering up—in this scene) and persistence at the same time. The slow violence of the dictatorship is made

visible by the director's emphasis on accumulation of ruins, both physical and emotional here. The director's aunt was a little girl when she snuck out of the house to bring her dad warm clothes while he was detained at the regiment, and here she is a mature adult with the signs of age on her features. So much time has passed, and yet the place is still full of the violent past; it is different only on the surface. Lily, too, still holds that pain close and present. As she tells the story of the last time she saw her father, Lily demonstrates deep, embodied memory as her voice, her gestures and her facial expressions suggest a return to her age at the time of this traumatic loss. As she recalls the memory, she acts out the scene. Moving her hands vividly, she describes how, when approaching her father with the clothing, he was among soldiers with his hands tied behind his back. She instinctively ran toward him to hug him and a soldier pushed her in the back with a machine gun, yelling to her father, "¡Si avanza disparo!" (Valencia 2010). Throughout this interview, and increasingly as Lily's voice breaks, the camera cuts to images of the dirty, broken vehicles haphazardly dumped on top of one another. These cars represent the physical ruins of the dictatorship's obliterating socio-economic model of neoliberalism. Under this model, the byproducts of consumption build up exponentially. Because they are cars, and because they are such large objects to balancing on top of each other, the image suggests halted motion: stillness where one expects movement, a sort of suspended growth and accumulated ruins that resonates with Lily's trauma and the loss of the Popular Unity dream. Because society has not reconciled with this history, the emotion builds up, and having no real place to go, appears, like the cars, anachronistically. As she describes the day she returned to the Regiment, only to find that her father had been taken in a truck to



Pisagua with the other detainees, the camera, from a high angle shot, slowly pans over the regiment, the sea of cars giving way to industrial-looking roads and jeeps, resting on a barbed wire fence with a sign: “RECINTO MILITAR”. The jeeps in the contemporary image are haunted by the description of the truck that transported Juan and the other prisoners to the camp. The same imposing control that the dictatorship regimented on the natural world—symbolized by the messy power lines and abandoned cars—also disrupted people and their feelings and lives, leaving behind atrophied hopes and dreams and marked human beings. What was termed “progress” by the dictatorship and the neoliberal model—technology, transport, industry—was used against people and against the natural world.

When Valencia visits Victoria, the communist mining town where Juan grew up, the viewer finds more rubble. Juan’s landscape and story capture a sort of “double death” (Rose 128). Rose describes the term as “[breaking] up the partnership between life and death, setting up an ‘amplification of death, so that the balance between life and death is overrun’” (Rose 128). Man-made mass extinctions, she explains, are an example of double death because death extends beyond particular living beings, extending to “the multiplicity of forms of life and of the capacity of evolutionary processes to regenerate life” (Rose 128). The Pinochet dictatorship imposed a similar sort of spiraling chain of destruction. Its campaign of terror murdered an estimated 3,500—4,500 individuals and tortured an estimated 100,000. This violence, of course, ripples out through family and collective life. Additionally, as indicated earlier, the neoliberal economy the dictatorship imposed has had serious negative implications for the environment, leading to extinction,

drought, erosion, water and air contamination. The scenes portraying Juan's life demonstrate the destructive nature of the dictatorship that results in atrophy. Not only did it lead to his assassination, but it also wiped out the whole way of being that characterized the social movements behind the Popular Unity party, which was based on a campaign of solidarity rather than competition. A landscape shot surveys the skeleton of the communist mining town where he grew up in a slow left to right pan. The leafless mangled trunk of a withered tree pushes through the arid soil, which preserves old tires, splinters of wood, the frame of a wall, a broken window, the debris of a former existence. The director recounts the story of the community that was flourishing there before it was raided by the military for being "un nido de comunistas" (Valencia 2010). There had been a school, a hospital, a theatre, a radio station, a church, even an airstrip. The memory of what could have been, and what was destroyed by the dictatorship, haunts the places where the director searches for her Chilean grandfather. The director finds a similar scene of ruins when she returns to the house where Juan lived with his wife and young family in Iquique: an uninhabited, dilapidated building. As the camera peers through the broken window of the second floor looking over the shambles of the old neighborhood, Lily explains that her father was the secretary of the Communist Party in Iquique. Hand-held shots walk the viewer through the home's skeletal interiors. Interspliced in the dreary home tour are clippings from the *El Porvenir -Iquique* newspaper, portraying young Juan Valencia under the headline, "Vote por Juan Valencia Hinojosa: candidato a rigor: va en la lista del Partido Comunista." These times of hope are overlaid onto the house in shambles. As she closes the windows and leaves the space,

the director comments, “en cada lugar en donde busco a mi abuelo sus pasos han sido destruidos” (Valencia 2010). Like in the scene in *Victoria*, the absence of Juan and the truncated political possibilities of Popular Unity’s alternative modernity haunt the scene before us.

In her discussion of the representation of displacement and disorientation in the film *Still Life*, which is about refugees of the Three Gorges Dam in China, Jennifer Fay addresses the temporal dimensions of displacement, which share some of the characteristics of “double death.” Drawing on Rob Nixon and John Berger, Fay explains that “developmental refugees,” or those forcibly displaced by developmental projects like mega dams, do not live homelessness “in a heightened sense of place and time, as one might expect . . . Rather, domesticity and the unexceptional rituals of residency are what enable us to experience time and space meaningfully. They form the backgrounds against which history unfolds” (Fay 136). Therefore, while the nation and the global market march toward the future, the developmental refugee lives “a temporal impoverishment” left outside of historical time, designated by the dominant discourse to a “nonworld,” an unregistered, unrepresented world (Fay 136). This sequence of scenes in *Abuelos* demonstrates how the persecution of Juan (sustained by discourse of development) resulted in his displacement to a nonworld. The expulsion from official history that he undergoes is similar to the intergenerational death in double death. First, as a disappeared person, the dictatorship tried to designate his body to a “nonworld”—no one would have to be accountable for his fate if his body were never found. His remains, unlike that of the majority, were recovered in a common grave in Pisagua in 1990, under the government of

Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle. And yet it is still clear that his legacy was atrophied, cast outside of historical time. Like the houses of Victoria and Iquique, at the hands of the dictatorship, his legacy shriveled while the wrecked cars and other “externalities” of the dictatorship grew. Finally, his family members, like Lily, and the director herself, are fractured by trauma. The director references this sense of “temporal impoverishment” at the beginning of the film, when she notes, “While part of me moved forward and grew strong, the other was buried in the desert” (Valencia 2010). Her generation inherited this trauma, passed down through affect and through the physical world. Her film is an act of confrontation that seeks to bring her grandfather's story back into the present through memory. This sense of agency through active processing of past traumas is consistent with a trend that Maria Fernanda Troya and Christian León identify in the films and scholarly work covered in the introduction to their text *La mirada insistente: repensando el archivo, la etnografía y la participación*: “Volver sobre un mismo gesto puede también dar cuenta, como en Ricoeur, de una necesidad de sanación de los traumas de la memoria. Frente una posición pasiva con respecto de los traumas del pasado, se produciría una voluntad de acción hacia el futuro” (León and Troya 10). By constructing Juan's character through the images and sounds of the environment, sensitizes the viewer to the temporalities (and stories, like Juan's) that the discourse of progress renders inapprehensible. Jennifer Fay makes a similar argument about the film *Still Life* (2006) by Jia Zhangke, a group oil paintings by Liu Xiaodong, and the digital photography of Yang Yi, which she claims question the normative concepts of hospitality through an aesthetics of slowness, deep space and deep time. For the author, these works suggest that

current “conventions of looking may not be adequate to perceive the world's human-caused disappearance” (132). Just as neoliberal conventions of looking fail to register the environmentally displaced, so too are they insensitive to the disappeared of Pinochet's Chile: it is the same logic of progress and homogeneous empty time that form the basis for their forced “displacement”. Fay asserts that while these works of art cannot change the reality they describe, nor do they provide viewers with a political plan, they *do* create “aesthetic registers enabling us to rethink and rescale political commitments in light of our environmental situation” (132). The slow pans that study people-less landscapes of skeletons of cities, and hand-held cameras that look out broken windows and stationary shots that pause long enough to see the shadows of ghosts under stacked up cars attune the senses to the hidden and accumulated violence of “progress.”

The images of the dry ruins of Victoria, with dusty browns and reds and the constant sound of wind, contrast with the sudden shift to close-up shots of rushing water and mossy rocks as the director introduces Remo, “un médico auto-didacto” (Valencia 2010). The director explains, “Fue mi único médico así como el de toda mi familia y yo tomé sólo sus medicamentos casi toda mi vida” (Valencia 2010). The camera moves slowly over the rocks and water in a vertical pan as she notes, “No sé de dónde le nació la curiosidad por la medicina, de donde vino esta pasión por investigar.” Just as the desert gave a face to Juan, the river and forest ecosystem give a face to Remo. Not only do the physical conditions of the place where he lived—Cuenca and Quito, Ecuador—shape him and give him an identity, but his passion for medicine and relationship with plants and the

elements are also communicated through the images and sounds of water, plants and animals.

Unlike Juan, whose dreams and land were atrophied by the Pinochet dictatorship, Remo's passion for medicine grows and connects him with others. The director asserts that in addition to giving a face to her grandfathers and allowing her to speak to her relationship to them, her aesthetic treatment of nature is "una metáfora que tiene que ver con la medicina de mi abuelo ecuatoriano, que trabaja sí con medicinas químicas, pero mezclaba y trabajaba muchísimo con plantas, con medicinas naturales y tenía toda esta percepción de chaman" (Valencia 2015). His spiritual connection with the cosmos and quest for immortality inform the logic of the film, and as she explains in voice-over, the director's understanding of the world: "Yo nací en Ecuador, rodeada de verdes y boscosas montañas cerca del universo de mi abuelo Remo . . . mi abuelo Remo podía hacer llover" (2010). Even today when it rains, she wonders if it was Remo at work, she says. Her poetic description layers over billowing clouds that fill with light as they roll over the Andean foothills in a magnificent time lapse in which the clouds seem to paint and unpaint themselves over the mountainous horizon (2010). Valencia's aunt describes how she and her father would sit outside and watch the mountains. Remo would ask her, "¿Quieres ver cómo se despeja?" as the clouds would majestically roll away. She explains, "Le apasionaba todo lo que esté relacionado con el funcionamiento de la vida, lo que es el ser humano en relación al cosmos" (2010). The film portrays Remo's passion for healing as rooted in his spiritual, almost magical connection with nature, whereby he recognizes the human body as part of a larger, sacred ecosystem.

As she looks through Remo's belongings, which are carefully put away in her grandmother's house—journals, medicine capsules, a mortar and pestle, a balance—the director notes that people have remembered him as “médico alternativo, químico, naturista, científico, energético, brujo, alquimista, como investigador, yo creo que era un poco de todo esto” and explains that Remo “se convirtió en el doctor de los desahuciados” (Valencia 2010). His remedies combined knowledge about plants and chemicals with a sense of mystic spirituality: “incluso decía que la maldad y el egoísmo eran una intoxicación” (Valencia 2010). Remo helped patients from Ecuador, Italy, Colombia, Belgium and the United States. Through interviews and old letters, the patients share their experiences of miraculous recovery under his care as images of shriveled leaves regain their color and vibrancy. In one sequence, in an interview with the director, Remo's daughter is sitting on the ground under a canopy of trees, the natural light illuminating her and her surroundings. She describes how as an adolescent she struggled with addiction and emotional instability. When no one else could reach her, Remo “logró rescatar la confianza . . . haciéndome ver que él es un ser humano como yo, que tiene defectos como yo . . .” (Valencia 2010). She continues, “eso fue para mí la salvación . . .” (Valencia 2010). As Remo's daughter, now an adult, describes her recovery process, a stunning close-up portrays a dandelion against the blue sky and intense sunlight: at first a bare green stem stands alone, naked of its petals. In time lapse, accompanied by piano notes and the sound of wind, the petals one by one return to the flower. Remo has long since passed, but once again, the viewer senses his continued

presence in the world—his immortality—through the vitality of the forest and through the vibrancy of his daughter.

Throughout the film, *Abuelos* develops Remo as representative of an alternative relationship with nature. When the director interviews writer Nicolás Kingman, a dear friend of Remo and author of the magical realist novel *Dioses, semidioses y astronautas*, the writer reveals that a character in his novel is based on Remo. Sitting before 90-year Kingman, the director reads an excerpt from the book. A close-up shows her hands cradling a worn text as, in voice-over, she reads: “Sorprendido vio en el río su imagen aureliada . . . comprendió recién ese día, no importaba cuál, jueves o sábado, frío o caluroso, había logrado por fin, después de años de experimentos y agotadoras pruebas, la inmortalidad” (Valencia 2010). As the excerpt describes the character’s search for immortality, the camera focuses on the light illuminating rocks and a puddle of water, which reflects the canopy of trees above. And when Valencia’s voice falls on the word “inmortalidad,” a few serene piano notes sound and a close-up portrays a large moss-covered stone, followed by leaf buds, branches, flowers, drops of water, and slightly swaying vines. The vital colors, slight movement and bright natural light reiterate Remo’s continued vitality, as if he does indeed live on amongst the elements. His is a cyclical temporality of return and entwinement. This visual and sonorous archive of the forest in fact make up a much larger percent of the footage portraying Remo than actual photographs or videos of him. The fact that he is portrayed by a magical realist, is of course, not gratuitous. The prevalence of the magical realist logic in the film, and the way it interweaves the story of Juan and Remo, is a key aspect of its contribution to the



dialogue around memory, human rights violations and the environment. Especially when combined with the story of Juan, Remo's vision of nature takes on political meaning. Juan's death at the hands of the Pinochet dictatorship represents the violent imposition of a particular brand of realist discourse. After all, it was under the guise of reason that the Dictatorship positioned itself as the proponent of progress and the champion order. Within this context, Remo's magical realism contests the rhetorical and logical underpinnings of the Dictatorship. His spiritual approach to nature refutes the capitalist approach to the environment as a resource with no intrinsic value.

Another way that the film re-incorporates the concept of ecology into historical consciousness is through the connections it creates between the two grandfathers based on an aesthetic of water. Water—its sounds, image and patterns—is central to the meaning and narrative flow of the film and comprises a significant amount of the audio and visual footage of the film. As I have already mentioned, water is associated with Remo and the rivers and forests of Ecuador, and the Juan and the coastal desert of Chile. But more broadly, it reveals a connection across time and space. In the introduction to the film, a stationary camera captures the river water rushing over rocks. The director explains in voice-over that her Chilean grandfather grew up along the coast, where this river that we see—the river of her Ecuadorian grandfather—went to empty into the sea. Highlighting the sense of transition, piano music accompanies the sound of the rapids and crescendos as the shot switches to an underwater camera. This camera portrays water moving and debris passing by the lens. Cued by the director's commentary, the viewer presumes that the movement before the camera is the river on its way to the sea. Amongst

the swirls of water, the word “ABUELOS” appears. Literally, the film connects their stories through the movement of water from Remo to Juan. In another example, the director observes that “durante las últimas dos décadas, aunque parezca imposible, cada cuatro años o más, ha llovido en el desierto” (Valencia 2010). Here the director refers to the cycle of rainfall in nature. When she reflects that “mi abuelo Remo ha hecho llover en el desierto de mi abuelo Juan,” she adds not only a personal, affective dimension to this cycle, but also a spatial one (Valencia 2010). As one of the substances essential to life, water brings life with it as it crosses time and space. This connective logic of water carries political significance under an economy that privatizes and capitalizes on the right to water, and a culture that cannot see beyond the abbreviated present of the individual. It gives witness to the temporal and spatial logics of the non-human environment “in ways that bring into our ken the entanglements that hold the lives of all of us within the skein of life” (Rose 139). Just as water is the thread that unites all living things in ecology, it opens the story of the grandfathers with the river of Remo and closes it with the rain of the desert flowers of Juan.

The trope of water as a bridge between their stories is repeated throughout the film. As the director reflects on Juan’s death, for example, the camera closes in on the grains of sand as a wave breaks on the shore of Chile. The light shines intensely and the shot loses focus, bringing the scene to a close. When the camera refocuses, it is in the deep, clear water of the river in Cuenca, Ecuador, leading into the next scene, which switches back to Remo’s story. In this scene, water functions to communicate the sensations Remo experiences as part of his increasing illness due to a brain tumor. In

voice-over, Remo's daughters explain that the tumor was leaving him hard of hearing, causing ringing in his ears, and causing him to develop cataracts. The sensual experience of these symptoms is mimicked by the fast movement and rushing sound of the water, which grows progressively deafening as the sequence advances.

As the sequence continues, a high angle shot captures a puddle of water reflecting the image of the crisscrossing tree branches above. In voice-over, Remo's daughters explain that his brain tumor was determined fatal and that he began to experience a multitude more of symptoms—loss of pigmentation in his hair, headaches. A single drop of water falls over the synapsing branches and ripples outward, like the effects of the tumor on a brain. He can't keep working and loses his laboratory, where he researched and manufactured chemical and plant-based medicines. Extreme close-up shots of the swirling water continue as the director explains that her grandfather began to search for his own cure. Suddenly, from a bird's eye view the camera portrays the puddle again. Just as the puddle comes to an equilibrium, the lens comes into focus and one sees the reflection of the tree branches, still and clear again. The equilibrium in the image provides a visual metaphor for the information revealed: even though conventional doctors told him there was no cure and that he did not have long to live, after relentless research and testing on himself, Remo suddenly began to get better. His brain tumor was gone; his remedies had cured his tumor. Here, the image of water provides the logical concept of the sequence—the shift from turbulence and disturbance to clarity health—as readily as the spoken narrative.

In the sequence following Dr. Neuman's moving testimony, water provides both a logical and emotional register. The director visits the beach with her hand-held camera. She looks out at the waves as she thinks over what she has learned about grandfather's story. The sound of the waves crashing underlays a violin and harp score, which, like the light on the water, jumps from note to note. The tension of the string instruments contrasts with the fluid sound and movement of the waves, highlighting the complexity of her feelings. Her poetic narration detailing the stages of Remo's life along this coast expresses simultaneous feelings of appreciation for the beauty of his life, and her growing sense of closeness to him, and the pain of his unjust death. The water moves around dark, stoic rocks along the shore. In a direct shot of the water (no horizon showing), we see how, like tiny lanterns, circular blurs of light, too quick for the camera to capture in focus, dance over the surface of the water. In voice-over, the director notes, "Este mar que lo vio crecer, enamorarse, jugar con sus hijos y que fue el único testigo que estuvo a su favor el día de su fusilamiento" (Valencia 2010). The lights fall into focus on a closeup of the waves rocking back and forth and from slightly further away, the camera captures the breaking of the waves along the shore. The movement and transformation of light and water reinforce the stages of her grandfather's life—from childhood to adulthood to death—suggesting that while his next stage and form are unknown, they are part of a larger metamorphosis.

The fact that the director communicates her grandfather's memory through the sounds, movements and images of water, is significant. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon asks, "How, indeed, are we to act ethically

toward human and biotic communities that lie beyond our sensory ken? What then, in the fullest sense of the phrase, is the place of seeing in the world that we now inhabit? What, moreover, is the place of the other senses?" (15). This sequence, and *Abuelos* as a whole, contributes to an environmentally conscious form of memory by bringing water, and the multiple ways of experiencing it, into the viewer's "sensory ken" (15). The logic of water moves through bodies, ecosystems, across borders, continents, and time. It also suggests a common denominator uniting the lives of the two men. While they lived in different countries, and Juan's fate of political persecution may seem far from Remo's life as a holistic doctor, the two stories are in fact united ecologically. This ecological connection speaks to the "disappeared" aspects of neoliberalism's discourse, wherein the environment is an "other"—a resource to be consumed—. Through an aesthetics of water, in contrast, the viewer becomes sensitive to the ways in which the environment is both an intimate part of the bodied and emotional self, and at the same time presents a set of limits and laws much larger than the scope of the human being. By sensitizing the viewer to the temporalities of water and its transformative nature, the film communicates inherent value in the environment and asks its viewers to see beyond "foreshortened narratives" and beyond national borders. This sensitization and valorization are contradictory to the dictatorship's neoliberal policies, including the 1981 Chilean Código de Aguas, which was put into place in order to allow private transnational hydroelectric companies to obtain access to waterways. This legislation treats water as the means to transnational profit and disregards the diverse values it has for local communities and ecologies. Water is treated as a resource, even a quality-less object, rather than a source

of life across places and species with its own language, logic and beauty, as it is portrayed in *Abuelos*.

In her summary of Marx's concept of "metabolic rift" (coined by John Bellamy Foster), Hayley Stevenson notes that "Marx observed that capitalism generated an unavoidable 'metabolic rift' in soil nutrients by rupturing the 'metabolic interaction' between humans and the earth . . . The accumulative imperative of capitalism was seen to concentrate land ownership, depopulate rural areas, increase the density of urban living, and ultimately create an urban-rural divide that saw soil nutrients accumulate as urban waste" (46). What Marx signals through the idea of metabolic rift is the way in which capitalism and its logic of accumulation disregard the environment's limits and laws, and how this disregard results in social and ecological unsustainability and destruction. Through the logic of water, *Abuelos* reinforces nature's laws, characterized by an inescapable and un-ending web of connections. I agree with Deborah Rose Bird in her assertion that "If we understand all living creatures to be in connection, in relationship, in systems of mutual interdependence, then surely these relationships must be analyzed in terms of ethics" (134). Given the ecological connections the film establishes through its aesthetics of water, I argue that *Abuelos* works to reinforce the ethical connections brought under attack by the violence of the dictatorship and the individualist, extractivist socioeconomic regime it enforced.

Reflecting on the environment and the flow of energy between living things across space and time allows the director to reconcile the pain of loss of her grandfather Remo and the pain and loss of Juan, the grandfather she never had the chance to meet.

Ecological memory is what allows her to face death from a place of possibility and presence. In the temporal narratives of ecological sequence and synchrony, death is a sort of gift and responsibility: “the narrative breathed across generations arrives unasked for and carries an obligation” (130). This unasked-for ethical gift and obligation is similar to the messianic index that Benjamin describes in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. In the second thesis, he states:

The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim.” (254).

Dialoguing with the concept of autobiographical documentary film and a redemptive process, the director states, “En el caso de los documentales personales, sí es una introspección súper grande . . . y no [sólo] porque finalmente decides lo que vas a contar, pero [porque] todo el proceso es mucho más profundo y doloroso y enriquecedor. . .” (Valencia 2015). One can imagine the meaning of making the film for Valencia and her family. The director explains that her father had never talked about the topic of his father’s death and previously, she was not close with her family in Chile. In an interview for *El otro cine*, the director states, “Todos tenemos raíces y lo importante es saber en dónde empiezan a crecer y qué nos van dejando por dentro.” (Simon). To become familiar with one’s roots, and how they define one today, can be a powerful process.

Two scenes in the film portray a trip the director took with her aunt Lily and uncle Juan to Pisagua, the northern coastal city where their father Juan Valencia was held in a concentration camp and later executed. These two scenes, which are explicitly focused on death, are also examples of return, life, and continuance in new forms. In 1990, when the

dictatorship ended, the process of recovering the remains from the mass graves at Pisagua began. As the director and her family walk around the area, Lily notices a large butterfly that seems to be following her, hovering over her shoulder and flying in close to her face and to the photo of her father that she has pinned to her jacket. Lily looks directly into the camera and says, “Mira, Carla, ¡qué te digo yo, Es mi papa! ¡Qué te digo yo, es mi papá! ¿a ti y a mí por qué? Y se fue . . .” (Valencia 2010). Especially because the rest of this sequence appears to be observational, rather than interactive, Lily’s candid interjection generates a sense of excitement and authenticity. Juan appears to have joined them, returned as a butterfly. Contemporary shots of the excavated grave sites are interspersed with archival footage from the 1990s, when the bodies were recovered. Black and white still shots reveal the bodies lined up in the graves, preserved to a striking degree. As Lily points to her father’s name on a plaque, the butterfly hovers arounds her and she calls out, “de arriba nos viene siguiendo, de arriba, de arriba!” (Valencia 2010). In this moment, piano music picks up and images of the graves at Pisagua give way to long desert shots, then closer shots of desert plants and flowers, their purple hues bright under the sun. The director explains how Remo’s rain nourishes the seeds of the desert flowers. Linking together the two previous scenes of the butterfly with this one, the film emphasizes not only that energy continues on and returns in new forms. These sequences suggest that Juan’s energy is present at the gravesite with his daughter and granddaughter, but also that human history is not isolated from the experiences of other species: we are more connected than we could ever imagine. The film plays with the idea that Juan appears in a new body, nourished by his mutualists and forebearers present and past. Rose explains,



“The lives of flying foxes are found in the trees; the lives of eucalypts are found in soil and rain; the life of a rainforest is found as well in the lives of numerous creatures including cassowaries and others, and it permeates the air we breathe... There is no way to determine where connectivity and responsibility stop.” (138). Trauma does not remain frozen in time; the loss of their father at the hands of the dictatorship is clearly still painful for Lily and Juan. Yet at the same time, life also does not remain frozen, instead flowing into new forms carrying forward and nourished by the past. This sort of return places human life within the ecological processes whereby the biotic and abiotic world interact and shape one another. It stresses mutualism, or relationships between species that are beneficial to both or all species, over neoliberalism’s individualism and competition.

The portrayal of the temporalities of life and death in *Abuelos* has an important lesson for the narrative of human rights violations and the larger neoliberal discourse which frames the official history of the dictatorship. The representation of deep ecological memory creates a critical affront to the dictatorship, the democracies that followed and the neoliberal system that unites them. In his article, “Representing Absences in the Postdictatorial Documentary Cinema of Patricio Guzmán,” Patrick Blaine explains that “Historical memory is . . . antithetical to the ideology of neoliberalism, which depends on ‘forced obsolescence,’ creating a past and present essentially devoid of substantial meaning . . .” (121). Not only does memory of human rights violations delegitimize the neoliberal economy and ideology that the dictatorship established, but it also does not serve market society’s consumptive impulse geared

toward satisfaction in an abbreviated present. Drawing on the work of Tomás Moulian, Blaine explores the concept of “forced obsolescence” in the political context of post-dictatorship Chile, as well. In large part due to the 1980 constitution, the Concertación found itself faced by the possibility of military action if it threatened the interests of the dictatorship in any way. So, the Concertación maintained the neoliberal model and did not prosecute the military for human rights violations. Therefore, memory of the human rights violations and socialist past represented “incongruity” for the Concertación government, “[t]hus, instead of encouraging a true reckoning with the past and the conflict and reopening of wounds that this would surely imply, the consistent impulse during the transition was to avoid disagreement and to create a highly questionable “consensus.” (121) A consensus to forget maintains the neoliberal structure and both the human and environmental casualties that continue to accrue under its operation.

Neoliberalism’s basis on the concept of progress, individualism, competition and freedom (from legal protections on the environment and limits on the market) make it an extremely anthropocentric ideology. It is human-centered to point of being oblivious in terms of both its conviction that nature serves the needs of humans and its faith in human capacities to shape history and the environment. In his article “Deep Time and Secular Time: A Critique of the Environmental ‘Long View,’” Stefan Skrimshire discusses the “geological turn” in the humanities as a response to the Anthropocene epoch, in which humans are forced to think of themselves as part of a vast temporality that extends beyond the specie’s existence. He notes the representational challenges presented by this deep temporality, which climate change increasingly demands humans to understand.

How, he asks, “does one theorize the historical, ethical subject of the epic geo-narrative (with her differentiated experiences of suffering and oppression)? How do we live well in deep time?” (Skrimshire 64). *Abuelos* responds to this question through an exercise of memory based in the body and poetics. By foregrounding the bodily experience of memory, the film recognizes the individual as a valid starting point for responding to Skrimshire’s question. As an individual body, one always already lives in the deep temporality of the distant past and distant future. This is true because ecologically, the body is not only an individual, but also its contemporaries and ancestors, as the film’s haptic “graze” and focus on water hints. Given these connections, the individual is also granted the responsibility to feel deeply and to act on the threat of extinction. It is through poetics, the expressive modality of desire, that *Abuelos* most effectively connects with the viewer. Not surprisingly, Renov’s account of the expressive modality references Flaherty, the romantic documentary poet of snowscapes (33). Like Flaherty’s imaginative (albeit problematic) interpretation of the Canadian arctic and the Inuit peoples, *Abuelos* communicates emotion and temporal concepts through its creative treatment of nature. Take, for example, the Chilean coast scene following Dr. Neuman’s testimony. The sequence that combines the violin composition with shots of light on the waves communicates the symphony of Juan’s life and the director’s pain at learning of his death before a firing squad; at the same time it speaks to the ebb and flow of life and death, a cycle of gift and return. Through its poetic construction of memory, *Abuelos* honors both Remo and Juan with an archive of beautiful sounds, images and patterns from nature, and

challenges its viewers to register emotionally, intellectually and physically the legacy of the Pinochet dictatorship in the world around them.

The concluding sequence of *Abuelos* reiterates the concept of poetic creation as a way to navigate the ethical responsibility to the past that one carries with them in their body. When she describes the flower seeds that have germinated in the desert, the director stresses her creative interpretation of the way Juan and Remo's stories come together and grew into something new. She says "me gusta imaginar"—she likes to *imagine*-- that Remo made it rain in Juan's desert, signaling the way in which the film is her own creative interpretation and the culmination of her memory process. A series of "road" shots captures the scenery flying by from the window of a bus. Shots of the trees along the road in Ecuador and the desert in Chile are edited together in such a way that they are clearly two parts of one trip. The director seems to be making her way home from the trip, reflecting on all she has learned. The camera focuses on the white lines of the road markings quickly slipping away and the director notes, "Mis dos abuelos lograron ver concretadas las metas por las que trabajaron y pelearon siempre" (Valencia 2010). She explains that Remo cured hundreds of patients and Juan was able to live the three years of dignity that the Union Popular was able to give to Chile (Valencia 2010). A medium shot of the director shows her sitting on the bus, looking out the window as the curtain flaps in the wind. The camera closes in on her face and her eyes, stressing the play of light over her eyes as the curtain moves back and forth. As rain falls on the window and reflective piano music gains momentum, an extreme close-up with a blurred focus looks out the front window as the windshield wipers move and the yellow light of

an on-coming car illuminates the water on the glass. The blurred camera captures the sensation of squinting eyes and the extreme closeups of the water rippling over the glass highlights the feeling of wetness. All of this serves to stress the director's corporal experience of the trip. In another close-up, the camera captures the director once again looking out the window, a profile shot of her face with the sun outlining strands of her hair as they blow in the wind, takes up one half of the frame, and on the other half, the desert is visible. The sunlight pours into the image as the piano music crescendos and Valencia concludes: "Dos caras de una misma historia me han contado de dónde vengo, de la inmortalidad y la muerte de la muerte y la inmortalidad." The mention of the two faces of the same story combines with the divided framed and the repetition of shots of her face in such a way that the stories of her grandfathers, told through their natural landscapes, are mapped onto the director. She carries them forward in her own trajectory. The concept of simultaneous return and renewal comes to a culmination through the song that plays as the credits role. Accompanied by piano (Camilo Salinas), the director sings "Piedra y camino," an Atahualpa Yupanqui song that Remo always enjoyed. Not only is Valencia giving new life to a song that reminds her of her grandfather, but because the viewer has not heard the director sing up until this point, the distinct register of her voice in song also represents a sort of transformation. The lyrics reiterate this meaning through their description of a peregrination: "a veces soy como el río, vengo cantando . . . es mi destino, piedra y camino, un sueño lejano y bello, viday soy peregrino." After this peregrination, just as her grandfather Juan has transformed into a butterfly and her

grandfather Remo is all around her in the rushing water and vital forest, she too has changed, shaped by the meaning she gives to these memories.

In an interview with *8 y medio* cinema magazine in Ecuador, the director states, “He heredado de mis abuelos mi pensamiento político y espero que también el convencimiento que ambos tenían de saber que todo es posible” (Simon). While her convictions grow from her roots and her grandfathers’ era, her approach reflects the perspective of another generation; she witnessed her father’s exile, loss, and silence, rather than experiencing them firsthand. Valencia’s exercise of memory creates a space to reconstruct a personal and political identity from the individual subjectivity. As I mentioned before, this is a distinct approach to that of the militant New Latin American Cinema films of the 1960s and 70s, which spoke from the national collective. Since its premiere at IDFA in November, 2010, *Abuelos* has been screened in more than 26 festival in more than 24 countries. The director notes, “Se proyectó frente a públicos hindúes, turcos y chinos y aunque yo no vi esas reacciones, saber que este ‘primer hijo’ anda por ahí caminando solo es muy reconfortante” (“El camino de los abuelos”). The fact that the director thinks of the film as a sort of first child emphasizes the concept of simultaneous return and transformed continuation central to the film, and how it extends beyond the director and beyond *Abuelos* as a work of art. In Colombia, the film created a lot of discussion around the topic of mass graves, due to the pertinence of political deaths and disappearances in that country. In Mexico, where journalists are among the most persecuted in the world, questions and dialogue revolved around the fear of speaking out about political violence. And in Europe, the director explains, the public wanted to hear

more about Remo, his spiritual and herbal medicine, and Ecuador (“El camino de los abuelos”). The give and take between the individual perspective and a diverse, collective public brings this analysis back to Benjamin and the flowers turning toward the sun. “A historical materialist must be aware of this most inconspicuous of all transformations,” Benjamin states (255). This transformation, which begins with the director looking toward the sun, water and land in order to reconnect with her grandfathers, reaches outward. While it did not instigate the beginning of a revolution or political or legal changes, the film, in an inconspicuous way—speaking poetically, from the individual subject proper to neoliberalism—manages to ever so slightly shift the discussion of human rights violations through ecological memory.

#### The Personal Perspective, Collective Memory and the Use of Archival Materials

In the film’s portrayal of Remo, individual memory overshadows concern with socio-economic structure. As I have suggested above, the film thoroughly explores the connections between Remo and Juan at an ecological level. The same level of attention to connection and simultaneity is not given to the socio-political context. While politics and economy also intertwine across borders, places and times, and profoundly affect the environment, the political lens is applied only to Juan, and by extension, Chile. Because the director is concerned with her individual memory of Remo, the political nature of his story (and national context) is left outside the scope of her film. The director notes, “la historia política de mi abuelo ecuatoriano no tenía que ver con lo que a mí me interesaba contar de su vida” (Valencia 2015). Even though Remo was also involved in leftist politics at one point in his life—“No es una casualidad que mis papás se conocen en

[communist] Moscú”—that was not Remo’s defining passion and the lesson the director learned from him originated elsewhere, in his spiritual and ecological insight on life (Valencia 2015). I argue that by focusing only on this aspect of Remo’s life, and by not mentioning an umbrella Cold-War era political context that gave way to neoliberalism, the director unintentionally represents Ecuador as a-political. This disparity is particularly noticeable when one considers the use of archival materials in the film, which privileges Juan’s (and Chile’s) story.

In contrast to the Chilean desert, with the legacy of the Pinochet dictatorship projected onto it, the green mountains and time-lapsed clouds, moss-covered trees and rivers of Ecuador come to represent a place of life and mystical healing. In her opening voice-over commentary, the director establishes that she was divided between the immortality of her grandfather Remo and the mortality of her grandfather Juan. Once established, the relationship of opposites easily extends itself to the national context as well: Juan, whose personal history was so integrally tied to Chile’s Popular Unity coalition and the violent repression of the Pinochet dictatorship, portrays a politically charged Chile. Remo, whose story is told from a more familial and mystical angle, portrays a powerful yet a-political Ecuador. If one were to understand Ecuador only via this story of Remo, Ecuador would be a magical place, a place where one can achieve immortality, essentially, a place out of time. Considering that Ecuador was also under a dictatorship during the time of the coup d’état in Chile, and that it was under that regime that the country began exporting oil on a significant scale, this is problematic. Years later, when the country returned to democratic rule, President Jaime Roldós died in a plane



crash that is widely believed to be part of Operation Condor, a U.S.-backed campaign of terror and repression implemented by the Southern Cone. The Pinochet dictatorship played a fundamental and active role in Operation Condor. So, it is just as one would assume given the ethological connection that Valencia establishes between the two contexts: the two stories are also integrally connected in terms of politics. Due to the individual and personal perspective the director takes, however, this connection is understated. Director Juan Martín Cueva addresses this common but problematic representation of Ecuador in his documentary *El lugar donde se juntan los polos*, where he posits that the perception of Ecuador as “un lugar donde no pasa nada más que una línea imaginaria” is part of the national and regional colonial legacy that marginalizes indigenous and mestizo history (2004).

The representational disparity between the two characters (and by extension their national history) in terms of political context stems from the dominance of the intimate focus on memory. Similar to Patricio Guzmán’s portrayal of the 1940s and 50s as an idyllic period in Chilean history, a period in which, for the director, Chile lived in peace and outside of time, this portrayal of Ecuador privileges the director’s personal account at the expense of the collective context. Just as for Guzmán (but not necessarily the larger Chilean collective) the period of his childhood in the 40s and 50s was personally a peaceful one; for Valencia, the aspect of Remo’s life that was most important to explore was his dedication to medicine, not his involvement in leftist politics, which was in a very distinct context to that of Juan. She explains that her concept for the film started to gain traction when independently of one another, her Chilean aunt and Ecuadorian aunt

each gave her a book about her grandfathers: “. . . Uno me regaló mi tía chilena, *Fragmentos de Pisagua*, que es sobre la historia del campo de concentración de Pisagua, que fue escrito por uno de los presos y en este libro se habla de mi abuelo chileno y el otro libro que era *Dioses, semidioses y astronautas* de Nicolás Kingman, en donde uno de los personajes está basado en mi abuelo Remo” (Valencia 2015). Not only does each grandfather clearly have an established frame (political prisoner/magical realism character) that the director inherits, but also the familial context of receiving the texts from her aunts influences her conception of the story. The director explains that her development of Remo as “más mágico y más irreal casi” stems from her “recuerdo infantil” of that grandfather as a larger-than-life figure. She notes that this narrative perhaps overshadows the fact that Remo “logró hacer cosas super trascendentes en mi vida y la de mi familia” (Valencia 2015). The meaning of her grandfather in her own life contributed to the film’s focus on Remo’s magical side, rather than his political involvements. The stories of Juan and Remo are placed within an over-arching political context in Latin America, in which magical realism and the leftist movements (including the Popular Unity party) were part of a common moment and political impulse. Magical realism includes a critique of power and a popular appeal that mobilizes collectivist sentiments and pride in Latin American mestizaje. This artistic and ideological approach grows out of and dialogues with the growing anti-imperialist leftist consciousness at the time, which, of course, informed the agenda of the Popular Unity alliance in Chile. But this context is not developed within the film. The interview with Kingman, for example, makes no reference to the larger trend of magical realism that informed his work.

Because the film does not draw connections between magical realism and the historical context within Ecuador or Latin America more widely, Remo's spirituality (aligned with the search for immortality and magical realism within the film) is not given an explicitly political meaning in the film. In contrast, the film develops Lillo's testimony from the Pisagua concentration camp within the context of the dictatorship and Cold War politics. Due to this uneven approach, the engagement with the connection between the Pinochet dictatorship and a neoliberal economic model that encompasses both Chile and Ecuador is left underdeveloped in the film.

Juan's story includes a substantial historical narrative. The film recuperates Juan Valencia's story, and that of the Popular Unity era, from "el baúl del olvido" on an international level, having been shown in more than 24 countries, and makes significant contributions to audiovisual historical memory. Additionally, the film incorporates a didactic description of the economic and media attacks that the Chilean right and the international business interests, especially from the U.S. private sector and government, imposed on Allende's government. Interview testimonies and different forms of archival documents tell the story of Juan Valencia, a man who dedicated his life to building a more just society and supported Salvador Allende through his political trajectory. Perhaps not surprising given the project's focus on the history of human rights violations, within the sections of the film dedicated to Juan, the record/reveal/preserve modality of desire is prominent. That being said, as Renov asserts, "the markers of documentary authenticity are historically variable" (*Theorizing Documentary* 23). I will discuss several different ways the film approaches its desire to preserve the memory of her grandfather. Through

an interview with Lily Valencia and voice-over narration from the director, the spectator learns that he was already active in the Communist Party in Iquique during González Videla's presidency. He was secretary for the Communist Party in Iquique in 1948 at the age of 26, when he was elected city councilman. Close ups of a newspaper announcement with Valencia's photograph and the messages "Vote por Juan Valencia Hinojosa Candidato a Regidor" and "Va en la lista del partido comunista" provide archival documentation of the narrative. Although González Videla's candidacy had been supported by communists, under pressure from the U.S., his administration passed "la ley maldita" or "Law 8987, The Law for the Permanent Defense of Democracy," which outlawed the Communist Party and disqualified its leaders, members and followers from assuming public office or voting (Lockhart 113). Because of this law, Juan Valencia was never able to assume his position as city councilman. During the "ley maldita" years, Juan lived clandestinely in order to continue his political participation and was actively persecuted by the government.

The film contributes an emotive and informative portrayal of the implementation of Allende's socialist agenda through its description of Juan Valencia's role as "Jefe Provincial de la Empresa de Comercio Agrícola (ECA)" in Iquique ("Juan Valencia" *Museo de la memoria y los derechos humanos*). The director notes that Allende travelled to Iquique to name the functionaries for his new government in the northern region of the country and social subject Rigoberto Echeverría, fellow communist militant and friend of Juan Valencia explains that Allende appointed the director's grandfather as the head of ECA due to his dedication to the party. Echeverría teaches the director about her

grandfather by showing her newspaper clippings and telling her stories. He is particularly passionate as he shows her a photocopy of a photograph that is carefully preserved in a plastic folder. Echeverría's aged hand points to Valencia in the photo and he states with excitement, "Ahí se ve cuando está estrechando la mano de Allende. Ese es Allende ahí y le está dando la mano, le tiene la mano, ve?" (Valencia 2010). The camera narrows in on the handshake, hovering over the image static as the director sums up what she has just learned—"A mi abuelo Juan, se le encargó el manejo de la ECA en la region de Tarapacá"—and the original of the Valencia-Allende photograph replaces the photocopy, as if the picture of her grandfather is becoming clearer, coming closer. Valencia, who had never gone to college and was a mechanic by profession, took over the national agricultural Company and was in charge of the distribution of foodstuffs for the Tarapacá region, which was determined by the number of members in each family. This description helps one to understand the important role that Juan played and provides insight into the deeply transformational and participatory nature of the Allende government. It also clarifies the centrality of food distribution and the great threat that shortages of goods presented to the administration's functionality and approval rates. But perhaps even more importantly, the engagement with the archive in this scene helps establish the "reflective" vs "restorative" nostalgia for the past that the film produces (Boym 13). Svetlana Boym distinguishes between restorative nostalgia, which "attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" and reflective nostalgia, which "delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately" (13). She further develops the concept of reflective nostalgia as "concerned with historical and individual time, with the

irrevocability of the past and human finitude” (15). A restorative approach to the archive may have demonstrated a series of images of Juan that fill the frame, appearing unmediated before the viewer. In this way, they would seek to resurrect him for the viewer in his whole, as he was when he was alive. Here, the film portrays Juan through a mediated, *handled* archive. Boym signals that whereas restorative nostalgia seeks the resurrection of the truth from the past, reflective nostalgia emphasizes “the meditation on history and the passage of time” (15). This is precisely the approach that *Abuelos* takes to the representation of Juan through Echeverría’s presentation of the newspaper clips. Echeverría directs the viewer’s gaze over the image, to focus on the handshake with Allende, even pointing his finger to the interaction within the image. His emotional response to the image and his transference of that emotion to the director are what give this history meaning. The camera’s conspicuous zoom over the image similarly denotes the director’s construction of emotion (growing sense of intimacy) through the manipulation of the archive, rather than the presence of inherent truth within the archival document. Additionally, the fact that the photocopy is imperfect highlights the loss that has occurred in the process of reproducing the newspaper photograph, already a copy of a copy. Additionally, the preservation of the clipping within a plastic folder emphasizes the physical deterioration that all material undergoes with the passing of time, doubly suggesting the unrestorable nature of the past. In her analysis of the film *Decasia*, Jamie Baron describes a similar dynamic that combines a focus on haptic engagement with the archive and reflective nostalgia. She explains, “Watching *Decasia*, we can sense—in a tactile and embodied experience—the physical, material presence and disintegration of

the (original) nitrate filmstrip” (131). Through their engagement with documents, both films hint at historical presence without an expectation of restoration (130).

Through images of the director’s father as a young man, one notes not only the deep commitment to communist values in the Valencia family, but also the romantic revolutionary ethos and image that characterized this period. Family photographs portray him at the airport, happy, young and finely dressed. He is accompanied by his travel bags and hugging his mother before his departure for Moscú, where he would study and share Chilean culture in the Soviet Union. The director notes that, “Seguramente mi abuelo Juan tomó esta foto” (Valencia 2010). In each successive photograph, her father (Héctor Valencia) is further and further from the camera man, Juan Valencia. The director explains that it was his first time leaving the country. She states, “Sabía que el viaje que apenas empezaba duraría varios años. Pero nunca pensó que tantos. Tampoco se imaginó que no volvería ver a su padre, que lo miraba y se despedía a través de esta lente y que sin saberlo me dejó estas fotos” (Valencia 2010). Also from a communist family, her mother also left her family for the first time to study and dance in the Soviet Union. They met as part of a performance troop that performed folkloric music and dance. Black and white photographs portray the two attractive young people with the clothing and styles of the era. The director confesses, “el encuentro de los jóvenes latinoamericanos que se conocen bailando en esta época de ideales revolucionarios siempre me ha parecido muy romántico” (Valencia 2010). This sequence and the director’s narration hints at an overarching Latin American leftist sentiment, but the domestic political details are only explored within the Chilean context. The passion for the social movement that Allende

represented is supported in the film through various avenues. One of them is the inclusion of folkloric music and graphic art from the period. As the song “Chiloé,” by the Chilean group Inti-Illimani plays extra-diegetically, close ups of the Popular Unity graphics by Vicente Larrea and Alejandro “Mono” Gonzalez take the screen with their bright colors and rounded shapes, portraying workers and families of diverse skin tones and cultural markers, smiling faces, raised fists, hammers, flowers and birds. The director notes that these sounds and images transport her to a country and a time that she did not experience, but which still defined her childhood imaginary. They speak to a sense of hope, possibility, resolve and clearly an appeal to the popular. They speak to the life that Juan Valencia lived and shared with his children. He worked for Allende’s campaigns in 1952, ’58, ’64 and ’70, and as his children explain through anecdotes, raising money for the campaign was a regular part of their lives in the form of “malones” or community parties, parades and trips to other cities. When Allende visited Iquique, they explain, Juan Valencia borrowed his mother’s truck to parade the candidate around the city. Intermixed with Larrea and Gonzalez’ graphics, black and white photographs portray Valencia handing out fliers among big groups of people and speaking at public events. Lily notes that he even taught his mother to read so that she could vote. Photographs from the days around Allende’s election in 1970 demonstrate Valencia’s name among other members of the party on a mural in Northern Chile. In front of the art, a group of young children are smiling and holding their fists in the air. Lily describes the day he won as so emotional and intense that he could not help but “llorar de alegría” (Valencia 2010). As the song “Hacia la libertad” by Inti Illimani gains force and volume, a social subject on the street



in Iquique gives testimony to how Juan Valencia would say “esto es solo el principio” and made everyone around him feel like they were “reyes del universo” (Valencia 2010). This sense of social and political commitment alone is a sort of document.

Another important historical document that the film restores and disseminates is a recording that Juan Valencia and family made for the director’s father (Héctor) upon Allende’s victory, to send him the good news in Moscow. The tape had never been heard and it captures a very different sense of political life than that which characterizes the neoliberal moment.

“Día 12 de septiembre de 1970, después de pasar unos días del gran triunfo que el pueblo chileno dio a la Unidad Popular y a su abanderado el Doctor Salvador Allende. La derecha se está maniobrando, eso lo esperábamos, pero la gente se está movilizandando en Chile, con medios económicos bastante escuálidos logramos vencer una campaña multimillonaria, una campana especialmente anticomunista . . . es la cristalización de nuestra línea política . . . por los cambios profundos que Chile necesita” (Valencia 2010).

Although the text of Juan’s statement, isolated from the audio, cannot capture the level of profound emotion and sense of purpose that characterizes his letter, it does signal the way in which his and his family’s lives were built around Allende and the Popular Unity’s platform. It also reveals his reading of the political situation, which foreshadows in an unsettling way his persecution and death at the hands of the “la derecha,” which was “maniobrando” or planning illicit actions to derail Allende’s triumph. Valencia begins to break into tears as he tells his son, “Estoy emocionado porque Juanito (hijo) también está comprendiendo que la lucha del pueblo va a por fin a cristalizarse y él fue un gran aporte . . .” (Valencia 2010). On the recording, Héctor’s mother tells him, “Mi querido Tito . . . que no vayas a esos países capitalistas . . .” and his sister Lily states, “Aunque la derecha

no quiere reconocer que hemos ganado . . . como el pueblo unido jamás será vencido, no nos vencerán . . .” (Valencia 2010). The unity of the family around their political commitments is curious for a viewer from the post-social era in which there seems to be a disparity of leadership and the “political” seems distant from one’s individual or family reality. Part of the power of this recording is watching Juan Valencia’s children hear their father’s voice and discourse after all these years, recovering this emotional moment and message that had never reached its destination. Each listening on different occasions, Juan, Lily and Héctor all break into tears as they listen to the letter. Héctor states, “El tipo tenía clarísima la película,” reiterating the sense that the values that his father preached were legitimate and powerful and that far from being disproven in the current moment they maintain their dignity (Valencia 2010). Together, these anecdotes, archival documents and testimonies create an image of Juan Valencia and the larger Popular Unity platform that is family-based, admirable, possible, inspired and humble. This image of communist supporters contrasts greatly with the image of violent aggressor that the dictatorship and broader Cold War anti-communist discourse portrayed. It contrasts the official narrative of war-like conditions, which the dictatorship claimed legitimated violent repression to save the country from the threat of communism. Because the director frames this period with her father’s lament—“Yo estaba apuntando todo para regresar a estar cerca de mi padre y poder ayudarlo . . .”—the film also generates a sense of loss related to the Allende platform on a personal level (Valencia 2010). The director explains that after her parents met and had their first daughter, they had planned to return

to Chile, but the dictatorship changed their plans and years later, the director was born in Ecuador.

The film also contributes some information about the political context surrounding the downfall of the Allende presidency. This section relies on a microhistory approach, relying on anecdotal accounts to document national and international attacks on Juan's dreams of social and economic equality through the Popular Unity government. In his analysis of *Abuelos*, Ignacio del Valle notes that while many autobiographical films that address the dictatorship in Chile (*Mi vida con Carlos*, 2010, *El edificio de los chilenos*, 2010, *El eco de las canciones* 2010) refrain from dedicating significant time to historical context, *Abuelos* is an exception (del Valle). He attributes this difference to Valencia's upbringing outside of Chile, which makes sense as the historical research she carries out forms part of her exercise of memory and her attempt to better understand Juan ("Hablad por mis palabras y mi sangre"). When researching her Chilean grandfather's life work, the director interviews several individuals familiar with the agricultural and food distribution sectors in Iquique during the Allende years. Juan Valencia Campos (son), Héctor Valencia Campos (son), Lily Valencia Campos (daughter) and Dr. Vladislav Kuzmich, ex-political prisoner who was active in the Socialist Party, all explain that Juan, working in the distribution of foodstuff, was immersed in one of the most vulnerable and affected sectors of the Allende presidency. Héctor hints at some weaknesses on the part of the Allende government, mentioning the difficulty of taking over a large company without the necessary tools and capacitation. The film focuses on Kuzmich's analysis, however, which notes how the Chilean right,

financed by transnational corporations that were significantly affected by the Allende government's restructuring of the economy (nationalizing large sectors of the economy), attacked the government through artificial shortages that created a sense of emergency and dissatisfaction. Juan (son) describes the way in which these attacks changed social relationships, initiating distrust. Lily supports this account telling how their family was accused of having better access to goods given that Juan was the in charge of food distribution. She explains how their mother invited into their home the woman who accused them, to open the cabinets and refrigerator and see for herself the integrity of the family. Lily and Dr. Kuzmicic describe the role of trucking strikes that further debilitated the economy. Lily notes the direct connection with Juan Valencia's work, explaining that he had stopped several groups of trucks that were removing goods from Chile and taking them to Bolivia, further inciting shortages. This section provides a helpful frame for understanding the historical context, but does not go into significant analysis; rather, the summary gives a general understanding of the attacks on the Allende government, the roots of these attacks in the threat that the socialist government posed to transnational capital, and the hardships and uphill battle that Juan, his family and the Popular Unity faced. These scenes, I argue, at times lag in their desire to preserve/record/reveal because of their reliance on interviews. Similar to the revisionist Wobblies films of the 1970s that Michael Renov references, the director's "interest in the visual document—interview footage intercut with archival material [outpaces] the historian's obligation to interrogate rather than serve up the visible evidence" (26). The interviews with Dr. Kuzmicic, Lily and Héctor are informative and engaging, but the director is even more successful in

“recording” a sense of history when she engages it more poetically and analytically. For example, another scene explores the dictatorship’s intervention in the economy, but rather than archival materials, this scene relies on poetic visual metaphor. In the sequence describing the forced shortages caused by the Chilean right and transnational companies, the repetition of footage of trucks coming and going from a parking lot where no people are present, once again creates a sense of haunting, of faceless machines that dismantle the possibility and hope—the kind of human relationships—that Juan’s Popular Unity represented. The effects of the neoliberal economy that the trucks foreshadow are also hinted at through the sequences portraying the rusty and ruined cars that have accumulated on top of the old regiment, where the political prisoners of Iquique were held after the military coup.

*Abuelos* makes significant contributions to historical memory of the Pinochet dictatorship’s repressive mechanisms through its poetic portrayal of the concentration camps. There is certainly a drive to “develar”—to reveal to its viewers—the heinous crimes the dictatorship inflicted on its population, but the testimonies in this section are powerful not so much because of the information they reveal. Rather, it is the film’s ability to cast the emotional charge of testimony onto the material world that make its portrayals of the camps especially powerful. Interviews with Francisco Lillo, ex-political prisoner of the Pisagua concentration camp and the author of *Fragmentos de Pisagua*, excerpts from his text, and shots of objects recovered from the prison serve as significant sources in this labor. Lillo met Juan Valencia at the Pisagua prison, where he wrote *Fragmentos de Pisagua*. The text includes testimony from the prison in narrative form

and in the form of drawings (by several different prisoners) that map out the camp and depict the torture tactics employed by the military. On camera, the director holds a copy of the book and in voice-over, she reads Lillo's testimony:

“A Juan Valencia lo conocí en una de las celdas, típico hombre del norte, fuerte, franco, sencillo, de extracción obrera, parecía conocer múltiples oficios, es fácil recordarlo porque era nuestro peluquero. A demás cooperaba para entretener y con ello cortaba los días...De los tanguistas sobresalían dos—Chico Carter, de Valparaiso, y Juan Valencia, que sacaba la cara por el norte” (Valencia 2010)

As the director reads this fragment about her grandfather, the camera shows the original pieces of paper on which Lillo wrote the book. The papers themselves are fragments, weathered, and torn. Similarly, handmade playing cards appear onscreen as the excerpt describes life in the prison. Not only do the anecdotes about tango singers and barbers create a sense of the lived experience of the prison—the resilience as well as the oppression—but also the physical objects suggest that this history of both violence and resilience continues to be present in the physical world. Like the book the director holds in her hands, she can reach out and touch it. These objects represent artifacts from the camp. Developing this logic, a contemporary long shot of Pisagua with the diegetic sound of wind gives way to closer shots of the port city and surrounding dunes, as another political prisoner, Hugo Bolivar, explains that due to the geographic formations of the area, it was possible to escape. He notes that men with machine guns would line the area and that “Por uno que se arrancara eran 20 muertos” (Valencia 2010). His testimony is layered onto the images of the city we see. What looks like a quaint city has layers of

trauma that may not be visible at first glance. As Lillo describes having been with Juan Valencia in the tight quarters of the catacombs, so small that prisoners had to sleep standing up, drawings portray the violence of the prisoners' experiences, stick figures blindfolded and stripped being pulled apart by men with uniforms and guns. Lillo points to a photograph of the prison structures and signals the area where he and Juan were held. Lillo explains, "tanto la tortura que algunos pidieron que los mataran." Rigoberto Echeverría, another ex-prisoner describes the "pan de Guerra" the prisoners were forced to eat. The loaves of bread were hollowed out by rats who left excrement inside the loaves of bread and the men would bang the loaves to shake out the excrement. The director asks Lillo to read the excerpt in which he describes the meaning of freedom from the perspective of Pisagua. The director reads from *Fragmentos de Pisagua* in voice-over:

"Esta libertad era del punto de vista de Pisagua." ¿Qué es la libertad? "Es sentarse bajo unos rayos de sol por solo unos minutos, es poder cantar dentro de la celda, es poder sonreír con los hermanos dentro del penal, es ver algunas estrellas desde las ventanas, es poder pegarse un baño en la playa después de estar dos meses en las catacumbas, es poder jugar futbol en la canchita frente del penal rodeado de soldados con metralletas, es poder escribir más que dos cartas a los seres queridos en el mes, es ver el paso de las hormigas y el vuelo de las moscas sin ser interrumpido, es ver partir a los amigos fuera del penal para no volver, es salir del penal, salir del pueblo, subir la cuesta y no volver" (Valencia 2010).

This excerpt, in addition to the photographs, maps, letters and scribbled notes, contributes to collective history of the Pisagua Prison and to documentation of the mechanism of

torture and repression under Pinochet's dictatorship. Once again, through her artistic approach to memory—like the use of the stick figure drawings, the appeal to material history, and a projection of trauma onto the physical spaces she portrays—the director's voice is felt most strongly and her impulse to preserve is most successful (Renov *Theorizing Documentary* 27).

Another significant aspect of the film's contribution to historical memory is its portrayal of the uncovering of the mass graves at Pisagua. The director interviews Fernando Muñoz, the cameraman who documented the search in June, 1990, when Dr. Neuman returned to Chile to collaborate in the search. Valencia combines her own footage of the area (sandy dunes and ocean) with Muñoz' footage from 1990, and his account of the day on which the bodies were found. In this way, Valencia actualizes this important legal and social document, re-registering for the public not only the process that occurred to uncover the bodies, but also the crime of the murders itself, saving the memory of this atrocity from "el baúl del olvido" just as it does the dignified image of the Popular Unity coalition. In the interview, Muñoz explains that at the end of the first day, nothing had been found. Giving the viewer a sense of the emotional register of the event, the director explains in voice-over that the search group was accompanied by *carabineros*—the Chilean national police force—who prevented anyone else from entering the area and that at one point Dr. Neuman felt so uncomfortable with their presence that he asked to be removed from the premises. As Muñoz recounts the day, both his footage—which is of a grainy and greyish video quality—and that of the director visually reinforce his testimony. For example, the director's camera portrays the sandy



cliffs, looking down at the crashing waves from extreme distance, as Muñoz describes in voice-over how he had been asked to photograph the area from above on the second day of the search. Returning to the interview video, he starts to describe how his colleague called his attention to look in the opposite direction, and how he turned the camera to look, and at that moment, his own footage from 1990 appears, effectively turning the camera to look at a shoe, a flower and markings in the sands—“73”—. The shoe and flower stand out in the same way that the playing cards and preserved letter did early, physical vestiges of an earlier moment that managed to persist into the present moment, reminding the viewer of the continuance of the past in the present through the physical world. At that moment, Muñoz explains, he and his colleague were able to distinguish the markings of the mass grave, and the excavation began. As he describes the impact of uncovering the first body, which had “. . .una expresión muy. . .muy dramática,” his footage zooms in on the stunned expression of the face, the hand extended toward the face in a gesture of anguish (Valencia 2010). The sequence continues with the aforementioned contemporary footage of the interview with Juan and Lily, at the site of the grave, when Juan describes having recognized immediately his father’s remains. Splicing her footage of the empty mass grave with Muñoz’ footage of the grave 20 years earlier—which demonstrates the bodies lined up—, the director, just like Guzmán, explains how the climate and the mineral properties of the desert had preserved the bodies, creating “evidencia inegable del abuso y los asesinatos cometidos por el ejército chileno.” (Valencia 2010). Twenty bodies were found in the mass grave. Similar to the sense of anachronism created by the flower and the shoe, vestiges of a previous era, the

absence of the grave in Valencia's shot creates a sense of reverberation with the presence of the bodies in Muñoz' footage. The bodies are gone—her grandfather is gone, her father, aunt and uncle's father is gone—and yet his presence, like that of the other disappeared—seems to linger here. In one way that persistence represents pain, vestiges of the crime that was committed there. And yet, in another, because the director gives it this meaning, her grandfather's presence continues through the extension of life, through herself and her camera.

In a concluding comment on the use of archival documents in Juan's story, I want to call attention to a choice the director makes in documenting her own archival research. Turning her computer screen to the camera as she researches the repressive mechanisms of the Pinochet dictatorship, the film calls attention to the key names and terms that she types into the search engine. The camera closes in on the screen as she types the words, "ley maldita," "González Videla," "el consejo de Guerra de Pisagua," "Caravana de la Muerte," and "Arellano Stark." By capturing her research process on camera, the film not only creates a connection with the spectator, who has likely sat down to search for information on Wikipedia; it also puts the possibility of continuing this research into the hands of the spectator. Through this simple meta-textual scene that calls attention to the banal activity of sitting down to look at Wikipedia, *Abuelos* suggests that the information is readily available and not overly complicated; what matters, and what the film invites the spectator to participate in, is the active engagement with the past.

The extra scenes that are available on the *Abuelos* DVD include two scenes that explore Remo's youth; one of them mentions the fact that Remo was involved in "el

partido.” In the first extra scene, interviews shots are mixed with landscape and cityscape shots of Cuenca and Quito, Ecuador to tell the story of how Remo adventurously leaves behind high school and his family in Cuenca to move to Quito and make it on his own there. There is one particularly moving sequence in which the director returns to the 150 year-old building where Remo attended high school in Cuenca. Reflexive shots in which Valencia appears on camera in the architecturally beautiful school building are layered with detail shots of doorways and windows. Over a high angle shot looking down at the colored tiles of the school’s open air hallways, she notes in voice-over that when the hallways are empty, the spaces begin to talk. The testimonies of that time, she says, are gone with those who experienced them, but the space still holds something of those memories. This commentary creates the sense of presence and incites the viewer to listen and look carefully as the camera moves through the space. A long shot portrays the director at the end of a hallway, looking out from a grandiose arch at the view of the city as the director says she can imagine his eyes gazing from these very windows. This is a similar sense of doubling that makes present bodily absence in the scene of the mass graves, where contemporary footage is combined with Fernando Muñoz’ takes from the search in 1990.

An interviewee who is not identified but who seems to be a family member or family friend explains how one day when Remo was 17, he simply disappeared from his circles in Cuenca. No one knew where he went, until sometime, months later, they heard from friends and family that he was in Quito. The man in the interview explains that he was leaving behind a situation of poverty. The remainder of the scene includes interviews

with Remo's friends, who describe him as good looking and an adventurer and remember how he fell in love with the director's grandmother. While there is only one mention of his political involvement, in an interview, the director notes that Remo was indeed involved in leftist organizing and politics, but his involvement "era una militancia que era diferente, mucho más intelectual, digamos, incluso les hacía falta involucrarse" (Valencia 2015). The director wanted to share the incredible story of Remo's passion was for researching and healing, and how what she learned from him allowed her to understand her grandfather Juan's life and death in an ecological context. Accordingly, the archival documents portraying Remo's life include family photographs, letters to patients, images showing the machine he used to make pills, his notebooks and balance, and above all, the natural world that speaks to his connection with life, the elements and the energy that flows between them.

However moving and personally truthful this connection is, the viewer still is left with a vision of Ecuador as a place out of time and history. Although the director does develop them as integrally connected through a poetics of nature, the same level of connection is not given to the historical political context of each film. The other extra scene from the DVD provides a small window into the larger context that contributes to a history that privileges one kind of politics over another. The scene, which is prefaced by the intertitle "Azogues ciudad en donde nació mi abuelo Remo," is a series of observatory shots of the city of Azogues, Ecuador. These shots are characterized by a sense of respectful distance, starting with a high angle shot that captures people walking down a stone stairway. Some of the individuals are wearing traditional "chola cuencana"

clothing, a form of dress that is shared among groups from the provinces of Azuay and Cañar (where Azogues is located) and reflect a history of mestizaje. Other individuals are wearing mainstream clothing. Within the diegetic audio, a pregón, or vendor's call can be heard: "¡al instante la foto al instante!" (Valencia 2010). The camera lingers on a man standing next to a llama in a small plaza-like area. He has a theatrical set in place with the llama, a horse statue large enough for a small child to get on, and a large curtain backdrop with a zebra, lion and elephant on it. The man is selling "Polaroid" photographs taken in front of the set. A woman takes him up on his pregón, puts on a cowboy hat that is part of the scene, mounts the llama and holds a bouquet of flowers. The photographer takes her picture. Valencia films the process from a distance but also gets a close-up of the photograph of the smiling woman. What does this scene tell us about Azogues and about Remo, who was born there? This whole sequence gives voice to the cultural and ethnic mestizaje that characterizes Ecuadorian history and how mestizaje forms part of Remo's roots. In his essay, "La clave barroca de la América Latina," Bolívar Echeverría describes the beginnings of a baroque ethos in Latin America. This ethos, or strategy for surviving the contradictions and hidden repressions of capitalism, emerges from the process of conquest and colonization, whereby the indigenous population that survived the genocide faced "la imposibilidad de reconstruir sus mundos antiguos" (10). He explains what he terms "la performance sin fin del mestizaje":

esa capa indígena derrotada emprendió en la práctica, espontáneamente, sin pregonar planes ni proyectos, la reconstrucción o re-creación de la civilización europea --ibérica-- en América. No sólo dejó que los restos de su antiguo código civilizatorio fuesen devorados por el código civilizatorio vencedor de los europeos, sino que, asumiendo ella misma la sujetidad de este proceso, lo llevó a cabo de manera tal, que lo que esa re-construcción reconstruyó resultó ser algo

completamente diferente del modelo a reconstruir, resultó ser una civilización occidental europea re trabajada en el núcleo de su código por los restos del código indígena que debió asimilar (Echeverría 10).

Facing the structures of power imposed by colonization, the mestizo subjects assumed agency in rebuilding the culture as a process of reinterpretation, a “reworking” of European culture, as Echeverría notes. This reworking and baroque ethos of cultural layering is precisely what the scene from *Azogues* represents, only in a more contemporary stage: the reality of the indigenous cultural heritage coexists with global tropes (i.e the safari-themed curtain that forms the photos backdrop, for example). While this process informs lived experience—the baroque ethos of survival—for many, the national discourse of power, the official narrative, is quite different. The national discourse, which even in the era of globalization continues to be a decisive factor, has historically looked to suppress the indigenous legacy as a living reality, choosing to recognize only the aspects of indigenous culture and history that serve the national discourse and typically place “lo indígena” firmly in the past. This impulse has led to the erasure of indigenous peoples from historical accounts, on a national and international level, relegating that which is not euro-centric outside the frame of the properly political and historical. In combination with the emphasis on how Remo ran away from Cuenca to escape a context of poverty, this scene hints at the fact that Remo’s path led him away from the cultural context portrayed in this scene from *Azogues*, and that there is a whole other story there that has been unexplored. Distanced from this story, the director gives no voice-over explanation for the *Azogues* scene, nor does she speak with any of the social subjects. She only holds the photograph in her hand, gazing at the image of the

women on the llama, in her cowboy hat against a safari backdrop. *Abuelos* does not analyze the context of mestizaje portrayed in this “extra,” which informs Remo’s roots in Azogues (and perhaps even his knowledge of the local plants). While it sets up a Chile-Ecuador binary dynamic through the director’s portrayal of her two grandfathers and the landscapes of the places they lived, but it only addresses the political context of Juan’s Chile. This erasure is connected largely to the privileging of the director’s personal memory of Remo, whose meaning for the director was larger than politics. I propose that another aspect of the erasure lies in the film’s reliance on national binaries, which invites a repetition of the already established stereotype of Ecuador as a place outside of time. Juan Martín Cueva analyzes this problematic historical portrayal in his films *El lugar donde se juntan los polos* and *Este maldito país*. I argue that the film reiterates, or at the very least does not question, the historical dynamic of erasure and a-politicization of the Ecuadorian national narrative. So, on one hand, *Abuelos* use of the first-person narrative and personal approach to memory contest the notion of “post-social” society through affect, embodiment and an aesthetics of nature. However, the personal perspective, paired with a national one, also leaves in the “extras” some important pieces of the collective story.

### **Conclusion and Comparative Analysis**

#### Eco-criticism, Gender and Neoliberal Chile in *Abuelos* and *Nostalgia de la luz*

Both *Nostalgia de la luz* and *Abuelos* champion a Benjaminian vision of memory as a process that is capable of fostering change by addressing the ethical debt the present has with the past. Both films look to the environment to understand the relationship

between the past and present. In this way, the films have some uncanny similarities: a prominence of landscape shots portraying the Atacama Desert, repeated sequences of wooden crosses marking the bodies of the disappeared, and the haunting sound of the wind. Both films premiered in 2010 and, anecdotally, the director of *Abuelos* tells that on one occasion, when requesting archival materials of the excavation of the mass graves at Pisagua, she was told that another filmmaker (Guzmán) had requested the same material not long before.

The authorial, production and distribution profile of each film point toward their different impulses: *Nostalgia* as a film with personal and poetic intentions that tend toward macrohistorical and *Abuelos* as a film with personal and poetic intentions that reach toward the intimate. *Abuelos* is Valencia's opera prima, while *Nostalgia* is a sort of *obra maestra*, the culmination of a lifelong filmmaking career dedicated largely to defending the dignity of the Allende years and denouncing the violence of the Pinochet dictatorship. Following in the wake of the *Batalla de Chile* trilogy (1975, 1977, 1979), *Chile, la memoria obstinada* (1997), *El caso Pinochet* (1991), and *Salvador Allende* (2004), *Nostalgia* is the first film of a new turn in Guzmán's work, in which he looks to different aspects of the environment to make a poetic reflection on memory (*El botón de nácar* 2015, *La cordillera de los sueños* 2019). In his interview with Frederick Wiseman, Guzmán relates that with *Nostalgia*, he wanted to find "nuevos elementos para volver a hablar del pasado" (Wiseman). After *Nostalgia*, he made *El botón de nácar*, which focuses on water and Chile's coast, and *La cordillera de los sueños*, which focuses on rock and Chile's Andean mountain range. *Abuelos*, in contrast, is the director's first



documentary film. As she asserts in the 2015 interview, before her work on *Abuelos*, Valencia worked in fiction film. Working at the EDOC Documentary Film Festival in Quito, she discovered documentary cinema and was inspired (Valencia 2015). As Manuel Medina notes, “Valencia Dávila has emerged as a key player in the prolific Ecuadorian film scene” (Medina 137). While *Abuelos* was her first documentary film, she directed short films *Restos* (2004), *Emilia* (2006), edited the feature length documentaries *Tu Sangre* (2005) and *Cuba, el valor de una utopía* (2007), as well as the fiction film *¡Alfaro vive carajo!* (2007), and worked as production designer for fiction films *Estas no son penas* (2006) and *Sin otoño y sin primavera* (2011). In 2014, she released an animated short documentary film, *Vicenta*, about her great grandmother, a woman of humble background who migrated from Bolivia to Chile, raised her children as a single mother and faced the disappearance of her son during the dictatorship. She is currently a professor at the University of the Arts, School of Cinema in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

In terms of funding, both *Abuelos* and *Nostalgia* were international co-productions. *Nostalgia*, which costed about 378.000 €, received funding from FONDS SUD (French Government support for Latin American, African and Middle Eastern cinema), Televisión Española, the German television network WDR, support from the Paris-region of France, a few writing grants and personal loans (Guzmán “La odisea”). The project was rejected twice by FONDART and once by CORFO, the principal state-funded forms of support for film and television in Chile (Guzmán “La odisea”). *Abuelos* received support from the Ecuadorian government, the Chilean government, Cinememoria and European Documentary Network, Morelia Documentary Film Lab,

DocSantiago and Doc Buenos Aires and the film costed approximately \$94,000 (“Abuelos” CINESUD). From the sources of financial support, one can also see that *Abuelos* is a Latin American project in terms of finance, whereas *Nostalgia* ended up having “el estatus de obra francesa hablada en una lengua de la Comunidad Europea” (Guzmán “La odisea”). While both films gained recognition internationally, *Nostalgia de la luz* has gained canonic status as, “a work of rare poetry and emotional power,” according to Harvard University’s Film Archives (where the film was re-screened at the beginning of 2020) (“Nostalgia de la luz” 2020). In his testimony, “La odisea financiera de *Nostalgia de la luz*,” Guzmán highlights the contradiction that while the film had tremendous difficulty in securing funding—“fue rechazada por 15 canales de televisión europeos y dos veces por el CNC (*Centre National de la Cinématographie*)”—, European Film Academy awarded the film Best European Documentary of 2010, which is among the most prestigious European film awards (Guzmán “La odisea”). It also premiered at Cannes Film Festival and won the Public Choice Award at Toronto International Film Festival and at Biarritz in 2010, among countless other celebrated prizes. *Abuelos* too saw great success, especially as an opera prima, premiering as part of IDFA’s Official Selection of First Appearance films and screening in more than 26 festivales and 24 countries (“El camino de los Abuelos”). *Abuelos*, however, is today unavailable via online platforms in the U.S., whereas *Nostalgia* is available for rent through Amazon, Docuseek, and Vimeo platforms, and as part of PBS’ “Point of View” collection. There are many extensive academic articles analyzing *Nostalgia de la luz* from diverse disciplines including Cultural Studies, Cinema

Studies, and Philosophy. Scholarly analysis of *Abuelos* exists, but there are few peer reviewed articles and the analysis of the film in English-language sources is limited. Jorge Ruffinelli's Spanish-language text *América Latina en 130 documentales* (2012) includes a summary of the film and *La mirada insistente: Repensando el archivo, la etnografía y la participación* (2018) includes a chapter by Orisel Castro López that addresses on *Abuelos* in its analysis of what the author refers to as found footage in a group of Ecuadorian documentary films. Additionally, *Telling Migrant Stories: Latin American Diaspora in Documentary Film* includes a chapter by Manuel Medina that focuses on the topic of migration and exile in the film and includes a detailed and thoughtful analysis of its narrative.

Both films are “[documentales] de autor,” as Jorge Ruffinelli designates *Abuelos*, and both are also personal projects on one level (258). I have already addressed the multiple roles that Valencia plays in her film: director, writer, narrator, and social subject. Evident in the film, as well as in the interviews with Valencia, is her personal relationship to the project and the artisan-quality of her work, undoubtedly authorial cinema. Guzmán also reveals a very intimate relationship with his film in his interviews and in “La odisea financiera de *Nostalgia de la luz*.” In this testimony-style article, the director sounds the alarm about the way in which the industry surrounding documentary film pushes out directors who have their own vision and who want creative freedom to ask questions outside the tastes that executives and programmers calculate for the public. He exclaims, for example, “Mi mundo está en peligro y hay muchos realizadores como yo en todos los países que también están en peligro. Estamos inmersos en un gran río “del cada vez más

de todo”: más público, más audiencia, más estereotipos, más concesiones, más rapidez. Y todo lo que no es “más”, vale menos” (Guzmán “La odisea”). Through his experience with *Nostalgia*, he demonstrates that as a philosophical filmmaker-artist, he feels threatened by the changing nature of the film industry, which caters to ratings and reception over artistic vision. As he outlines the many rejections the film faced in its production period, he also explains that his wife, Renate Sachse (producer and art director for the film) took the project into her own hands to try and see it past its obstacles. He also notes that the film was only able to be finalized because of personal loans from close friends. Both of these examples demonstrate the personal nature of Guzmán’s filmmaking (and *Nostalgia de la luz* in particular): it is not some distant business measure, but instead forms an integrate part of his close relationships. In interviews, he describes how the film is born from both his life experience and existential questions, as well as the questions that the Atacama Desert itself provokes. He notes that, “Desde que era adolescente he amado la astronomía con pasión” and “Mi primera novia era una arqueóloga. Ella estudiaba en el museo de historia natural donde está el esqueleto de la ballena que también aparece en la película” (Wiseman 2011). At the root of these universal questions and historical analyses are those impulses that shape one’s life from childhood and young adulthood: “Continúo haciéndome preguntas. Lo que yo quería hacer con la película es abrir puertas, como lo hacen los científicos cuando se interrogan sobre el origen de nuestra vida” (Wiseman 2011). Guzmán dialogues with these questions by observing the place itself: “Yo creo que la materia misma del film nace por lo tanto de una serie de metáforas que están depositadas en el desierto, que existen mucho antes que

yo llegara.” (Wiseman 2011). From the way that he advocates for his artistic voice to the involvement of his family and friends in his work and the way he navigates his childhood and philosophical ponders together through his topic, it is clear that *Nostalgia de la luz* is an auteur film, the existential wrestling, research and expression of a film artist. The films’ status as auteur projects speaks to the nature of the intervention in politics as individual artists, rather than collectives, and through aesthetic approaches that push against the ontological underpinnings of history as progress.

While today he works as an auteur filmmaker unassociated with any political organization, collective revolutionary roots pulse through *Nostalgia* and all Guzmán’s work, animated by a collective utopian dream that was never given the chance to play out due to the context of the dictatorship and the broader Cold War era politics. *Abuelos* stems from a generation of filmmakers and filmmaking structures (like the EDOC project pitch and the other labs in which *Abuelos* participated) that privilege the individual. The very number of social subjects that each filmmaker interviews, and their unique relationships with the respective directors, demonstrate these contrasting tendencies. *Nostalgia* interviews multiple international scientists at the Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory (CTIO), multiple ex-political prisoners of the Pinochet concentration camps, several of the women who search for their loved ones’ remains in the Atacama Desert, and includes both Paula Allen’s “Flowers in the Desert” photographs of the women of Calama, and an extensive repertoire of footage and still shots of galaxies, planets and asteroids from NASA (Abbot 333, Rohter 2011). *Abuelos*, on the other hand, includes interviews from family and friends of the director’s grandfather and family photos of her

grandfathers and of her parents as young children and “jóvenes latinoamericanos” en Moscú.

Guzmán, like Valencia, begins his film with a personal reflection, revisiting the old German telescope to which he says he owes his passion for astronomy. He also returns to an old home similar to that of his childhood and observes, “Estos objetos, que podrían haber sido los mismos que había mi casa.” They remind him of “ese momento lejano cuando uno cree que deja de ser niño.” Notice his reference to the distant time when “one” feels they have left behind childhood. Similarly, the objects *could* be the same objects that were in his childhood home. They, like the concept of lost innocence, serve the purpose of a more general, poetic reflection that begins with Guzmán and extends outward immensely through the cosmos. What does all of this mean to *one*? The film does reflect Guzmán’s personal experience, but abstracted and emptied of particular biographical details, and then expanded to speak to universal truths. As Violeta Berríos and Victoria Saavedra observe the moon through the old telescope, accompanied by astronomer Gaspar Galaz, the recurring visual motif of star dust mingles with their image and connects it with the next shot. The falling star dust and the crescendo of violin music continue as a close up pans over different sizes of colored marbles on a table. The light illuminates the spheres, which, with their swirls and bright colors, recall the NASA images of planets and galaxies. In voice-over, Guzmán reflects:

Comparados con la inmensidad del cosmos, los problemas de los chilenos podrían considerarse insignificantes, pero si los colocáramos encima de una mesa, serían tan grandes como una galaxia. Haciendo esta película, mirando hacia atrás,

estas bolitas también me recuerdan la inocencia de Chile cuando yo era niño. En esa época, cada uno de nosotros podía guardar en el fondo de sus bolsillos el universo entero (Guzmán 2010).

Seeing the marbles laid out on the table creates a scalar conversion, in which the camera focuses on these mini-universes—los problemas de los chilenos, referring back to Victoria and Violeta and their loss—from up close; it also constructs a sense of fracture. No longer are these marbles-planets in their mythic place in the sky as part of a larger universe-harmony, but instead they are a sea of individual bodies. The marbles are also a symbol of Guzmán's past—"la inocencia de Chile cuando yo era niño"—and refer to childhood innocence more broadly, a period in "one's" life when time and space do not seem fractured, when the whole universe can be carried in "el fondo de sus bolsillos." Similar to the "All at one point" story by Calvino, Guzmán's film reflects on his loss through the cosmos, finding a sense of scale on which to map that loss, as well as a sense of mystery to which one can relinquish some of the pain. But, as I indicated above, this pain is not only nor principally his personal pain, but rather, toggling in scale from the marbles to Victoria and Violeta and to the cosmos, a universal sense of loss that contests the logic of progress and abstract time that philosophically undergird the dictatorship, Concertación governments and neoliberalism more generally.

Valencia's conclusion does something quite different. The director brings the film, her memory process and the story of her grandfathers together in her own body and song. She explicitly speaks from her own subjectivity about her own experience. With the close-up of her face as she rides on the bus, the camera centers the end of the film on

Valencia, her voice-over reflection reaffirming the joining together of the threads she has woven through the film: “Dos caras de una misma historia me han contado de dónde vengo, de la inmortalidad y la muerte, y de la muerte y la inmortalidad” (Valencia 2010). She offers this experiences up to her viewers, creating legitimacy through her first-person narrative, appeals to affect and meditation on nature, but not speaking for anyone else. In reflecting on Valencia’s approach, an excerpt from Guzmán’s *Chile, la memoria obstinada* comes to mind. The basis of the film is that Guzmán returns to Chile to screen *Batalla de Chile*, reconnecting with some of the social actors and screening the film for young people, many of whom have little concept of the story it tells about the Allende period and the coup d’état. After viewing *Batalla de Chile*, one of the young people states, “hay que seguir luchando, yo creo a modo personal...creo que es lícito soñar, que es muy lícito luchar por un sueño personal.” Her reflection on the validity of fighting for a personal dream speaks to the fragmentation of the political collective that protagonizes *Batalla de Chile*, as well as the possibility for political action in the contemporary moment. *Chile, la memoria obstinada* marks a shift in the meaning of “political” from collective dream and action to a combination of critical, active memory and “un sueño personal.” Valencia takes up this approach to politics in her film, while Guzmán maintains a greater level of connection with the collective agency that characterized the utopian vision of the Allende years.

Considering the focus on the environment in each film, one might ask how this difference in subjective voice plays out in terms of the ecological reach of each text. So deeply marked by his past, Guzmán maintains his desire to somehow regain what was.



For this reason, the cosmic and geological approaches serve his purpose: from this perspective, the past is never gone and feels more palpably reachable. On these expansive scales that underline the continuance of the past in the present, the victory over Unidad Popular and Allende will never be complete. Nor does the progress-oriented logic of the oppressors hold any legitimacy up against the stars, which speak to humans from a distant future that is already past once it reaches Earth. To the individualist discourse defined by competition, the stars are a constant reminder of tense totality. A cosmic perspective does not dissolve the individual's agency, but it does, like the still marbles on the table-top, indicate an expansion so great that it results in stillness. I argue that this sense of stillness dialogues with Guzmán's own difficulty in moving past the Popular Unity dream, his perception that his world is being left behind and that it would be better if one could go back and put together what was broken. This sense of loss, however, is masterfully balanced by the beauty of the past and the mystery of the universe that connects us to it, a sort of humility that encourages the viewer, like Guzmán, to keep asking questions. Valencia has a distinct relationship with the past, and a distinct sense of authority. Her story emanates from her individual embodied experience and speaks to the dynamic extension of the past into the present as it assumes new forms and courses. In *Abuelos*, the preserving nature of the arid desert is paired with the constant transformation of water and forest. Valencia's ecological poetics empower the individual viewer to embrace their own memory and to see themselves in connection with their mutualists and forebears, to see themselves as part of constant shared transformation.

*Nostalgia de la luz* and *Abuelos* both propose concepts of history that contest neoliberal logic through the temporalities that define the relationships between the biotic and abiotic, neither elaborates explicitly the connection between the dictatorship, neoliberal legacy and environmental destruction. In *Nostalgia*, the absence of overt recognition of environmental damages is noticeable in the film's portrayal of the mining industry, which has had a devastating environmental effect and was a prime industry under Allende's government, the dictatorship, and continues to play a principal role in the economy and environment of Chile today (*Quinto Reporte* 16, 30; *Informe País Estado del Medio Ambiente en Chile 2018*, 20). Mining currently represents 10% of the gross domestic product and Chile is the number one leading producer of copper at a global level (*Informe País* 20). When Guzmán explains that the military only had to add barbed wire to the camp at Chacabuco because it had served as the miners' housing during the years when mining exploitation was like slavery, it would have made sense to mention the environmental degradation caused by the mining endeavors. The effects of mining on both the land and indigenous communities which was even more substantial during the 19<sup>th</sup> century period that Guzmán and Núñez focus on. The National Chilean Library's *Memoria Chilena* digital archive, for example, cites that "Durante el siglo XIX y buena parte del XX, prácticamente no existió conciencia ambiental, lo que impidió que la explotación de los recursos naturales vinculados a la minería fuesen evaluados en forma negativa, preponderando siempre el progreso económico por sobre las materias medioambientales" ("El impacto ambiental de la minería en Chile"). While the ecological impact of mining was not seriously measured until 1990, the damage done up until that

point was extensive. In their article, “Mining Development and Environmental Injustice in the Atacama Desert of Norther Chile,” Romero, Méndez and Smith assert that, “During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the exploitation of nitrate meant the emergence of many towns around the reservoirs, destruction of vegetation (fuel used) and drying of multiple sources of water. The replacement of natural salts by chemical ones, involved the abandonment of all of these landscapes and the consequence was the formation of ghost towns which have remained abandoned until today” (73). The photographs of late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century miners, mining equipment and the Chacabuco camp, interspliced with images from the dictatorship and of the rubble of the camps today, therefore, document the waste associated with economic models that rely on resource extraction and focus on constant “growth”. Additionally, the connection between the Pinochet dictatorship and the expansion of the mining industry, a part from the use of the abandoned camps as prisons, is clear. It is not a coincidence that the dictatorship’s 1981 Water Code allowed for the privatization of water use, which allowed mining companies access to the mass amounts of water necessary for the copper extraction. Similarly, the 1982 Ley General de Servicios Eléctricos DFL1 de Minería, allow companies to expropriate land and resources while limiting workers’ rights. Just as the dictatorship’s use of the old mining town for the Chacabuco Concentration Camp reveals a haunting social violence, so too does its expansion of the mining industry reveal a haunting ecological violence. Because Guzmán appeals to the haunting logic in order to question the concept of progress that connects the violence of the conquest, nation-building and industrialization, and dictatorship periods, and because he appeals so much

to the beauty and rhythms of the environment, the connection with ecological slow violence seems like an obvious choice.

The *Memoria Chilena* article on the environmental impact of mining notes that while studies and subsequent government action from the 1990s on have focused on reducing the level of contamination caused by the mining industry, “el patrimonio y equilibrio ambiental del país se ha visto afectado al menos en tres ámbitos claves: la contaminación atmosférica, la contaminación del agua, y del suelo” (“El impacto ambiental de la minería en Chile”). The prolonged destruction of mining plays out in many ways. In terms of atmospheric pollution, sulfur dioxide emissions and dust with arsenic are dangerous side effects of the industry (“El impacto ambiental de la minería en Chile”). A *Chicago Tribune* article outlined the effects of these emissions on the health of those living in Antofagasta (in the Atacama Desert), the mining capital of Chile: “La grave exposición al arsénico entre 1958 y 1971 -cuando en el agua potable superó 86 veces la norma- es hasta ahora el único factor comprobado que explica el incremento del cáncer y otras enfermedades cardiovasculares en la región” (“Cáncer y contaminación, la otra cara de la minería en Chile”). Guzmán calls attention to the slow violence that weaves together the oppressive 19th century industry and policies with those of the Pinochet dictatorship, but unfortunately, he does not make the same connection with the lingering effects of environmental degradation. The span of years of arsenic exposure mentioned in the *Chicago Tribune* quote—1958-1971—includes the Allende period. Perhaps Guzmán’s oversight of the connection between the environment and an oppressive, extractive economy and society based on the concept of progress, could be

related to his lack of critical distance when it comes to the Allende government, which also supported mining efforts. It is true that the Popular Unity government expanded the nationalization of the mining industry and looked to make it more sustainable for the workers and environment, but it was still after all, an economy based on resource extraction. If Guzmán's non-anthropocentric cosmic logic were applied more uniformly, he would have noted this incongruence, as well as the effects of the dictatorship's neoliberal policies on the environment, which continue to present major problems for the Chilean people and the ecosystems within Chile.

Laútaró Núñez, the archeologist that Guzmán interviews at length in the film, in fact collaborated on an article with Martin Grosjean and Isabel Cartajena addressing precisely this topic. Their paper, which was published the same year that *Nostalgia* was released, describes the human occupation of the Atacama Desert from end of the Pleistocene (geological epoch lasting from approximately 2,580,000 to 11,700 years ago) to the present day and calls attention to the "extreme ecological fragility" created by extractive mining activity in the region, which requires massive amounts of water (Núñez et al. 363). This practice is compared to that of "traditional natural resource production" carried out by indigenous peoples, which resulted in far less ecological and social (especially affecting indigenous peasant communities) damage (Núñez et al. 363). In the paper's conclusion, the researchers note that "the growing deterioration of cultures and agrarian, herding, fishing and maritime resources, which are longer-lasting and, therefore, deserve to be recovered" (Núñez et al. 387). The paper explicitly underlines the roles of the dictatorship in building Chile's economy around industrial mining, but also notes that

the return to democracy maintained the neoliberal model that limits restrictions in order to attract international investment (Núñez et al. 385, 386). Interestingly, Núñez, Grosjean and Cartajena argue that the neoliberal system in Chile “resulted in the total disconnection of human activities with renewable natural resources according to the principles of Sustainable Development” (385). Especially given the focus on both the destructive nature of industrialization and the unique knowledge that the Atacama Desert contains—“puerta hacia el pasado”—in the conversation between Guzmán and Núñez, it seems odd that Guzmán did not engage with the explicitly ecological aspect of Núñez’ work.

One issue Núñez et al. focus on in their study is the role of water in mining practices and how they have contributed to extreme water depletion in the area and the abandonment of indigenous towns. Because copper lixiviation—the process of using chemical reactions to separate the copper from other materials—requires massive amounts of water, companies have been drilling industrial wells in areas close to where they are mining (which in turn pushes groups previously living in these areas out), an action which is permitted by the Water Code of 1981 (385, 386). The sale of this water to mining operations is managed by private companies (Núñez et al. 385, 386). The practice of using local water at the source, or drilling close to these bodies of water (and close to the communities living in the area), was not always the norm, the article notes, but instead was a precedent set by U.S. mining companies in the region (Núñez et al. 386). In addition to human displacement and the deterioration of traditional ways of life, these practices result in desertification, as well as the pollution of deep and surface level water

sources, and lead to the destruction of biodiversity (Núñez et al. 387, “El impacto ambiental de la minería en Chile”). Their article ends by drawing attention to the “macro-spatial contamination” around the Salvador mines in Chile, “whose toxic tailing waste affects not only the intermediate valley but also the beach and marine area surrounding the port of Chañaral” (Núñez et al. 387). The long term damage related to the tailing waste, they note, greatly outweighs the “short-term success” of the economic gains made through mining (Núñez et al. 387). If international policy does not address these damages, they will spiral outward and combine with other processes of climate change until eventually resulting in extinction on a scale with which humans have not yet faced (Núñez et al. 387). This is the larger-scale connection that *Nostalgia de la luz* fails to make. The geological and cosmic approaches *Nostalgia* assumes provide this framework, but without at least some mention of the ecological effects of mining, the connection between the dictatorship, industrialization and the desert falls short of complete.

The topic of trailing waste is also addressed by photographer David Maisel in his recent collection, “Desolation Desert,” in which he captures the Atacama Desert’s mining industry and its effects on the region. In his article “The devastating environmental impact of technological progress,” Amit Katwala notes that Maisel coordinated with the Chilean military, which controls the majority air space around the region, in order to avoid interfering with military exercises as he photographed the mines over a two-week period (*Katwala*). In their exchange for the article, Maisel notes the strange coexistence of beauty and incredible damage in the place, explaining that, ““These new photographs show how the supposedly remote Atacama Desert is becoming

part of a planetary fabric of urbanization, and at what cost” (Katwala). Through his images and explanation of them, Maisel makes sure to note the global nature of this industry and the damage associated with it, speaking to consumers who believe themselves to be removed from them both. For example, several of the shots focus not only on the massive mines themselves, but also the toxic trailing ponds which exceed them in vastness. He also calls attention to the ocean tankers stationed close to the region, which will transport the extracted minerals to China for battery manufacturing, which will then be sold in Chile and around the world (Katwala).

This sort of developed, explicitly political connection is what *Abuelos*, also misses the chance to make, largely because of the political-magical binary between her Chilean and Ecuadorian grandfather. The cyclical and transformational logic of water connects the grandfathers in a powerful and moving way, but because Ecuador stays in the magical realm, the director misses out on the chance to note the connection between the destructive socio-economic system of the Pinochet dictatorship and the larger Cold War politics that enveloped all countries in the Americas, with Ecuador as a key player and a key ecological region. The beautiful green forests and cycling water of her grandfather Remo, are in one way metaphorical, and the story the director looks to tell is a personal one in which the director, unlike Guzmán, is not looking to explore new philosophical or political territory with her film. For this reason, the lack of an explicit mention of the environment is more understandable, but the lack of any sort of political connection between the two countries does not cease to be unfortunate, as she misses out on the chance to bring the environment, which she clearly celebrates, into a discussion



that moves beyond the metaphoric meaning and develops the eco-logic within the contemporary context of climate chaos. The connection with the environment that *Abuelos* makes in many ways responds to the “disconnection” between humans and the environment that the neoliberal logic imposes (as Núñez et al. note), reminding the viewer, by way of the director, of their own connection with the living and non-living beings around them. However, without the region-wide political context, this connection loses some of its potential political power. Two brief examples from contemporary news in the business world make it clear why including this context is so important. The first example is an excerpt from the KPMG International Cooperative (one of the “Big Four” professional services networks) 2014 “Chile Country Mining Guide”. KPMG Global is a transnational firm that among other services, assesses risks for companies looking to invest in mining around the world. The very first thing the report does, unsurprisingly, is highlight Chile’s minerals:

The country has abundant metals and minerals, especially in its northern desert region. None of these is more important than copper, for which Chile is widely known as the world’s number one producer. Reserves of fine copper are estimated to be in excess of 100 million tons (*KPMG “Chile Country Mining Guide”* 3).

The minerals, the “excess of 100 millions of tons” of “fine copper,” are the product with which the company intrigues future clients. There is no description of the minerals’ utility or history or beauty, just its quantity. The report then calls Chile “the most attractive business destination in South America” and compliments its “well-functioning market economy and sophisticated financial markets,” noting that “Nearly 90 percent of Chile’s

trade is conducted within free trade agreements” (KPMG “*Chile Country Mining Guide*” 3). It also complements Chile’s “initiatives to promote sustainable and environment friendly practices” (9). This language, which stresses Chile’s large quantities of copper, its accessibility (“free trade agreements”), stability (“well-functioning market”) and image (“environment friendly practices”) are of course not surprising from a corporate perspective. But this very kind of profit-focused language, disguised as reason and future-oriented thinking, which appears in reports read by executives that deal in massive capitalist ventures, is exactly what the environmental humanities are up against. Neoliberalism accepts the environmental externalities of resource extraction as simply part of business as usual. It also removes the ecological damage from the public eye through free trade agreements that allow private companies to negotiate the fate of the land behind closed doors with a white-washed “environment-friendly” rhetoric. Finally, this logic imposes itself as the only logic, silencing the reality of unnegotiable environmental circumstances (i.e. the ecological connections that make the collapse of the Atacama ecosystem a global problem that could spiral into mass extinction). *Abuelos* does an amazing job of weaving together affect and ecology for the viewer, through the director’s active memory of her grandfathers; if only that sense of connection could be plugged into the larger reality that the KPMG report exemplifies. Another, perhaps more concrete example can be found in the recent revelation that Codelco, the Chilean national mining company (and the world’s leading producer of copper), will work with ENAMI, the Ecuadorian state mining company, to develop the Llurimagua copper project (“Empresas de Ecuador y Chile firman acuerdo complementario en proyecto minero”).

Projections suggest an extraction of 210,000 tons of copper each year for about 27 years (Jamasmie “Chile’s Codelco”). The mining site, which is currently being assessed, will be a 12,246.54 acre area in the Province of Imbabura, about 50 miles northeast of Quito. The land for the Llurimagua project falls with the Andean Forest Zone, one of the most biodiverse areas of the planet (Roy et al. 1-3). A peer-reviewed article in *Tropical Conservation Science* explores the damages that mining projects currently under exploration in Ecuador (Llurimagua is one of them) would have, citing roadbuilding and deforestation as among the principle causes of damage. The report notes that the mining projects would:

not only destroy the biodiversity and its water generating and holding capacity but also strongly decrease the quality of water downstream—where people, invertebrates, and fish depend on it—for generations, by changing acidity and releasing toxic compounds such as mercury and arsenic (Roy et al. 14).

The multigenerational, geographically and ecologically extensive effects of over usage and contamination of water described here unsurprisingly mimic the damage that mining has imposed on Chile’s Atacama region. In addition to these threats, the report also notes that the proposed mining ventures in the Andean forest zone would negatively affect “eight critically endangered species, including two primates (brown-headed spider monkey and white-fronted capuchin), 37 endangered species, 153 vulnerable, 89 near threatened, and a large number of less threatened species” (Roy et al.1). The Llurimagua transnational mining project concretely represents what is at stake by not calling attention

to the ways in which neoliberal policies established during the Pinochet dictatorship connect Chile and Ecuador and the ecologies that extend beyond their borders.

That being said, what *Abuelos* does do is extremely important: the film brings the individual back into the ecological collective in terms of their own embodied experience, counteracting the kind of discourse present in the KPMG report. The combination between embodiment and ecology in *Abuelos* provides some insight into the ways gender and a logic of progress intersect. In her work on the intersection of gendered subjectivity and memory studies, Elizabeth Jelin distinguishes habitual memory from narrative memory. In the hegemonic division of labor in society, women take on more “habitual” labors, which are related to emotions and caring for the home and family (Jelin 557). Given the event-based logic of history (underpinned by the concept of progress and an abstract, quantifiable time), habitual memory, much like environmental memory, goes unrecorded. Jelin also describes the silence around gendered repression, mentioning the specific case of the silence around the rape of women as part of the Pinochet dictatorship’s control apparatus (558). She suggests that part of the reason that survivors remained silent about the role of rape in the dictatorship’s repression is that society was not receptive—no one would listen. I argue that the silence around sexual repression in Pinochet’s Chile is similar to the silence around environmental degradation: no one hears it because society doesn’t listen. In this way, feminist theory and ecological theory dialogue well and often overlap, as occurs in *Abuelos*.

Valencia shares habitual memory through a focus on the senses and embodied subjectivity. The focus on her hands, feet and eyes throughout the film remind the viewer

that the story Valencia tells is one she experiences with her body. Additionally, the use of first-person narration and recurring reflexivity (the director appears on screen managing multiple forms of media, like photographs, audio recordings, books, articles on the internet, etc.) create a story less out of events than an ongoing process. By sewing her own sense-based experience of memory into the physical world around her, she challenges viewers to ask themselves, “What history do *I* bring with me in my body?” She also recuperates some of this habitual memory through the interviews with her aunts, both maternal and paternal. While the men she interviews focus on historical context or specific “acontecimientos,” the women often elaborate on their relationships with their father, and tell about day-to-day experiences that reveal their father’s characteristics. For example, Remo’s daughters, and even the director, each comment on how they knew they were someone special for Remo, maybe even his “favorite.” This detail demonstrates not only the subjective nature of memory, but also something particular about Remo that is not based in any one event in his life. Similarly, Lily tells how she and her father were very close, how she used to follow him around and how she admired him. The director also recalls day to day moments with her grandfather when she returns to Remo’s home and spends time looking at his journals, letters, and work supplies (a scale, pill capsules). She remembers him writing prescriptions and taking notes. His daughter Bruna also remembers him obsessively working on his remedies, and how one could not even say hello before he was ready to explain his newest discovery. These testimonies gather a sense of Remo and Juan’s personalities that reaches beyond particular events in their lives. Similarly, the amount of time the film dedicates to observing the sounds, cycles,

colors and textures of the environment, and the meaning that the director finds there, assigns value to the habitual memory of the biotic and abiotic world, fostering eyes and ears to be able to engage with the lessons it holds. In a society defined by a logic of progress and dematerialized time, narrative history based on events is privileged and the “habitual” or performed and embodied is made invisible and irrelevant. As Jelin explains, “ya que hay diferencias entre mujeres y varones en los roles sociales predominantes, así como en la importancia social asignada a esos roles,” the kind of memory women more often “keep” tends to be silenced. The material memory in nature undergoes a similar but perhaps even more complete erasure, given the status of the environment as agency-devoid resource. Therefore, through a focus on habitual (embodied, performed, material) memory, feminist and ecological approaches come together to contest the logic of power.

On one hand, the director does create an idealized image of Juan as a masculine revolutionary, an image which is reinforced by her Aunt Lily, who compliments her father as a wonderful speaker, a provider who could fish food from the sea, and a righteous citizen. Juan appears shaking Allende’s hand, charmingly posed in the sand among his children, his name in the headlines and on a mural celebrating the Popular Unity leaders. But, through Lily’s comments, the director also manages to point out the constructed nature of this vision. Lily remembers that while she could be free to be who she was as a child, her brothers felt pressure to fulfill their father’s ideals of the upright, manly revolutionary. Remo, while also idealized, is constructed as an individual who was one with the world around him, embodying a connection with nature that, under traditional gender roles, tends to be feminized. But Remo in many ways breaks down this

barrier, appearing, as I mentioned earlier, more often than in photographs, through diverse images of the environment, from running water to stones to trees, sunlight and rolling clouds, all of which resist a gendered portrayal. Perhaps most importantly, the director assumes a sense of agency in designating what kinds of memory are valid, and what they mean to her, based on her own desire to remember. This is different from Guzmán's approach in the sense that the women in *Nostalgia de la luz* perform more traditional memory roles, in which women represent the fight for human rights, legitimated by their roles as mothers, sisters, wives. The one woman scientist who appears in the film, Valentina Rodríguez, contributes a very powerful testimony and concept, but her labor bears more emotional weight than scientific and her reflections about the future are integrally connected to her portrayal as granddaughter, daughter and mother. I do not wish to diminish or criticize in any way this labor—it is one of the most moving scenes in the film and also the most proactive, the most capable of finding new ways to look forward. This example does, however, demonstrate Guzmán's tendency to maintain gender norms in his memory dynamics. Even though several male social subjects in the film push beyond these norms—like Víctor, the astronomer who actively listens to his mother's description of her healing work with torture victims, or Gaspar Galaz, who pauses to empathize with and understand the plight of Victoria and Violeta, or Luis, who expresses a great deal of emotion through his silences—the overall logic of Guzmán's film remains more closely tied to the revolutionary gender constructions. I argue that along with an extremely admirable commitment to social justice, Guzmán's wide-reaching sense of agency that encompasses others within his reflections perhaps

also demonstrates a sense of idealized revolutionary masculinity. Similar to the way he sees the Atacama Desert as “un gran libro de memoria,” he also seems to read the “Women of Calama” as source from which he can learn, allowing them to do the emotional work and then reflecting on that work through his contemplation of the cosmos.

In her interview for the magazine *The Believer* (titled “Eco-thoughts” 2019), media theorist Joanna Zylińska responds to a question about the role of gender in the Anthropocene, and how her work shifts away from the Gaia concept, which was introduced in the 1970s by James E. Lovelock and asserts that living and non-living parts of the Earth can be thought of as a single organism (Roberts). Zylińska states, “What’s changed today, however, is that we have much more of a critique of this unquestioned feminization of the Earth and of the positioning of women as somehow being closer to nature. So the new Gaia is seen as quite a dynamic and complex system rather than as benevolent Mother Nature” (Roberts). She goes on to reference Timothy Morton’s concept of “ecology without nature” and Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto,” explaining that “meaningful planetary engagement has to come from a position of technology, of being involved in the world with its apparatuses, machines, and networks.” Taking this perspective, she says, allows one to let go of the “fantasy of a pure moment in time to which we can return, and of nature as something that we can recover and reconnect with if only we leave behind this whole civilizational mess” (Roberts). While at first glance, this approach appears quite distinct from that of Valencia’s beautiful sequences of light playing on mossy rocks, the rushing sound of the



river and the glowing petals of flowers; I would like to suggest that *Abuelos* embraces this “[letting] go” of a pure moment in the past. In fact, the film stages the director’s performed memory of grandfathers as the extension of life in new forms. *Nostalgia de la luz*, while it does seem to relate women to the Earth through the representation of the women of Calama and hold onto a moment of innocence in the past (Guzmán’s childhood years, which he extends to Chile as a period of peace), also embraces technology (i.e. telescopes) in a critical but unafraid way, as part of a material world that is near infinitely larger than humans. In this way, the films speak to each other and to their audiences of generational experiences, gendered experiences and questions about the way society can move past a history of violence through ecological memory. They provoke their viewers to ask themselves, what does it mean, in this neoliberal world, to turn, by dint of a secret heliotropism, toward the sun which is rising in the sky of history?

## NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Throughout the chapter, I will sometimes refer to *Nostalgia de la luz* as *Nostalgia*

<sup>ii</sup> Anthropocentric refers to a focus “meeting human needs and aspirations as judged in isolation from their ecological context” (Dyer 85). Related to the term “anthropocentric” is the geological epoch that has been termed the “Anthropocene.” Paul J. Crutzen describes the Anthropocene: “It seems appropriate to assign the term 'Anthropocene' to the present, in many ways human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene -- the warm period of the past 10-12 millennia. The Anthropocene could be said to have started in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane. This date also happens to coincide with James Watt's design of the steam engine in 1784” (2002). The Anthropocene is characterized by anthropocentrism, or a narrow focus on the human species and a concept of human progress and agency. As Crutzen indicates, the human species' exponential population growth and resource exploitation have been toxic for the environment, resulting in climate change. A non-anthropocentric view, rather than seeing human beings as the “protagonist” of history, notes that human beings form a (small) part of a larger environment in which the species' agency is limited and where the other elements of the environment have moral worth.

<sup>iii</sup> Ecological, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means “Of, relating to, or involving the interrelationships between living organisms and their environment” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

<sup>iv</sup> Note the correlation between the Frankfurt School of thought, the philosophical movement with which Benjamin is traditionally associated, and “a critique of domination.” In the Routledge Handbook of Global Environmental Politics, Hayley Stevenson explains that “[The Frankfurt School theorists'] interpretation of domination has clear affinities with the concerns of green political theorists” (Stevenson 48). Critical Theory's critique of instrumental reasoning, she explains, correlates closely with the environmentalist critique of the concept of nature as solely a resource for human consumption, a means to an end. For Critical Theorists, she explains, “the possibility remains of ‘domesticating’ instrumental reason and supplementing it with substantive reasoning. Substantive reasoning entails value-enfused deliberation about the goals pursued by society, not merely a value-free assessment of the means to attain pre-given goals” (Stevenson 48, 49). Hayley's assessment resonates with the value assigned to nature's “secret heliotropism” in Benjamin's fourth thesis, which is associated with “courage, humor, cunning and fortitude”—the ethical agreement or debt that the past holds on the present, based on the dignity of the vanquished.

<sup>v</sup> Referencing the work of Environmental Philosophy scholar James Hatley, Rose defines aenocide as the elimination of a generation: “In Hatley's analysis, the term aenocide indicates that the termination of a group (genos, species) is an attack upon time. Generational time is the time of aeons, and ethical time is the flow of death narratives across generations. Aenocide is therefore ‘the murdering of ethical time through the annihilation of all the following generations’” (Rose 134).

<sup>vi</sup> In addition to connecting the legacy of the dictatorship with neoliberal economy and the abuse of the environment, the concept of slow violence is also useful in representing a tradition of democratic rupture that contradicts the international discourse of Chile as symbol of stable democracy in Latin America. This concept of national history, as characterized by democratic stability, is a perspective that both left and right have maintained. (Salazar *Construcción de Estado en Chile (1800 – 1837)* 17-21).

<sup>vii</sup> The women of Calama are a group of women from the city of Calama, the capital of the extreme northern region of Antofagasta. According to the Chilean Museum of Memory and Human Rights website, the group of mothers, wives and daughters of the disappeared organized to demand information and search for their loved ones in the wave of “Caravana de la Muerte,” a military mission ordered by Pinochet and lead by Arellano Stark in the days following the coup de'tat. The mission resulted in 97 deaths, 26 of which were “Calameños” (“Mujeres de Calama, la búsqueda incansable entre el silencio y el desierto”).

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<sup>viii</sup> I use this term—*multi-scalar figure*—in conversation with Couret, who argues that Guzmán, in *Nostalgia*, uses a juxtaposition of multiple scales to posit ‘challenges to representation’ (74). He continues: ‘That is, how do we read a part in relation to multiple wholes?’ (74).

<sup>ix</sup> In her article “The Cybersyn Revolution,” Eden Medina argues that Chile’s social computing system, Project Cybersyn, which was put into place during Allende’s presidency, offers important examples of how to use technology sustainably. Because the state took control of the country’s industries, it need a massive new management plan, to centralize information and foster communication. Cybersyn—developed by British cybernetician Stafford Beer, Chilean engineer Fernando Flores and a team of engineers from both countries—was the system they used. Its name acknowledges its origins in “*cybernetics*, the scientific principles guiding its development, and *synergy*, the idea that the whole of the system was more than the sum of its technological parts” (Medina). Note the reference, in this definition, to scale and an almost mysterious totality—more than the sum of its parts. The example of Project Cybersyn demonstrates how the Allende years represent an alternative vision of progress that, while still focused on extractive industry, was more sustainable than the neoliberal model that took its place because of its collective approach. Medina notes that Cynbersyn, while not without flaws, included workers in the design process and showed “how computerization in a factory setting might work toward an end other than speed-ups and deskilling” (*The Cybersyn Revolution*). The design’s use of space and the body also demonstrate how biases can be built into or avoided through technology. The innovative use of “‘big hand’ buttons located in the armrests of the chairs” encouraged participation from workers who did not have experience with keyboards, but they were also a way to exclude women, who often worked as secretaries. Project Cybersyn was also more ecologically-sound in its re-use of old materials (telex machines) and its minimalist approach to data collection. She notes the huge amount of e-waste created by discarded technology and the exorbitant amounts of energy it takes to sweep and store mass amounts of data, noting that “Project Cybersyn showed that it is possible to create a cutting-edge system using technologies that are not state-of-the-art. It demonstrates that the future can be tied to the technological past.” (Medina) This using-what-you-have approach recalls the Imperfect Cinema movement in Cuba, which, like Italy’s New Realism movement, encouraged “Third World” filmmakers to embrace the limited technological or material resources at their hands as part of their aesthetics. Medina highlights the Cybersyn Project as a reminder that “We can do more with less, and help the environment in the process.”

<sup>x</sup> As Cecilia Enjuto Rangel demonstrated in her paper “La construcción de la memoria a través del documental eco-crítico: *Nostalgia de la luz* y *Botón de nácar* de Patricio Guzmán,” Chilean poet Raúl Zurita makes a similar connection between memory and landscape.

<sup>xi</sup> Dutch graphic artist Maurits Cornelis Escher (1898-1972) made mathematically-inspired works, most often prints, reflecting on the concept of infinity, relativity and metamorphosis (among other topics) (“M.C. Escher — Life and Work.”). About his piece “Other World (Another World)”, the U.S. National Gallery of art comments, “This is his first print to focus primarily on his idea of relativity, how one object is seen in relation to another.” (“M.C. Escher — Life and Work”).

<sup>xii</sup> ALMA Observatory website describes the project’s global nature: “El *Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array* (ALMA), una instalación astronómica internacional, es una asociación entre el Observatorio Europeo Austral (ESO), la Fundación Nacional de Ciencia de Estados Unidos (NSF) y los Institutos Nacionales de Ciencias Naturales de Japón (NINS) en cooperación con la República de Chile” (“Cooperación global”). In the section “Cómo ve ALMA” of the site, the observatory establishes the far-reaching discoveries being made with the installation: “Con ALMA está apareciendo la misteriosa luminosidad del Universo más frío y oculto. Podemos contemplar con vívida claridad lo que nadie ha visto. Ese es el Universo de ALMA: un universo en que lo invisible se vuelve visible y el conocimiento, de la mano de los astrónomos, se revela ante la humanidad.” (“Cómo ve ALMA”).

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<sup>xiii</sup> In an interview with Colegio de Arqueólogos, Lautaro Núñez asserts that the Dictator's military officials did not anticipate the close working relationship that the team of arqueologist who collaborated to find and uncover the bodies of the disappeared in Calama would develop with the families of the disappeared: "no se imaginaron que nosotros trabajaríamos mano a mano con los parientes, porque en el caso de Calama, fueron las mujeres las que encontraron el sitio, no los arqueólogos. Ellas encontraron sectores con huesecillos que fue lo que el viento sacó cuando las máquinas estaban echando los cuerpos a los camiones. Por eso las mujeres pensaron que había sido un dinamitazo, y ahí nos convocaron a nosotros." ("Lautaro Núñez: 'Si hay que desentrañar una verdad, los arqueólogos van a estar ahí'").

<sup>xiv</sup> Anthropocene refers to a geological epoch in which humans have exercised geological agency, using and interacting with the environment in such an excessive way as to have brought about climate change (Heringman 56, 57). Heringman states, "The Anthropocene . . . is a proposed geological epoch that will be uniquely recognizable to hypothetical observers up to five million years from now from marks left by human environmental impact, such as a "reef gap" in the marine fossil record caused by acidification of the oceans (caused in turn by CO2 emissions)" (57). It is thought to have initiated with the expanding use of the steam engine in the 1780s (58). It "comes freighted with the Enlightenment origins of the geological time scale, an escalation so profound that it dislocated time itself into a spatial register: deep time" (Heringman 56). In contrast to the Anthropocene concept, which centralizes human tenure, deep time "presupposes the insignificance of human tenure on the planet" (57). Both, however, rely on the primitive-modern binary, "[leaving] open a large middle ground of evolutionary time and antiquity" (58). The Anthropocene, he explains, is also "an act of writing ourselves into the rock," a form of inscription (58).

<sup>xv</sup> Kingman's text is a novel characterized by its magical realism. Within the novel, Remo Dávila is represented by a character who has found the recipe for immortality. *Fragmentos de Pisagua*, on the other hand includes Lillo's testimony of his experience at the Pisagua Concentration Camp. Lillo met Juan at the camp and narrates the day of his assassination, as well as other anecdotes paying tribute to his character.

## CHAPTER III:

### PART TWO—ARCHIVES THAT BURN

#### Theoretical Introduction

Archives That Burn: *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* (2013) and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* (2011)

“No se puede hablar del contacto entre la imagen y lo real sin hablar de una especie de incendio. Por lo tanto, no se puede hablar de imágenes sin hablar de cenizas<sup>3</sup>.”  
--Georges Didi-Huberman, “Cuando las imágenes tocan lo real”

Art historian Georges Didi-Huberman writes of images that “burn” in relation to the real. The documentary films *Con mi corazón en Yambo* and *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* burn. They are ablaze with the tense incongruity between official historical narrative and the lived experience of state-sponsored violence. These films speak to the capacity of documentary films to reignite archival documents and the histories they represent with contemporary meaning, and in doing so occasionally re-write history, empowering the viewers to question those in power, change laws, change educational curriculums, bring alive the memory of the dead. Of course, it makes sense that *how* and *why* a representation manages to “light a fire” between the image and the audience’s reality, is constantly changing according to historical circumstances. Georges Didi-Huberman asks in what senses the burning nature of an image represents “. . . una “función” paradójica, mejor dicho una disfunción, una enfermedad crónica o recurrente, un malestar en la cultura visual: algo que apela, por consiguiente, a una poética capaz de

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<sup>3</sup> “One cannot speak of the contact between the image and the real without speaking of a kind of fire. Therefore, one cannot speak of images without speaking of ashes” (my translation).

incluir su propia sintomatología.” The burning nature of an image, he explains, is symptomatic of a sickness in the visual culture. In this way, it searches out a poetics capable of addressing its own status as a part of a larger flawed system. In this chapter, I argue that the Ecuadorian documentary films *Con mi corazón en Yambo* (María Fernanda Restrepo 2011) and *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* (Lisandra Rivera and Manolo Sarmiento 2013) demonstrate a shift in the “how” and “why” within the logic of Latin American documentary film, that reflects the symptomology of the Post-Cold War reorganization of global politics. This Post-Cold War reality is marked by the downfall of Marxist revolutionary discourse on one hand, and the hegemonization of liberal democracy and neoliberal policy, on the other. In contrast to their New Latin American cinematic predecessors, these films privilege redemptive dedication to the past over fervor for an emancipated future. In their creative uses of the archive, they employ an epistemology of doubt rather than proof and recover an affective and embodied experience of history.

*La muerte de Jaime Roldós* brings back into question the deadly 1981 plane crash of Ecuadorian president Jaime Roldós, pioneer of human rights politics and the country’s first democratically elected president after a decade of dictatorships. Overwhelmingly silenced in Ecuadorian history books, this chapter in Ecuadorian and Latin American history has resurfaced through the film’s arduous journalistic labor, the result of eight years of research and production and the revision of more than 80 hours of audiovisual archives (“80 horas de archivos”; León 17). After thirty years of silence, the Ecuadorian attorney general reopened the Roldós case just months following the film’s 2013 premiere. The film’s contributions to journalism and the public access to information

were recognized in 2014, when *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* was awarded the prestigious Iberoamerican Gabriel García Márquez Prize for Journalism, in the category “Imagen.” *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* was also shown at IDFA (International Documentary Film Festival of Amsterdam) and won Audience Choice Award at both Chicago Latino Film Festival and DocsBarcelona, as well as “Best Documentary” at Cinélatino, Rencontres de Toulouse, among numerous other prizes.

*Con mi corazón en Yambo* reopens within public debate and within the national justice system, the case of the director’s brothers, who were disappeared by the Ecuadorian police in 1988 at the ages of 17 and 14 in an act of police violence and torture. *Con mi corazón en Yambo* undeniably provoked renewed public discussion of the boys’ disappearance and struck great interest with viewers. In fact, the film had 150 thousand spectators, fourth highest box office totals in Ecuadorian history and the most successful documentary film (CNC 2016, Llerena Puglla 62, León 15). *Yambo* (I will occasionally refer to the film as *Yambo* from here on out) also participated in IDFA (International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam) and won “Best Documentary” at the Havana Film Festival, UNASUR in Argentina, and Taiwan International Film Festival in 2012. The *Con mi corazón en Yambo* project, which spanned more than five years, contributed to concrete advancements in the Restrepo case. Influenced and promoted public discussion in such a way that it moved the Correa Administration to reopen the legal case of Santiago and Andrés’ disappearance before the national courts. On October 17th, 2011, *El Comercio* reported that earlier in the week Correa had announced his decision to “relanzar la investigación del caso para castigar a todos los

responsables y hallar los cuerpos” (“Pedro Restrepo agradece a Correa por relanzar pesquisa”). Just days before, the president ordered a \$250,000 compensation for information about the case. The article notes that, “Correa anunció la recompensa al comentar el documental *Con mi corazón en Yambo*, dirigido por María Fernanda Restrepo, hermana de las víctimas” (“Pedro Restrepo agradece a Correa por relanzar pesquisa” October 17, 2011). Additionally, the film documents the 2009 national search for the boys’ remains in Lake Yambo, as well as sessions from the Ecuadorian Truth Commission, which addressed political violence that occurred in the country during the period of 1984-2007, focusing especially on León Febres Cordero’s so-called “antissubversive” campaign, which employed repressive mechanisms to establish “order” in the country (Solís Chiriboga 183). It was during this period and under this repressive state that the Restrepo brothers were disappeared. In January, 2016, a public hospital was opened in honor of Luz Elena Arismendi, the late mother of Santiago, Andrés and Fernanda Restrepo, honoring her life and pursuit of justice (“Maria Fernanda Restrepo: Mis hermanos renacen en cada niño de la patria”).

The fact that these films contribute to concrete social and legal changes suggest that in their objectives, they have a great deal in common with their cinematic predecessors, the politically and socially-committed filmmakers of New Latin American Cinema. A diverse and long-lasting film movement, New Latin American Cinema incorporated, among many other initiatives, Pino Solanas and Octavio Getino’s concept of Third Cinema, Julio García Espinosa’s concept of Imperfect Cinema and Glauber Rocha’s Aesthetic of Hunger. Julianne Burton’s 1986 text, *Cinema and Social Change in*



*Latin America* describes the motivations behind this diverse film impulse that accompanied the revolutionary movements of Cold-War era Latin America:

. . . scores of young Latin American filmmakers assembled the minimum equipment necessary and undertook to produce films about and for and eventually with the disenfranchised Latin American masses. They sought to express ‘national reality,’ which they believed to be hidden, distorted, or negated by the dominant sectors and the media they controlled (Burton xi).

The mobilization of the masses, the liberation of the disenfranchised, and resistance to hegemonic discourses were some of the key motivations that ignited the surge of innovative Latin American filmmaking from the late 1950s-1980s. The New Latin American Cinema project was not one solidified movement. It had many different faces and overlapping phases that ranged from trends toward neorealist aesthetics to political militancy and neobaroque critiques of authoritarianism. Underlying all these trends was a critique of power structures and artistic experimentation invested in the emancipation of the oppressed (71). Especially influential in the most militant phase of New Latin American Cinema was Pino Solanas and Octavio Getino’s manifesto, “Towards a Third Cinema.” In the manifesto, they state:

In the neocolonial situation two concepts of culture, art, science, and cinema compete: *that of the rulers and that of the nation* . . . the duality will be overcome and will reach a single and universal category only when the best values of man emerge from proscription to achieve hegemony, when the liberation of man is universal (Solanas and Getino 35).

The manifesto reveals the role of cinema (and other forms of artistic creation) as the means through which national and regional collectives could overcome unjust pasts and lead the way to emancipated future. The investment in a struggle that “*will* over come” demonstrates a Marxist vision of history that perceives the downfall of capitalism as the

inevitable outcome of the class struggle: society “*will reach* a single and universal category”—the classless society. As I have already mentioned, *Yambo* and *Roldós* also demonstrate a strong ethical commitment to calling out injustice. Their approach, however, is distinct from that of New Latin American Cinema. Because they respond to the downfall of revolutionary initiatives and the settling in of neoliberal discourses, *Yambo* and *Roldós* construct revolutionary action as a critical engagement of the past—a focus on redeeming the past—rather than an unquestioning investment in the emancipated future. The fact that the “liberation of man” that New Latin American Cinema so full-heartedly believed in never came, that today the injustices of the past continue under new masks, seems to transform the contemporary filmmakers’ engagement with history and time. Ecuadorian film scholar Christian León asserts that *Yambo* and *Roldós* are not alone in the attention they give to the recent national past but rather form part of a trend in Ecuadorian cinema (León “Maneras de evocar” 13). León attributes this shift to the social and political crisis that Ecuador faced at the turn of the century, noting that among the directors of the more than 40 historical and memory documentary films released in the past 20 years, “es perceptible un fuerte impulso de volver sobre el pasado para entender las razones de la crisis y esclarecer las lagunas de la memoria colectiva que no están siendo asumidas por el Estado, la academia o los medios” (León “Maneras de evocar” 14). This phenomenon is also unique to Ecuador. As many film scholars have argued, Latin American documentary films centered on memory and history have played an important role in confronting the defeat of revolutionary movements, state-sponsored violence of the 1970s and 80s and the impunity that

followed in many countries in the region (see Arenillas and Lazara 2016, Auderheide 2007, López 2014, León 2019, among many others). These new documentaries differ from those of the previous generation of filmmakers whose social films were motivated by the political utopias of the Latin American left, which, as exemplified by Solanas and Getino's manifesto, were confident that the future would bring victory.

*La muerte de Jaime Roldós* portrays the Cold War ideological background in which left-leaning revolutionary ideals were quelled by U.S.-backed dictatorships. When Roldós was elected in 1979, there were dictatorships in Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay, Paraguay, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Brazil, and, as the documentary mentions, the Sandinistas had defeated the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua but weeks before. *Con mi corazón en Yambo* reveals the aftermath of Roldós' death, the period characterized by the collapse of the Soviet Union, neoliberal policies and policies of transitional justice which, according to official discourse represented the transition to human rights protected by liberal democracy and free trade economy. In his book *Omens of Adversity*, David Scott analyzes the temporality associated with post-political catastrophe, focusing on the aftermath of the downfall of Hegelian-Marxist futurity in the Grenada Revolution. He states that "In a real sense, the Granada Revolution was the first casualty of the rise in the Reagan era of a belligerent neoconservative anticommunism" (4). In this analysis, I introduce Ecuador, and the death of Jaime Roldós and the disappearance of the Restrepo brothers during the Febres Cordero era, as another, even earlier example of the transition from hopeful futurity and its demise under the politics and discourse of U.S.-driven neoliberal anticommunism. Scott explains that "The rise of

transitional justice as a mechanism for settling past state crimes is an *effect* of the post-Cold War reorganization of the constraint and possibilities, values and expectations, of the global political landscape. . . these late twentieth-century transformations not only destroyed the legitimacy of non-liberal democratic alternatives—especially Marxist or Marxism-inspired ones—they also *reorganized* the very social and political imaginary in terms of which liberal democracy articulated its distinctive virtue” (128, 129). *Roldós* and *Yambo* both address this era of transformation—neoliberal reorganization and its twin concept of liberal democracy. The history books sum up Roldós’ presidency in a line or two representing the “return to democracy” period, and Rivera and Sarmiento argue that this designation is both entirely ironic and telling. Roldós’ commitment to democracy for democracy’s sake did not fit within the interests of those in favor of neoliberal policies, therefore the president faced innumerable obstacles and ultimately an untimely death. But official state narrative silences the political meaning of Roldós’ stances and maintains the “return to democracy” story supported by the “accident” theory of Roldós’ death. Scott describes how, “in those fin de siècle years, an attitude of triumphalist self-congratulation marked liberalism’s appraisal of its world-historical renewal, its militant sense of its *right* to a global mission” (128). Part of the righteousness of this liberal attitude stemmed from its appropriation of the human rights discourse: “. . . now liberal democracy presents itself as the exclusive form of political regime eligible to make that claim [in the protection and promotion of human rights]” (129). *Yambo* puts administration after administration on trial for their hypocrisy in claiming to protect human rights while maintaining a political apparatus that both commits and covers up acts of violence against

its own citizens. So, together these films put the concept of democracy in Ecuadorian politics up for reconsideration. They ask what these past events have to say about the state of democracy today, for spectators in Ecuador and around the world.

In *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Walter Benjamin famously stated, “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger” (Benjamin 255). I propose that these films embrace memory of the past in a manner that reflects Benjamin’s radical philosophy of history and time, and that the resonance of his ideas stems precisely from the aforementioned political context of disillusionment, questioning, and foreclosed horizons. In his chapter, “Benjamin: Mesianismo y Utopía,” Ecuadorian philosopher Bolívar Echeverría explains how the political implications of Walter Benjamin’s work, while out of joint in his own time, “se enciende[n] con una capacidad de seducción inigualable”—in the political context of late capitalism (*Siete Aproximaciones a Walter Benjamin* 26). He states:

. . . en condiciones en que la cultura política de la modernidad capitalista parece irremediabilmente fatigada, nos percatamos de lo mucho de ilusorio que ha tenido todo el escenario político, aparentemente tan realista, del siglo XX; del alto grado de ‘inactualidad’ respecto de la vida política profunda de las sociedades modernas, del que ha adolecido la noción de ‘gobierno’ de los estados tradicionales y sus reacomodos ‘posmodernos’ (26).

This eye-opening un-remediable exhaustion with the official narrative of progress is just the force I perceive at work behind the redemptive and revolutionary temporality that *Roldós* and *Yambo* propose. Given the violent repression of the previous generation’s aspirations for greater equality and the official silence that surrounds that repression, the danger Benjamin refers to—the storm of progress—speaks loudly to those filmmakers

reflecting on the past. In this case, the danger of progress is two-fold: on one hand, the memory of loved ones and beloved ideals is at stake. If the filmmaker does not engage the memory of her disappeared brothers (in Restrepo's case), or the memory of President Roldós' humanist ideals (in Sarmiento and Rivera's case, as well as for Roldós children, their close friends), dominant discourse will continue to conveniently erase their lives and deaths from history; or alternatively, classify their deaths as "accidents," thereby emptying their lives and deaths of political, historical significance and allowing the perpetrators and their crimes to go unnoticed and unpunished. The fact that *Supercines*, one of the biggest movie theatre chains in Guayaquil, refused to screen *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* speaks to the threat that the film and its alternative reading of history represents for certain living individuals and groups. According to an article in *El Telégrafo*, the executive president of the company asserted the following in a statement to the press:

'Supercines siendo una empresa de entretenimiento y no un medio de comunicación, cree que le asiste el derecho de evitar dentro de lo posible la proyección en sus salas de documentales, películas y comerciales, cuyo contenido implícita o explícitamente pueda entenderse como de carácter político . . .'

(Johnny Czarninski in "Supercines no pasó documental de Roldós" August 28, 2013).

The fact that a major cinema chain would choose not to screen a national film gathering significant interest with audiences, by claiming the right to deny the film's projection based upon their identity as an entertainment entity, rather than a form of communication media, demonstrates the power of the film, as well as the very real threat of silence around the history of Roldós' death. Entities like Supercines prefer that this information not be shared because it questions the ideological positioning of the company's

stakeholders, who align politically with León Febres Cordero and other neoliberal conservative governments. Silence represents a danger to the memory of Roldós and the ideals he represented.

On the other hand, the danger is continued trauma, both personal and philosophical in nature, for family members and society in the present. *Not* recognizing the past's mark upon the present puts the filmmaker, the social actors and viewers in a position of vulnerability, remaining stuck in unaddressed trauma that has real consequences in the present and possible futures. If the past is not seized up, faced and incorporated into collective memory, the public (including the directors) will remain oblivious to their present condition as constituted by past actions and therefore susceptible to the continued legacy of oppression. Ecuador must confront the state of democracy in the country today as the product of these influential historical events in national and international history. In these films, therefore, the camera seizes hold of the past as a constitutive stain on the present. By doing so, the films accommodate for the past in the present moment as an ethical duty.

The creative incorporation of the archival documents in *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* is one of the ways they “seize hold of the past.” When Benjamin insists that “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’,” he means that on one hand ‘the way it really was’ is constructed by a discourse of power, official history with a capital H, that has vested interests in its claims on the truth (255). On the other hand, when talking about documentary film, “the way it really was” relates to the genre’s relationship with the

historical past and with realist aesthetics. In his chapter, “How Can We Define Documentary Film?” Bill Nichols asserts that:

The division of documentary from fiction, like the division of historiography from fiction, rests on the degree to which the story fundamentally corresponds to actual situations, events, and people versus the degree to which it is primarily a product of the filmmaker’s invention. (8, 9 *Introduction to Documentary Film* 2017).

The fact that documentary film is often defined indirectly against fiction film, as Bill Nichols does here, is suggestive of the illusive nature of the genre’s parameters. Many theorists agree that documentary films “refer directly to the historical world” and interpret or tell a story “from the perspective of the filmmaker in a form and style of his or her choosing” (Nichols 2017 5,8). Patricia Aufderheide highlights this tension between representation and reality in her definition of the filmmaking form, while Antonio Weinrichter offers an even more open definition in which documentary film is that which is played where people go to see documentaries (Aufderheide 9, Mamblona “Nuevas conversaciones”). In an interview Weinrichter states, ““Si hablamos de lo que se pone en la tele, eso es reportaje. Pero hablando del documental cinematográfico lo encontramos donde lo vamos a ver”” (Mamblona “Nuevas conversaciones”). No matter how documentary film is defined, historically speaking, the form has been understood to have a commitment to the truth, and therefore holds significant stakes in the dialogue about the past. As Nichols explains, a key reason for the expectation of truth-telling in documentary film is the “indexical capacity of the photographic image and of sound recordings to replicate what we take to be the distinctive visual or acoustic qualities of the world around us” (Nichols 23). He also signals the way in which realist styles encourage and reinforce the perception of documentary film as a medium with a strong



objective quality. Of course, documentary film is always a representation controlled by one or more filmmakers, and not a reproduction of “what really happened,” but it is precisely this expectation of objectivity and indexicality that the directors of *Roldós* and *Yambo* take advantage of and question at the same time. Through their re-appropriation and resignification of archival documents, the films seek legitimacy in telling a non-official version of history while also underlining the constructed and unstable nature of any discourse, even their own. In both films, the directors are like detectives who want to reveal the truth. They are also researchers who come up against the elusive and fabricated nature of the Archive; and artists who face the complexity of representing their stories through film. In this way, the use of both official archival documents *and* a logic of *burla* and *duda* (derision, irony and doubt) are central to these films.

In Latin America, baroque aesthetics have been an important contestatory response to realism that reflects colonial and postcolonial context. While I would not claim that these films employ a baroque aesthetics, since they are both very much rooted in the tradition of compilation documentary films that embrace a journalistic style, I do argue that they employ a *baroque ethos* in their representation of history and in their use of their archive. Ecuadorian economist and cultural historian Bolívar Echeverría outlines the realist, romantic, classic and baroque ethos as the four “ways of living” the contradiction between use value and capital value inherent to capitalist modernity (72 “Ethos Barroco” *Debate Feminista* 1994). Echeverría explains that each of these ethos “implica una actitud particular” (72). Baroque ethos, with its roots in the capacity of marginalized mestizos to maintain indigenous traditions and ways of being while also

appropriating and adapting to the imposition of Spanish hegemony represents a strategy of survival (“La Clave Barroca de América Latina” 2002). According to Echeverría, the baroque ethos:

. . . promueve la reivindicación de la forma social-natural de la vida y su mundo de valores de uso, y lo hace incluso en medio del sacrificio del que ellos son objeto a manos del capital y su acumulación; un rescate de lo concreto que lo reafirma en un Segundo grado, en un plano imaginario, en medio de su misma devastación. (8)

I see this simultaneous participation in and resistance to the system of power (capitalism and capital value, in Echeverría’s work) at play in the films. By contrasting testimonies and private archives with official state documents, the films emphasize the silences and blatant incongruences of official discourse. For example, in *Con mi corazón en Yambo*, footage capturing domestic details and happy photographs in the Restrepo family home is interrupted by an excerpt from President León Febres Cordero’s campaign video. The domestic video and testimony discredit the campaign promises. A slow left-right pan surveys a mantel with framed photographs of dance recitals, vacations and first communions. The director’s father explains in voice over that the family had been living a happy life. Everything was normal, he says, and then his voice trails off as the camera pans back in the other direction, and settles on an image of the Restrepo family holding their protest signs, which read “Por nuestros hijos hasta la vida” and “Con mi corazón en Yambo.” The upbeat music of the campaign video grows louder and louder and the image transitions to the grainy footage. A stadium full of people wave their flags in support of León Febres Cordero and the announcer yells, “¡Esta es la violencia de León!” as he smiles and waves. The crowd cheers as Febres Cordero

presents himself as the candidate for liberty and order. Given the previous scene, which prefaces the tragedy to come, we know that Febres Cordero's discourse is full of lies. His repressive policies did not provide liberty and order, as he promised, but instead familial devastation and the disintegration of domestic normalcy. Through examples like this one, the films undermine the documents of official history, demonstrating them to be part of a dishonest, performed and imposed discourse. By layering official archival documents with alternative archival sources including testimonies, landscape shots, and family photos and videos, the filmmakers perform the baroque ethos, simultaneously engaging the discourse (documents) of power and revindicating the history of experience. The contrast between the two narratives constructs a productive logic of doubt in which the viewer realizes that they cannot trust the official narrative. *Roldós* and *Yambo* represent the history of the repressed, the family members of *desaparecidos latinoamericanos* who have lived firsthand the violence and lies of the state. They are invested in motivating viewers to question power and think for themselves. Despite their emphasis on distrust for official archival documents and narratives, both films emphasize the importance of preserving and engaging with the past through the unofficial archive. Interestingly, private archives provide important documentation of Roldós' role as the leader of human rights politics in Latin America. Similarly, family video, photographs and audio recordings represent an important avenue to reveal to the public both the tragic loss of Santiago and Andrés, and the brutal and bizarre measures the Ecuadorian state took in order to silence the family members' questions and demands. The aspects of national history represented by these lived experiences have been pushed into the private sector

because they question the legitimacy of the state as a body that claims to protect its citizens.

The revindication of a history of experience is the second aspect of the baroque ethos that the films engage. The emphasis on materiality and affect in both the content and framing of archival documents in *Roldós* and *Yambo* makes a step in recuperating those aspects of history that are left out of an articulation focused on “the way it really was.” This unique approach is part of the films’ redemptive impulse toward the past. Materiality and affect are also keys way in which the films demonstrate a generational deviation from the tradition of New Latin American Cinema. Rather than a national collective that will overthrow the oppressors in armed political revolution, these films relegate the power to change to the individual by urging them to be present in their own experience of history and to be aware of their capacity to doubt the official discourse. In *Con mi corazón en Yambo*, María Fernanda Restrepo tells her family’s story through her first-person reflections, with interviews in her home, through family photos and videos, literally as a part of family life as it unfolds as part of the film. For example, one sequence portrays the family at their home, preparing for an anniversary demonstration marking the boys’ disappearance, and then later the demonstration itself in La Plaza Grande. She also builds a history of experience through a poetics of materiality and visual metaphors of light, water and leaves, all of which help the director to communicate the family’s affective experience of losing Santiago and Andrés and being plunged into a lifetime struggle to find their remains and fight for justice. The directors of *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*, Lisandra Rivera and Manolo Sarmiento, frame their story through

Sarmiento's perspective as both documentary filmmaker and citizen. In the film, Sarmiento embarks on an investigative and reflective journey as he strives to give meaning and order to this period in his country's history and to better understand the logic of history that has contributed to the silence surrounding it. Testimonies from Roldós' children, who are friends of the filmmakers, also invite the spectators to consider the personal affective experience of this national history, and to reflect on where political, historical or poetic justice can be carved out. Unlike New Latin American films like *Hora de los hornos*, these films portray a single filmmaker in their journey to do justice before the past, asking questions, rather than a collective discourse of revolution established through dialectical editing and omniscient voice over narration.

*Military Rule and Transition in Ecuador, 1972-1992* written by political scientist Anita Isaacs in 1993 is a well-documented and interesting look at the political and economic reasons behind the weak public trust in democracy in Ecuador. The author demonstrates that due to the Ecuadorian experience of military rule, which was not repressive in the same way as the brutal dictatorships of the Southern Cone or in Central America, and which maintained a tradition of military social and economic reform starting with the Transformación Juliana in 1925, the country's perception of military rule is not altogether negative (3-5, 143). Isaacs concludes that in fact at the time she was writing in 1992 or 1993, military dictatorship in fact remained a "viable political alternative" (143). Her prediction would in fact come to pass when Lucio Gutiérrez, Colonel of the Armed Forces, joined an indigenous uprising that resulted in the deposition of President Jamil Mahuad, gaining recognition and alliances that would lead

him to the presidency in 2003 (to later be removed from office as the result of popular uprisings in 2005). Gutiérrez (then and now) dresses in military attire, taking advantage of both Ecuador's history of military rule and, before his election in 2002, the interest among voters in Hugo Chávez's image as paternal and progressive military leader. In *Military Rule and Transition in Ecuador*, Isaacs states,

We argue, therefore, against the tendency to equate elections with democracy and caution against placing too much faith in the belief that the bargaining and compromise that accompany pacted transitions will persist during the consolidation phase. (8)

While Isaacs contributes a detailed and insightful look into Ecuador's political history from 1972-92, and clearly questions the application of hegemonic concepts of democracy in the Ecuadorian context, she not once mentions Roldós' death, much less the highly tense and suspect circumstances surrounding the plane crash. The silences in Isaac's text around Roldós' case and the hemispheric political context that influenced it, however, are not an exception, but instead the norm in the social sciences within Ecuadorian and North American accounts of the period. For this reason, the film's engagement with the period of "return to democracy" is extremely important.

## **Historical Context**

### Ecuadorian Cold War Historical Context

I have already begun to sketch out the historical backdrop that these films portray, together revisiting the transition from dictatorship to democracy in Ecuador during the late 1970s and 80s. Speaking from the context of the 2010s, they also reflect on the contemporary legacy of this shift. *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* portrays the Cold-War

ideological battleground at the end of the 1970s in Latin America, where U.S.-backed dictatorships sought to eliminate socialist ideals and movements and anyone who supported them. When Roldós assumed presidential office in Ecuador, Jimmy Carter was president of the U.S. and two months before he was killed, Ronald Reagan had taken office (Salvador Lara 541-548). *Con mi corazón en Yambo* (2011) reveals the aftermath of Roldós' death, the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the transitional justice period, which according to official discourse, represented the transition to human rights protected by liberal democracy and free trade economy. The detention, torture and murder of Santiago and Andrés Restrepo by the Ecuadorian National Police took place during the presidency of León Febres Cordero, who cooperated closely with the Reagan administration in implementing neoliberal policies and is known for his abusive authoritarianism, especially in repressing guerilla movements like Alfaro Vive Carajo and Monteros Patria Libre (Ayala "Resumen de Historia del Ecuador" 2008, Isaacs 136, Khalifé and Laso 76, Romero, Hodgson and Gómez 109-110, Salvador Lara 554-567). The cover-up and trial of their case were carried out during various presidential administrations that claimed to be champions of change and human rights advocacy (Ayala "Resumen de Historia del Ecuador" 2008).

Especially for international audiences, much of the historical context outlined above represents a new perspective on the return to democracy period in Latin America. As noted in the films *El lugar donde se juntan los polos* (Juan Martín Cueva) and *El secreto en la caja* (Javier Izquierdo), Ecuadorian history has been depoliticized in national and international narratives. Cueva recalls in his film, "una broma decía que en

el Ecuador no pasaba nada más que una línea imaginaria” (Cueva 2001). Both Cueva and Izquierdo show that such a characterization finds its roots in the postcolonial legacy of a mestizo country that does not want to acknowledge its indigenous population and roots. This historical marginalization has also played out in broader Latin American narratives, especially in terms of the Cold War period, given that much scholarly attention has focused on the Southern Cone and Brazilian context and the horrendous human rights violations that occurred there. The films *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* respond to these silences in both national and regional discourses by reframing the deaths they investigate as part of a larger Latin American and hemispheric story—by reframing Jaime Roldós (and those who died in the plane crash with him) and the Restrepo brothers as *desaparecidos políticos latinoamericanos* whose deaths tell the story of a state and international policy that stopped at no cost to eliminate perceived threats to neoliberal economic and social order. Ecuador was not only fully enmeshed in the struggles between authoritarianism and democracy, and between capitalism and socialism in the Americas; it played a pivotal role in these political and economic dynamics.

After the cacao boom collapsed in the early 1920s, due to the post World War I economic depression and plagues that wiped out entire cacao plantations, Ecuador underwent the July 1925 coup and the Transformación Juliana (Aspiazu “El ‘boom’ del cacao ecuatoriano,” Isaacs 1, Ayala Mora “Predominio plutocrático,” “Un nuevo escenario” and “Crisis e irrupción de las masas”). La Transformación Juliana refers to the changes that occurred in the country after a group of young progressive military officers ousted the liberal government of president Gonzalo Córdova and set up a civilian regime



that emphasized economic and social reform, including the establishment of the national Central Bank and women's suffrage, which was implemented through legal reform in 1928 (Isaacs 1, Ayala Mora "Predominio plutocrático," "Un nuevo escenario" and "Crisis e irrupción de las masas"). As Isaacs notes, Ecuador was the first Latin American country to honor women's right to vote (1). The socially-oriented military coup and regime of "los militares julianos" represents a trend that would be repeated in Ecuador, the beginning of a "longstanding military commitment to social reform and economic modernization" (Isaacs 3). In the 1960s, after the fall of the banana boom, there was another military intervention (Isaacs 2, Ayala Mora "De la crisis al auge"). The coup took place in 1963 and the military junta governed until 1966. While the junta took an anti-communist position, it also sought policies that echoed the modernizing Juliana reforms (like the 1964 Ley de Reforma Agraria) but was only partially successful in implementing them (Isaacs 3, Ayala Mora "De la crisis al auge"). In the 1970s, the country was once again under a dictatorial regime, but this time within the context of the oil boom, rather than the cacao or banana crisis. Isaacs indicates that "The governing strategy thus pursued by the military dictatorship (1972-1979) was true to the spirit of the reforms introduced during the 1920s, as well as by the Enriquez dictatorship of 1937-38 and the military junta which held power during the mid-1960s" (Isaacs 3). The historical context of 1970s dictatorship and the oil boom is one that *Roldós* lays out clearly and the information I provide below draws on the film as well as other historiographies.

In 1972, army commander Guillermo Rodríguez Lara led a coup that overthrew five-time President José María Velasco Ibarra. From 1972 until 1979, Ecuador was

subjected to a dictatorial regime (Romero, Hodgson and Gómez 109, Ayala Mora “De la crisis al auge”). The government of Rodríguez Lara (known popularly as “Bombita”) was labeled “dictablanda.” Historian Enrique Ayala Mora explains that the Rodríguez Lara government “tuvo iniciativas progresistas, especialmente en su política internacional, puesto que defendió la soberanía del país sobre sus recursos naturales. El Ecuador ingresó a la Organización de Países Exportadores de Petróleo (OPEP) e impulsó el control estatal de la explotación y comercialización petrolera” (Ayala Mora “De la crisis al auge 38).

The term “dictablanda” was used to describe Rodríguez Lara’s government for several reasons. “Bland” in part because of the general’s relatively progressive initiatives; in part because of the enormous increase in public earnings that accompanied the oil production and exportation boom, which “Bombita” kept under state control (Ayala Mora “De la crisis al auge,” Isaacs 4, Romero, Hodgson and Gómez 109). Fernando Martín Mayoral, for example, observes that “El incremento del precio de petróleo—que pasó de 2,5 dólares el barril en 1972 a 35,2 dólares en 1980—permitió un aumento de los ingresos públicos, que le otorgó al Estado una clara autonomía respecto de los grupos de poder” (123). Romero, Hodgson and Gómez emphasize that the Ecuadorian GDP per capita more than doubled during the 1970s (109). While it was a dictatorship, the country’s economic expansion caused the period to be regarded positively. Finally, Rodríguez Lara’s rule was labelled “dictablanda” because of the dictatorship’s relatively moderate authoritarian posture—bland when pitted against the terrifying dictatorships in Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Nicaragua and more Latin American countries at

the time (Ayala Mora 38, Isaacs 4, Martín-Mayoral 123, 124, Romero, Hodgson and Gómez 109).

When the Consejo Supremo de Gobierno, formed by the military triumvirate (Air Force, Army and Navy), pushed Rodríguez Lara out of power in 1976, the dictatorship became more repressive and cut back on the progressive state interventionist policies and economy. Under the Consejo Supremo de Gobierno, the government committed human rights violations including the AZTRA massacre that occurred October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1977, when a still-undetermined number of (estimates calculate approximately one hundred) majority indigenous striking sugar mill workers and their family members were killed by the Ecuadorian National Police (Ayala Mora 38, Harari et al. 107). Despite resistance among hardliners in the dictatorship, the triumvirate called for elections and in 1978, Jaime Roldós entered the scene as a presidential candidate for the party CFP (Concentración de Fuerzas Populares) (Isaacs 122, 123). Roldós represented a center-left position with an emphasis on the value of democracy, national sovereignty and populist social policies (Ayala Mora 39, Isaacs 122, Restrepo Echavarría 2015 147). After a decade of dictatorship and more than seventeen years of institutionalized militarism, Roldós' populist politics, oratory skills and campaign slogan, "la fuerza del cambio," made him a popular candidate and the Roldós-Hurtado binomial won by a landslide (Isaacs 119, Echavarría 147, Romero et al. 109). When he assumed office in 1979, Roldós was the first Latin American head of state to assume a democratic government following a dictatorship (Isaacs 119). During his presidency, Ecuador was a safe haven for political exiles from across Latin America, where at the time 12 countries were controlled by

dictatorships. The conservative oligarchy of Ecuador was not pleased by either his plan to implement “desarrollo económico, justicia social y consolidación democrática”; or his foreign policy, which focused on human rights (Rámirez Prieto 10). Tensions grew between Ecuador and Argentina (under dictator Jorge Videla) as a result of Roldós’ famous “Carta de Conducta,” a voluntary agreement which held Latin American countries accountable for human rights violations; and because of Roldós’ refusal to sign Plan Viola, a repressive policy orchestrated by Argentine military dictator Roberto Viola. At the time, Argentina was leading Operation Condor, the U.S.-backed campaign of political repression and state terror designed to eliminate political opponents.

Under these tense national and international circumstances, May 24<sup>th</sup> of 1981, Jaime Roldós, Martha Bucaram, Defense Minister Marco Subía Martínez, Irlanda Sarango, lieutenant colonels Héctor Torres and Armando Navarrete, Pilot Colonel Marco Andrade, copilot Galo Romo and flight attendant Soledad Rosero died when their plane crashed into the side of the Huayrapungo mountainside, in the Province of Loja, Ecuador. There is still a great deal of contradiction regarding the cause of the crash and, while the official story concludes that the crash was caused by an error made by the pilot, the Zurich Police investigation suggests a motor failure. Despite this contradiction, the Ecuadorian government did not pursue further investigation. In the official history books, Roldós’ presidency and death are commonly summed up in a paragraph; the controversy surrounding his death went largely uncontested. While doing this research, many of the historical accounts I consulted on the history of Ecuador mentioned nothing of Roldós’ death at all.

*La muerte de Jaime Roldós* creates a frame of Cold War politics in which U.S. interests aligned with those of the dictatorships in Central America and South America and against governments like that of Roldós, which sought to protect national sovereignty and democracy for democracy's sake, rather than in opposition to socialist or Marxist movements. *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* analyzes the period leading up to the 1978 Ecuadorian election (when Ecuador was transitioning to democracy after ten years of dictatorship), the years of Roldós' presidency, and directly after. *Con mi corazón en Yambo*, explores the aftermath of Roldós' death. The year of his death and those following are characterized as the period “. . .[en el cual] nace el nuevo orden neoliberal de democracia mínima . . .” (Restrepo Echavarría 147). After Roldós died in 1981, President Hurtado finished off Roldós' term implementing neoliberal measures. The next President, León Febrés Cordero not only furthered these measures, he also implemented repressive “counterinsurgency” policies to repress leftist groups. Filmmaker Maria Fernanda Restrepo's brothers were detained, tortured, killed and disappeared by the Ecuadorian National Police, specifically SIC-P (Servicio de Investigación Criminal de Pichincha), which formed part of León Febrés Cordero's “counterinsurgency” mechanisms (Isaacs 136, van Dongen 2). The film goes to great lengths to demonstrate that their deaths were not a “mistake,” but instead part of state and international policy that uses repressive measures against citizens and that covers up information that does not serve the interests of those in power. While the exact chain of events that led to the boys being pulled over by the Ecuadorian police just outside Quito on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1988 are not known. Member of the international commission of inquiry on the Restrepo case,

Toine van Dongen, notes that “In those days, police were looking for one of the barons from the Ochoa drug cartel” and asks, “Was it their Colombian family name that sealed their fate?” (“The Restrepo Case: Murky Waters” 1992). Van Dongen also mentions that while the commission of inquiry ultimately decided to keep silent about motives, they felt that they were “looking at a torture run out of hand” (“The Restrepo Case: Murky Waters” 1992). He explains that under León Febres Cordero, “The SIC tortured as a matter of routine.” (“The Restrepo Case: Murky Waters” 1992). Isaacs includes a succinct description of the pattern of human rights violations in Ecuador under Febres Cordero’s presidency:

Although the numbers of tortured and disappeared could not compare with those who suffered a similar fate during the years of dictatorship in Argentina, Chile or Uruguay, and abuses have declined following the peace agreements signed between the AVC [Alfaro Vive Carajo] and the Borja administration, violations of human rights continue. Indian activists associated with CONAIE, in particular, have suffered torture at the hands of the police force in recent years. (136)

Febres Cordero expanded and intensified the opening of Ecuador to transnational capital that had already begun under Osvaldo Hurtado, vice president who assumed the presidency after Roldós’ death (Martín-Mayoral 127). Ayala explains that Febres Cordero’s neoliberal measures “incrementaron el poder de banqueros y exportadores, y reactivaron a los productores para la exportación. Una indiscriminada apertura al capital extranjero no tuvo eco, pero agudizó la especulación . . .” (39). In many ways, the death of Roldós marked the beginning of the neoliberal era in Ecuador and in Latin America more generally. The democratic governments that followed show that while U.S.-rhetoric painted democracy as the only possible way to protect human rights, in many cases democratically-elected governments actually privilege capital interests over people.

Echavarría reitirates the articulation of Roldós' death as the beginning of a new period in the country: he states, "Con la muerte de Roldós en 1981, por la caída del avión que lo transportaba, nace el nuevo orden neoliberal de democracia mínima de ese entonces. En Ecuador, el neoliberalismo se articuló al sistema de hacienda y, como era común en esa época, ahondó la supremacía del capital sobre el individuo y el Estado" (147). These policies and the others that privileged transnational capital inserted Ecuador further in the global economy: "Estas políticas fueron aplicadas a partir de la presidencia de Osvaldo Hurtado (1981-1984), quien sucedió a Roldós luego de que este falleciera en un accidente de avión, y luego profundizadas por León Febres Cordero (1984-1988) y posteriormente por Sixto Durán Ballén" (127). Both Echavarría and Martín-Mayoral explain how Hurtado opened the doors to neoliberalism in Ecuador by pushing private liabilities of a select group of politically-connected business interests onto the public while maintaining the entirely private nature of assets (Echavarría 148, Martín-Mayoral 127). This process basically paved the way for the redistribution of wealth from the middle and lower classes towards a very small elite, a process with León Febres Cordero exacerbated by granting further privileges and protections to the private sector (Martín-Mayoral 128).

Long gone were the humanist values of Roldós, who sought to protect a diverse national collective's sovereignty and resources and for who human rights policies was a goal rather than an obstacle. As I detailed in both the introduction and part one, these socioeconomic changes result in a shift in cultural and institutional narratives of time. They also have a major impact on the environment. The year that Roldós assumed the presidency (1979) was the same year that the prices for oil increased significantly,

causing inflation to get out of hand in the global North and set off a debt crisis in Latin America starting in about 1982 (Bellinger 13). As Bellinger explains in his study of neoliberalism's effects on Ecuador's tuna fishing industry, this debt crisis "provided an opportunity for the International Monetary Fund and World Bank (with strong guidance from the United States and Great Britain) to introduce neoliberal economic policies to Latin America" (14). Because governments relied on loans from IMF and World Bank to keep their economies from collapsing, they were forced to put into practice the neoliberal policies dictated by these two financial institutions, which were strongly influenced by the agendas of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher (15-17). These measures were supported and promoted by the Latin American elites for whom neoliberal policies represented the opportunity for growth in the economic and political clout. Bellinger highlights that, "The environmental problems [associated with neoliberalism] stem from greater pressures to extract primary resources (e.g. mining, logging, fishing) and the relocation of pollution intensive industries to Latin America" (19). Additionally, the emphasis on deregulation meant that it was detrimental to a country's chances at entering in the global market if they established protective environmental regulations (21). For example, the Ecuadorian government allowed oil companies to extend their drilling to the Amazon region, which has resulted in major devastation for the environment as well as indigenous groups (21).

The narratives of both films point to a clear case for unmasking the ideals of progress: in both stories, the discourse of "progress" has set the circumstances for the likely assassination of a loved one (Restrepo's brothers, the Roldós' children, the beloved



president) and for the institutional cover-ups of crimes and the impunity of the perpetrators. This critique, placed in dialogue with a history of experience and the sense that the present carries with it an index of ethical responsibility to the past, responds to the philosophy of history Walter Benjamin proposes in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*—one where redemption lies in the present’s relationship to the past.

### *La Muerte de Jaime Roldós*

#### A Pending Account in Ecuadorian History

“They have retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers. As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history.” (Benjamin *Illuminations* 255).

*La muerte de Jaime Roldós* is a compilation film that appropriates archival documents, gives them a particular order through montage and grants them new meaning through the director’s voice over narration and gaze. (Nichols 2016, 106). As Cristián León asserts, these characteristics make *Roldós* a historical documentary. *Roldós* has two directors, Lisandra Rivera and Manolo Sarmiento, but only Sarmiento appears within the film. The film’s introductory section reveals director Sarmiento as the narrator of the story. Within the film, he represents an individual who has sat down with the archive to ask himself some questions and piece together some ideas about his own national history. After presenting some possible beginnings to understand Roldós’ death and the silence that followed it—all based in archival documents related to Ecuadorian historical and political context—the film includes a long traveling sequence taken from inside a van as it moves down a bumpy and foggy mountain road. Not only does this sequence give the viewer a chance to take a deep breath and reflect on the narrator’s questions and the

dense compilation of documents; it also functions to invite the spectator to embark on this journey into the past with the filmmaker and the social subjects. Overlaid with the intertitle “La muerte de Jaime Roldós,” the camera, stationary within the van, moves forward with the car, always toward the center of the frame, as if diving into the story. The extradiegetic music, a melodic song in Quichua, bridges the earlier archival shots with the traveling sequence (“Manila” interpreted by Mariela Condo, arranged by Daniel Mancero). The soft high voice of Condo, combined with the Andean flute and subtle, rustic percussion that might be a rain stick, the song has an ancestral feeling. The atmosphere evoked through the foggy mountain road, the music and the movement of the van into the center of the frame generate a sensation of traveling between temporalities.

Interspliced within this long shot, as the vehicle continues down the road, the film introduces Diana, Martha and Santiago Roldós, the children of Jaime and Martha, as well as Mariana, Jaime’s sister. Through a compilation of archival footage portraying the children during the hopeful times of Roldós’ campaign, and their interviews in the present, the film demonstrates how trauma and loss mark the present, creating a past that won’t recede. As the camera observes Santiago and Martha reflectively looking out the window of the van as the vehicle passes by mountain scenery, the director explains in voice over, “yo tenía más o menos la misma edad que ellos.” With this comment, the viewer understands that this sense of trauma is not only that of Roldós’ family and friends, but also the director and the nation: a historical, collective trauma. As the mountainside car sequence continues, the director explains in voice over that on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crash, he accompanied Martha, Santiago, Mariana and María Antonieta de Andre, (the

widow of pilot Andrade) to the site of the plane crash in Huairapungo, Ecuador, where Martha and Jaime Roldós, the pilot and the other passengers died. Landscape shots capturing the immensity of the mountain range where the plane crashed are spliced with photographs and video of the area from the days after the crash, revealing the incinerated rubble of the fallen plane. This *place* is captured various times throughout the film, on different occasions. Archival broadcast footage from soon after Roldós' death portrays a military official announcing that the Ecuadorian state has fully investigated and closed the case. In voice over, the director states that despite numerous claims that the crash was an assassination, the state closed the investigation after only eight days. As the camera looks out over the mountainside, capturing the family members walking silently in reflection, Sarmiento asserts in voice over, "La muerte del presidente Roldós sigue siendo una cuenta pendiente en Ecuador." By combining the landscape shots of Huairapungo and the family members, the archival photos and video of the rubble of the crash, and the voice over reflection, the film suggests that the unresolved issue is materially, political and emotionally present, "una cuenta pendiente," as the director states.

Describing *fukeiron* or "landscape theory," film and media historian Yuriko Furuhashi describes how slow pans of everyday spaces—"utterly ordinary, eventless and devoid of any visible conflict"—can contrast sensationalist media coverage and create a poignant sense of a present frozen in time, where the material space reflects the hanging residues of the unfronted past. Not only does *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* present a material, political and emotional present that is full of the past, but through the perspective of the filmmaker, the film also demonstrates a desire to honor the past by

confronting it. By engaging the past—the stories surrounding the death of Jaime Roldós—the director establishes an example of an inspiring democratic leader, and a bigger picture of national and international development politics that hides its destructive side through an official history based on the narrative of progress.

### Democracy for Democracy's Sake

Rivera and Sarmiento, the directors of the film *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* worked with a research team gathering archival materials for four years, followed by more than two years of editing. The film includes documents from Ecuador, Bolivia, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, El Salvador and the United States (Brito Montenegro 25, 124, León 17). With the majority of the film's two hours comprised by historical documents ranging from official state correspondence to newsreels, newspaper articles and international reports, *Roldós* can easily be classified as an archival film. According to Brito Montenegro's research, the film includes 154 different documents (62). Sarmiento outlines three different kinds of films within *Roldós*—a memory film based on interviews with Roldós' three children; a journalistic denunciation film that would reveal the coverup of the circumstances of Roldós' death using historical documents; and a more philosophical film about the writing of history and the contrast between the official history, which posed Roldós' death as an accident, and the leftist journalist narrative that asserts it was an assassination (2015). The third approach, which addresses the contradiction between official history and un-official history, is the one that relied most heavily on archival documents “porque implicaba explorar los motivos de la duda y por lo tanto relatar nuevamente lo que fue el retorno a la democracia, tomando a Roldós

como el eje de ese relato” (Sarmiento 2015). Sarmiento and Rivera needed more than documents suggesting wrongdoing; they needed to create for their spectators an understanding of the threat that Roldós represented to the conservative right in Ecuador, the dictatorships in Latin America and the U.S. administrations and corporations that backed them. Therefore, one of the most significant contributions the film makes to these alternative forms of historical memory is that of bringing back for public consideration Roldós’ image and ideals as a public figure—his speeches, his interactions with journalists and other heads of state. The film presents a sort of reckoning with the past, a mourning, but also a re-projection of Ecuadorian history and national identity. Roldós, the film posits, plays a key role in that re-projection. As is to be expected, the photographs, newspaper articles and film clips of Roldós are numerous in the film. Of those, I have selected a few representations I analyze as key to reconstruct the image of Roldós that the film creates.

Some of the archival photos, documents or footage may be familiar to earlier generations of Ecuadorians, brought before the public’s eyes anew in contemporary circumstances, while for younger viewers and international audiences, the documents will be entirely new information. Either way, the spectator will experience a sense of what Jamie Baron terms “temporal disparity” –or the perception of a “then” and “now” within the archival film. The viewer will sense the difference between the documents from the 70s and 80s and the footage filmed for the purpose of the documentary in the 2000s (Baron 18). In the introduction of the film, which comprises approximately the first 18 minutes of the film, a short film clip portrays Jaime Roldós and his wife Martha Bucaram

dancing to popular music among a crowd of people. The couple celebrates Roldós' triumph in the second round of elections in April, 1979. Their dress is informal, both in short-sleeved attire, and they dance joyfully while children and adults in the crowd clap their hands in the air, singing and dancing to the song "Guayaquileño madera de guerrero" by Carlos Rubira Infante, a popular pasillo or pasacalles characteristic of national popular culture that speaks to the beauty of Guayaquil, the beauty of the women and the courage and frankness of its men. It's nighttime, and the celebration appears to take place outside with the crowd dancing in close proximity. For those who are familiar with the song, it may invoke a sense of closeness: Roldós is indeed el Guayaquileño, and the film represents him as a man of his people, "made from the wood of warriors," as the song states.

This happy image is overlaid with other temporalities that help us create additional meaning for the scene of Roldós celebrating among the masses in 1979. The clip gives way to a sequence of newspaper articles that, in combination with voice over narration, explain the importance of student uprising in Guayaquil on June 3rd, 1959. The director explains that Roldós' political stance was impacted greatly by the state-sponsored repression of the massacre. That day, the military violently repressed the demonstrators, killing an indeterminate number of people: the official numbers record a maximum of 25, but unofficial accounts signal a much greater number, possibly in the 100s. Because the newspapers are filmed rather than edited into the timeline as still shots, and because the camera moves over the material newspaper clippings, looking them up and down, zooming in on a word or an image, the viewer experiences two temporalities

simultaneously. On one hand these shots emphasize the now of the filmmaker scrutinizing the images, and on the other hand they of course recall the 1959 massacre they portray. They also refer back to the images of Roldós dancing amongst the people. We come to understand that his dedication to the masses is rooted in the quest for justice incited by the blatant disregard for citizens' lives that his generation witnesses in the massacre. This technique produces a nonlinear temporality that stresses multiplicity. It also captures the elusive nature of the truth in relation to documentary film and an archive controlled by power. The film relates one thing to another while recognizing its own limits in being able to prove. This tragedy shaped the political consciousness of an entire generation, Sarmiento explains, including that of Roldós, who early in his career aligned himself with anti-oligarchic populism and the CFP (Concentración de Fuerzas Populares) party. Through this platform he hoped to build a nationalist, social democratic platform, professing, “Aquí está el pueblo. El pueblo no está en la izquierda marxista.” Linking together the earlier dancing clip with this powerful statement, the film creates an image of Roldós as a man of the people--serious and committed, dedicated to the people of Ecuador, a different sort of populist candidate. His appeals to the pueblo are not based on a desire to rise to power but a commitment to assuring human rights through dignified leadership.

Leading up to the next clip to be analyzed, Sarmiento comments, “Hasta hoy se acuerda el día en que denunció el origen de la conspiración y calificó al más rabioso de sus opositores de insolente recadero del bananero más poderoso del país.” The use of voice over allows the directors to share their critical view of history—their reading of the

archive—through Sarmiento’s first-person narration. When Roldós won the first round of elections, not only was a psychological war incited to create instability and defame Roldós, but the right also professed that Roldós had committed fraud in the elections. Roldós was fearless in calling out the man he considered the initiator of his defamation: León Febres Cordero, future president of Ecuador who preached the religion of a free market and societal order by way of an authoritarian government. Febres Cordero will play a significant role in the Restrepo case. In the newsreel, Roldós, 38 years old, dressed in a suit and tie and wearing his thick-framed glasses, looks right into the camera and, sitting back in his chair, with a composed but firm and frank voice, pointing his finger almost at the screen at points of emphasis (Figure 1), states:

Un señor, el ingeniero León Febres Cordero, a quien califico en este instante como el insolente recadero del señor Luis Noboa, ha prendido a través de una campaña infamante y de imputaciones calumniosas, apartar al país de sus problemas medulares y pretender que quienes hemos estado en acción contraria a la dictadura podemos pactar con la dictadura. (Sarmiento and Rivera 2013).



**Figure 1.** Jaime Roldós refers to León Febres Cordero as “el insolente recadero del bananero más poderoso del país” (*La muerte de Jaime Roldós* 2013).



His tone and physical appearance reaffirm his image as passionate and composed professional, while the content of his speech communicates the set of possibilities the country faced in its transition to democracy. The country could follow a neoliberal democratic path in which the government serves elitist big business and a trickle-down exportation economy (represented by Febres Cordero's line of thinking), or a human rights-focused democracy that confronts the "problemas medulares" of the country—inequality and poverty as the legacy of imperialism, colonialism and development—. Roldós valued democracy in and of itself, rather than, as Ruben Zamora points out in his interview in the film, democracy as the triumph of capitalism over communism (Rivera and Sarmiento 37:28). David Scott, in his discussion of the case of the Grenada 17 argues that, ". . . the whole point of the US military intervention to topple the Revolutionary Military council . . . was to reverse the course of the Marxist-led revolution and return Grenada to the fold of obedient Caribbean client state" (133). Scott establishes the way in which transitional justice emerges as a political concept at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where justice facilitated a political transition ". . . away from illiberal rule in the direction of liberal democracy, now understood as the single direction of an acceptable political future" (128). Roldós represented a different sort of democracy that calls into question the historical track-record of governments advocating for liberal democracy. He valued anti-imperialist sovereignty and humanist popular representation over free trade and development. His inaugural speech on August 10, 1979 reaffirms this unique vision of democracy. Rosalynn Carter (spouse of U.S. president Jimmy Carter) and Violeta Chamorro (key figure of the Sandinista Revolution) appear in the audience, and after

Roldós closes his speech the audience, led by Roldós three young children, rises in a standing ovation. His proposal is innovative even by today's standards:

Ahora todos podemos dirigir, tomando la valentía de nuestros antepasados, hablo para todos los habitantes de esta tierra, para los que viven por donde sale el sol—shuar, Waorani, Sequoia, Siona, Cofán, para los que viven en las montañas y para los que viven donde se oculta el sol, para los Cayapas rojos que aman los árboles, para los miles que viven en nuestra patria, para los blancos y los negros, para todos los que han venido de lejos, ayudándonos entre todos, seguiremos así adelante, no solo de boca, hablando al aire, avanzaremos haciendo lo que pensamos hasta terminar con la pobreza, solo así alcanzaremos la libertad. (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013).

The above excerpt from his speech was delivered in Quichua (translation included in the film in voice over). Roldós was the first Ecuadorian president to address the nation in Quichua (Santos-Granero 2007). The use of the Quichua and the mention of many different indigenous groups, frame Roldós' concept of democracy as one that necessarily recognizes and embraces Ecuador's plurality--plurinational, pluricultural and multiethnic. This approach is key to confronting the legacy of Ecuador's colonial past, and to addressing poverty in the country, which continues to disproportionately affect the indigenous population. In a section of the speech not included in the film, he states, "Hablo para los centenares de miles de indios, para mis hermanos indígenas ecuatorianos . . . objeto permanente de explotación social y preteridos en las obras. Para ellos, la historia se quedó en la colonia" (El Comercio August 10, 1979). Embracing the country's diversity and emphasizing its indigenous cultures, is also a way to reject cultural imperialism and form a distinctive, proud multilingual and multiracial national identity. These are factors that (whether or not they were fulfilled) became influential parts of Rafael Correa's (Ecuadorian president 2007-2017) political discourse and that today continue to hold meaning for Ecuadorians and citizens all over the world. For all viewers,

but perhaps especially for Ecuadorians, this archive creates a sense of lost possibility in that it makes evident that Roldós had begun to draft such a vision of the nation long before it became part of the popular ideological discourse. Especially because Sarmiento introduces the inaugural speech with the contextual information that at the time there were dictatorships in Argentina, Bolivia, Perú, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, the viewer understand the impact of Roldós' vision of "una democracia integral y pluralista" (El Comercio). He stated, "Yo quiero una voz para Ecuador en América Latina y quiero una voz de América Latina en el mundo" (Rivera and Sarmiento). He continues: ". . . queríamos que El Salvador encuentre su camino, como en el caso de Bolivia también, que Bolivia encuentre su camino por decisión soberana de sus pueblos, hemos dicho, manos extranjeras fuera de El Salvador, fuera de Bolivia, cuales quiera que sean estas manos y de cualquier colorido que sean creemos que cada pueblo debe decidir su destino" (Rivera and Sarmiento). One cannot help but wonder—should this vision have been realized—how would Ecuador, and Latin America more generally, be in a different position today. One cannot help but note, also, what a threat this vision represented to those dictatorships and the plan of economic development they tended to represent.

One group of the archival documents that stands out are those that convey Roldós' central role in the Latin American process of transitioning to democracy. The "primera muerte" chapter, the first section after the introduction, suggests that Roldós' foreign policy, which centered on human rights and democracy, made him a threat to the dictatorships in the Southern Cone. This sequence includes clips from a newsreel in

which Roldós, surrounded by other democratic heads of state from the Andean region, as well as Panamá, Spain and Costa Rica, signs the Charter of Conduct, a document spearheaded by Roldós asserting the international community's responsibility to hold governments accountable for human rights violations; due to this responsibility, the Charter stipulates, actions taken by the pact of neighboring countries to protect human rights are not in violation of national sovereignty and do not violate the policy of non-intervention (<https://ddhh2016.wordpress.com/2017/02/11/carta-de-conducta-o-doctrina-roldos/>). Interview testimony in the film from Horacio Sevilla (Ecuadorian ambassador to the United Nations) affirms that:

“Aquí el Ecuador se convirtió en, Quito, sobre todo, en un centro donde venían los asilados políticos que vivían en ese momento, no nos olvidemos que en ese momento había feroces dictaduras del Cono Sur—estaba Pinochet en Chile, estaban los militares argentinos azotando ese país, los militares uruguayos, Stroessner en Paraguay y por el norte estaban las dictaduras y guerra civil centroamericana...”

Sevilla's comments are followed by a photograph of Roldós shaking hands with Hortensia Bussi, widow of Chilean President Salvador Allende, and then a series of newspaper headlines relaying Roldós' plans to form a pact of democratic governments supporting human rights: “Seminario Internacional sobre Derechos Humanos empezará mañana en Quito,” “Roldós: queremos ser un balcón de democracia” y “Carta conducta para consolidar democracia.” Because of the succession of one news article after another, these headlines give the sense of a wide consensus regarding the centrality, even if polemical, of Roldós' stance on human rights and democracy. Also, the way the camera moves over the physical newspapers, zooming in on the headline of choice, gives the viewer the sense that they are interacting with a physical newspaper, accentuating the

materiality of these archival documents, as if they were a newspaper at home on one's kitchen table. Together with photographs and videos of Roldós with other democratic heads of state, the viewer comes away with the exciting and central nature of Roldós' stance on democracy and human rights in the Latin American community. One has been inserted into the official archive, recuperating an image of Roldós that is little known for the international community and largely erased by the Ecuadorian official historical narrative.

In another video clip, Roldós confronts Napoleón Duarte, the El Salvadoran head of state. Leading up to the clip, the director can be seen travelling in a vehicle in San Salvador (indicated by a textual title) as part of his research. Contemporary video, apparently made for the documentary, demonstrates a group of individuals with photos of their disappeared relatives, in front of the Monumento a la Memoria y la Verdad and Sarmiento narrates:

“la oligarquía y los militares de extrema derecha bloquearon toda posibilidad de reforma, todo él que reclamaba por justicia social era acusado de comunista, con el pretexto de exterminar esta amenaza se formaron escuadrones de la muerte vinculados a las fuerzas militares que asesinaron a 70 mil salvadoreños durante la década que duró la guerra civil...los partidos de centro izquierda y de izquierda pasaron a la clandestinidad y apoyaron a la guerrilla. Esas fuerzas insurgentes recibieron el apoyo incondicional del gobierno ecuatoriano.”

These shots and the historical background give provided by the voice over give context to the archival video. The video was made to document the Cumbre de Santa Marta, a political meeting between Latin American heads of state that took place in Colombia in December 1980. It captures Napoleón Duarte's intense and disdainful expression, apparently directed toward Roldós, who the Salvadoran head of state refused to acknowledge on account of his public criticism of Duarte's alliance with the repressive

Salvadorian military. Duarte had been included in the summit with pressure from the U.S. government. Placed within the context of the previous material--the photos of the disappeared, which are held by their mourning family members decades later, and the seemingly infinite list of names on the Monumento a la Memoria y la Verdad in El Salvador---this archival document reinforces not only the gravity of the situation and the extent of the violence, but also Roldós' courage and resolve in actively supporting the protection of human rights in the region. Taking a vocal and active support on human rights was a risk that, the film suggests, had consequences. Responding to a public discourse that has emptied the figure of Roldós of political meaning, the film uses these archival documents to recover that significance by reinserting Roldós' actions into their charged international context.

Roldós' confrontation with Duarte was part of the larger ideological Cold War battlefield. As codirector Sarmiento explains in voice over in the film: "Cuando Roldós ayudó a los salvadoreños y los bolivianos, en realidad se estaba enfrentando la dictadura argentina." During the Carter Administration, which ran on a platform of human rights, Argentina took an active stance in supplying the anticommunist repressive apparatuses in the rest of Latin America with ideological and economic support. While Roldós was not a Marxist (because, as he stated, "El pueblo no está en la izquierda marxista"), his stance on human rights placed him in opposition with the interests of the antimarxist/pro-capitalist stance taken by the United States and their allies in Latin America—the repressive dictatorships that protected the interests of transnational capitalist ventures. By reintroducing these archival materials that speak to another concept of democracy that

was not complicit with U.S. and Southern Cone political and business interests, the film calls into question the consensus on liberal democracy as an ethical advancement and the one and only alternative to authoritarianism. It re-opens for the national and international public the dialogue about the meaning of the “return to democracy” period in Ecuador and the Americas.

Another of Roldós’ speeches that stands out in terms of its contribution to historical memory and its contemporary relevance is that which he gave in the days after a border conflict arose between Ecuador and Perú. With a firm but almost desperate tone, he spells out to the Ecuadorian public the great economic cost of the war. The public budget would be used to purchase arms from Israel “built under U.S. license” and “containing U.S.-made or -licensed components.” (Cody 1981). The film posits that the conflict between Ecuador and Perú was, in the words of Raúl Falconí, a “fabricated conflict” that was the result of intervention from the United States and the Southern Cone countries looking to destabilize Roldós’ presidency. Two days after Reagan’s inauguration, an unexpected attack of Peruvian forces on disputed territory along the border broke out. As the *Washington Post* article incorporated in the film notes, “The Reagan administration has given Israel an unusually swift go-ahead to sell its Kfir jet fighters to Ecuador, the first such approval under a shift from past policy banning the plane's sale to other countries, American and Israeli sources say” (Cody 1981). Roldós responds to this crisis that confronts his young and already troubled democracy by outlining the cost of the fighter planes, missiles, radars, etc. In his impacting rhetoric he asks the nation, “Sabeis vosotros cuánto vale, cuánto vale, un avión supersónico Mirage?”

Está por encima de los 300,000,000 de sucres. Uno, por encima de los 300,000,000 sucres. Y el avión sin armamento. Cada misil que tiene ese avión tiene un costo de 3,550,000 sucres. Cada misil. Y lleva dos.” The expenses go on and on, the amount of money, spelled out in such clear terms, leaves the listener in awe. “. . . Eso es lo que cuesta armar un país. . .” he concludes. His comments make an important connection for the public. Not only does the cost of arming the nation for the war cost the Republic a great deal of money, but also that money, although indirectly, goes toward the United States. That is to say, the United States, beyond ideological differences with Roldós’ politics, also had economic interests in the Perú-Ecuador conflict, and the removal of a president who was against further arming the country. The sale of arms was an important and often under-noticed aspect of the Cold War in Latin America. Pinochet, for example, accrued an incredible amount of wealth through arms sales. In fact, though it was after Pinochet had stepped down as president, the sale of weapons to Ecuador during the 1990s, when the country was in a military conflict with Perú, was illegal, but Chile made sales anyway (“Colonel’s Death” *NY Times* 2006). Weapons sales, as we see in both cases, are an integral aspect of the neoliberal power complex.

Finally, the redemptive image the film creates of Roldós by combining archival documents with voice over, the image of a leader who was committed to human rights and democracy, also paints the picture of a character within a tragic set of circumstances. He is portrayed as making decisions in time, albeit not always the ones that lead him to success—like, for example, deciding not to call a referendum and abolish the congress, even though the people show support for this act and even though he knows he has



important enemies working against him. The great prudence he shows, while humbling and admirable in some circumstances, also leads him into a trap. In his reading of the Grenada Revolution, David Scott similarly underlines the importance of contingency, unpredictability, and “susceptibility to political emotions (pathos) such as fear and anger and resentment” in understanding tragic action as free action, action made in awareness that “we cannot entirely calculate or control its final outcome” (51). Portraying Roldós in this fashion allows the viewer to conceive of this idea of a full “now”, governed on one hand by human action and on another on the contingency of circumstances in which that action occurs. For example, in the film, a family photograph of Roldós’s 40th birthday party is portrayed, the director explaining in voice over that this day—his birthday, November 5th, 1980, was also the day that Ronald Reagan and George Bush won the presidential elections by a landslide. The photograph functions as a segue to describe the grave disadvantage the Reagan’s administration represented for Roldós’ presidency—the tragic scenario within which Roldós choices would unfold. Whereas Carter reached out to Roldós and sought to create a positive relationship with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, Reagan fueled the Contras and invited Argentine dictator Jorge Videla as his first head of state in the White House. While Carter preached human rights, Reagan sought to eliminate restrictions on commerce and establish U.S. dominance in Latin America. By emphasizing history as an overlapping multitude of decisions, circumstances and consequences, the film incites the viewer to engage the contemporary silence of Roldós’ death as an outcome of this larger history, to consider this shady past as a definitive mark on the present, rather than a long-gone piece of history.

But in addition to setting this scenario, the photograph also contributes to the image of Roldós as a leader. Roldós and his young son Santiago, and his wife Martha Bucaram appear uninhibited in the photograph, which captures them in the midst of blowing out the candles on a large birthday cake while the other guests crowd around them, smiling enthusiastically as they watch. This photograph speaks to a sense of authenticity, to Roldós' integrity and simplicity, contrasted with the performance of civility enacted in clips dominated by elite military leaders, can be related to a discourse around democracy. One of the most significant contributions the film makes to historical memory—through its use of the archive—is that of rescuing Roldós' work, preserving his speeches, his image and ideas for the Ecuadorian public in the face of an official narrative that has systematically silenced his memory. It is not coincidental or merely ornamental that the film opens with “toque de silencio,” the melancholic and reflective song played at military funerals, playing over the “subdesarrollo” quote and leading into a 1970s video clip of masses in the street in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The film assumes a redemptive position to the past, working to honor the ideals that Roldós represented and speak out against the repression they faced and their erasure in the official history.

#### Reflexive Cinema and an Epistemology of Doubt

*La muerte de Jaime Roldós* opens with a simple quote: “Una de las señales del subdesarrollo es la incapacidad de relacionar una cosa con otra.” The quote is a line from the *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*, film (by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea), and book (by Edmundo Desnoes). *Memorias del subdesarrollo* is a film with symbolic status and the

significance of opening with this reference is multiple. *Memorias* is arguably one of the most famous Latin American films of all time and it represents not only the dialectical revolutionary cinema of Alea, but also, by extension, the Cuban Revolution and the inseparable nature of New Latin American Cinema and revolutionary ideals (anticapitalist and antiimperialist). By opening their film with this quote, directors Rivera and Sarmiento pay a certain homage to this cinematic tradition and ideological positioning. New Latin American Cinema was part and parcel of the revolutionary movements that opposed capitalist exploitation and cultural imperialism in the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s in Latin America. “Imperfect,” “third cinema” and the aesthetics of hunger represented an epistemological act of resistance to capitalism and its discourse and politics. But *Roldós* is made in the first two decades of the 2000s. Those acts of resistance did not see their utopias fulfilled and this time the camera is like the angel of History in Walter Benjamin’s IX thesis, looking back, from the neoliberal moment, at the ruins of those projects as one big catastrophe, giving voice to *los vencidos*. The archive (and archival documents) in many ways represents the “wreckage upon wreckage” of the past—the vestiges of the past that the filmmakers would like to make whole, but the discourse of progress keeps them from ever being able to put the pieces back together.

As the director is seen onscreen following Marina Roldós (sister to Jaime Roldós) through her home, where she keeps the president and Martha Bucaram’s photographs, books and other things, Sarmiento asks himself in voice over narration, “¿A quién le pertenece esta historia? ¿Quien debe hacerse cargo de abrir estas cajas?” (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013). He responds to himself, continuing in his voice over reflection by

explaining that “La historia oficial convirtió a la muerte de Roldós en un recuerdo privado, en la tragedia personal que vivió cada ecuatoriano el 24 de mayo de 1981.” (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013). He speaks slowly and his tone is reflective, growing in conviction as he comes to this conclusion. The national collective—in many ways the same collective represented by the revolutionary ideals of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and New Latin American cinema—was ruptured when Roldós’ death was silenced. The official history, the one told by the government and the history books, maintains that Roldós’ death was an accident. Therefore, other narratives that sustain that his death was the result of the political dynamics that defined the hemispherical and global history—narratives that relate one thing to another—were pushed aside, privatized, silenced by the official discourse. Roldós’ death and the silence surrounding it becomes symbolic of the privatization of the economy and the individualization of society. Echoing the irony of the quote from *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, photographer Francois Laso states, “Se dice que los ecuatorianos tenemos mala memoria. Pero no es que tenemos una falla en el chip...la memoria es política y el poder oculta lo que no le conviene” (Laso 2015). Just as Laso suggests, the film shows that it is not the *incapacity* of individuals to make connections that sustains so-called underdevelopment, but the dynamics of power, which the very discourse of development maintains. The film in fact both documents and represents the act of an individual (the filmmaker who appears on screen, albeit scarcely) relating one thing to another: the past (archival documents) with the present (memory story); the discourse of progress and the lived reality of loss, violation and impunity; an excess of archival documents with an inability to prove. In the process of creating these

tense connections, the film engages the viewer in *doubt*, a productive, political doubt that honors the ideals of futures past and questions the logic and actors that stood in the way of their fruition and then silenced or manipulated their legacy. The collective impulse of New Latin American Cinema may be fractured by the imposition of the neoliberal discourse and economy, but the individual still has the capacity to *doubt*, as the documentary filmmaker does in the film.

As the last chapter of the film (before the epilogue) comes to a close, archival footage of a large group of people rolls as slow, melancholy piano music plays. This group is made up of politicians, family members and friends who await the arrival of Martha Bucaram and Jaime Roldós' coffins at the airport runway in Guayaquil. Rather than capture the collective in a stationary extreme long shot, the footage uses slow pans to move over the multitude slowly and evenly from eye level in close-up and medium shots, pausing on the individual faces of those who wait in closed frames. The viewer senses a large collective but can only see one or two individuals at a time. Each one has a unique expression of confusion, grief, disbelief. The delayed speed of the camera movement and the faces themselves suggest a pause or suspension in time, a memory knot in the moment it is being formed. In voice over, the director asks, "¿Qué había pasado? ¿Qué hacer ahora? ¿Fue un accidente o un atentado?" (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013). He continues: "Vaciada de sentido político, extraída de la consecuencia de causas y efectos, la muerte de Jaime Roldós en estricto sentido no formaba parte de la historia" (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013). This shot reveals a moment when collective history made it into the personal experience—the individuals are clearly touched by the death of the

president and the other passengers on the plane--, but it also reveals the relegation of this memory to the private realm.

The director's voice takes on a more decided tone as the archival footage changes to shots of Roldós children coming off the airplane this same day; their somber faces resignedly looking away from the camera as they move through the people. He contrasts the earlier images of a fractured, confused collective with the image of Roldós' children, who have maintained doubt throughout their lives about their parents' death and the accident thesis, at times in the form of resigned and active silence, others through direct intervention via theatre, politics, and the study of economics (the respective livelihoods of Santiago, Martha and Diana Roldós). Through these individuals, he seems to say, the Ecuadorian public, and the viewer, can take a lesson. He states, "Asumirse como los hijos de dos víctimas del genocidio latinoamericano equivale a rescatar ese lado político de la duda, recuperar el carácter subversivo del compromiso de sus padres y afirmar que ese compromiso forma parte de la historia. Al menos de una historia." As Sarmiento speaks these words, extreme long shot from bird's eye view of the president and his wife's funeral. The masses are seen moving through the street and the direct sound, layered over the director's commentary, captures the refrain, "El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido." (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013). By taking a critical view, by practicing doubt and looking to make connections where silences abound in the hegemonic discourse, the individual has the power to "abrir las cajas" of the past and move towards a recuperation of the collective by facing up to the pending debts with history, maintained in place by an official discourse that provides impunity for those in power. With the political power of

the collective truncated by this discourse, the most accessible power the collective has now is in the individual capacity to doubt, to bring into question the official story that calls Roldós' death an accident. *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*, and I would argue much of Ecuadorian documentary cinema, as an institution and as a group of texts, reflects this circumstance. Only through the validation of the individual's experience and capacity to doubt can the collective begin to recuperate its usurped power. This is so because it is only by doubting discourse, which contradicts experience, that one can restore the tragedy, officially understood as *accident*, to its proper place among historical context—where subversive political actions had consequences. The power to doubt legitimizes the lived experience of the oppressed. The collective can be restored when individuals become aware of how the crises of the past unite them.

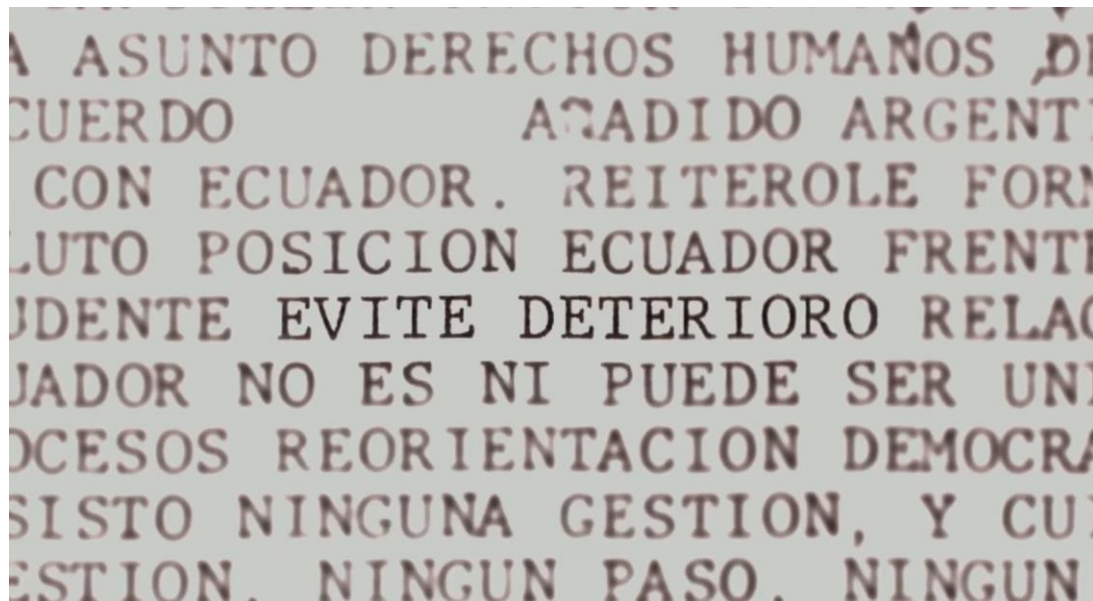
The narrative of doubt highlights the contradiction between the official story of an accident caused by the pilot's error and the story of assassination told by family members, journalists and high level government officials who worked with Roldós. Rivera and Sarmiento utilize a combination of documentary modes to approach the concept of doubt. I argue that the balance between these modes reveals the historical conundrum they face: the desire to reveal the truth about Roldós' death from within a historical discourse of progress that refuses to recognize that truth and ruptures the collective voice. ¿The film, like most expository documentaries, “[takes] shape around commentary directed toward the viewers; images serve as illustration or counterpoint. Nonsynchronous sound prevails” (34, 35). The majority of the archival documents/footage are layered with nonsynchronous sound, most prominently the

director's commentary. While the relationship of doubt established through the contrast between archival documents and testimonies prevails, the documents themselves also serve to inform the viewer about the context of Roldós' death. The expository nature of the film is related to its didactic and revelatory intentions: to re-introduce this national history to Ecuadorians and to audiences across the globe, to uncover Roldós' death not as an accident but as a political assassination that formed part of the Cold War context; to re-insert Roldós into history. Through archival footage of presidential speeches, manifestations, official meetings and documents, which comprise more than half of the film, this narrative gives a detailed historical account of the period leading up to Roldós presidency—the dictatorship, the discovery of oil in Ecuador's Amazon region, as well as the alternative political and social platform Roldós represented.

A few examples help illustrate the expository approach of the film. The official correspondence via telegram between the Ecuadorian ambassador in Argentina and Raúl Falconí, Ecuadorian delegate to the Organization of American States, highlights the dissent to Roldós within the Ecuadorian government. Those letters reveal the aggressive pressure of the Argentine dictatorship on Ecuadorian politics, and the brazen dismissal of violence that the “anti-subversive” ideology engaged in. As Roldós' ambassador to O.A.S., Falconí advocated for accountability of human rights violations under the Latin American dictatorships. In a close-up during an interview, the camera observes Falconí's worn face as he leafs through one of several large binders. He pauses at the telegram and begins to read from it. The camera cuts to a close up of the document, demonstrating the date and all-caps text typical of a telegram, and then cuts again to a series of detail shots



edited in such a way that key phrases are highlighted: “REITEROLE FORMA EXPRESA/EVITE DETERIERO/NINGUNA GESTION/NINGUN PASO/NINGUN PROYECTO” (Figure 2). The Ecuadorian ambassador in Argentina expressed the host country’s threat to end relations if Falconí’s complaints to the O.A.S. about human rights violations in Argentina continued. An additional letter from the ambassador is framed in the same way. A close up of the document, stamped several times with “IMPORTANTE-URGENTE,” is followed by detail shots of the text while the director narrates the contents of the letter in a paused voice, accompanied by melancholic acoustic guitar. He narrates the content of the letter, quoting specific phrases as he advances. For the ambassador, he explains, it is absurd for Ecuador to take on a national policy based on human rights. Given the “peso continental” of Chile and Argentina, it is preferable, instead, to maintain friendly relations, regardless of human rights violations in the countries, which, “nacen de explicables circunstancias.” To do the contrary, writes the ambassador, would be mistaking the state’s responsibilities, disregarding the hierarchy of needs of “un país pequeño y subdesarrollado.” The materiality of the documents, combined with their content, indicate that indeed much archival “evidence” exists to learn about the context in which Roldós’ death occurred, if one is willing to look for it. Because the close-up shots are framed so as to show only small fragments of the text while codirector-narrator Sarmiento reads from letter, it is evident that the visual is in place more to emphasize, on one hand, revealing words or phrases, and on the other hand to highlight for the viewer the existence of the official bureaucratic document.



**Figure 2.** Remediation of archival documents “EVITE DETERIORO” (*La Muerte de Jaime Roldós* 2013).

The close-ups of the piece of paper isolates the meaning of the text from the actual object, which calls to mind the act that it represents: Ecuadorian ambassador sat down to write out in very explicit terms a warning that reveals an entire ideology of progress in which development is valued over human rights. Ecuador, under this ideology, has no place to intervene in “politics,” but should seek out the most viable path out of “underdevelopment.”

Another important document that resurfaces through the film in a similar sequences of close ups is a C.I.A. document stating that Ecuador’s Armed Forces joined Operation Condor—“una asociación criminal de las fuerzas armadas de los países del Cono Sur”—in January, 1978, months before Roldós became president. The covert campaign was backed by the United States and sought to both gather intelligence on, and

eliminate, individuals or groups that interfered with neoliberal policies. Apart from Ecuadorian Armed Force's participation in the pact, the document indicates that an Argentine military official—Luis Francisco Nigra—was assigned to Quito to supervise the installation of Operation Condor's telecommunications network in Ecuador. The many black-boxed regions of this C.I.A. document call attention to withheld information: what else does the document reveal, but we aren't allowed to know? The director, reiterating this dynamic of power in the archive, reveals that the Ecuadorian Defense Ministry reported having no information regarding Luis Francisco Nigra, or the C.I.A. document that stipulates his work in Ecuador. This archival document is key for national and international audiences in that it establishes Ecuador's inclusion in Operation Condor: putting any controversy regarding Roldós' death aside, the public can be sure that the surrounding context included both internal strife—as indicated by the Ecuadorian ambassador's position—and international strife marked by Cold War power dynamics—as indicated by Ecuador's subjection to Operation Condor. That C.I.A. document, although covered in black boxes, exists. In March of 2015, in the wake of the film's release, Ecuadorian Attorney General Galo Chiriboga confirmed that declassified CIA documents confirm that Ecuador was indeed a part of Operation Condor (El Comercio, 3/11/15). While some of these documents had been available previously, recognition from the Ecuadorian Attorney General represented an important institutional step in addressing the past.

The film goes on to explain the protagonist role of Argentina in implementing PLAN VIOLA, authored by Roberto Viola, Army Commander In Chief and later dictator

of Argentina. The plan was presented to a summit of Army commanders in the Americas in Bogotá in 1979. It proposed to combine military efforts and intelligence in order to stop the spread of communism and “subversive” movements (Galarza 101). Information about Plan Viola is communicated in the film principally through interviews with general Richelieu Levoyer, commander of the Ecuadorian army during Roldós’ presidency. During the interview, Levoyer holds in his hands the book *Quiénes mataron a Roldós*, by Jaime Galarza Zavala, showing it to the camera clearly several times. While the film does not comment on the book, it clearly served as a support document during the research period and it is the first and one of few texts to counter the narrative of Roldós’ death as an “accident”. In this way, it is also an important document in the film. *Quiénes mataron a Roldós* (as does Levoyer in his testimony in the film) asserts that those countries that did not ratify the Plan Viola document, he explains, were faced with high-profile deaths in aviation accidents: Ecuadorian Minister of Defense Rafael Rodríguez (November 20, 1979, one week after the summit in Bogotá); President Jaime Roldós (May 24, 1981); General Marco Aurelio Subía (May 24, 1981); Peruvian General Rafael Hoyos Rubio (June, 1981); Omar Torrijos, head of state of Panamá and close ally of Roldós (July 31, 1981).

There are no official documents discussing Plan Viola in the film, but, as is the case of Officer Francisco Luis Nigra, there are documents that shine light on the context and possible outcomes of the plan. The photograph of the official funeral of Rafael Rodríguez, for example, depicts the heads of state seated before the caskets of Rodríguez and the others who died in the plane crash. The camera closes in on Roldós, Vice

President Hurtado, his wife Margarita Pérez Pallares, and Admiral Raul Sorroza Encalada as Sarmiento narrates in voice off, explaining that with Rodríguez' death the influence of officers who supported Plan Viola grew. All of them, not surprisingly, have somber expressions. A close up of the photo narrows in on Raúl Sorroza, Commander of the Navy. This photograph serves as the first of a trail of documents that tie together a story about Sorroza, creating an archive that, by necessity, suggests, hints and wonders more than it proclaims.

In a conference talk at the EDOC colloquial in 2013, Manolo Sarmiento remarked the following about the production: “Fue necesario que [un colega] me dijera esta frase, que me deprimió por unos días. Me dijo: ‘eres un prisionero de tu investigación. Olvídate de ella y empieza a hacer una película.’ Fue un momento muy importante en el proceso de hacer *Roldós*.” (Sarmiento, “Irrupción del archivo” 168). In an interview, the director explains that at the beginning of the *Roldós* project, he and co-director Lisandra Rivera shared their story with Patricio Guzmán. When Manolo spoke to Guzmán, Guzmán asked if they believed that Roldós had been assassinated as part of Plan Condor. Yes, they did, Manolo replied. Sarmiento shares Guzmán's response: “Te creo, Manolo. Mataron a todos, ¿por qué no le van a matar a él? Entonces, eso dalo por resuelto y cuenta otras cosas” (Sarmiento 2015). Guzmán also told them that there would always be someone in the public who would not believe, so it was important to go beyond the goal of proving his assassination, or finding those guilty for the deaths (Sarmiento 2015). The aspect of the film that transcends the direct question of “accident or assassination” is the power of doubt, or as Echeverría states, the power to reaffirm “use value,” the value of experience,

even while having to live under the imposed dynamics of power that define official history.

It is by combining the expository approach with the interactive and reflexive that the directors manage to balance the three stories they look to tell—that of the denunciation/assassination; that of the personal memory and experience of their friends Martha, Diana and Santiago Roldós; and that of the contradiction between official history and lived experience, the story of doubt. Take the abovementioned scenarios for example, which reveal information about the context of Roldós’ death through the use of physical, archival documents, as well as through interviews with ambassador Raúl Falconí, and army commander Richelieu Levoyer. During the interviews, Sarmiento is occasionally visible on screen and his voice can be heard from outside the camera frame as the conversations advance. Characteristic of an interactive text, the film “[draws its] social actors into direct encounter with the filmmaker” (Nichols *Representing Reality* 47). Accordingly, within the interviews that form a significant portion of the film, “the voice of the filmmaker addresses the social actors on screen rather than the spectator” (Nichols *Representing Reality* 47). That being said, even though the presence of the filmmaker is carefully and selectively revealed to remind the viewer of the director as the orchestrating force of the investigation, interview material tends to serve more to illustrate information the director wishes to communicate—vis a vis the testimony of the social subject—and less to highlight the social interaction between director and subject. There are a few interesting exceptions throughout the film, in which the interaction between the filmmaker and social subject becomes tense and, in this sense, revelatory of the argument

of doubt. However, even these examples are framed within the concept of the filmmaker's quest, his journey to reveal and reflect on the circumstances and meaning of the death of Jaime Roldós, which brings to the forefront the reflexive mode of representation that I argue is most central to the film.

Within the film, Sarmiento is portrayed as he searches out documents and individuals who have direct experience with the documents and who knew Roldós personally. On screen, Sarmiento conducts detective-like research, tracking down one person after the next who may have information about the case. In fact, behind the scenes, Sarmiento and Rivera dedicated more than seven years to researching the Roldós case and conducted interviews and research in Bolivia, Argentina, El Salvador, and Guatemala. The directors also developed a close friendship with the Roldós family and this relationship is felt within the film, especially in the interviews between Sarmiento and Santiago Roldós. Unlike the clandestine projects of film collectives that produced New Latin American Cinema documentaries like *Hora de los hornos* or *Batalla de Chile*, the filmmakers made the films as individuals, rather than members of political groups or on behalf of specific social agendas. Produced by Rivera, the film received funding from the Ecuadorian National Cinema Council, the Ecuadorian Ministries of Culture and Education, Ibermedia, Arte International Prize, IDFA Bertha Fund, Foundation AlterCiné, and DocBuenosAires (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013). So while the film was funded largely by Ecuadorian, Latin American and European government institutions, it was made by independent auteur filmmakers who spoke not on behalf of any party-

political cause or in conjunction with a movement, but on the basis of their personal research and reflection (León 2019 14).

There are several ways that the film demonstrates self-consciousness in regard to its own process and status as a film. Bill Nichols states that, “Whereas the great preponderance of documentary production concerns itself with talking about the historical world, the reflexive mode addresses the question of *how* we talk about the historical world” (*Representing Reality* 56, 57). One aspect of *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* that poses the question of *how to tell* is the on-screen documentation of the research process, following the director on his trip through Latin America where he interviews individuals who worked with or were familiar with Roldós. For example, in the sequence describing how Roldós’ foreign policy made Ecuador a safe haven for political exiles of the authoritarian dictatorships of Latin America (because it stressed the protection of human rights), the film incorporates interactive/participatory shots of the filmmaker in a car in San Salvador, where he visits the Monumento a la Memoria y la Verdad and meets with the family members of desaparecidos, filming them in silence as they hold the photographs of their loved ones. As the director enters the city, an intertitle “San Salvador/El Salvador” appears in the corner and the camera is placed in the back seat of a car, revealing just the profile of the director in the passenger seat. Later, the handheld camera at eye level insinuates the gaze of the Sarmiento as he observes the Monumento a la Memoria y la Verdad. The same backseat car shot is repeated when the director arrives in La Paz, where he interviews a MIR militant who sought exile in Quito during Roldós’ government.



A similar shot, taken at eye level from a car driving through the streets of Buenos Aires, introduces a sequence in which the director visits the Argentine Ministry of Defense in search of information about Luis Francisco Nigra, the Argentine Military Officer who, according to a declassified C.I.A. document, was sent to monitor the Operation Condor telecommunications system in Ecuador. Handheld camera footage portrays the filmmaker as he enters the Ministry of Defense and then arrives in an office. He is seen taking off his backpack and another bag and then waiting, gazing at the Luis Francisco Nigra file, which slightly withered and marked with several notes, sits on the desk at a distance of a few feet from the director. In voice over, the director explains that at first it was not clear whether or not he would be able to open the file. In the diegetic sound, one can hear the employee of the Ministry signaling and stating that at least he could confirm the existence of the file. This scene highlights the Archive as a dynamics of power with a set of regulations. Just the fact that the file is visible, right there before the director, but that he must still wait for permission underlines the bureaucratic, imposed and selective nature of discourse that governs the archive. The filmmaker asks again if he may see the document—not film it, he clarifies, just see it—and the Ministry official tells him that they will see, that he is waiting to hear from the legal division (Figure 3). This transaction demonstrates how the narrator’s possibility of *telling* the story of Roldós’ death is subject to the power structure that controls the archive—“un tema delicado” especially when one is seeking military information. Eventually, the director is granted access to the file and an over-the shoulder, eyelevel shot captures the director’s gaze as he looks over the photograph of Nigra and the other documents

including official communications to and from the lieutenant. The viewer sees the director's hands as he holds the documents in his hands and examines them. It is as if the filmmaker not only wants to underline the imposed barriers that silence Roldós's story, but also provide the viewer with an image of archives and Archives, as if to reinforce that there is always some paper trail, some trace of the past, encouraging the viewer to value and seek out archives and question those bodies that control them. The file demonstrated Nigra's involvement in Operation Condor, but the documents related to the time he spent in Ecuador was left out, because it was classified as strategic military information, for national security reasons. This silence—this hole in the archive—speaks by suggesting the absence of the documents, like the absence of the bodies of the disappeared, as the result of violent repression.



**Figure 3.** Director Manolo Sarmiento at the Argentine Ministry of Defense, awaiting permission to open classified Luis Francisco Nigra file (*La muerte de Jaime Roldós* 2013).

Another instance in which the director visits an official archive (though the institution is not specified) occurs in Ecuador, where Sarmiento visits a controlled-environment archive with rolling stacks. The director explains in voice over that two key documents are conspicuously absent from the national archive--the president's letter firing Navy Commander Raúl Sorrosa's and an intelligence report outlining a possible threat against the president's life—in spite of the fact that several witnessed in the Parliament's investigation testified to having seen them. As he speaks, the viewer sees an attendant in a white lab coat walk the director through walls of binders. She indicates to him where to find the "Caso Roldós" section and he retrieves a box. The camera once again focuses on the director's hands, this time with protective gloves, as he looks over the items in the file box. There are an abundance of documents, even testimonies to the existence of the firing and the intelligence report, and yet those documents are missing. The president's secretary, top advisor and the ambassador before the Organization of American States all reference the assassination plot intelligence report; numerous declarations regarding the documents are on file with the National Congress, but the intelligence report and Roldós' order for the firing of Sorrosa are nowhere to be found. The *disappeared* documents, their physical absence from this carefully preserved collection, speaks to the constructed nature of the Archive and reiterate the film's political embrace of aporia.

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida states, "There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its

interpretation” (Derrida 4). By bringing to the screen images of national archives, the directors at once call attention to the importance of the archive to democracy—access to the documents preserving stories about the shared past is necessary for citizens to participate in an informed way in their collective experience as a nation—and to the political powers that control that access, denying Ecuadorians the truth about Roldós’ death. What official history terms “the return to democracy” actually took an anti-democratic direction when Roldós died and the circumstances were covered up.

This sequence also makes a comment on the violent impulse of the Archive more generally, which, as an extension of power, is as destructive as it is constructive. Just as Derrida claims, “The archive takes place at the place of the originary and structural breakdown of the said memory.” The directors of *Roldós* seem to be calling attention to the aporia that the film itself must reconcile with: given that the very discourse that should provide legitimate evidence about the past works against itself, disproving and erasing memory, more than throwing light on the past and creating collective memory(11). In this sense, the incorporation of archival documents and the representation of visits to Archives in *Roldós* contribute to the reflexive nature of the film and the epistemology of doubt the film proposes as a political reaction to the silence surrounding Roldós’ death. On the connection between the reflexive mode and doubt, Bill Nichols states:

“The reflexive mode emphasizes epistemological doubt. It stresses the deformative intervention of the cinematic apparatus in the process of representation. Knowledge is not only localized but itself subject to question. Knowledge is hyper-situated, placed not only in relation to the filmmaker’s physical presence, but also in relation to the fundamental issues about the nature of the world, the structure and function of language, the authenticity of

documentary sound and image, the difficulties of verification, and the status of empirical evidence in Western culture” (61).

One sequence that highlights the logic of doubt is the group of shots that analyze the photograph from the funeral of Ecuadorian Minister of Defense Rafael Rodríguez Palacios, which zeros in on Admiral Raul Sorroza Encalada, is followed by a shot of the codirector Sarmiento in a library, leafing through an old newspaper. The camera assumes the gaze of the director and provides a closeup of a two article titles: one on the death of Rodríguez and another covering Sorrosa’s visit to Argentina. As Sarmiento explains in voice over that Sorrosa traveled the same day Rodríguez Palacios died, black and white footage of a military ceremony rolls. At first glance, the black and white footage appears banal. Through voice over commentary, however, the viewer learns that it was taken during Navy Commander’s visit to Buenos Aires, where he met with Argentine Admiral Lambruschini and the rest of the Argentine Military Junta, including General Roberto Viola. The video shows all of the men in pristine military uniform; the women wear chic formal dresses and Lambruschini’s wife has on a long string of pearls. Medals are exchanged; laughs are exchanged as Lambruschini and Sorroza smoke a cigarette. Close up shots reveal the details of intricate shining medals and just before the last shot comes to an end, the camera zooms in on Sorroza’s smiling face. There is an air of triumph and rigid festivity among the participants in this “retrato de las alianzas secretas del poder militar latinoamericano, que se tejían a las espaldas de los jóvenes gobiernos democráticos.” The stiffness of the occasion contrasts starkly with the image of Roldós dancing with the masses or blowing out the candles of his birthday cake.

It’s clear from this footage that Sorroza was negotiating with the Argentine

dictatorship, which, as Sarmiento points out in voice over, “had already assassinated more than 30,000 people in Argentina.” It’s also known that the Argentine dictatorship at the time led the advances of Operation Condor, spearheaded Plan Viola, and was known to have sent official Luis Francisco Nigra to Quito. The video sequence does not prove Sorrosa’s involvement in any assassination; other than reiterate his relationship with the military junta, it doesn’t give many hard, crime-solving facts. But it does leave the viewer with a very particular *feeling*. The people in it are celebrating, but there is a clear rigidity to their movements and interactions, only compounded by the closed framing of the shots chosen, and the erratic transition between them. Perhaps especially because the soundtrack includes in this sequence an extradiegetic, low, hollow-sounding echo—the sound of emptiness—; and because the voices of the people at the party are silenced; the sinister acts that have been alluded to—the human rights violations---seem to bubble up underneath the affluence and décor captured. Why was this meeting filmed? The film’s research team found the footage more than thirty years after it was filmed, at Museo del Cine Pablo Ducrós Hicken, which is dedicated to the preservation of Argentine Cinema.

What purpose did this document originally serve? Interjected between shots from the archival video, the film includes a contemporary shot from the very hall where the dinner and medals exchange took place: a handheld camera approaches the hall in a tracking shot, looking around the wide open, empty space, proffering both a sense of relief and a sense of doubling, as if in spite of themselves the viewers were to superimpose the bodies and murmurs of the previous shots onto the space. Even more than hard facts, this sequence offers a sense of truth regarding time: Roldós’ death and

the larger context of Cold War conflict is a past that has not been redeemed, that still hangs about, unresolved. In his chapter, “The Question of Evidence,” Bill Nichols refers to a turn away from dogmatic voice in recent documentary films, citing Werner Herzog’s concept of “ecstatic truth” that strikes, “[setting] out not to show but to move” (*Speaking Truths With Film* 107). This is the same sort of impulse at play in the directors’ remediation of this footage: “a form of speech that can predispose us to see anew and, in seeing anew, to make a radical shift in what is both true and still a mystery” (108). Through the silencing of the diegetic sound, the addition of an extradiegetic echo and the splicing of the footage with contemporary video of the empty hall, the directors embrace this shift in rhetoric toward “radical doubt” (110). Additionally, the scene offers a sense of the systematic but illogical and unethical nature of totalitarian power—like the ceremonial exchange of metals. The very making and archiving of the film documenting the ceremony, the formal clothing and gestures, the Argentine dictatorship, the disappearances, and likely the assassination of Roldós, were all carried out through careful planning, masked by the façade of order, civility and progress.

### Questioning the Narrative

In addition to the physical presence of Sarmiento as a co-director on screen, and the documentation of the process of archival research, first person voice over narration gives the film its overarching reflexive frame. In the very first spoken line of the film, layered over footage from the Ecuadorian democratic elections of 1978, Sarmiento asks, “¿Dónde comienza esta historia?” (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013). By starting the film with a question, the directors establish an openness to the archive and its role as evidence. Bill

Nichols notes that: “When we recognize that evidence emerges as a response to the questions we pose, we are in a position to recognize the ambiguity of that evidence: with a different question, different evidence, and different arguments, different conclusions would have emerged” (Nichols 2016 110). In the first chapter of the film, archival documents establish the historical context of Ecuador in the 1960s, while through voice over, the director-narrator introduces seven possible beginnings for the story of Roldós’ death and the silence that followed. If the day on which Roldós won the presidency is one possible ending, the director asks us to think further back, stating in voice over, “Una vez más pienso que esta historia podría comenzar antes, mucho antes” (*Roldós* 2013). He refers to the student uprising in Guayaquil in 1959 that was violently oppressed by the military, resulting in an undetermined number of deaths. The newspaper photographs of the bodies of those killed are framed within the director’s statement that “esa matanza quedó en la impunidad, pero ese día tomó conciencia política toda una generación,” and then linked to the photograph of a young Roldós speaking into a microphone. In other words, the director speaks to the viewer, saying, ‘here is a diversity of images, of sounds, of archives that speak to our shared past. As the director of the film, I ask myself what to make of this story and how to tell it? How should the return to democracy period be understood?’ Because the film is structured as a question, it embarks upon creating a new interpretive framework for the past. The director-narrator’s first-person voice is key to stitching the framework together with the viewer. It provides the questioning logic of the film and guides the evidentiary editing pattern, taking the viewer from topic to topic in the larger argument that Roldós’ assassination was part of the hemispheric transition



away from a period of anti-imperialist national and pan Latin-American socialist movements and into neoliberalism through repressive ideology and violent apparatuses of control.

Sarmiento's voice also incorporates an affective reflection, clearly an example of "... the multidimensional, embodied voice of films that speak to viewers in the hopes of moving them, predisposing them, inducing a sense of political and historical consciousness that represents a struggle toward going beyond established boundaries by means of a truth that had escaped awareness" (Nichols 107). The director's narration tends to be paused and intentional and he uses the first person often, as he did in the earlier example, "una vez más, me pregunto..." (*Roldós* 2013). The director's generational sense of connection with the Martha and Jaime Roldós' children, as well as through his friendship with them, provides the framework for the affective connection the film develops. In fact, as the journey to the past begins, the director, as described earlier, is travelling in a van with Martha and Santiago Roldós, to the site of the plane crash in Southern Ecuador. As if setting the scene for the beginning of the story, Sarmiento states, "Roldós y su esposa Martha Bucaram tuvieron tres hijos—Martha, Diana y Santiago. Yo tenía más o menos la misma edad que ellos" (*Roldós* 2013). Notice again, the use of the first person voice--"yo tenía más o menos la misma edad que ellos" to connect the "I" to the story of the Roldós siblings. Because Sarmiento refers here to the age the siblings had when their mother and father died, the description brings to bear the strong feelings people tend to associate with their families and the loss of loved ones. This history is not a purely political or historical investigation, rather it is also the story of a family broken

apart by tragedy. By relating this affective legacy to his own subjectivity, and connecting to it in a personal way, the director's voice invites the viewer to do the same; it "seeks to convey what it feels like to experience oppressive, violent conditions and to emerge with an altered sense of self by being placed in relation to others who pass before us" (Nichols 108).

The first-person voice also establishes a self-conscious construction of the narrative. For example, consider the director's voice over, narrating as observational landscape shots portray the family members of those who died in the plane crash at Huayrapungo walking contemplatively through the altiplanos. Marked by a tone of contemplation, he states,

He pasado varios años leyendo documentos y entrevistando a muchas personas, tratando de entender el sentido de tantas pistas y sospechas, pero a medida que avanza la historia solo se hacía más compleja e inabarcable. Cuando Santiago y sus hermanas me dijeron que ellos pensaban que sus padres habían muerto dos veces, pensé que ésta era quizás la mejor manera de entender, y contar, esta historia (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013).

Not only is the director revealing the obstacles he has faced in constructing a narrative, but he signals that he has foregone the intention of a complete, cohesive account of Roldós' death. Instead, he chooses to underscore and incorporate the understanding of Roldós' children by telling the story in two parts—the first death as the result of his stance on human rights and national sovereignty, his actions as having political consequences—and the second part the manipulation of his legacy by Abdalá Bucaram, their maternal uncle who in 1996 would assume the presidency of the nation on the PRE ticket, or Ecuadorian Roldosista Party (Partido Roldosista Ecuatoriano) the political party

he founded in 1983, two years after Roldós' death. The first death is more political in nature, whereas the second death is more personal and affective, given that Bucaram, his mother's brother was a very close part of his family life, "el tío predilecto," as Santiago Roldós notes with irony in the film. Abdalá Bucaram took advantage of his connection to Jaime Roldós in order to gain political support. He coopted Roldós' name and political agenda and made a mockery of his ideals by involving himself in corruption scandals and behaving in an irrational way. The film's narrative is presented as the director's decision to understand this event through both a historical political perspective and an emotional, familial perspective. As he closes this statement, the camera lingers on a message that a visitor to the area had chipped onto the rocks, "Roldós viva la patria." Rock fills the entire frame and the handheld camera lingers there, the shot lasting long enough for the viewer to read the rocks and pause to think about the meaning. This kind of street/public art amplifies the viewer's sense of present tense, *lo en-sitio*, where one can observe that which survives of the past in the present, marked in the physical world. It also demonstrates that whoever left that message willed Roldós into the world of collective memory in the geological, material surroundings.

Bill Nichols claims that voice is the channel through which documentary film "acknowledges its subject, and audience, as its equal, not its object, target, victim, or tool" (Nichols 106). He clarifies that voice speaks through both "verbal commentary" and the image and that "film speaks through its imagery as readily as through its verbal commentary" (108). Because the voice over narration is read over this image, the viewer associates the gaze of the camera as the gaze of the director. In this way, the viewer, for

the duration of the shot, for the duration for which they *see* through the directors' camera lens, relates to the subjectivity of the director and asks themselves the same questions, whether they draw the same conclusions or not. The above example demonstrates how the two work together to address the viewer on a plane of mutual recognition, or ethics. The reflexivity required for a director to speak from their first person voice through images and sounds helps to establish a dialogue among others. Nichols maintains that "[r]eflexivity and consciousness-raising go hand in hand because it is through an awareness of form and structure and its determining effects that new forms and structures can be brought into being, not only in theory, or aesthetically, but in practice, socially. What is need not be" (67). Therefore, the first person voice over narration and first person gaze play an important role in creating a self-reflexive film that incites doubt in its viewers in a way that ignites new political potentialities.

*La Muerte de Jaime Roldós*, like *Con Mi Corazón en Yambo*, for example, captures video archive of government officials (General Sorrosa Encalada in *Roldós*, and León Febrés Cordero, in *Yambo*) receiving honorary sashes. As an official helps place the sash over the president's shoulders, Febrés Cordero gets frustrated and awkwardly removes the sash to place it on himself once again. This small and seemingly irrelevant detail mocks political theatrics generally and Febrés Cordero's image as tough and controlling specifically. Similarly, *Roldós* includes a question-and-answer session with President Ronald Reagan the night he assumed his presidency. In the film, a journalist mentions that Jimmy Carter had given human rights a very high priority and asks if Reagan's will make human rights in the Third and Fourth world countries a high priority.

Reagan states that “turning away from friendly countries because of ‘some facet of some issue’ of human rights is impractical” (La Muerte de Jaime Roldós). Because this clip is placed in dialogue with others that underline the more than 30,000 disappeared in Argentina, the civil war in El Salvador and, of course, the assassination of Roldós, Reagan’s stance on human rights assumes a very dark undertone, an additional meaning.

### Silences, the Writing of History and the Logic of Progress

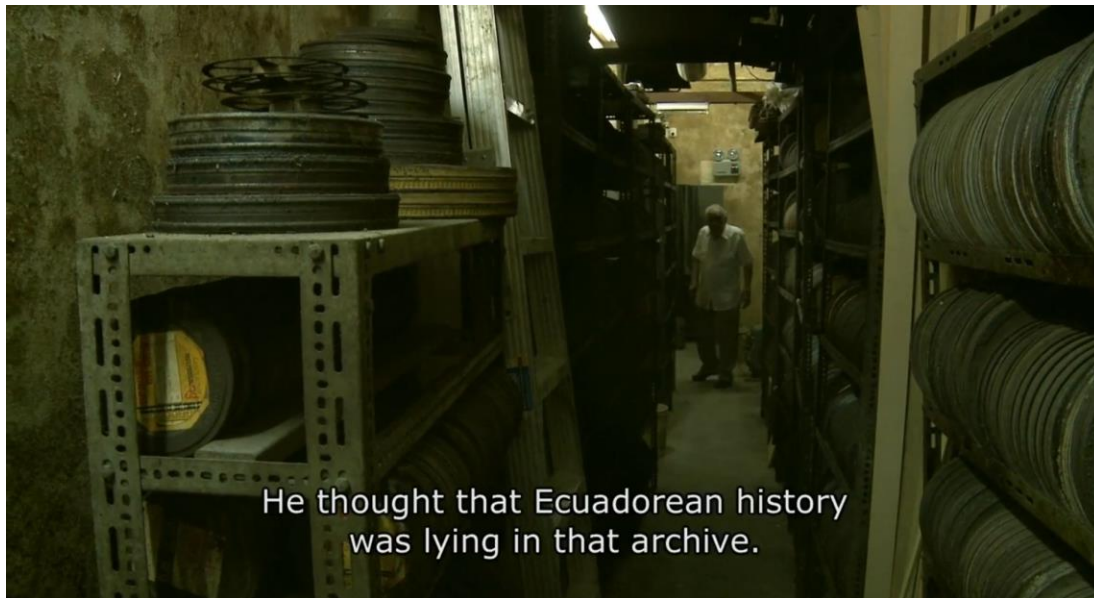
At the center of this documentary you will find these questions: how to tell *this* history, the story of Jaime Roldós’ death? Where to begin? Whose story is it to tell? Why it impossible to tell the complete story using the official archive? What is behind the silences around his story? One interesting example of this interrogation of historical discourse and its silences is when the director interviews Edgar Palacios, the nephew of the deceased Minister of Defense, Rafael Rodríguez Palacios, who died in an airplane crash just weeks after he chose not to agree the repressive Viola Plan. Edgar Palacios is a music composer and when the director interviews him, Palacios is at a big band concert, playing his trumpet. While they talk, band members can be heard conversing loudly and mulling around in the background, giving the whole interview the tone of listening in on someone’s gossip at a party. In a closeup, handheld shot, the camera shows Palacios sitting down during the interview. He explains that someone he knows once told him that they felt great remorse about the Minister of Defense’s death; he pauses to repeat and reflect on the word, “remordimiento”/(remorse, regret), but will not reveal who it was. The interview ends abruptly, marked by Palacios standing up to leave. The director

appears at the edge of the frame, and he can be heard asking, “Quién fue que te dijo que tenía remordimiento?” Palacios smiles and says “he can’t tell... someday maybe... it was someone too high up.” The director, off screen insists, “Pero dínos, quién era?” as the camera registers Palacios’ growing discomfort, fidgeting with his hands in his pockets. The director insists. Palacios says no, looks away and then remains silent, the camera lingering a little longer to hang on to his silence. This is one of the most interactive sequences in the film; the director appears on screen and rather than coolly listening and observing as he does during many interviews, here he pushes, gets more impassioned. Sarmiento wants the information, but even though he was willing to bring the subject up and chismear, making suggestions in what felt like an intimate conversation, Palacios won’t speak out loud the name of the military official who told him (privately) about his remorse for the Defense Minister’s death. The scene highlights the relegation of the truth regarding the death of the Minister (and by proxy Roldós) to the private realm, and how this understanding has been incorporated into social norms, the archive of the repertoire. Even though most agree in private that their deaths were state-sponsored assassinations, some unspoken rule keeps them from proclaiming that truth officially, in public.

The epilogue of the film also focuses on silences as it addresses these questions about the writing of history and specifically, the role of cinema in portraying the history of the country. In this chapter, the director visits the private archive of Gabriel Tramontana, a prominent cinema producer who filmed, but never made public, footage of the massacre in Guayaquil, June 2 and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1959. Instead, he handed the footage over to President Ponce, who had ordered the repression of the demonstrations. This event was

presented early on in the film as formative to Roldós' commitment to the public, to his populist approach and commitment to human rights. As he interviews Tramontana in his office, which houses 100s of reels and other cinematic documents from Ecuador's past, the director comments that while the newspapers report only 20 deaths, the number of dead in the Guayaquil massacre is popularly known to be in the 100s. Tramontana nods his head, affirming the latter, but when the director asks directly, "¿cuántos son?" he remarks evasively, "son más que 20" (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013). Once again, the unspoken, the seemingly unspeakable, hangs conspicuously in the air. The director asks, "qué se veía en las imágenes?" and Tramontana tells him it was horrendous, affirming that the footage included bodies being dumped into garbage trucks. But when the director explains that he doesn't understand, why, as a newsreel journalist Tramontana did not reveal the truth, Tramontana explains that he was just getting started in his career and that President Ponce was doing important things for the progress of the country, opening doors for filmmakers like Tramontana. The president told him to show whomever he liked...and then face the consequences. With that statement, Tramontana explains, "me puso la clave" (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013). Sitting in his old-fashioned office, dressed in a way characteristic of another era in Guayaquil, carefully combed white hair, gold watch, light white guayabera, Tramontana himself seems to represent a living archive who holds many silences and many stories about the past. Observational shots of Tramontana's office reveal rows and rows of film reels (Figure 4). Decades worth of the country's film archives are housed in his private archive (though it became Cultural

Patrimonial after his death in 2009). Once again, the viewer is presented with an abundance of archives at the same time as it confronts conspicuous silences.



**Figure 4.** Gabriel Tramontana’s private archive: rows and rows of film reels (*La muerte de Jaime Roldós* 2013).

Extra-diegetic acoustic guitar grants the next scene a reflective tone. The interview continues, but the imposition of the music and the voice over narration stress distance from the recorded moment, insinuating that the director is now looking back on this footage and striving to give it meaning. As Tramontana talks about how his archives do indeed include the history of Ecuador--its transformation through the construction of roads and factories that produced refrigerators and cars--“el progreso del país”—it is as if the director is thinking back on their conversation. He is reflecting on his own film, as well as the official history he has confronted. Archival footage portrays Roldós visiting development projects. Meanwhile, the director narrates, “Al escribir la historia, no solo elegimos lo que recordaremos, sobre todo decidimos lo que olvidaremos porque no nos



conviene, todo depende entonces de quién recuerda, de quién elige recordar y de quién olvida” (La muerte de Jaime Roldós, 2015). The shots the viewer sees are the shots that the director did not include within main narrative of Roldós’ presidency; they form part of the archive that wasn’t chosen, symbolic of the inevitable silences of any narrative. This layering of image and sound creates a metatextual reference to the choices inherent in the telling of history. Adriana Sofía Brito Montenegro of PUCE (PONTIFICIA UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DEL ECUADOR) writes that, “Gracias al nivel de yuxtaposición de diferentes imágenes del gobierno de Jaime Roldós, Manolo Sarmiento hace una reflexión sobre la memoria y el olvido en la sociedad ecuatoriana, afirmando que estos dependen de la decisión de quien tiene el poder de escribir la historia” (Brito Montenegro 90). In her analysis of the epilogue, Brito Montenegro reads the film as self-critical of Ecuadorian society: “Con esto, se hace una crítica a la sociedad ecuatoriana ya que una tesis, al convertirse en oficial, no tiene cuestionamientos.” (91). In the first person plural, she responds to the directors’ call to examine the shared past as an Ecuadorian citizen, “Nos convertimos en una sociedad pasiva que no es escuchada, pero que tampoco quiere hablar para cambiar esa realidad.” (91). But this is one of the most intriguing questions the film raises: How does one create an ethical relationship with that past on individual and collective terms? How to interpret the irony of the quote from *Memorias de subdesarrollo*? What balance is there between the individual’s responsibility and that of those state or corporate powers that have dominated discourse? The directors also include footage from Tramontana’s archive—traveling shots of the oil pipelines and aerial shots of highways—as if to call attention once again to different

possible choices in the telling of history. In voice over Sarmiento reflects that if Tramontana would have made his film about the history of Ecuador, it would have included these images. This, he explains, is because the history Tramontana chose was that of progress, a history written in terms of development rhetoric.

The logic of doubt highlights the performative nature of official discourse and its silences. It highlights contradictions between reports, the theatrical nature of official ceremonies and misleading rhetoric. Unlike the tenants of Third Cinema, which hoped to sweep the collective into revolution by *showing, proving* injustice, this approach reflects the experience of revolution attempted and defeated, where life goes on anyway; where liberal democracy was *supposed* to mean the end of human rights violations and transparency but in fact meant more of the same, if not worse. Furuhata describes avant-garde documentarists' use of intermedial techniques to reaffirm cinema's sense of actuality in the face of television's competing status as image-based media (15). The intermedial is also a way to "liberate" the document, to challenge "habituated modes of perception" (29). By seeing archives—newspapers, paintings, drawings, videos, etc.—as remediated, manipulated objects—the viewer learns to “distrust the visible, external world that appears objective, and delve into the invisible, internal world of his own subjectivity” (29). In *Roldós*, television is not so much the threat. Instead, the threat is the continued faith in the temporality of a discourse of progress, that allows for repetition of these cases of injustice and the silent complacency of the collective. Like the angel of history in Benjamin's Thesis IX, the filmmakers look back at this past, listening to the many voices who will speak to the story of Jaime Roldós.

### Memory, Affect, and Poetic Justice

In 2014, Sarmiento gave a conference talk on *Roldós* at Encuentros del Otro Cine Colloquium, hosted in conjunction with the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar. In his talk, Sarmiento asserts that one layer of the film's narrative is made up by the personal memories of the three children of President Jaime Roldós and Martha Bucaram. This part of the film is anchored in the present. Via interviews with Santiago, Diana and Martha, this narrative explores their reaction to a history of impunity and the forgotten memory of their parents. Footage of the three as young children, passionately hopeful and dutiful in their comments about their father's humanist campaign, underlines the loss of tragically frustrated dreams. By filming the three siblings in their current professions: theatre, economic theorist of exploitation, and politician, respectively, the film reveals how the death of their parents has defined Santiago, Diana and Martha's lives. While some aspects of their lives have flourished, others are tied to a past that won't recede. Following an initial sequence that sets the historical stage, the film title "The Death of Jaime Roldós" appears and a long travelling shot follows Martha and Santiago in a car down the road leading to the place of the plane crash. This shot emphasizes the analysis of Jaime Roldós and Martha Bucaram's death from their children's point of view, as a still painful wound. For them, silence has been a resigned, obligatory, but also rebellious reaction. They break this silence by participating in the film and in doing so contribute to a recuperation of their parents' memory at a national and international level.

This part of the film moves between the present and past by combining testimonial interviews with archival footage and documents. Appropriately, the film considerably slows at this point, recedes and observes the intimate spaces Santiago, Diana and Martha inhabit. The film moves from landscape shots of Huayrapungo, the mountain in southern Ecuador where Roldós' plane crashed, to an investigative archival photo of the plane's engine, and back to distant landscape shots of the mountainside. As I noted earlier, this transition suggests the physical preservation of Roldós' death in the land. The spaces speak, albeit without words and through the cracks; they communicate the history of experience, the temporality of a lingering, persistent past.

Through theatre, Santiago Roldós, one of the symbolic heirs of President Roldós' legacy, explores the aesthetics of doubt to begin to meaningfully "repair" the injustice of his parents' murder, the governments' coverup and impunity, and the people's complicity in accepting the official story. The political situation, proven again and again to be corrupt, offers him no outlet for repair, and clearly does not interest him. So, Santiago confronts the past creatively, with his passion for theatre through satirical representations of the past. The shots of Santiago on stage do not ever offer a cross shot of the audience; the camera focuses on his eyes, on the wrinkles in his forehead and his expressive posture. In dialogue with the clearly painful, though often ironic and witty interviews where he explores his loss, these shots reveal a sort of coming to terms, a loving and passionate confrontation with his parents' deaths and the meaning of their commitment to justice today. The camera captures Santiago on stage, performing satirical representations of his family's Hamlet-like story. These shots do not offer a reverse shot of the audience.

Just as earlier the process of the filmmaker –shown on screen—encountering the archive, and doubting it, on screen, becomes more politically charged powerful than the truth, which the camera will never be able to film, here the camera makes its effort to communicate Santiago’s embodied, performed appropriation of official history. After all, as Oshima announced in delight over his remediated film *Band of Ninja*, “Everything can be made into cinema” (Furuhata 16).

The film presents several additional factors that may have contributed to Roldós’ demise. Martha Roldós’ uncle, Assad Bucaram, who had originally supported Roldós and incorrectly assumed that he would function as a puppet president, withdrew support of his entire political party (Social Democrat Party), leaving Roldós without a political party and without control of the congress. Ecuador also entered into armed conflict with Perú over land disputes at the border. The costly armed conflict created economic instability and massive strikes. The film suggests that the U.S. government have been involved in Perú’s instigation of conflict. Additionally, the film explains that the arms Roldós purchased were sold to the country by the U.S. Galo Chiriboga Zambrano, Ecuadorian attorney general, opened the Roldós case months after the film premiered in 2013. Investigations continue as the government obtains declassified documents from the CIA and US National Security Archive, the Paraguayan and Argentine governments regarding Plan Condor and its possible relation to Jaime Roldós’ plane crash.

His layered narrative reinserts Roldós’ story in a larger Ecuadorian, Latin American and Cold War history. The concept of Roldós’ death as assassination, rather than accident, even in 2013 at the time of the film’s release created polemics. In 2013, the

film premiered in Ecuador, but commercial cinema Supercines refused to screen the film, claiming that as an entertainment industry –and not a communication media-- "no quiere convertirse en el campo de batalla de los diferentes actores políticos del país" (Supercines, Telegrafo, Miércoles, 28 Agosto 2013). Roldós did not represent a massive revolutionary social mobilization; he did not lead a revolution. But he did represent a viable alternative to the dictatorships that characterized his historical moment and the neoliberal, authoritarian period that followed in his wake. He did represent part of a historical context in which the governments of some countries –here Argentina and the U.S. are foregrounded--- eliminate the presidents of other countries when they find them inconvenient. Economies and governments are forcefully restructured by conservative national governments and the international military and economic pressure of Ronald Reagan’s administration in the U.S. and that of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom. In this “tired” political scene, as Bolívar indicates, Walter Benjamin’s “untimely” vision of history, with its critique of progress and sense of redemptive “now” time, becomes quite suggestive.

When I asked director Manolo Sarmiento what he considered key achievements of the film, he explained that on a national level, *La Muerte de Jaime Roldós* has served to incite dialogue about the current political situation, soliciting comparisons between Roldós and then- president Rafael Correa in order to underline either similarities or contradictions, and spurred a re-reading of the country’s return to democracy after nearly ten years of dictatorship (Sarmiento 2015). While Sarmiento himself explains that the film was made for an Ecuadorian audience, and it *does* tell a very detailed and locally

specific history on one level, the film has also been very successfully internationally and across generations. I predict that this wide-reaching success is due to the fact that this national story is woven into a larger Cold War era history, to a familial, intimate story with which wide audiences can relate and to a philosophical engagement of history that stirs doubt in its viewers independently of their collective alliances.

### *Con mi corazón en Yambo*

#### The Public Impact of *Con mi corazón en Yambo*



**Figure 5.** *Con mi corazón en Yambo* poster.

“Nevertheless, it is not in the form of the spoils which fall to the victor that the latter make their presence felt in the class struggle. They manifest themselves in this struggle as courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude. They have retroactive force and will constantly call into question every victory, past and present, of the rulers.”

—Walter Benjamin, Thesis IV, *Illuminations* (254, 255)

Maria Fernanda Restrepo’s documentary *Con mi corazón en Yambo* (2011) reignited public discussion of the case of the director’s brothers, who were disappeared by Ecuadorian police in 1988 at the ages of 17 and 14. With her film, Restrepo takes on

not only a personal process of confronting her past, but also a journey to bring justice to her brothers' memory and seek the prosecution of those responsible for their death. While working at the EDOC ("Encuentros del Otro Cine") International Documentary Film Festival in Quito, Ecuador in 2015, I was able to observe the renewed attention to the Restrepo story in the city in the aftermath of the film's release: in the city's physical spaces, in academic dialogue around social memory and documentary film, and in everyday conversation. One day while we were in Quito, my son, at the time 5 years old, picked up the DVD case of the film and, studying intently the image of Santiago and Andrés Restrepo, asked me who were these two boys. Weeks later, we were in a taxi when my son pointed out the window and shouted, "the Restrepo brothers!" He had spotted one of the many graffiti stencils of the two boys on the streets of Quito. The taxi driver heard his comment and told us to look to the right, indicating that we were about to pass "Grito de la Memoria," a mural honoring the Restrepo brothers and other victims of human rights violations in Ecuador. I remember that that day it seemed as if the faces of Santiago and Andrés had called out to us, not in sadness and agony, but in humor and fortitude, their youthful smiles calling into question the systems of power that allow abuses against the population day in and day out.

This anecdote speaks to the capability of the film to generate interest in the story of her brothers and the political context in which they were disappeared. Not only did the public debate created by the film—which reached more than 160,000 viewers—incite President Correa to reopen the Restrepo case, but the film has contributed to historical memory in a significant way. The film has been incorporated into many high school and



university curriculums and a brief search for research about the film brings up theses and dissertations written about *Yambo* by faculty or students at FLACSO-Ecuador, La Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, La Universidad Central del Ecuador, Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral (2), Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil, Universidad Politécnica Salesiana Sede Quito, Universidad Nacional de las Artes Buenos Aires and more. These analyses cover the story of human rights violations that the film brings to light, but they also discuss a variety of other topics including the reconstruction of social and political identity in the collective imaginary, the representation of the Ecuadorian state, and emerging trends in Ecuadorian cinema. The fact that the film and the Restrepo Case more generally are being discussed within Ecuadorian and international institutions of learning is significant and leaves a legacy for further research into human rights violations and the role of democracy in either preventing, permitting or promoting them. The film has also been screened around the world (Taiwan, France, Belgium, U.S., Cuba, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina to name a few) and maintains a steady flow of online and in-person screenings+Q&As with universities, human rights organizations and cultural institutions; it is also available on streaming platforms including iTunes, Amazon, CholoFlix, zine.ec, and Kanopy.

*Con mi corazón en Yambo* documents and participates in the Ecuadorian Truth Commission (created in 2007, under Rafael Correa's government), which investigated instances of human rights abuses in Ecuador from 1984-2008, with a special focus on the 1988-1984 period, when León Febres Cordero was president. It also portrays the 2009

national search for the Restrepo brothers' remains in Lake Yambo, a process which had been promised to the family in earlier years but only finally fulfilled during Correa's government. The film's production and release clearly coincided with favorable political circumstances, given that Rafael Correa's administration (January 2007-May 2017) sought to build an image of its government as the beginning of a new era focused on national sovereignty and the protection of human rights. The Correista discourse especially drew attention to the human rights violations committed during León Febres Cordero's government, the administration under which Santiago and Andrés Restrepo were detained and disappeared. Febres Cordero was one of Correa's staunch political opponents. While these circumstances helped facilitate renewed political attention to the case, the dedicated work of filmmaker Maria Fernanda Restrepo, which continued the sustained efforts of her father and mother to pursue justice for their sons, played an indispensable role in solidifying the emblematic nature of her brothers' story. By pursuing a sort of unofficial investigation through the process of her film, and by establishing a strong affective connection and ethical appeal to viewers, the director brought the case of her brothers' disappearance to generations of national and international audiences who had no direct memory of the case. In an interview, I asked Restrepo what memory meant to her. She replied simply, "la memoria es la vida." This film has reignited the embers of her brothers' memory among a broad public and sparked new conversations and initiatives addressing human rights in Ecuador.

## Democracy, Human Rights and the Restrepo Case

In some respects, *Con Mi Corazón en Yambo* takes up where the historical context of *Roldós* left off. The sequence in *Roldós* capturing the crowds awaiting the arrival of Jaime and Martha Roldós' coffins at the Guayaquil airport portrays individual somber faces among the multitude, a fractured collective that speaks to the new socio-economic reality that his death ushered in: "Con la muerte de Jaime Roldós en 1981, por la caída del avión que lo transportaba, nace el nuevo orden neoliberal de democracia mínima . . ."

(Restrepo Echavarría 147). Not only does the first-person and intimate narration of *Con mi corazón en Yambo*, established from the first frame of the film, tell its viewers about an individual struggle to express a tragic loss and uphill battle for justice, but it can also be read as a symptom of the new neoliberal order that defines the context of the boys' disappearance. While there is no definitive account of what happened the day Santiago and Andrés disappeared on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1988, Toine van Dongen, an independent expert nominated by the UN Secretary-General to serve on the commission of inquiry into the case (ordered by Ecuadorian President Rodrigo Borja in 1991) gives an outline of the details that are known and some hypotheses as to what may have happened. A segment of Toine van Dongen reading the report's conclusions is incorporated in the film. The boys left the house at 9:30 a.m. to pick up their friend and bring him to the airport. They never made it to their friends' house. Santiago, 17 at the time, was driving. It is known that there was a traffic surveillance on the route they would have normally taken, Avenida Shiris, a main highway in the capital city of Quito. Van Dongen states:

Usually that kind of surveillance involved not only traffic police but also plainclothes officers concerned with drug offenses and subversive activities. (In those days, police were looking for one of the barons from the Ochoa drug cartel, who was thought to travel in the area.) The Restrepo brothers' car was probably signaled to move over. Perhaps Santiago instead stepped on the accelerator. He did not have a license, and after all, he was in a hurry. (Also, a boy from an upper class family like his would normally get away with scoffing at the police.) In any event, witnesses reported a car chase between what may have been the Restrepo Trooper and a US built car with dark windows. Ultimately, they must have been forced to stop outside Quito, because other witnesses reported the car sitting there the whole weekend with one door ajar. The escape attempt must have aroused the suspicion of the police. Was it their Colombian family name that sealed their fate? (Human Rights Quarterly 1992).

Their father, Pedro Restrepo and their mother, Luz Arizmendi Restrepo, both Colombian, had been living in Quito for nearly twenty years and were a well-established part of their community. Santiago, Andrés and María Fernanda were all born in Quito. No one in their family was associated with the drug trade or with the local guerrilla group Alvaro Vive Carajo, but the boys' murder was likely the result of Leon Febres Cordero's "antissubversive" policies and repressive apparatuses, which went hand in hand with his alignment with other U.S.-backed repressive regimes in the region sought to ward off socialist agendas and protect private interests. This shift toward neoliberalism began with President Hurtado. When Roldós died, vice-president Hurtado assumed the presidency and did not move forward with Roldós' human rights agenda, but instead worked closely with some of Roldós' opponents, who worked closely with the dictatorships in Argentina and U.S. business interests. Facing natural disasters and economic crisis due to the international drop in oil prices, Hurtado, "[tomó] medidas que afectaban duramente los ingresos de la mayoría, cediendo a presiones de las élites y del Fondo Monetario Internacional (IMF)" (Ayala "Del auge a la crisis"). Bellinger explains that by

negotiating Ecuador's first IMF loan, Hurtado's government subjected the country to the IMF's neoliberal ideals, given that the loan "was made on the condition that Ecuador's government cut spending on education, health care, subsidies and cut public sector jobs" (23, 24). While there was resistance from the population (especially, as Bellinger notes, among organized indigenous groups), these policies became cemented as Ecuador's development model over the next two decades. León Febres Cordero, representing a coalition of groups from the conservative right (Frente de Reconstrucción Nacional) worked to further entrench the neoliberal model: "aplicó medidas de corte neoliberal que incrementaron el poder de banqueros y exportadores, y reactivaron a los productores para la exportación. Una indiscriminada apertura al capital extranjero no tuvo eco, pero agudizó la especulación . . ." (Ayala "Del auge a la crisis"). As part of his discourse of "libertad y orden," Febres Cordero made the capture of the members of the insurgent group Alfaro Vive Carajo (AVC) a top priority of his presidency (Romero, Hodgson and Gómez 110, Gálvez Vaca 13, Isaacs 136, Salvador Lara 554-567). AVC was an armed leftist guerrilla group that emerged publicly in 1983 in opposition to the direction the country was taking (Gálvez Vaca 13). The group's political acts included bank robberies, the robbery of the sword of President Eloy Alfaro's (1895-1901, 1906-1911, leader of the "Liberal Revolution of Ecuador) from a museum in Guayaquil, and the occupation of media outlets, including a national media agency which the group used to spread their stance against then presidential candidate León Febres Cordero. As Gálvez Vaca notes, the Ecuadorian Truth Commission outlines Febres Cordero's stance against political opponents as " . . . de permanente confrontación con todos los sectores que discrepaban

con su proyecto político. Su discurso violento siempre estuvo dirigido a atacar a la oposición, especialmente a los sectores de izquierda.” (13). Acting under the National Security Decrees (implemented through “La Ley de Seguridad Nacional”) established during the years of the hardliner’s control of the dictatorship (1976-1979) and which formed part of a regional Cold War doctrine that sought to combat communism in so-called Third World countries, Febres Cordero created repressive bodies to eliminate enemies to the state (Peñañiel Valencia 5, Gálvez Vaca 13, 14, van Dongen *Human Rights Quarterly* 1992). During Hurtado’s presidency, the Consejo de Seguridad Nacional (COSENA) and el Comando Conjunto de las Fuerzas Armadas (COMACO) had further detailed the National Security Decree (6-10). As COMACO’s Internal Military Defense Plan outlined, the enemies were the “subversives” and the National Police were assigned to carry out the counter-insurgency efforts (Peñañiel Valencia 9). When León Febres Cordero assumed office in 1984, he amplified these efforts, extending the focus to broader groups of citizens including marginalized populations, high school and college students, unions and rural organizations (Peñañiel Valencia 10, 11). The Truth Commission establishes that one of those repressive bodies that was created during Febres Cordero’s presidency was SIC-10, a clandestine police unit dedicated to combat “subversion” which formed part of the Servicio de Investigación Criminal-Pichincha branch and used torture, illegal detention and committed numerous human rights violations (“La Fiscalía confirmó la existencia del SIC-10 y tiene lista de integrantes” 2013). It was agents from SIC-10 who tortured and disappeared Santiago and Andrés Restrepo.

Not surprising given his political and economic stance, Febres Cordero was a close ally of Ronald Reagan and on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1986, was received with full military honors as Reagan's guest in the White House. In his lengthy welcoming address, Reagan offers many points worthy of analysis and critique, but here I will offer a brief excerpt that helps bring clarity to the relationship between Febres Cordero's neoliberal policy, repressive authoritarian stance and the kind of duplicitous discourse the Restrepo family was up against when they spoke out against his government:

President and Mrs. Febres-Cordero, other distinguished guests, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you as friends of the United States and as friends of human freedom. Ecuador's return to elected government in 1979 was one of the first waves of a rising tide of liberty witnessed throughout the hemisphere. President Febres-Cordero . . . [y]ou are an articulate champion of free enterprise and those democratic ideals that are close to the hearts of the American people . . . Mr. President, by protecting your country's good name and creditworthiness, by avoiding simplistic solutions and quick fixes, by unleashing the economy, building forces of the marketplace, you are leading your country to a better tomorrow . . . We applaud your efforts to bolster the democratic institutions of your country. We also applaud your moves to encourage private sector growth and invigorate your economy. . . When I say the United States stands with you, that is especially true when it comes to your determination to defeat the twin menace of international terrorism and narcotics trafficking. You've put yourself on the line against these vile and insidious forces. Your courage and integrity and that of your people have not gone unnoticed here.  
(Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony for President Leon Febres-Cordero Ribadeneyra of Ecuador—Reagan Library)

To start, Reagan applauds Ecuador's return to democracy in 1979. Given the previous chapter's exposition, this compliment speaks to the heavily-loaded and ideological nature of the concept of democracy. Celebrating the return to democracy in 1979 *sounds* positive and makes Reagan sound like a champion of democracy. But the United States under Reagan most certainly did not support the measures Roldós was taking to assure national sovereignty to Latin American countries or to hold leaders in the region

accountable for human rights crimes. In fact, it is not at all unplausible that Reagan's government supported measures that sought to remove Roldós from office in a non-democratic form, just as it supported coup d'états in other Latin American countries. The fact that León Febres Cordero knew this, and was one of Roldós' greatest enemies, makes Reagan's comment all the more cynical. Under the terms outlined by Cold War-era National Security Decrees, most of the victims of human rights violations that Roldós looked to protect were seen as "subversives" because within the Cold War binary, they were painted as anti-capitalist "reds." Democracy was only really protected by the U.S. when, like Febres Cordero's government, it would advocate for the interests of capitalism—"free trade" and privatization, which privileged U.S. companies and political prowess, definitely not the majority of the Ecuadorian people, given that ". . . by 1999 Ecuador's richest 20 percent owned 73% of the nation's wealth" and "between 1982 and 2000 GDP percent growth was negative for eight years and only higher than two percent in three years" (Bellinger 26). Reagan's applaud of Febres Cordero as full of "integrity," "democratic ideals" and a "friend of human freedom," paired with his admiration for the president's stand against the "twin menace of international terrorism and narcotics trafficking" is especially disturbing considering that it is precisely those "anti-subversive" operations that led so many human rights violations to be committed by the state during his presidency. In fact, The Ecuadorian Truth Commission, published in 2010, established that 310 (68% ) of the victims of human rights violations committed in Ecuador during the period of study, which covered 1984-2008, were committed during the period of Febres Cordero's presidency: "Los casos que dan lugar a las cifras



expuestas corresponden prácticamente a los comprendidos entre el 10 de agosto de 1984 y el 10 de agosto de 1988 en el que gobernó el país León Febres Cordero. En esos cuatro años se concentran, finalmente, 310 víctimas o el 68% del total nacional que se desprende de los expedientes de la Comisión de la Verdad para el período 1984-2008.” (Informe de la Comisión de la Verdad 2010 77). There were more human rights violations committed during his 4-year presidency than in all of the other administrations in the period combined, which covered 24 years. Santiago and Andrés were among that group of 310. Just like Reagan’s words here, the discourse of the Ecuadorian government during Febres Cordero’s presidency and those that followed would, for the most part, respond to the Restrepo family’s pleas for information and later demands for justice empty promises of human rights protections.

### The Burning Embers of a Broken Discourse

María Fernanda Restrepo tells the story of her brothers’ disappearance in the first-person, through a documentary film, “the way I knew how to” (Restrepo 2015). Like one of those individual faces looking out at the camera in disillusionment and confusion at the end of Roldós’ story, director María Fernanda Restrepo speaks from the perspective of the individual, who must speak back to the state (speak truth to power) and to her viewers, asking them to remember. The first-person narration allows her to speak to a broad public, because the emphasis on affect asks the spectator to identify with the director for the duration of the film, to experience this story of devastating loss and deception alongside remarkable love and determination, and then transfer that feeling to a

sense of social, ethical responsibility. As Laura Podalsky argues of the films she analyzes in *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema*, *Yambo* “[socializes] emotion” and “[moves] the spectator’s alignment with the individual toward a wider engagement with the social” (56). The film opens with a black background over which the following text appears: “January 8th of 1988/my brothers were disappeared/Santiago was 17 and Andres 14.” These words are placed on the left side of the screen. As they fade, off to the right, the line “I was ten years old” slowly comes into focus. The rest of the film develops this enigmatic beginning to a horrific story in relation to the “I”. The director and first-person narrator of the film, Fernanda Restrepo, shares this story, and the process of her search for justice, with brave intimacy. When Restrepo’s father Pedro tells her, “Life is full of losses and one must confront them, period,” the film cuts to home video of Santiago and Andres and the director states, “I have decided not to forget.” With this comment, she establishes the film as an ethical commitment to herself and to her brothers, to actively remember and to persuade others to do the same. The film is a form of testimony.

At eye level, the camera walks through the family home room by room, revealing a museum-like scene of what the family’s life used to be and what it has become: children’s drawings and happy family photos, and then images of Santiago and Andrés not in photos, but instead painted portraits and signs from political protests. This intimate account gives way to archival television footage covering a political gathering in the late 1980s. People cover the street waving flags and excitedly yelling, “¡Con León Sí Se Puede!” “With León it can be done!” Pedro explains that the family, like many people at

that time, believed in Leon Febrés Cordero, the conservative authoritarian president that took office a few years after Roldós' death. He explains, "We believed in the slogan of the right: liberty and order, above all, order. We believed in León, in the church, in the police—until Santiago and Andres' death, when we went asking for help and answers and realized we meant nothing to them." By building up the narrative of family loss and abruptly switching to this flashy footage of León Febrés Cordero being adored by the masses, the film stresses both the suddenness of being on one side of history or the other, and the power of discourse to mask ugly realities.

Like Sarmiento and Rivera, Restrepo also very carefully places the family tragedy within the context of national politics. In this sense, the memory of her brothers also implies a strong critique of the idea of progress touted by the conservative discourse of "order and liberty," and of liberal democracy's discourse of human rights. In contrast with *La Muerte de Jaime Roldós*, however, *Con Mi Corazón en Yambo*'s argument places much greater emphasis on personal experience in making this criticism. This emphasis reflects the nature of the director's relationship to the subjects of the film, but it also reflects a generational shift. While the directors of *Roldós* reveal admiration for the ideals of Roldós, a public figure of the past; Restrepo, does not participate in this sentiment. Her moment of añoranza is found in her family life of the past—the happy existence they shared before her brothers were disappeared. In fact, the film reveals that her family in fact embraced the onset of right-leaning politics, until the loss of her brothers incited a different perspective of the conservative discourse. I argue that this difference has to do not only with her personal experience, but also her generational one. Since the time

Restrepo was a young child, Ecuador's government experienced economic and political crisis almost consistently, the most rotund period of neoliberal entrenchment the country has faced. The first period of political stability would come with Rafael Correa, and although the film does not comment specifically on the Correa administration's politics, the fact that her family's case was able to make great strides with his support is a positive sign within the film for his record in addressing human rights violations. That being said, in contrast with María Fernanda Miño Puga, it is my argument that the film does not entirely represent a reaffirmation of the collective imaginary that serves the status quo of Correa's government (26 Miño Puga). Rather, I argue, it does indeed ask of its spectators to imagine a new political and social order regimented by a sense of ethics.

The film develops a discourse that interlaces three narratives. The first is the director's autobiographical narrative, an expression of the affective experience of the family's traumatic loss. The second narrative is that of denuncia, or denouncement, a baroque critique of the official archive and the discourse of liberal democracy. This narrative thread is based on an epistemology of doubt. Finally, the third narrative, when the discourse relies on a material poetics of nature, whereby the film engages its viewers in a critical look at current institutions of power that is based on the meaning of memory and the role of the archive in the writing of history.

### Voice and the Subjective Account of History

In my interview with Restrepo in 2015, I asked her about her decision to tell her own story in such an intimate way by opening the family home to the camera and sharing

her and her father's testimonies about their loss and fight for justice. She responded, "No lo podía realizar de otra manera: era y es parte de mi vida, no eran dos personas extrañas a mi de las cuales contaba la película. Es la historia íntima de la familia, fue muy duro realizarlo así porque no quería que quede en un plano solo íntimo o sentimental, o sentimentalista que es peor . . ." (Restrepo 2015). Juan Martín Cueva, director, professor and cultural administrator in Ecuador, also commented on the intimate nature of this film project: ". . . evidentemente la que debía contar la historia y la que lo hace como nadie más podía hacerlo es ella [María Fernanda Restrepo]. Lo mismo con Carla Valencia, o sea quién mas va a contar esa historia . . . son proyectos que son desde el inicio absolutamente íntimos" (Cueva 2015). The director's first-person voice over narration, combined with her participatory role in the film, the use of family archives (from photos to home video and even the mise-en-scene, which often includes the family home) and a prevalent recurrence to visual metaphors to express complex emotions, make this film undeniably María Fernanda Restrepo's story: her gaze, her offering and her demand to society. In his article, "El documental histórico, el documental de memoria," Cristián León observes how, by silencing the original audio of archival materials and narrating her personal story over them in voice over, Restrepo ". . . encontró una manera de reelaboración subjetiva que lleva a calificar la película como un documental de memoria que narra una versión de la historia matizada por la experiencia vivida y encarnada en el cuerpo y el dolor de la cineasta" (17).

The impulses behind this subjective view on history, I believe are multiple. On one level, the film demonstrates what Michael Renov terms "expressive" modality. In

sketching a description of expressive documentaries, Renov asks, “Do we not, after all, in the instance of Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog*, find ourselves persuaded (moved toward a certain comprehension of the incommensurable) through the starkness of Resnais’ iconic choices (a mountain of eyeglasses), the poetic character of Jean Cayrol’s writing, or the stateliness of the camera’s inexorable tracking across and through time and space?” (Renov 1993 30). Similar to the way aesthetic choices in *Night and Fog* express feelings that carry ethical weight, Yambo’s subjective view gives the director the opportunity to not only put into images, sounds and words her sense of utter loss and pain, but also to make the public privy to this experience of pain, open it up for all to see and also be held accountable to as a collective.

In addition to expressivity, the subjective portrayal of history is also given strength through the “record, reveal or preserve” modality. “The emphasis here [in the record, reveal, or preserve modality] is on the replication of the historical real, the creation of a second-order reality cut to the measure of our desire—to cheat death, stop time, restore loss” (Renov 25). On one hand, the director looks to preserve what memory she does have of her brothers, explaining that she tries to find them more often in her memory and revealing that she has only 10 seconds of her memory of them left, those captured by home video that shows them celebrating among friends and family in the family’s home. Using the few records she has of Santiago and Andrés, Restrepo builds an image of her brothers as she remembers them, seemingly holding on to the memories she has of them. In doing so, she also creates an image of her brothers as symbols of youth, hope, and innocence. This construction of their image and story is not strictly a personal

labor of love, but also a labor based on the pursuit of justice through intervention in the telling of history. Whereas government officials across generations of administrations chose to cover up the crime, to hold back and purposefully alter information regarding the case, Restrepo wants the public, national and international, to remember this case and others like it. In order to give the public a context in which they can place this tragedy and its affective costs, the film combines the first-person subjective narrative of the director and her family with national and international political narratives through archival footage and footage created by the director that documents the case on a national level. Like the director herself, the viewer has only ten seconds of film, played and replayed, to remember Santiago and Andrés. Santiago Restrepo is caught taking a photo, his last photo. He smiles charmingly from the back of a crowd in church—Fernanda's first communion. Andrés—whose nickname is Nene--the kicks in the air, the shot repeats and his image fades into a snapshot, frozen: the ten seconds of footage are up, but these images hint at happy times in young boys' lives. Using her own history of experience, Restrepo offers these images up to the public, transforming them, like her brothers, into something larger than individual history, that reaches beyond her family and their loss, by contributing to the public discourse through her own archival document, her own rhetorical contribution to the discourse.

The first-person voice over narration of *Con mi corazón en Yambo* is perhaps the most obvious place to start an analysis of the film's subjective portrayal of history, given that the director's commentary threads together the distinct narratives and sequences encompassed by the film. In his book *Speaking Truth With Film*, Bill Nichols points to

the importance of rhetoric in documentary film, noting that “[r]hetoric gives a distinct voice to those who wish their perspective and their interpretation to enter into dialogue with that of others” (106). He argues that rhetoric should not be regarded as a straying from the truth, rather a set of tools that helps the director portray their perspective in a way that can allow them to enter into dialogue with the spectator. Voice, Nichols signals, is the multiple ways in which the film makes this address at the level of equals with the subject at hand and with the audience (106). He notes that, “[o]ften, this voice includes the personal but untrained voice of the filmmaker him-or herself rather than the impersonal, professional delivery of a voice-over commentator” (Nichols 2016 106). Such is the case of *Con mi corazón en Yambo*. As Orisel Castro López notes “. . . la voz narradora [de *Con mi corazón en Yambo*] tematiza el montaje y el trabajo con el material doméstico y los sentidos que va asumiendo sucesivamente” (Castro López *La mirada insistente* 72). This dynamic in which the first-person voice over narration gives logic to the relationship between scenes is established immediately, in the opening scene that I referred to earlier, in which a brief text appears on the left side of the screen-- “January 8th of 1988/my brothers were disappeared/Santiago was 17 and Andres 14”—paired with the text “I was ten years old” on the right side. The director immediately connects the story of Santiago and Andrés’ disappearance with her own experience and that relationship determines the discourse of the film. The concept of discourse is emphasized here through the written text that appears before a dark backdrop. The date of the disappearance of the Restrepo brothers fades as the “I” statement slowly appears on screen, as if to say, when Santiago and Andrés faded from life is the same moment that



my testimony begins. This scene establishes the film's status as first-person singular subject (I) testimony and could even be plausibly read to introduce the film as a cinematic memoir or diary: "En esta ciudad nacieron mis hermanos Santiago y Andrés. Aquí también nací yo."

The voice over narration, however, is second to another aspect of the first-person singular subjectivity: the gaze. As Nichols asserts (and I shared earlier), "The film speaks through its imagery as readily as through its verbal commentary" (Nichols 2016 108). After the introductory text has faded from the screen, the sounds of birds chirping, traffic and dogs barking grow stronger as the low-angle image of power lines, sun-filled clouds and colonial building tops fills the screen. The camera lingers on a landscape of colonial houses and apartment buildings spread over the city, whose horizon is marked by the entangled electric lines that move across and through the frame. The title, "Quito-Ecuador" appears in the bottom right corner." This imagery recalls the famous barbed wire images in *Night and Fog*, or the scar like image in the opening shot of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, which simultaneously suggests ashes, a mapping of bombs, and barbed wire. The tension and chaos of the electric lines, which seem to mark or trap the city, contrast the tranquility of the cityscape sounds, the beauty of the billowing clouds and the image of two school-aged boys dressed in traditional red-sweater school uniforms, introduce the director's open remarks and comments on her childhood. *Mise-en-scène*, lighting, camera angle and movement establish the gaze and emotional register of the director, which is marked by the injustice done to her family, a stained beauty that reflects loss.

Once the image has introduced an idea, concept or occurrence, these ideas are reinforced by and united with the director's spoken voice. The first-person singular voice over narration is as much visual as spoken voice: "Mis padres vinieron de Colombia y decidieron que Ecuador era un buen lugar para vernos crecer a los tres"—as the camera pans slowly to the right over the Central Plaza of the historic center of the city in an aerial view. Just as the director is "setting the scene" with her voice, so too is the camera setting the scene; unified in purpose, they are established as the voice-gaze of the director. This logic is solidified when a cut-in transitions to a closer aerial shot focused on Pedro Restrepo, just as the director states, "Él es Pedro, mi papá. Desde hace más de veinte años todos los miércoles protesta al frente de la presidencia con la foto de mis hermanos desaparecidos. Ésta es la oficina de mi papá." Successive shots portray Pedro from closer up, setting up the banner with their photos and a cross as passersby walk through the plaza. Then a close up of Pedro's face introduces him as one of the principal characters and interlocutors of the film.

The continuity between the gaze of the camera and the content of the voice over narration establish the voice of the director, a rhetorical voice that persuades the public to listen based on an ethical position and through affective appeal. Renov notes: "We can be persuaded by the ethical status of the filmmaker or interview subject, by the tug of heartstrings, or by a barrage of bar graphs . . . The documentary 'truth claim' (which says at the very least: 'believe me, I'm of the world') is the baseline of persuasion for all of nonfiction, from propaganda to rock doc" (Renov 30). Restrepo's voice is granted rhetorical legitimacy in part due to her and her family's admirable fight to have Santiago

and Andres' case recognized by history, and the “the tug of heartstrings,” the tragedy of loss and deceit that their experiences includes. The director rightfully explains that she could not tell this story in any other way, due to her relationship to the topic addressed, but the intimate perspective also serves Restrepo's goals of expressing and recording for history. In regards to the film, Juan Martín Cueva asserts, “Es difícil pensar otra forma de contar esa historia, al menos otra manera que logre establecer ese nivel de empatía con un público masivo y diverso, que no sea el uso de la primera persona . . .” (Cueva *Hacer con los ojos* 2015 147). While the upper-class experience of this family is distanced from that of the majority of national viewers in many ways, the centrality of family love and values (which in many ways conform with heteronormative, patriarchal power structures) offers an important opportunity to generate empathy with its public, where the traditional family unit plays a prominent role. In reference to *Yambo* and a group of other recent Ecuadorian documentary films that utilize the first person “I” narrative voice, Cueva emphasizes, “. . . la infancia, la familia, recuerdos personales en relación con la memoria social, la masculinidad o feminidad, el surgimiento de una forma de entender el mundo—son elementos que apuntan a la comprensión, por parte del propio documentalista, de la identidad individual; se trata de algún modo, de un cine terapéutico” (Cueva *Hacer con los ojos* 2015 148). The intimate nature of the film is part of the director's active exercise in memory.

#### Audiovisual Metaphors: From the Private to Public Sphere

One important aspect of the expressive, first-person subjective view of history in the film is its use of family archives (family photos and videos) and the family house as

an archive. The Restrepo family lives in the same home as before. It is here where Martha Restrepo keeps her extensive records from the case of her nephews Santiago and Andrés, and where the family has experienced both the tragic loss and the fight for memory and justice. These documents and spaces are traditionally property of the private and intimate realm; they were not created for the purpose of the documentary film. Through the film, the director opens that space and place up to the public in order to work through her memory and contribute to the collective history. Orisel Castro notes, “. . . la autora nos deja ver en los espacios más íntimos y sensibles de su historia privada, desde las paredes de su casa hasta los pensamientos y memorias dentro de su cabeza” (Castro López *La mirada insistente* 72)

Take the sequence of images below, for example. The director weaves together home video from the period of time just before her brothers were disappeared by the police with shots from the present day. The home video format, maintained within the film in its original dimensions (as highlighted below, where the black backdrop accentuates the shift in register), signals a before, an idyllic period in the family’s life when things were going well, things felt normal (Pedro Restrepo explains, “en el año 88, todo iba normal hasta que...” (Figure 6). At another point in the film, still shots of this idyllic period appear in sequence, one after the other; as the images change, the (extradiegetic) sound of the project clicking can be heard. The grainy quality of the images (both the stills and the film footage) also functions as a temporal marker that communicates a pastness imbued with romanticism and a sense of purity, before-ness.



**Figure 6.** Restrepo family video archives with grainy quality and original dimensions highlighted by black backdrop (*Con mi corazón en Yambo* 2011).

In her text *The Archive Effect*, Jame Baron states, “. . . I would argue that what makes footage read as ‘archival’ is, first of all, the effect within a given film generated by the juxtaposition of shots perceived as produced at different moments in time” (17). This sequence juxtaposes the family video from when the director was a young girl with shots of the family home at the time of the making of the film. As scenes like the above one roll before the camera, melancholic piano music plays over almost entirely silenced footage (with an exception of an occasional sound of distant voices at low volume). The screen goes dark and the extradiegetic piano track continues, but it is increasingly overpowered with the sound of moving water. The intertitle, “Con mi corazón en Yambo/With My Heart in Yambo,” appears, marking the defining loss of her brothers on

this previous existence (Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** “Con mi corazón en Yambo/With My Heart in Yambo” intertitle (*Con mi corazón en Yambo* 2011).

The letters of the text, sink and disperse as contemplative piano music gives way to the diegetic sound of birds and an eye-level shot of the doorway of the family home (Figure 8). The shift from silenced diegetic sound (the irretrievable past as experienced through memory) in the home video to presence of diegetic sound in the contemporary shots of the home, accentuated by the birds, helps provide context for the spectator’s understanding of the relationship between the two sequences. Baron argues that “. . . we regard archival documents as—in part—the product of what I call ‘temporal disparity,’ the perception by the viewer of an appropriation film of a ‘then’ and a ‘now’ generated within a single text” (18). For example, in this series of shots, the viewer understands the home footage to represent a “then” and the loss of the boys (signified by the title, ‘My Heart in Yambo,’ Lake Yambo being the believed place of resting of Santiago and

Andrés' bodies) as a portal, a defining moment that marks the new 'now,' portrayed in subsequent observational shots of the home in the present.



**Figure 8.** Eye-level shot of the doorway of the Restrepo family home (*Con mi corazón en Yambo* 2011)

The relationship between them, in terms of sequence, cinematography and sound (extradiegetic and diegetic) defines the spectator's barring in time. Baron notes the relationship between a sense of pastness and a sense of loss:

Moreover, the production of temporal disparity often produces not only the archive *effect* but also what I call the 'archive *affect*.' When we are confronted by these images of time's inscription on human bodies and places, there is not only an epistemological effect but also an emotional one based in the revelation of temporal disparity. In other words, not only do we invest archival documents with the authority of the 'real' past, but also with the feeling of loss." (21).

Such is most definitely the case in *Yambo*, where images of the intimate past are imbued with a sense of haziness, an irrecoverable, fragmented past.

The camerawork reinforces or reflects on this process by which the intimate past is offered up to a collective and public present. Throughout the film, visual metaphors reinforce the transformation of the private, intimate experience into a shared, public memory through art. Director María Fernanda Restrepo asserts, “En ese sentido ha sido un triunfo inimaginable *Con mi corazón en yambo* como tal porque Santiago y Andres están más vivos que nunca. La policía nunca imaginó que matándolos dos veces iban a vivir un millón mil millones, 14 millones de veces en cada memoria en cada corazón” (2015). The media played and continues to play an important role in the Restrepo case and the film both intervenes in this dynamic through the film and reflects on the role of the archive in the construction of memory and history. In order to make this story meaningful to its audience, to keep the memory of Santiago and Andrés alive, to make sure that those who committed the crime are remembered, too, the director makes a film. As a film, the text appeals to various audiovisual resources to make a personal memory meaningful to the collective.

One of the ways the film reflects on its own status as a voice in the public discourse and a document in the archive in process of creation is through the juxtaposition of cinematography. In the archival footage of the Restrepo family gathering, typical of home videos taken during social occasions, the camera movement is fast and sporadic, following the occasion as it unfolds. The subjects move freely and chaotically through the frame and the camera shakes with the movements of the cameraperson, who interacts directly with the other subjects. Time seems to unfold with no hesitation, imbuing the moment with presence. In contrast, in the contemporary



footage of the Restrepo family home, the camera moves almost in tune with the extradiegetic piano music, stressing the purposefulness of this footage; its composed nature and status as an “after” (after the murder of Santiago and Andrés) and “now” at the same time. The camera movement is slow and paused, and while the camera is handheld like that of the earlier footage, this time the image is steady, the work of a practiced photographer. The camera pauses at the door, as if asking permission, and then moves in, through the house, up the stairs to the family photos along the hallway to the bedrooms. The focus of the shots is pristine, capturing a great deal of detail across a broad spatial range and highlighting the lightest and darkest areas of the spaces in the home. The absence of social subjects in this footage makes grants the space a museum-like feeling. Rather than social subjects, we see the faces in framed pictures, portraits and protest banners; in voice over the director and her father recall their life before Santiago and Pedro were detained and disappeared. She asks him to tell her again about how it was when he would wake her and her brothers for school in the morning and as he responds, the camera moves through the bedrooms where they used to sleep. There is a great deal of light in these shots, highlighting the happy tone of Pedro’s memories. In a paused left to right pan, the camera moves over pictures on the wall--Pedro sitting on the hood of the car with the kids, Luz Elena, Pedro and a new baby--the happy moments we record in family photos. And yet, there are many picture frames, but no people (other social subjects) in these shots. The absence of Santiago and Andrés is made hyper-present through the framed photos of protests where Pedro and Luz Elena hold up their sons’ pictures and portraits of the boys made from the same photographs that appear in the

reports regarding the boys' case. A picture of a picture within a film. A picture where there once was a person. The film is another extension of their memory, which, like the desaparecidos portraits and the protest banners, seeks to create justice for Santiago and Andrés.

In a similar scene further on in the film, like a projector flipping between images, the camera shows family photos of Santiago and Andrés as babies, children, young adults, falling into sequence until in one moment, they stop. One manipulated image that contains two different photos, one of Andrés and the other of Santiago fills the frame. These are the iconic images most people remember Santiago and Andrés Restrepo by today. The framing gets smaller and smaller until it reaches a closeup of the two faces. The camera pauses, goes to black and transitions to a serigraphy image made from the photo, and from the serigraphy to shots of young people spray painting stencils of the same image on the streets of Quito. The film reflects on its own role as one more piece in this larger puzzle through which collective memory is built, one more stitch in the quilt.

### Memory as a Material Register

The film also builds a history of experience through visual metaphors of light and nature that help the director to communicate what it felt like for her and her family to lose Santiago and Andrés and to be plunged into a lifetime of struggle to find their remains and fight for justice. For example, when Restrepo describes in voice off the day her brothers were detained, the camera records the blue sky and clouds out the window of a car. In voice over commentary, she explains that this is the road where they would have

driven the day they were stopped by the police. The camera looks up at the sky from a very low angle, catching almost nothing of the roadside and registering only the clouds. This low angle shot at first suggests the view the boys may have had from inside the vehicle, but as the angle becomes more extreme (a camera position repeated several times throughout the film) the view of only sky suggests escape, as if the surroundings were too painful to take in.

In one of the most difficult scenes in the film, Restrepo relates her experience waiting for Santiago and Andrés to pick her up from a birthday party the day of their disappearance. She returns to the home of her friend, where the birthday party took place so many years ago. Restrepo films the empty seat by a window on the second floor, where she had waited for them that day that they never came back. Once again filming out the window, the camera registers the bright afternoon sky as it turns darker and darker. The camera hangs on the empty space through the window; clouds move in and out of frame and the camera remains fixed on the sky. The duration of the image signals the anxious passing of time and the omen of the dark news to come.

Water also serves as a metaphor for the complex meaning of memory. Restrepo explains that for her, “memory is life” (February 2015). Memory means bringing Santiago and Andrés close; it represents justice and a battle against forgetting. But it also means embracing painful times. Making *Con Mi Corazón en Yambo* took more than five years to make and the film itself implies how memory, the battle to confront, create and defend memory impacted the director’s life. I suggest that the use of water in the film helps to signal this deep and complex relationship with memory.

The title itself, *Con Mi Corazón en Yambo*, reveals the importance of water in a straightforward way: Yambo is a lake south of the capital city of Quito. The Restrepo family has visited the lake some 15 -20 times because, although the evidence remains unclear, Restrepo and her family believe that Santiago and Andrés' bodies may be at the bottom of the lake Yambo, or were at one time. In 1991, the state funded a search of the lake but Restrepo suggests that its possible officials ordered an incomplete search at that time. The second search was carried out in 2008 as part of the re-opening of the case, incited by the investigative efforts Restrepo realized as part of the making of the film. Although they didn't find any remains in the lake, parts of this scene have a peaceful, almost joyous sentiment. The movement of the water represents hope, tranquility and fluidity. The camera moves below the surface like a fish and the director smiles several times while on the boat with her father and the team of divers. The birds play on the surface of the water and the camera captures the way light moves over miniscule waves.

On other occasions, however, the water of Yambo communicates stagnation, a darkness that persists with the absence of the bodies. A sediment-filled boat floats above dark water filled with debris and Pedro and Martha look out at the water from inside the skeleton of a building, old paint-chipped beams and nothing of walls. This bare form floating above the gray water that laps calmly around them resonates with the absence of Santiago and Andrés' skeletons, and seems to speak of the home that was torn apart through their loss. In these moments, water conveys the painful, traumatic aspect of memory. When the director returns to the police station where the brothers were tortured, the camera peers through the bars of a second floor window and a reverse shot reveals the

opposite perspective, from the outside in. The sky is now dark but a light from outside casts over the glass, which begins to fill with shining dark drops that could be rain, or tears, or blood. The light passes through and reflects off the water, creating a sensation disconcerting and comforting at the same time. Remembering is necessary; after all, it is all she has of her brothers; like the water in this scene, it is painful and curative at the same time.

Footage recuperated during the making of the film shows Santiago and Andrés playing in the family pool. The water is crystal clear and full of movement. Years later, the stagnant greying water demonstrates that after they were gone, the parties and good times were suddenly gone; overtaken by anguish and lies. Finally, Restrepo relates her last memories with her mother at the ocean, where mother and daughter spent their last day together before Luz Elena was killed in a car accident. Distant shots of the beach lead to close-ups of the waves rushing away from the rocks, and finally a high angle close-up observes a small, gentle wave as it breaks over the sand, leaving only bubbles behind. The waves, they come and go. The light is beautiful and yet also painful. In voice over commentary, as the last small waves still over the sand and slow piano music fades off, Restrepo states, “lying on the pavement, without anyone telling me, I felt, I knew that my mother had died”. This moment reflects an ending, a quiet finality that contrasts with that of Santiago and Andrés’ death, where the search for their remains doesn’t allow for a sense of closure. The water helps to express the multiplicity of nature, not inherently good or bad, but a way outside and independent of ourselves to understand and feel our experience. The finality of Luz Elena’s death is contrasted by the infinite nature of the

waves, which just keep coming and going. While Luz Elena and Santiago and Andrés are gone, the ocean speaks to the constant flow of energy to which their memory and lives belong.

The representation of trees and leaves speak to the multiple forms of intelligence and kinds of lessons that nature has to share. In one scene, the camera captures a closeup of the shadow of a tree branch against a white wall. The shot remains focused there for a few seconds more as the director states in voice over, “Hay historias silenciosas que viven en nuestro jardín.” The delay between the narration and the silent observation shot, which seems to drag just a bit, speaks to the past that won’t recede. Extreme low angle shots portray the dominance of the olive tree, whose leaves shake in the wind before a dark sky. This tree, the narrator explains, was a gift from Doris Morán, and while her aunt would like to cut it down, her dad won’t let her, “para no olvidar que ese árbol tiene la edad de la mentira y el engaño.” The low angle shot portraying the majority of the tree, whose canopy fills the entire frame, shaking its many, many leaves, lingers in silence once again. On the other hand, at the end of the film, as the closing scene of the film, a list of the names of those involved and the sentences they paid partially at best combines with a song about rebirth. The song is called “Luz Elena,” lyrics by Peko Andino and music by the Ecuadorian rock band Sal y Mileto’s Paul Segovia.



**Figure 9.** “Luz Elena”: A song about rebirth (*Yambo* 2011).

As the names of the perpetrators are cemented into the discourse, as they appear in text on the screen, the song becomes stronger:

Me dijeron las gaviotas que en ese lugar Santiago y Andrés recogen estrellas de la mar. Me he terminado de fraccionar para convertirme en aire y poder volar, estar en todas partes, así se hará más fácil dejarlos ir. Volverlos a parir. Santiago ya somos nuevamente inquilinos en la vida. Vuélvete semilla. ¿Hay cómo volver a empezar? Andrés nada en mi placenta que se renueva como las aguas de la mar. que terminan de fraccionar para convertirme en aire y poder volar. Estar en todas partes, así sea mas fácil dejarlos ir. Volverlos a parir. Santiago ya somos nuevamente inquilinos de la vida, vuélvete semilla, hay como volver a empezar (“Luz Elena”).

Shots of nature, first immense light-filled clouds rapidly changing shape, then leaves and insects, dominate the rest of the conclusion. The lyrics of the song narrate their relation to one another, to Luz Elena Arismendi and the Restrepo story. Whereas the olive tree in their yard marks the age of lies and deceit, these leaves represent the continuation of life,

rebirth, a return by becoming “luz astral, en luz madre, en luz total, en Luz Elena . . . en luz de todos los que perdimos a nuestros hijos en aguas del mar” (“Luz Elena”). In the end, the images of nature as a force that seeks life predominate in the film, because that is the tone the director wished to communicate, but not because nature is an inherently “good” force. In fact, the last line of the song references all of those who have lost their children to the sea, making a reference to the many family members whose loved ones were dropped from helicopters over the ocean in Chile, clearly a dark reminder. Having an active memory and sense of ecology, of being able to put oneself in someone else’s shoes, the director’s shoes, as the sister of two *desaparecidos* latinoamericanos. The focus on the material world, especially the sky, water and leaves, remind the viewer that this is not only a political story, a personal story, but also a material story. This chapter began with an excerpt from the article, “Cuando las imágenes tocan lo real,” by George Didi-Huberman:

No se puede hablar del contacto entre la imagen y lo real sin hablar de una especie de incendio. Por lo tanto no se puede hablar de imágenes sin hablar de cenizas. Las imágenes forman parte de lo que los pobres mortales se inventan para registrar sus temblores (de deseo o de temor) y sus propias consumaciones.

As Didi-Huberman suggests, the relationship the viewer has with the archival image is one determined simultaneously by destruction and survival. That image survived in spite of all the circumstances that could have led to its destruction, and in spite of all the others that did not survive. It is also a relationship determined by physicality and by invention, the imaginative construction of the framework we give to that materiality: the mediation of the archive. This insight seems particularly fitting to comment on Restrepo’s approach to the archive in her journey to create a film that will keep the memory of her brothers



alive. After all, as the director herself put it, “la memoria es la vida”. She connects the material and emotional reality of the viewer to her own story to the archive through metaphor. The sensorium of the viewer is the place in which the archive comes alive, where the embers of an ethical response to the injustices of the past still burn and still have the capacity to ignite.

### Denuncia: León Febres Cordero and State-Sponsored Violence

In his analysis of the film, Cristián León points out that *Con mi corazón en Yambo* has a “*rizoma*” structure that establishes a constant intersection (“intersección constante”) between present and past (15). He also calls attention to interaction between private and public: “la película traza una ruta de ida y vuelta entre el espacio privado y el espacio público, entre la memoria individual y colectiva” and includes the director’s commentary about how the film is “un tejido,” “una trenza” between the past and present and between personal memory and collective history (León 2019 16). This “rizoma” (mass of roots) form dialogues with the concept of palimpsest. In this case, the film established a sort of 3-D palimpsest, an intersection between past and present across multiple spatiotemporal planes, through the subjective lens. On one hand this temporality is established as one of personal trauma, marked by important dates: just before it happened, the moment you found out, the deep grief, the anniversaries. But it is also a collective ethical moment of reckoning. Santiago and Andrés’ disappearance was the result of police violence, institutional torture and murder that formed part of a policy of repression and was covered up by the highest levels of power. Official dates include the first search for the boys’ remains in Yambo, the release of the international report on the

case, the 2008 Truth Commission, the 2011 search in Yambo, among others. Their deaths were among many other state-sponsored violations that occurred under León Febres Cordero's presidency, which in the director's words, "se alineaba al sentimiento de otras dictaduras latinoamericanas y en Ecuador, ser colombiano se convirtió en sinónimo de ser guerrillero." The deaths of Santiago and Andrés form part of collective history that has not ceased to be "current." The film is at heart un documental de denuncia. The director notes that for her, "el señalamiento público era importante" (Restrepo 2015). She also states, "Hay casos todos los días, hay cosas que contar y es nuestra misión como realizadores el estar atentos y sensibles a esas historias para que les llegue a la gente y para cambiar una sociedad...creo en el poder del documental sí, para cambiar sociedades, para mover gobiernos, para mover estructuras" (2015). The director also comments that she could not approach the film from solely an intimate approach because "la gente necesitaba también ubicarse en el tiempo porque precisamente la memoria es muy frágil . . . luego de 20 años de ocurrido el caso nadie ubicaba quién era quién y era y sigue siendo importante señalar a cada uno de estos cobardes personajes que formaron parte de esta historia de terror" (Restrepo 2015). So, the director braids together her own experiences with national history in a way that reveals history to be both individual and collective at the same time, the intimate becomes public and the public takes on an intimate, affective reading. I already referred to the scene in which the image transitions from family photos on the mantel at the family home to archival León Febres Cordero campaign footage. The camera pauses on the iconic 1991 photograph of Luz Elena and Pedro Restrepo, taken by photojournalist Dolores Ochoa (Figure 10). The photograph

portrays Luz Elena Arismendi de Restrepo, Pedro Restrepo and María Fernanda Restrepo with their protest signs, “Por nuestros hijos hasta la vida” (Luz Elena) and “Con mi corazón en Yambo” (Pedro). María Fernanda Restrepo appears behind them. In *La Mirada y la Memoria: fotografías periodísticas del Ecuador*, where the photo appears, Dolores Ochoa describes the photo, “Luz Elena, Pedro y la niña, con su soledad, caminando frente a la policía . . . Con sus letreros y su caminar esa familia logró acabar con algo que marcó una época . . . las pesquisas, el terror, un esquema consolidado en el país del que nadie se atrevía a decir nada” (76). This photograph speaks to the family’s fight, and the importance of the image, and media, in calling the discourse of power into question.



**Figure 10.** The camera pauses on the iconic 1991 protest photograph of Luz Elena, Pedro and María Fernanda Restrepo, taken by photojournalist Dolores Ochoa (*Con mi corazón en Yambo* 2011).

The sound of the cheering crowds grows stronger and the image transitions to an aerial shot of the “O”-shaped stadium filled with his followers. The director calls attention to

León Febres Cordero and his role in the disappearance of her brothers. She later reveals that the ex-President was never indicted in the case and he died celebrated by thousands, shortly before she was to interview him. Through the film, she contributes to the archival history documenting León Febres Cordero's record of human rights violations. She centers his face on the stage of history, contrasting the institutional erasure of the dark side of so-called progress, orden y Libertad (Figures 11 and 12).



**Figure 11.** Archival video of León Febres Cordero campaign video “La violencia de León” (Yambo 2011).



**Figure 12.** Centering León Febres Cordero in Ecuadorian history as a perpetrator of state-sponsored violence (*Yambo* 2011).

While the law and the institutions of power have failed to recognize the crime--the acts of utter inhumanity perpetrated by the government and its policies--the film will put the crime and its perpetrators before the public, contributing to a collective accountability for, or at the very least, recognition, of the human rights violations. In her chapter, "Photography as a Platform for Transitional Justice: Perú's Case," Gabriela Martínez explains that "In a way, the photographic exhibition [*Yuyanapaq: Para Recordar*] and book serve as a visual report that complements the CVR's *Informe Final or Final Report* composed of eight volumes around 4,000 pages" (Martínez 2018). In a similar way, *Yambo* complements the Ecuadorian Truth Commission report of 2010, and actively resists the institutional denial and silencing that the family has faced. In the film, the director's aunt (Martha Arizmendi Restrepo), explains that the camera was a weapon for the family, used to document the violent repression they faced from national police when

protesting the disappearance of their sons in the Plaza Grande in Quito. This film shares the logic of cinema as weapon used for protection. Documentation and discourse can serve to write history against the grain. They can also be used to make fun, to signal the ironies and hypocrisies.

To continue with the example of León Febres Cordero, the film's incorporation of footage from the presidential inauguration in 1984 is telling of the ironic use of official archival footage. The first shots capture the arrival of Vice-President George Bush, then León Febres Cordero greeting the Catholic Cardinal, and then León Febres Cordero while the presidential sash is placed upon him. The focus on Bush gives the scene an international context of Reaganism (1981-1989), administrations during which Bush was vice president to Reagan. The greeting with the Cardinal highlights the Church's alliance with Febres Cordero and its protection of the status quo. The coverage of the placement of the presidential sash draws attention to the performative nature of politics, and the extent that the lies can reach in the official national discourse. In this shot, the camera focuses on Febres Cordero as he glitches, the performance momentarily botched: the sash has been awkwardly placed and he must move his arms, readjust and then stand up completely. Just like this footage highlights a glitch in the official discourse carried out through both the archive and the repertoire (or performed aspect of history as Diana Taylor outlines), the film itself questions the elaborate facade the government maintained in order to preserve silence around the case. All the while, Pedro Restrepo explains how the family had previously been supporters of Febres Cordero and his party's conservative ideals of order and liberty, which were marked by a fear of change. He states that they

had believed in the Church and in the police, they had believed those institutions were there to defend them. But when Santiago and Andrés disappeared, the family knew that they meant nothing to these institutions: all doors were closed. They had been deceived like so many others by the discourse of León and came to see they were lies. Febres Cordero's concept of liberty and order justified policies of torture, disappearance and impunity.

After the international report came out signaling the guilt of the police, President Borja was forced to eliminate the SIC-10 unit, a special designated to eliminate subversive groups. Eliminating this group, however, did not eliminate state-sponsored acts of repression and human rights violations. The public image of the police in recent years has fallen so low that police training now includes classes on human rights violations. The Restrepo case is a case study in the course. As spectators, we watch and listen as the teacher informs the students that the National Police has a history of violation of human rights. In a series of observational shots portraying the police workshop, the camera is positioned in such a way that the shot captures the facilitator (a young man in his police uniform) speaking from a standing position to the class, a large group of uniformed men and women sitting at small desks. This framing once again highlights a hierarchal discourse between the police officer who speaks and the class, which listens. The teacher explains that after the UN report on the Restrepo case, SIC-10 was eliminated, but the Police officers involved were never removed from duty, and so the violations continued. The explicitness of the lesson, combined with recourse to choral repetition and other elementary capacitation tools incites a reflection on the extreme level

of corruption and deceit within the public institution. The facilitator says to the class, “We were killers. We were torturers. What else have we been?” and volunteers call out various answers including “abusivos.” The facilitator affirms, yes, “abusivos, etc, etc...” Why does something that is common sense have to be explained in such spelled-out terms? Because there is a precedence of violence within the policies of the institution. Another example that draws attention to the lack of common sense within the police institution is an animation simulating police violence against a citizen. We see a stout rudimentary police character repeatedly strike a prisoner who wears black and white stripes and is confined to a cell. The sound of the video, which is incorporated into the film, includes a loud cartoon banging-sound at each strike of the club. The step-by-step illustration of repression to the officers creates a sense of irony whereby the ridiculousness of the official discourse underlines the legitimacy of the director’s discourse.

Another example of the film’s combination of theatrics and a logic of doubt is the way that *Con mi Corazón en Yambo* incorporates audio recordings of the governments’ efforts to cover up the murder of Santiago and Andrés. In order to keep the family from speaking out, the police assigned sub-lieutenant Doris Morán, and her mother, who accompanied her in her work, to infiltrate the family. Claiming to be in contact with the two boys and to have information about their whereabouts, Doris and Aída promised to aid the family so long as they would maintain silence. In one long shot, the camera captures the reels of a cassette tape rolling as Luz Helena, mother of Santiago and Andrés, pleads with Aída to tell her where her boys are. The slow movement of the tape



reflects the anxious, unending psychological torture that this state-organized tactic afflicts on the family in order to keep them in silence. The sense of performance involved in these tactics (i.e. Aída and Doris pretending to be something they are not) is introduced by a series of shots preceding the cassette take. In medium to close shots, the camera focuses on dark corners in the family home. Detail shots of an old-fashioned telephone show parts of the phone from different angles (the cord, the dial, the ear piece), almost like photographs taken at the scene of a crime, capturing the objects of study from different angles. Layered over these images is the extra-diegetic recording of the sound of the phone clicking as it dials, and then ringing. Like the rapidly changing angles of the detail shots, the sound is also repetitive and fragmented, not lined up as dial-dial-ring-answer, but instead, a frenzy of dialing and ringing. Scenes like this one, revealing the disturbing conversations between the Restrepo family and Doris and Aída Morán, which the family recorded, recur throughout the film. In one scene, the spectator hears the desperate voice of Luz Elena asking Aída if the boys are ok and she assures her that they are. Later, family footage shows Doris and Aída hugging young María Fernanda at her dance recital, in her tutu. Their presence in a prototypical intimate family moment contributes to a sense of disbelief and disgust at the lengths to which the government went to maintain the family's silence and coverup the crime. The director reiterates that while her brothers died the same weekend they were detained, the police had her parents looking for them all over the country for years afterward. Pedro Restrepo even shared a hotel with one of the police agents, Agente Camilo Badillo, when they went to search for

the boys in Tulcán. Camilo Badillo was one of the agents who disposed of the boys' bodies in Lake Yambo.

The film presents other examples of elaborate and cruel government fabrications in the case. For example, in the film, María Fernanda Restrepo and Pedro Restrepo are seen walking along the abandoned highway where the boys are believed to have been detained. In voice over, the director clarifies that the steep ravine that descends from the highway into the river was carefully combed for any remains in the days following the boys' disappearance. Nothing was found. Clips from the audio and video of a news clip (February 17, 1988) then reveal that a month later, the police claimed to have found the family's Jeep Trooper, which the boys were driving at the time of the disappearance, in the ravine. The footage reveals an exhausted but stoic Pedro Restrepo participating in the search. In voice over, he comments on how he hoped they would find something. Shortly after the car parts were found, the Ecuadorian General Molina closed the case. The film then transitions to a sequence of Martha Restrepo, the director's aunt, pulling out a file from her wall full of binders, leafing through one until she pulls out the Valenzuela Report, an official police report that ruled out the possibility of a traffic accident and specified that the boys were not in the vehicle when it went over the edge of the cliff. On another occasion which the director mentions, and which her mother relates on an Ecuadorian talk show, in "Operación Zapato," the government presented the family with one of Santiago's shoes as evidence that there had been an automobile accident. Their so-called evidence was so clearly a farse that it worked more to discredit the official story of accident than to support it.

Similar to the sensation of disbelief provoked by the Doris and Aída Morán sequences, the contradictions here between the official reports highlights the web of lies that developed around the Restrepo case. Two scenes speak to the film's ironic use of the archive. In one, the director appears on screen, in a small office. The camera is on the other side of the room, peeking through the empty shelves of a bookshelf. The director is distanced from the viewer and framed by the shelving. She sits before a small television, among piles of documents and tapes. In voice over, she explains that she searched the archives for documents on the fabrication of the car accident: "Encuentro dos cassettes que dicen 'Restrepo' pero solo hay agua." The camera assumes a closer position at eye level, from behind Restrepo, mimicking her gaze, which is directed toward the television, where footage of a waterfall rolls. The archival footage is stationary, just observing the waterfall as it plunges down the ravine. An observation shot of the director, who is framed within the frame, watching footage that is nothing more than a stationary shot of the waterfall, speaks to the evasive and deceitful nature of the official discourse. With layer upon layer upon layer of frantic official discourse, the story becomes more evasive while the truth of the government's coverup of the police killing becomes clearer and more solid. Like the example of the clumsy shoe fiasco, the filming of the water, in a case where the boy's bodies are believed to have been dumped in a lake, is an example of the government's willful evasion of the truth. The director rewinds and fast forwards the footage, all of which documents the water. Suddenly the image transitions to contemporary footage, notably different because of the clarity of the image and the proximity to the water. This brief transition speaks to the director's appropriation of the

discourse, her ability to respond to it, question it, ridicule it for its contradictions, base inhumanities and stupidities.

In 1990, after a team of Colombian police detectives from the Colombian Administrative Department of Security determined the Ecuadorian police as guilty of the murder of Santiago and Andres, the Ecuadorian police, led by Colonel Gustavo Gallegos (of the SIC—“Servicio de Investigación Criminal”), elaborated a 400-page scientific report supporting the accident theory. The film includes footage from a news report in which Gallegos asserts that the bodies must have fallen into the river—how could there be any other answer? he asks. Several different shots focus in on Gallegos flipping through the thick report, as is the number of pages in the report were to lend it legitimacy. As he does this, the director mentions in voice over that the report included the thesis that the bodies had been eaten by fish, a thesis “únicamente concebible en la mente de un policía.” As she elaborates on Gallego’s ridiculous conclusion, the footage of the archival waterfall appears. The official archive serves less to uncover the truth than it does to make evident the lies sustained by institutions of power.

### **Conclusion and Comparative Analysis**

#### The Use of the Archive in *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* and *Con mi corazón en Yambo*

*La muerte de Jaime Roldós* is the story of a disappeared father who is also the president of the country (Jaime Roldós). *Con mi corazón en Yambo* is the story of disappeared sons, disappeared brothers (Santiago and Andres Restrepo). In *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*, national politics (the death of the Ecuadorian head of state) take on an individual and personal significance through the perspective of the Roldós’ orphaned

children, and through the perspective of the filmmakers in their investigative process. In *Con mi corazón en Yambo*, the private and individual life is forced into the public arena through a horrendous crime involving a coverup at the highest levels of national and international politics. The international context of Cold War-era capitalist U.S. imperialism that defines the circumstances of Roldós' death, imposes the neoliberal order that condones torture in the name of law and order, the kind of policy that condoned the kind of violence used on Santiago and Andres Restrepo. *Roldós* portrays actions that happened at a greater temporal distance than those portrayed in *Yambo*. While his death occurred relatively recently, in 1981, less than 50 years ago, the circumstances and political tensions surrounding his death have been almost entirely wiped from the history books. Sarmiento and Rivera approach this past from a generational perspective (same age as the children of Martha and Jaime Roldós) and a national perspective whereby the filmmakers confront a debt with the country's past, through the archive, on a macro-level. The possibility for holding anyone accountable for his death on a legal level seems more distant, the political fight is fought on the poetic battlefield of the telling of history. By contrast, *Yambo* is an ethical, affective debt with the memory of the director's brothers, on a more micro-scale. The film utilizes personal archives from the director's childhood and comparatively more footage created for the purpose of the film and documentation of the family's fight for justice in terms of their search for the boys' remains and the investigation into all parties involved in their murder and the subsequent coverup of their deaths. In his article, "Las imágenes recreadas en los documentales históricos. Un análisis

de *Con mi corazón en Yambo* y *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*, Darwin Gonzalo Borja

Salguero draws the conclusion that:

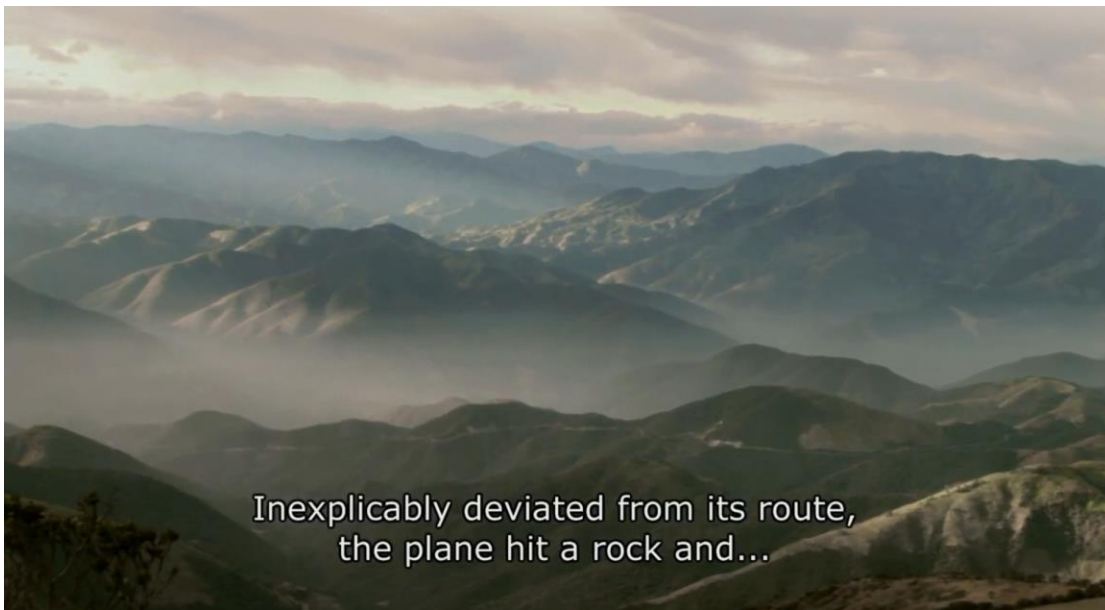
Entre ambas historias hay una diferencia bien marcada, en cuanto al número de imágenes recreadas. María Fernanda Restrepo en *Con mi corazón en Yambo* recurre más abundantemente a ese recurso que Manolo Sarmiento y Lisandra Rivera en *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*. Uno de los factores determinantes en la importancia de los protagonistas, previo a los trágicos acontecimientos. Así, Jaime Roldós, por su cargo de Presidente de la República, ya era considerado en la agenda mediática del país. Lo contrario pasaba con los hermanos Restrepo, quienes fueron parte de los noticiarios después de que sus padres hicieron pública su desaparición.” (35)

*Yambo* relies on personal archives and creative footage combined with participatory interview sequences in the present tense. *Roldós* on the contrary relies on a great deal of official archival materials—newspapers, speeches, government communications—which comprise the majority of the film. Cueva notes that in films like *Yambo*, or *Abuelos* (Carla Valencia) or *El grill de César* (Darío Aguirre) or *El lugar donde se juntan los polos* (Cueva), “la hermana, la nieta, el hijo son fundamentales en tanto tales, no solo como garantes de la empatía entre el espectador, ellos mismos y los otros personajes—padres, hermanos o abuelos—” (Cueva “El uso de la primera persona en el cine documental ecuatoriano,” *Hacer con los ojos*, 147). These films fall into the category of “alguien que habla de sí mismo” (Cueva 148, 149). On the other hand, *Roldós* forms part of the group of films by “alguien que habla sobre otro” (Cueva 149, 150). In these films, “la cercanía del realizador con las personas que filma lo terminan incluyendo en el discurso, y por lo tanto develando su presencia” (Cueva 150). In *Roldós*, the subjectivity of the filmmaker is recognized within the film, but the subject is someone beside themselves and their family (150). So, while both films work through a sort of trauma, be it

family or collective national trauma, they do so in different ways, different symptoms of the capitalist system as it transforms over time. *Roldós* strives for poetic justice through a reflection on the telling of history that extends outward to incorporate international politics, especially U.S. government and corporations' intervention in Latin American politics. The film invites the viewer to reflect on how the dynamics of power control the Archive and therefore the telling of history. *Yambo*, on the other hand, strives for an active search for her brothers' remains and new evidence that will bring answers to the unresolved questions around her brothers' disappearance. She strives to cement into history the names and faces of those involved in the murder of her brothers and the subsequent coverup of the crime. She wants her viewers to remember their faces in conjunction with the crime they committed. She puts them on trial before her public through the interviews (some unplanned) with Sixto Durán-Ballén, Agents Camilo Badillo and Guillermo Llerena, Coronel Trajano Barrionuevo, and officers Doris Morán and Juan Sosa. In *Yambo*, the majority of those officials who are interviewed deny involvement in the story. In fact, their blatant denial is part of the story the film tells. In *Roldós*, by contrast, the majority of those who are interviewed speak out against the narrative of the "accident," assuring that there was indeed a national and international agenda to deter Jaime Roldós in his efforts to serve his country. They also offer information to better understand the political context.

Poetic Justice in *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*

Two key examples from *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* demonstrate the kind of poetic justice the film seeks. In observational landscape shots, the camera surveys the windy mountainside where the plane fell and Mariana, Santiago and Martha Roldós, along with the widow of the pilot of the airplane, María Antonieta de Andrade, as they walk around the area (Figure 13).



**Figure 13.** Observational landscape shots of Huayrapungo, site of the plane crash (Roldós 2013).

In voice over, the director explains that the Roldós children, “Como la mayoría de los ecuatorianos, también sospechan que sus padres fueron asesinados. Ellos están convencidos de que los informes que elaboraron los militares fueron forjados y forman parte de un pacto de silencio.” These shots lead into observational sequences of Santiago Roldós speaking at a public event on the 30<sup>th</sup>-year anniversary of the plane crash. A



crowd of people is seen gathered around him as he speaks at a pulpit. A high angle establishing shot portrays the crowd against an amazing skyline of light-filled clouds, a beautiful shot that captures a magical side to the Andean context. A medium shot frames Santiago at a lectern. Hands with microphones extending toward him from outside the frame. He states:

“Creo que el Ecuador con el que soñaron nuestros padres es apenas un proyecto en construcción todavía. Y creo que la falta de la verdad y la ignominia que cubrió la muerte de ellos está en la génesis de la crisis del Ecuador.”

When it comes to trauma, not knowing the full story of what happened makes that trauma more difficult to confront. The questions remain unresolved and the wounds never reach a full scar before they are broken again. This is true on a personal level for Roldós’ children and on a collective level for the country of Ecuador. Santiago Roldós continues:

“No es posible que un país que regresa a la democracia para liderar además la vuelta a la democracia en América Latina como fue el Ecuador en el ‘79 y no es posible que ese país no se comprometa consigo mismo para saber qué paso . . . Preferiría saber que ellos murieron en un accidente, pero no lo sé, no lo sé . . . (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013).

The shots of the landscape seem to remind that despite the silences surrounding Roldós’ death, whatever happened there remains etched on the archive of the natural world, and perhaps even more potently so, it remains present in the social and political structures that kept going without addressing the reality of the loss as more than an “accident”: Roldós’ death remains “una cuenta pendiente” for the country as a whole.

The film reveals several barriers to responding to Santiago Roldós’ (and the nation’s) question of “¿qué pasó?” First, in comparison to the Restrepo case, more time has passed since the death of Jaime and Martha Roldós and the seven other passengers on

the plane. Second, the film makes it clear that, because of the high-profile nature of the case (which involves national and international politics related the U.S. and the Southern Cone dictatorships), the Archive is carefully and forcefully controlled to protect the silence around the plane crash. The absence, removal and classification of documents signal a coverup rather than proof of the “accident” thesis. Finally, the way in which Roldós’ name and image were appropriated and manipulated by his brother-in-law, Abdalá Bucaram, who became President of Ecuador on the Partido Roldosista Ecuatoriano ticket in August 1996 and was removed from office on charges of “mental incapacity” in February of 1997, further blocks a viable path toward political justice. In the film, infamous campaign footage of Bucaram in full-on theatrics, screaming before a crowd as he paces back and forth on the stage with his fist raised in the air, proclaiming that when he reaches the presidency, the conservative right will be like sperm released into democratic passions, the passions de “los pobres de mi patria!” Until then, he exclaims, he will keep them under control (signaling as if he had these sperm contained within his raised fist). Bucaram is sweating and pacing and his zealous tone, combined with the awkward comparison of the lawmakers to sperm, emphasizes the erratic nature of his behavior. With an audio bridge of extra-diegetic acoustic guitar music connecting the two shots, the camera transitions to another stage, across which Santiago Roldós prances elegantly in his underwear. He is laughing in a silly and erratic way that mimics the fervor of Bucaram in the earlier footage. Similarly, his comic gestures of flexing his muscles and pursing his lips to show his toughness (all while maintaining silence in a mime-like fashion), reveal that Santiago is mimicking his uncle’s performance of

masculinity. During the performance, Santiago paints a moustache onto his face similar to the characteristic mustache of his uncle. The parody becomes more and more evident, especially given the physical resemblance between the uncle and nephew. The director contextualizes in voice over: “Santiago por su parte dejó a un lado la carrera política a la que supuestamente estaba predestinado [como el hijo heredero de la presidencia] y se hizo actor y director de teatro.” The film captures a conversation between the director, Santiago and Santiago’s friend, dramaturge Arístedes Vargas, Argentine exile who has lived in Ecuador since fleeing political persecution in the 1970s. As they chat and smoke a cigarette, Vargas notes that Santiago, like Hamlet, looks to avenge the death of his father, but cannot realize his vengeance through the political structure, because the repair he seeks is emotional, not political. This need for emotional, rather than political repair, is made even more acute because of the conjunction of family life and national political life, where Santiago, Martha and Diana’s mother’s side of the family, to whom they were very close, privileged political gains over the wellbeing of the children and the honor of Martha and Santiago. Combine these circumstances with the dynamics of power behind the archival registers that can speak to Roldós’ death as assassination vs accident and it becomes evident that the avenues for justice become relegated to the poetic realm; hence, Santiago turns to theatre over politics (Figure 14).



**Figure 14.** Santiago Roldós performing a satirical representation of his uncle, Abdalá Bucaram, an exercise of poetic justice and repair (*Roldós* 2013).

The film participates in the same kind of poetic justice that Santiago seeks out. In fact, Santiago, within the film, not only talks about his experience, but also revisits the place of the crash and the presidential palace where he spent time with his father. The camera captures this return to el Palacio Nacional, carefully filming the elegant colonial-era hallways, entrances and “salas,” and long, silent observational takes of Santiago reflecting on how his father was the same age as him at the time of his death. He looks around the halls where he –Santiaguito—used to walk with his father, often dressed in a little suit and tie. It is also the place where his parents’ funeral was held. Santiago, the directors of *Roldós*, and the viewers perform this act of remembrance and confrontation through the film, which, in the end, is one more archival document for the Roldós file.

This act of contributing to the archive and the writing of history is reflected upon most explicitly at the end of the film, in the Epilogue, which I analyzed in the earlier

close reading of *Roldós*. By confronting Tramontana one-on-one in his archive, the director goes to the heart of the film's philosophical reflections on the writing of history concerning the "arckhē" in Archive. As Derrida outlines: both a place "commencement" and "commandment," a repeated exercise of power enforcement (Derrida *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 1). Observational shots show a seemingly endless collection of film reels housed in Tramontana's archive. But the footage of the massacre does not form part of this collection, which became part of Ecuadorian cultural patrimony when Tramontana passed away in 2009. Still shots from Tramontana's collection, combined with his reflections on "progress" demonstrate the industrialization of Ecuador—the opening of oil extraction sites, mines, the building of roads. As these images roll, in voice over, the director notes that he has finally realized that much of Roldós story, and the role it plays in national history, can be understood through Tramontana's revelation. The Archive is defined both by what is decided worthy of saving and by what is silenced: "Al escribir la historia no sólo decidimos lo que recordaremos, sobre todo decidimos lo que olvidaremos porque no nos conviene" (Rivera and Sarmiento 2013). "What would happen if all the silences of History were to speak?" The director sews the film into this dynamic by closing the film with observational shots taken off the beaten path, in a coastal neighborhood with dusty roads.

In contrast with the aerial shots that dominate Tramontana's archives of progress, capturing massive developmental projects from a very distant perspective, the next shot is a medium shot of two men riding up on a motorcycle on a dusty road in a coastal town. There is a transition here from the most official macro-perspective provided by

institutional video aerial shots of developmental projects to the most micro-perspective captured by an individual in a small town on an unmarked evening. The men get off the motorcycle at the entrance of a small shop and one of them approaches the camera, which seems to be waiting for them. The man is carrying with him an L.P., an album with a recording of President Roldós' speeches. Someone from the locale produces a cloth to wipe down the album and background noise of neighbors and kids playing outside along the street can be heard. LPs, given their analogic mechanisms and nostalgic feel, speak to the in-situ, lived history, presence, authenticity. By searching out someone from the town who has this album and playing it from a random home's record player, the director signals his own practice and performance of the writing of history. He will give voice to one tiny slice of the many silenced histories. This one is the story of Roldós, and the meaning that his voice and legacy has for the citizens of Ecuador. He brings Roldós out of silence.

#### Denunciation and Confrontation in *Con mi corazón en Yambo*

In many ways, the film itself is an act of denunciation, multiple acts of denunciation. One is seeing the director on screen in the act of confronting those who are involved in the disappearance of her brothers and the massive coverup of police violence that ensued. Some of these interactions the director sought out and planned for, while others were gratuitous surprises of chance. For example, the director makes a meeting with ex-President Sixto Durán Ballén. This occasion is planned in coordination with Durán Ballén's daughter. Before the face-to-face participatory shots in which we see Durán Ballén on screen with the director, the film introduces Durán Ballén as the candidate who

assumed office at the height of the family's protests in La Plaza Grande, where the Palacio Nacional is located. Archival footage from campaign videos portray Durán Ballén waving to the camera. As the director narrates, giving this political context, the camera transitions to other footage, documentation of a meeting the president had with a committee of young people from the country. The filming captures the performative nature of this visit, highlighting the president as he walks into the room and then the faces of young people at an official-looking, shiny oval table. The camera focuses in on María Fernanda Restrepo as a young person, among the group of young Ecuadorians at the oval table. The audio of these clips is silent, and in voice over, the director describes how she took advantage of this opportunity to speak with the President, to ask him about her brother's case—surely not the kind of question he had expected to receive during press coverage of his meeting with the country's young people.

As the director explains that ex-President Sixto Durán Ballén ignored her, a travelling long shot taken at eye-height by a handheld camera approaches the door of the same presidential quarters that appear in the earlier footage, of the meeting with ex-President when the director was a child. This shift signals a direct confrontation with that earlier painful moment from the perspective of the director, today. As the camera moves around the empty space of the presidential table, a recording of Sixto's response to her all those years before plays. He tells her that the family should stop bothering the country with their protests; they won't bring back her brothers, he says. He goes on to ridicule her, asking why, if protesting is what keeps them alive (as the director asserts), they don't protest every single day? His cruelty toward a child is uncomfortable for the viewer to

watch, especially within the performatic backdrop of the president's interview with young people. The director explains that after this meeting, he ordered the police to surround the plaza every Wednesday, the day of the family's protests. The cruelty that the spectator witnesses in the interview translates to real political repression, revealing further the baseness of the ex-President Sixto Durán Ballén. Archival footage shows armed troops surrounding the plaza interspliced with still shots of her parents (mostly focusing here on Luz Elena) in direct confrontation with the police, standing their ground. In the images, Luz Elena embodies the figure of the "madre de la plaza," similar to the las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, or the women of Calama in Chile, who continue to search for their disappeared children, grandchildren, partners, siblings. Pedro Restrepo describes in voice-over how the police would pull Luz Elena away from the area by her hair. He also describes how on one occasion, Sixto's daughter came out to tell Pedro Restrepo that instead of making so much noise, they should put classical music on for her dad.

This footage introduces the interview with Sixto that forms part of the making of the film. The camera is off to one corner as Sixto enters a formal living room area with a colonial furniture style. He happily asks where he should sit, smiling and appearing pleased at the attention, as if he assumes that it is positive attention honoring his time as president. This is where the film takes irony to a lived level using the camera. The camera focuses on both Sixto and his daughter within what appears to be Sixto's home. In voice over, the director explains that this was the same daughter who had told her father to put on classical music, instead of making so much noise. Her voice sounds strangely happy



as she explains this, indicating the irony and the implicit tone of *burla* around this whole encounter. Through the film, she plays with what she already knows about Sixto Durán Ballén's obtuseness and ignorance to create another record in the Archive to unveil for others his callousness and corruption. She even goes to the extent to follow him through his home with the camera, to his classical music LP collection. In the diegetic sound, the viewer hears the director asking Sixto Durán Ballén how a passionate music lover like him could ever concentrate when there was so much noise in the plaza. Again, the tone of her question, for the viewer, is more than clear—*burla*, sarcasm—but the ex-President, smoking his cigar and sitting back in his rocking chair, doesn't seem to notice. A detail shot shows how he moves his hand, to the classical music, cigar in hand, unaware of his surroundings and focused only on the music. Unlike the directors of *Roldós*, who can never get quite close enough to the archive to know who exactly to interview in terms of those guilty for Roldós' death, Restrepo confronts directly those who were involved in both the cover-up and the actual murders of her brothers. These unique forms of confrontation again are related to the political contexts of the cases. Roldós' case reaches international figures and history in a more direct way, therefore the archive has been more rigidly controlled. They also speak to the relationship of the director to their subject, which in the case of Restrepo is her own family experience. She expresses directly her feelings of loss and indignation and resolve, but she also confronts directly those involved in the trauma, seeking to contribute to the denunciation of their acts within public discourse, taking up the work that the state has yet to do in a just and complete way. The film reveals how those who were sentenced in the case, which existed only

because of the insistence of the family, only fulfilled half of their time, claiming “good behavior” to reduce their sentence, even when they lived out the sentences with comfortable accommodations and no respect to the spirit of the punishment, continuing to work and to go to public places. General Molina (sentenced to 2 years of reclusion for his role in the coverup), for example, left the country to avoid having to fulfill his sentence.

Another confrontation that is this time part planned and part a surprise, is the face-to-face filmed meeting with Restrepo and Camilo Badillo at the Ecuadorian Truth Commission of 2008. Restrepo decided to approach him before he left the Truth Commission session. Later, Badillo contacts her, stating that he has new information about the case. This leads to another meeting at the Truth Commission. Restrepo is expecting to find only Badillo, but instead, there waiting for her are Camilo Badillo, Juan Sosa, Trajano Barrionuevo, Guillermo Llerena and Salomón Castillo. Sosa is the ex-police agent who disappeared important documents in the case, including the paperwork documenting the boys’ admission to the police quarters and the kinds of torture they received, but also a recording of Agent Morán and Luz Elena Arismendi Restrepo. Trajano Barrionuevo was the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Services (SIC-10). At the time of the interview, in the film, in voice over, the director notes that he is a Christian preacher. Guillermo Llerena was head of the homicide unit within SIC-10 at the time of the Restrepo brothers’ disappearance. Llerena has been accused of torture before the CEDHU (La Comisión Ecuatoria de Derechos Humanos) several times. He was likely to have ordered and carried out the torture, possibly along with two other agents.

Ex-police agent Castillo says he witnessed the crime and accuses three other agents (Fraga, Medrano and Gudiño) of involvement.

In this significant sequence (lasting almost 5 minutes), the camera looks around at each of their faces in closeup shots. The camera accentuates the tightness of the room by constantly having to readjust to capture the speaker, able to only ever capture a fragment of the group at a time due to the tight quarters. The camera work in this way highlights the high stakes and tense atmosphere of confrontation. But here, the director is the one asking questions. With her recording equipment on, including a large hand-held microphone and headphones, Restrepo interacts with each of them, getting close to those giving testimony with the microphone as she presses them with questions, why? Why was torture used in the SIC-10 units?, she asks. She creates an archive of their evasion of the past and their responsibilities in the case. Camilo Badillo, Trajano Barrionuevo and Guillermo Llerena get aggressive, leaning toward her, responding to her questions with more questions, raising their voices and pointing their fingers at her. The scene is intense and the viewer wonders what it might have felt like for the director, confronting her aggressors in a group in this way. She demonstrates great courage in maintaining her calm and asking them questions in a way that documents their ethical crimes, getting straight at the damages done. As the room empties out and the men leave one by one, in voice over, the director reflects that she felt that in that moment she had lived a small piece of what her parents lived, stating, “Aprendí que la verdadera pelea no era en enfrentarlos. Era repetirles una y otra vez el crimen que cometieron y que siguen

negando” (Restrepo 2011). The labor, the reason she had to face them, was to repeat to them the crime they had committed, to confront their negation.

In another encounter, this one serendipitous, the director faces Doris Morán. She was filming a segment for a t.v. program she was working for when she found herself face to face with Morán in the midst of the public festivities she was filming. Doris, her mother Aída and son were among the crowd. The director *captures* Morán on film, getting as close as possible, so as to document her face for the public. What first caught her attention was in fact Morán’s son, who seemed to constantly cross in front of her lens. As she searched for other shots, the director explains in voice over, her camera found Doris and Aída Morán. Restrepo’s cinematography and editing here have a determined, almost aggressive note to them, as Morán and her mother cover their faces and look away from the camera, shielding themselves with the body of Morán son, who is a little boy. First, the director approaches them through more and more magnified and close-range lenses, but eventually, Restrepo approaches them physically. She makes her way through the crowd, the camera following behind her as she asks people, as if interviewing them for the show, what their opinion of the spectacle was. The camera shakes as the director makes her way further up the bleachers, between the people. This camera movement mimics the sense of intensity that characterizes the occasion. With determination, Restrepo approaches Doris and Aída, asking them directly to confirm their names, but they refuse. Restrepo goes on to ask how they could have treated her mother the way they did. They refuse and deny. At a low angle, looking up from below as if the camera had followed the director as far as it could but could not make it quite as close as her. The

camera captures Restrepo, microphone in hand, in frame with Doris and Aída in a close-medium shot in such angle that the viewer sees the women from below, looking up at their chins in an awkward way. Yelling over the town band, and with her face very close to Doris, the director asks her, “. . . when you let us believe they were alive for over a year, why, Doris, why?” and “how is your conscience?” The director starts to leave and then stays in frame in silence just a little longer, unable to leave the scene yet. The subsequent shots capture Doris Morán (who now lives under the name María Terán) leaving the crowd. In increasingly wide shots, the spectator watches her as she files away among the people, becoming smaller and smaller as she goes. The shot tells leaves the viewer with the sense that while Doris may live under the name María now, her crimes have not gone unseen and no matter where she goes or what her name is, she cannot be free of this crime until she will recognize what she has done. The camera for the Restrepo family has functioned as a weapon, as Martha Arismendi (the director’s aunt) said, and here, it serves to punish Doris and Aída Morán by registering their faces and names as part of the Restrepo Case, reinscribing their names in public discourse as guilty, and by making them repeat their lies in front of the camera for all to see. Just as in the earlier confrontation with the other individuals charged in the case, the director is notably altered by the experience. Even though it is painful, she looks resolved to pursue the conversation, to stand up for her brothers and family and ask for others to see their story.

## Ecuadorian Documentary Film, Film Festivals and the Platforms for Public Dialogue

The last few parts of the analysis have been close readings. But if the analytic perspective is distanced a little, one sees that *Yambo* and *Roldós* form part of a common goal, to make cinema that will participate in public discourse, to make a contribution to a more just narrative of collective history. While *Yambo*, as a first-person perspective about the filmmaker's own experiences, focuses on pursuing justice in a personal, legal and narrative level, and *Roldós* pursues a questioning of the writing of history, based in the story of Roldós and his role in the return to democracy in Latin America, both make significant contributions to the audiovisual archive that addresses recent Ecuadorian history. Their films not only search out important archival documents and display them before the public, but they also organize them into a larger story of Ecuadorian and Latin American politics, questioning hegemonic narratives around democracy and human rights, thereby contributing something new to the archive through voice as well as preserving archival materials. But neither film stops at this. Innovative and carefully crafted films with refined uses of documentary film language, they have managed to capture audiences, from the EDOC International Documentary Film festival in Ecuador, to 8 y medio art cinema, Cinemark and other theatre chains, to acclaimed film festivals across the globe, and more recently through online platforms including YouTube, iTunes, Kanopy, Google and others. Middle Schools and High Schools around Ecuador are using these films to address the national history they portray. Work coming out of the universities in Ecuador address the films from many different angles—documentary filmmaking, communications, history, politics, and more--. These films contribute to

public discussion of human rights, imperialism, police violence. They also grant generations who did not experience these histories directly to process them and incorporate them into the national narrative. In their communication impact analysis of *Con mi corazón en Yambo*, Universidad Politécnica Salesiana-Quito students conclude, “El cine permite que haya un espacio de reflexión que integra una historia, con la percepción individual que explota las sensaciones del público haciendo que se apropie del espacio y del tiempo del relato que expresa ‘Con mi corazón en Yambo’” (Gómez Noblecilla y López Naranjo 61). Through its use of the first-person narration and family archives, *Yambo* moves its viewers in a way that allows them to make space in their imagination for a new vision of history. Adriana Sofía Brito Montenegro, student of communications at Pontífica Universidad Católica de Ecuador, maintains the following of *Roldós* in her research on the film:

*La muerte de Jaime Roldós* ha permitido reconstruir la historia de un país y también cuestionar diferentes políticas que se han mantenido a lo largo del tiempo. Es una forma de crítica social por la cual se rompe un silencio impuesto por más de 30 años. El cine puede y debe denunciar ya que es una forma artística de interpretar la realidad. Aunque el punto de vista de los directores se vea definido, el espectador es capaz de generar sus propias conclusiones frente a los hechos que se le presenta (Brito Montenegro 104).

As both of these conclusions signal, in *Con Mi Corazón en Yambo* and *La Muerte de Jaime Roldós*, the relationship between the past and the present tense of the viewer is occasioned through the performative mediation of the archive. While *Roldós* demonstrates an initial effort to *reveal* the past, seemingly working through the ideological remnants of his generation’s revolutionary longing, the film eventually establishes its political potential through the contrast between that which is “known”

officially and that which has been lived. While these three planes of logic—official history, lived history, and discordance between the two, or doubt—also operate in *Con Mi Corazón en Yambo*, because of the filmmaker’s relationship to her topic, and her generational relationship to the image, the political potentiality of her film lies in *moving*, affectively and sensorially, more than *proving*. No longer impelled by the idea of a liberated future, and marked by a traumatic past, the past is embraced as a constitutive, lingering part of the present. The archive serves as the medium through which to perform this relationship. Together, *La Muerte de Jaime Roldós* and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* contribute to an unofficial archive documenting León Febres Cordero’s role in the conservative national and international politics of the Cold War context. They help viewers to see democracy in Latin America as very much affected by the repressive anti-socialist, neoliberal agenda of ruling elites from Ecuador, the rest of South America and the United States. Liberal democracy and its discourse of human rights especially post 1989, are questioned in both films; testimonies from the underside of liberal democracy offer a critical vision of Ecuadorian and Latin American history.

In his book, *Speaking Truths with Film*, Bill Nichols notes “. . . no one film has ever been the cause of fundamental social change” (*Speaking Truths With Film* 225). This is an important idea to keep in mind when one invests significant energy in analyzing the details of select scenes in a film, reflecting on the film’s aesthetics and their political meaning. In a related discussion to the above excerpt, Nichols notes, “The work of dedicated political filmmakers who captivate and provoke has its impact, but unless their provocations are taken up and carried further, unless the terms that frame debate shift to



progressive ground . . . the long term, systemic impact I am calling for will be lacking” (Nichols *Speaking Truths With Film* 222). While I would not argue that *Roldós* and *Yambo* have caused fundamental social change, I do argue that the films’ provocations have been taken up and carried further, shifting the political and historical debate significantly. Brito Montenegro writes that “Manolo Sarmiento (2015) comentó que el fiscal se sintió conmovido por la película y decidió reabrir el caso, lo cual demuestra la forma en la que se maneja la justicia en el Ecuador” (Brito Montenegro 99). *Yambo*, as I have mentioned, also resulted in the reopening of the Restrepo brothers’ case, and it documented the search of Lake Yambo for the boys’ remains in 2009. The reopening of cases at this high of a level is no small achievement, but it is true that the effects of the films on the political decisions to pursue justice, speaks to a need for larger commitment, deeper economic and social changes for justice to be carried out in Ecuador in a more integral way. An impulse within Ecuadorian society that does reach for this larger change—or at the very least, a platform and occasion for its consideration through shared dialogue—is that of Ecuadorian cinema, especially documentary film.

Restrepo’s film not only reflects the aftermath of *Roldós* in historic terms, but also in terms of the cinematic industries in which they were produced. In an interview with Restrepo, she very emphatically mentions the influence of the EDOC film festival on her formation as a filmmaker and as an “open door” for her film, which premiered at the festival in 2011, when it still had not gone through its final color corrections and adjustments. Her generation of cineastes learned a great deal from the global breadth of documentary films that Sarmiento and Rivera’s generation made available to the

Ecuadorian viewing public through the festival EDOC. In 2001, Sarmiento and Rivera were founding members of Cinememoria and Festival EDOC (Encuentros del Otro Cine Festival Internacional de Cine Documental), which sought to bring classic New Latin American cinema films like Patricio Guzmán's *Batalla de Chile* and *Memoria Obstinada* (and many others) to Ecuador, as well as to give filmmakers a chance to show the films they had been making with the newly available digital technology (Sarmiento 2015, Rivera 2015). Even though *Roldós'* directors' generation grew up facing considerable disillusionment in the repression of socialist movements, the passion and commitment of revolutionary cinema remained a highly motivating force. With the settling in of neoliberal politics and economy, which went hand in hand with economic crisis and the collapse of Ecuadorian political structures in the late 1990s and early 2000s, these filmmakers had to invent new avenues through which to resist, but also very plainly to work, to generate income; the festival was one such avenue. Festival EDOC, and its parallel structures, like the festival's video library, workshops, and theoretical conferences (at Universidad Andina Simon Bolivar) created actual jobs and a space through which to criticize structures of power and create. It also provided young filmmakers and viewers to see films from around the world, to work with internationally recognized cineastes, to present their own work and to dialogue cinema and pressing actualities. Restrepo, like many filmmakers from her generation, openly addresses the powerful role of EDOC in her cinematographic education. Therefore, in terms of the film culture, especially documentary film, both *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* (Lisandra Rivera

and Manolo Sarmiento) and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* (María Fernanda Restrepo), represent the political potential of documentary film that reaches beyond specific texts.

CHAPTER IV:  
CONCLUSION—GLOBAL ENCOUNTERS OF  
(AN)OTHER CINEMA

In this journey through Ecuadorian and Chilean documentary films about memory and state-sponsored violence, I have focused on the aesthetics of time. I chose to theorize those representations of time that incite new questions about persistent injustices. I have found that while *Nostalgia de la luz*, *Abuelos*, *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* advocate for structural change, and in some cases have successfully instigated the reopening of national investigations into state-sponsored violence, their greatest political potential lies in their contestation of injustice through the philosophy of time and history that they construct. The connections the films establish between sites of violence across time and space mobilize alternative conceptions of time, plant the seeds for solidarity that crosses borders, and emphasize the body as the key locus for active, ethical memory. These forms of collective relationality dispute the extreme individualism and disconnection from the environment that underpin neoliberal society and economy. As I bring my research on the representation of time in this corpus of films to a close, I want to draw attention to another factor that brings them together. The films in this corpus were all shown at the EDOC (Encuentros del otro cine) International Documentary Film Festival in Quito, Ecuador and were all made by directors who have worked closely with the festival. Their connection to EDOC both shapes and extends the commitment to ethical representation of history in each of the films.

In Latin America, the intertwined histories of conquest, colonialism, neocolonialism, repressive authoritarian regimes of the Cold War period, and neoliberalism are obstinate legacies. In the introduction to the 1981 photography collection, *Ecuador: Imágenes de un pretérito presente*, Ecuadorian writer Jorge Enrique Adoum observes the temporal dynamics of just such a *pending* past in the black and white still shots taken by César Álvarez from 1976-1979. The photographs depict individuals of diverse ethnic, racial and class backgrounds partaking in daily tasks in exterior settings from a multitude of locations around Ecuador. Adoum describes the political dynamics of the temporality made visible by the photos, stating,

No digo que estas fotos ni la realidad inmovilizada en ellas sean eternas: digo que han sido demasiado tiempo ‘actuales’ y que serán por algún tiempo duraderas. Mientras subsista el sistema con la mentira del ‘cambio’, de las soluciones y de las transformaciones, cuya periodicidad se altera cuando es reemplazada por la mentira del ‘orden’ o la ilusa pretensión del ‘paraíso’ que estas fotos acusatorias desbaratan, seguirá fija, detenida, paralizada la pesadilla de miseria terca . . . (*Ecuador: Imágenes de un pretérito presente*).

The author explains that the injustice of the past remains “inmovilizada” and “actual” (current) precisely because of a system whose discourse preaches solutions and falsely insinuates the sensation of rupture. It’s a system that feeds off “stubborn misery” while projecting the lure of progress. The use of the adverb “mientras,” and the present perfect conjugation “han sido,” clarify that the repetition of injustice is not a given, eternal path. Instead, he argues, the duration of these conditions is defined by the economic system of capitalism and its underlying philosophical premise of temporal progress, which he refers to as “la mentira del ‘cambio,’ de las soluciones y de las transformaciones” (Adoum *Ecuador: Imágenes de un pretérito presente*). With his description of the “lie of ‘change,’

of solutions,” Adoum refers to the concept of “qualitative transcendence” underlying the modern historical concept of time (Osborne 11). As Adoum insinuates, the notion of transcendence is both temporal (“periodicidad”) and qualitative (“soluciones,” “transformaciones,” “paraíso”). While Adoum does not explicitly unpack the connection between the temporal logic of the capitalist system and the legacy of colonization, his reading of the photographs makes this critique evident by focusing on the persistent marginalization of the indigenous population. In his book *Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, Peter Osborne explains how the perception of qualitative transcendence, key to the logic of time that emerged during the Enlightenment, is integrally related to the concept of the “other” of the “New World” (11). He states,

. . . a qualitative transcendence of the past of an epochal type . . . could only take place . . . once the advance of the sciences and the growing consciousness of the ‘New World’ and its peoples had opened up new horizons of expectation. Only at this point was a conceptual space available for an abstract temporality of *qualitative newness* which could be of epochal significance, because it could now be extrapolated into an otherwise empty future, without end, and hence without limit” (my italics) (11).

In line with the concept of “qualitative transcendence,” the conquest mentality allows the colonizer to believe they bring the future—a temporal status conferred by a perceived sense of dominion over reason—to indigenous peoples they consider to be living in the past. This perceived sense of superiority combines with the “newness” associated with the encounter between Europeans and indigenous peoples of the Americas to set the scene for capitalist expansion that consumes “without limit.” Osborne’s concept of “qualitative transcendence” helps unpack the relationship between the temporality of modernity, colonization, and the capitalist society that is portrayed in

*Ecuador: Imágenes de un pretérito presente* (Osborne 11). It also helps unpack the relationship between the logic of “qualitative transcendence” and the exploitation of people and resources proper to modernity, colonization and the capitalist economy. Like the concept of the future (“empty,” “without end”) associated with the modern concept of time, natural resources are considered to have no limit. The “New World” was perceived as a place of endless abundance that could supply the “Old World” with the resources and work force to generate surplus wealth.

Osborne’s concept of “qualitative newness” also serves to expose the continuity of temporal logic that extends from colonization to the context of the disappeared and the transitions to democracy portrayed in the films I analyze. Within this temporal logic, the dead, and the past more generally, hold an “inferior ontological status” in relation to the present (Bevernage 45). Operating under this logic, institutions and rhetoric privilege national reconciliation over confrontation of the violent past, because the past is considered “over” and less pressing than the present. In his analysis of “the time of the desaparecidos” and the activism of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, Berber Bevernage argues that “the Madres’ refusal to perform the labor of mourning, their resistance to closure, and their claim that the ghostlike *desaparecidos* will never be a matter of the past constitute a frontal attack on the prevalent modern concepts of time and history” (Bevernage 45). Bevernage explains that “Because [Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo] fear that the presumed inferior ontological status of the ‘dead’ past (in comparison with the ‘living’ present) facilitates its neglect and, thus, impunity, they have substituted it for a representation that stresses spectral presence” (Bevernage 45). If society is satisfied

with recognizing the disappeared through monuments and timid sentences for the perpetrators, but does not change the philosophical discourse and economic structure in a significant way, then the disappeared are incorporated into the “over and done with” past that serves the dominant neoliberal narrative of progress. The films in my corpus perform an ethical and philosophical gesture similar to that of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. Through the aesthetics of affect, ecological and cosmic return, and archival remediation, *Nostalgia de la luz*, *Abuelos*, *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* bring into question the modern historical representation of the past as *behind* the present in material, temporal and ethical terms. In this way, not only do *Nostalgia*, *Abuelos*, *Roldós* and *Yambo* resist the logic of capitalist regimes that depend on the internalization of a fleeting and abstract, rationalized temporality, but they also connect sites of violence across space and time (Doane 8, Thompson 90, 91).

Symbolic of Chilean society’s selective concept of “pastness,” *Nostalgia de la luz* portrays a museum that carefully displays the massive skeleton of a whale. An institutional archive safely houses prehistoric bodies. And yet, the remains of the dictatorship’s disappeared are conspicuously absent. As *Nostalgia* demonstrates through conversations with archeologists, astronomers and the family members who search for the remains of their loved ones in the desert, the disappeared are not even recognized as part of the past. They are simply absent. So, the director must change the scale of his search to find hints about their stories, appealing to the realm of the geological, cosmic and affective. Unlike the museum, the dry conditions of the desert and the whistling sounds of the wind that dominate the film, preserve the persisting stories of the conquest,



the 19<sup>th</sup> century mining camps and the Pinochet dictatorship concentration camps, which mingle and linger. Voice over narration disrupts a sense of neat coherence, shifting the viewer's temporal reference from one scale to the next while images portray observational shots of human skeletons, crosses and camp ruins. These images are in turn intermixed with photographs and aerial footage of the camp in its original use as an industrial mining site. This footage mixes with contemporary shots in which political prisoner Luis Henríquez leads the director through the ruins of the camp, describing what it was like to be held there when it was used as a concentration camp under the Pinochet dictatorship. Finally, all of the above layers are intersected by images of the stars, whose shining particles resonate tensely with the closeups of light on grains of sand in the desert. The eerie sound of wind dominant throughout *Nostalgia* references the whispering of the desert and of the stars, which speak to a multi-scalar totality that explains how the conquest, the exploitative 19<sup>th</sup> century mining, and the Pinochet dictatorship should be understood together.

The aesthetics of deep time suggests that the violence of the dictatorship went beyond the Cold War conflict between the socialist movements supporting Salvador Allende and the capitalist agendas backing Augusto Pinochet. Rather, the documentary insinuates that the erroneous logic of “qualitative transcendence” undergirding the conquest, colonization, and industrialization has a twin symptom of slow violence, which persists and resurfaces through the repression of the dictatorship (Osborne 11). Montage like that described in the above examples, which constructs expansive temporalities that encompass multiple scales of measurement, makes slow violence discernible. The

aesthetics of deep time/slow violence stall the concept of progress. For example, long takes with paused pans of landscapes large and small in scale (i.e. the horizon as well as a miniscule patch of sand) capture time with no events and no human subjects. By removing the sensation of advancement associated with events, the film refers to all those elements of history that are repressed by a narration of progress, including violence. The event is associated with the colonizer mentality of qualitative transcendence in which the (European) subject advances in the trajectory of progress while social and environmental “others” are relegated to the “ontologically inferior” past (Osborne 11). The film demonstrates how across time the “othering” of people and the environment is converted into (transforming) institutional and economic structures that hide the underlying gesture of repression. Developing this logic a bit further, the aesthetics of deep geologic and cosmic time underline the ways in which the legacy of the dictatorship is carried on by subsequent democratic governments that have maintained or further engrained neoliberal policies. Integrating work in cinema studies, Latin American Studies and environmental humanities, my analysis of *Nostalgia* relates the aesthetics of deep time/slow violence to a historical analysis of Pinochet Dictatorship’s effects on the environment. I develop my aesthetic analysis alongside an account of the adverse effects of extractive industries in Chile (including mining, fishing and hydroelectric power). While widely considered an “economic miracle,” the neoliberal economy in Chile has been far from miraculous in terms of environmental damages. This approach allows me to demonstrate how the social violence perpetrated by the Pinochet dictatorship went hand in hand with its exploitative stance on the environment. Similar to the way in which the trauma associated with

detention, torture and disappearance persists for victims and their family members in a society that does not account for their losses (i.e. when bumping into perpetrators on the street), the violence of the neoliberal economic model persists in the environment. The two forms of exploitation are based on an overlapping reduction of the “other” into something consumable and disposable. By attuning the viewer to multiple scales of measurement that encompass temporal and spatial “others,” *Nostalgia* prepares them to conceive of how erosion, drought, increased air pollution, deforestation, and soil toxicity linger while the responsibility of dealing with climate chaos is displaced onto future generations. I argue that the epistemological exercise in which the film engages the viewer contributes to a growing body of work concentrating on non-anthropocentric temporalities that respond to the climate crisis we are living. *Nostalgia*’s greatest political potential is grounded in its contribution to this work.

As I will demonstrate throughout this conclusion, Guzmán’s turn toward the material world in his last three films (*Nostalgia de la luz* (2010), *El botón de nácar* (2015), *La cordillera de los sueños* (2019)) forms part of an emerging trend within documentary films focusing on human rights. Especially because of the collective festival experience that plays an important role in the circulation of documentaries, this mode of filmmaking is heavily influenced by a dialogue between groups/kinds of films (human rights, LGBTQ, environmentalist, avant-garde/experimental) and their creators. Guzmán’s approach to filmmaking as a form of intervention in collective memory has had a significant impact on the EDOC Festival. Discussing the beginnings of the Encuentros del Otro Cine International Documentary Film Festival (first edition in 2002),

executive director of EDOC Manolo Sarmiento described Patricio Guzmán's film *Chile, la memoria obstinada* as a manifesto for the festival's commitment to historical memory (Sarmiento 2015). As the founders of EDOC were organizing the first edition of the festival, they were moved by the concept of memory the film establishes—memory as an ethical duty to the injustices of the past and at the same time a source of strength and motivation to persevere—and chose it as the inaugural film (Sarmiento 2015). To this day, the festival participates in the dialogue that *Chile, la memoria obstinada* initiates around history, memory, and the legacy of the Cold War. Guzmán's (and many others') focus on the material environment represents an emerging trend in this evolving conversation around memory. I hope to call attention to the ways the EDOC Festival has functioned as an incubator for new ways of thinking and of making documentary films, especially when it comes to issues of human rights that cross cultures and historical contexts.

*Nostalgia de la luz* and *Abuelos*, which both approach memory of the Pinochet dictatorship through the landscape of the Chilean desert, were filmed and released at the same time. *Abuelos* premiered at EDOC in May, 2010, and *Nostalgia* premiered at Cannes Film Festival in May, 2010. As I alluded to earlier, the filmmakers' investigative processes even crossed paths at one point when they both requested the same archival material of Pisagua grave site excavations. While working on a more microscopic scale, *Abuelos'* focus on the organic world of water, plants and sky in *Abuelos* leads to a temporal concept similar to that of *Nostalgia's* deep time/slow violence. In *Abuelos*, the past is portrayed as integrally connected with the present and future through the flow of

energy and life across material elements. Just like *Nostalgia*, *Abuelos* contests the concepts of the past as *behind* the present and as a purely abstract, quantifiable entity. Struggling with the concepts of death and loss in her family, the director explores the memory of her disappeared Chilean grandfather and her Ecuadorian grandfather, who was a holistic medicine man, through the natural world that connects them. *Abuelos* contests progressive, disembodied time by demonstrating that while the story of the director's Chilean grandfather was erased from history books and even from her own family memory, the past exists—and can be accessed—through the body and the material world. Often through the film, the camera focuses on the director's hands, feet and eyes. The shot-reverse-shot technique then establishes the camera's gaze as the director's gaze. Her eyes (through the camera) synecdochally represent the presence of her physical body in the spaces portrayed. Together with close-ups of water and earth, underwater shots, and an emphasis on the sounds of wind and water, the focus on the body within the film prepares the viewer to experience the memory of the director's grandfathers through his/her/their own embodied knowledge. This is significant theoretical work because as technology becomes increasingly presence in our daily lives, much of our memory is passed to machines, stored in the form of data. The film stresses that our bodily sensations and interactions with the world hold information of ethical and pleasurable importance. Within consumer society, what focus there is on the body tends to be concentrated on self-care in a superficial form (relaxing eye masks or the right shampoo, etc.). *Abuelos* recenters embodiment as the ethical interface between our contemporaries and multiple other pasts. The centering of the director's body and personal experience in

a way embrace the individual perspective proper to neoliberal society, but it also connects the individual to multiple collectives, human and nonhuman, past and present. In this way, *Abuelos* contests the distancing between humans and the environment inherent to capitalism and the underlying logic of “qualitative transcendence” (Osborne 11, Stevenson 48). Placing *Abuelos*’ concept of “multispecies” embodied memory into conversation with my analysis of the Pinochet dictatorship’s detrimental effects on the environment, I underline the film’s political potential (Deborah Bird Rose). For example, although *Abuelos* does not address the effects of the neoliberal economy on Ecuador, the framing of memory across national borders (“mi abuelo Remo ha hecho llover en el desierto de mi abuelo Juan) insinuates interconnection of ecosystems that do not heed national boundaries. Functioning within the hegemony of neoliberal democracy, the nation-state privileges “free” trade and economic growth over environmental issues. Therefore, the development of a sense of solidarity and collectivity that crosses borders is an important reorientation towards environmental awareness and agency. Of course, such a perspective is not a transcendental change in the larger philosophical-economic structure that must be changed if climate chaos is to be meaningfully addressed. It represents a small step towards a structural change, but in a form that connects with many contemporary viewers.

When analyzed together with the environmental aftermath of the Pinochet dictatorship and its neoliberal programme, it becomes evident that *Nostalgia* and *Abuelos* invite viewers to entertain an alternative relationship between humans and the environment. By attuning the spectator to the temporalities of the natural world—which

are not “without limit” and at the same time much more extensive than human understanding and control—these films propose a more sustainable place for humans in their concept of history. This work includes a critical look at the neoliberal model as well as a reflection on the social projects that were repressed by neoliberal democracy. Many of the repressed social movements of the Cold War period (including the Popular Unity platform in Chile) were deeply modernizing projects with both admirable ideals, and political and environmental shortcomings. By engaging with the temporalities of the environment, the films in my corpus propose a concept of history that reaches beyond the communist-capitalist binary established by Cold War politics. The cosmic, geological and biological temporalities embraced in *Nostalgia* and *Abuelos* offer a vision of history capable of conceiving of the long-term effects of an economy based on resource extraction that were overlooked by both leftist movements and their conservative (often repressive) opponents. This approach destabilizes the communist-capitalist binary in a productive way, opening up conceptual space for alternative economic systems outside extractive development.

While Guzmán forms part of the New Latin American Cinema generation that influenced the founders of EDOC, Carla Valencia is part of the generation of filmmakers who were educated in cinema through years of participation in the EDOC Festival. Since its establishment 20 years ago, the festival has functioned as a sort of school of cinema for emerging filmmakers in Ecuador, as well as a framework for global political and philosophical conversations. A look at how EDOC fits into the broader scene of Latin American documentary film festivals sheds light on the unique nature of the festival, as

well as how its dedication to memory plays into a broader political context. The “boom” of memory films in the region over the past 30 or so years, Lisandra Rivera (co-director *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*) argues, is in large part due to increased access to filmmaking equipment. The technological advances of digital filmmaking have allowed for Latin American countries to carry out the work around historical memory that had already been there waiting, but which could not previously be represented in film as readily as it was in other places (Rivera 2015).

In their article, “Meeting points: A survey of film festivals in Latin America,” Gutiérrez and Wagenberg explain that after Buenos Aires International Independent Film Festival (BAFICI) was established in 1999, a “sort of ‘trickle up’ effect has spread through the region. The reasons for this ‘boom’ are numerous and vary from country to country – legislative taxation and fiscal incentives, increased private sector investment, the proliferation of film schools, wider access to new technologies” (300). While Gutiérrez and Wagenberg do not mention EDOC, they do signal that Latin American documentary film experienced a “vital surge” in the late 90s and early 2000s (302). Their article calls attention to *É tudo Verdade* festival in Brazil (first edition in 1996), FIDOCS in Chile (1997), DOCSDF (2006) and *Ambulante* (2005) (both in Mexico) and *Internacional Documental* in Colombia (1998) (302, 303). EDOC International Documentary Film Festival also formed part of this resurgence of documentary film in Latin America, holding its first edition in 2002. As Gutiérrez and Wagenburg suggest of the other festivals, and Rivera emphasizes about Latin American film more generally, the emergence of new filmmaking technologies was a major factor for the establishment of



EDOC. In 2000 and 2001, several friends who had been living in Europe returned to Ecuador with films they had made thanks to more accessible digital recording equipment, and wanted to share their work with the public (Lisandra 2015; Manolo 2015).

Gutiérrez and Wagenberg mention increased private-sector investment in film as one possible motivator for the emergence of film festivals in Latin America during this period. In the case of EDOC, the festival has had minimum private support, but it did, in some ways arise in response to the rise of neoliberalism. Skadi Loist also addresses the impact of the neoliberal model on film festivals in her chapter, “The film festival circuit: Networks, hierarchies, and circulation,” explaining that many festivals adopted the corporate model of organization in order to thrive within the Post-Cold War era, especially after the 2008 recession (58, 60). EDOC takes a different route, however. Ecuadorian writer and cultural administrator Ramiro Noriega<sup>4</sup>, also a founder of Cinememoria/EDOC Festival, describes the correlation between the establishment of the festival and a critical moment in Ecuadorian history when neoliberalism had reached its most intense point in the country and resulted in an absolute governmental and economic collapse in Ecuador (2015). Increasing privatization, a growing external debt and inflation had been plaguing the economy for years when, in 1999, the majority of the nation’s banks collapsed, resulting in a banking “holiday” and the freezing of deposits for a year. (Ayala Mora “Del auge a la crisis (1997-200)”). Throughout the crisis, the government protected the interests of the banks and relegated the economic losses to the population, many losing their entire life savings (Ayala Mora “Del auge a la crisis (1997-

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<sup>4</sup> Ramiro Noriega was the Director of the Universidad de las Artes de Ecuador from 2015-2020 and Ecuadorian Minister of Culture from 2009-2010. He is also a Professor of Literature.

200)”). In the wake of the crisis, nearly 1/5 of the population was forced to migrate to find economic opportunities and in 2000, the country adopted the U.S. dollar as the official currency (Ayala Mora “Del auge a la crisis (1997-200),” *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*). During the period between 1996 and 2006, Ecuador had 6 different presidents and experienced overall political instability. For Noriega and the Cinememoria team, “nuestra respuesta a eso fue el cine documental. . . proponerle al país otras miradas . . . en ese sentido Cinememoria es una organización político insurgente” (Noriega 2015). He elaborates, stating, “. . . el discurso de la memoria, el relato, la crisis—poner en crisis el tema de la memoria—era una manera de poner en crisis al sistema capitalista que impera. . .” (Noriega 2015). Documentary film is a key way to preserve and reanimate archival documents, and to contest official memory, which conveniently excludes those aspects of history that are incriminating to those in power. The EDOC Festival is non-competitive, meaning there are no prizes, and it is therefore less costly to produce and exists as an “encounter” rather than a business endeavor (Sarmiento 2015). Through its 20 years of existence, EDOC has not once accepted impositions on its programming and there are no reserved seats for donors and no governmental or institutional speakers. The festival protects its independence, even if it means having to cut its budget and programming on occasion.

Each year, the festival invites filmmakers from around the world to give master classes, screen their films, and participate in Q and As, cinema conferences and workshops. The invited filmmakers range from the most prominent in documentary film (Patricio Guzmán, Fernando “Pino” Solanas, Lourdes Portillo, Joaquim Jordà, Helena

Trestiková, Marcel Łoziński, Ross McElwee, Jay Rosenblatt, Albert Maysles, Alan Berliner) to filmmakers who are just getting started. In 2014, Syrian cineaste and human rights defender Orwa Nyrabia (currently the IDFA Artistic Director) presented at the II Coloquio Internacional de Cine Documental, a conference on documentary theory put on by EDOC Festival and Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar. During his talk, Nyrabia refers to post-Newton cinema language to describe the film *A Citizen with a Movie Camera* (2011), which is a group of 6 thematic compilations of YouTube clips put together by a collective of Syrian directors (Nyrabia 81). On-site videos made by Syrian citizens document state-sponsored violence. Some of the videos capture missile launches, while others return to the scene of bombings not to document dead bodies, but instead to wander through empty spaces, observe broken walls, and contemplate the still hanging family photos of a previous existence (Nyrabia 81). Nyrabia explained that after many attempts to prove the violence by circulating cellphone videos widely on the internet, “We realized that proving didn’t change anything. That’s when cinema began, because it’s not about proving<sup>5</sup>” (Nyrabia *Hacer con los ojos* 81). He explains, “that’s when we become human, where you don’t have to prove anything but simply express what we inhabit in our bodies” (81). When a member of the audience challenged the authenticity of the images in the film, insinuating that they could have been fabricated, Nyrabia responded: “we don’t die so that you will believe” (Nyrabia 93). Nyrabia calls this approach post-Newton because the desire to *prove* is forfeited in favor of the desire to

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<sup>5</sup> While Nyrabia’s colloquium presentation “No morimos para que tú creas” appears in Spanish in *Hacer con los ojos*, the original talk was given in English. Here, I used Nyrabia’s original language, using a videorecording of the colloquium as reference.

express “what we inhabit in our bodies” (80). The disclosure inherent in the expression of embodiment and affect generates a sense of intimacy with the viewer and invites the viewer to be open to seeing his/her/their self within the other.

I call attention to Nyrabia’s approach in part because, like the films in my corpus it employs embodiment, a focus on material spaces and affect to move the spectator at an ethical level. I also reference Nyrabia’s story because it provides a sense of the diverse aesthetic and political conversations that characterize the EDOC Festival. What makes EDOC’s programming so rich is that it includes a plurality of approaches to working with memory from many different contexts. Documentary film has an incredible array of tools to underline the tension between the past and the present, to make evident the difficult nature of fully accounting for the past. The creativity behind these approaches is another important tool in responding to the persistent injustices that accumulate in societies and economies based on the principal of “qualitative transcendence” (Osborne 11). If the temporalities of nature offer conceptual “exits” from this destructive logic, so too does the creative production and reappropriation of archival documents offer opportunities to destabilize the narrative of progress. There is a reason that Rob Nixon studies representations of slow violence in multicultural fictions and Deborah Rose Bird highlights writing as a key act of witness to contest “aenocide” (massive, exponential extinction) (Nixon “Slow Violence,” Rose Bird 139). By creating affective and material connections through which the viewer can recognize “others” on an eye-to-eye level, documentary films can offer the public an experience in which difference is not eliminated, but shared humanity is foregrounded. It is essential to theorize these attempts

to generate alternative forms of relationality that reimagine experiences of time and connect unique, but related experiences of global capitalism.

Documentary film has historically had strong ties to the concept of objective truth. Nyrabia's post-Newton aesthetics reference the renunciation of proof. To move beyond the impulse to prove, especially within the realm of human rights films and archival films, is a rich and productive leap that promotes new forms of political agency. One of the concepts that I develop in my chapter on *Roldós* is that of productive doubt. Like *Nostalgia de la luz*' multi-scalar representation of memory, *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* weaves together archives in a tense, non-linear montage scheme that puts archives in conversation while sidestepping conclusive readings of their relationships. Both within the film itself and in interviews, the directors of *Roldós* (also co-founders of Cinememoria/EDOC) explain that they chose to move beyond the goal of proving Roldós' assassination. Instead, *Roldós* privileges critical reflection on the writing of history, attention to material traces of memory, and moving the audience emotionally. Rivera and Sarmiento explain that they made this choice out of necessity. According to the directors, it was clear to them that Roldós had been assassinated as part of Operation Condor, but the power structures controlling the archive made it so that key documents necessary to laying out the case were missing or classified. By focusing on the film's narrative as a series of questions and a process of investigation on the part of the directors, I suggest that the film engages the viewer in an active exercise of critical memory. Like the director on screen, the viewer is interpellated to engage with historical archives rather than accept the official historical narrative. My attention to the haptic

remediation of archival materials—in which the camera moves over the documents to highlight their material nature and the physical manipulation (black boxes) to which they have been subjected—explores new forms of understanding archival documentaries and the kinds of truth to which they appeal.

In order to sidestep the barriers that prevent a narrative of assassination, *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* constructs a montage of archival footage, reports, newspaper articles, photographs and official correspondences from multiple countries in the Americas during the Cold War period. Roldós' death, the film signals, must be understood within the context of the discourse of development, U.S. hegemony and the neocolonial capitalist-communist binary that framed Cold War politics in Latin America. A few of the archival documents mapping out this scene include: footage from the 1972 ceremonial arrival of the first barrel of oil extracted in Ecuador under the dictatorship of General Rodríguez Lara; photographs of the 1976 assassination of Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier in Washington D.C.; footage of Roldós' speeches on the national sovereignty and the need to speak out against human rights violations in Latin America; photographs of the disappeared in El Salvador; footage from a 1981 press conference in which President Ronald Reagan reveals a highly ambiguous stance on human rights in Latin America. Providing spaces for reflection on these archival materials, long, silent observational landscape shots portray the mountainside where Roldós' plane crashed. Like the stellar images and pans of the desert in *Nostalgia* and the closeups of the ocean and desert flowers in *Abuelos*, these landscapes speak to the lingering legacy of the past and the capacity of nature to speak to the silences in official discourses.

My chapter on *Con mi corazón en Yambo* further develops this discussion on how the remediation of archival documents allows directors to reinscribe Ecuador into the hemispheric context of the Cold War narrative that has typically not focused on the country. In the aftermath of Roldós' death and Osvaldo Hurtado's term (V.P. who assumed Ecuadorian presidency after Roldós' death), León Febres Cordero's maintains a repressive "democratic" government that maintained a close relationship with the U.S. My analysis of *Yambo* serves to further destabilize the notion of democracy as the one and only avenue for justice. Several factors contribute to this destabilization. One of the primary factors in this analysis is the connection the film establishes between affect and its remediation of archival material. Throughout the film, family photographs and videos refer to the life the Restrepo family lived before the director's brothers were disappeared. They are incorporated in the narrative in different ways. In one example, early in the film, snapshots portray the stages in the Restrepo family's life—baby pictures, the three siblings playing and hugging their parents, family photos from a vacation at the beach. These were happier times. The photographs are played in slow succession, accompanied by the extradiegetic sound of the clicking of a mechanical projector with each transition. Sometimes the camera lingers on a particular image as the director reflects in voice over on the stages of their life together. Meanwhile, nostalgic piano music accompanies the memories she relays in voice over. Then, the piano stops and the projector halts, and the viewer is left in silence with the humming of the paused machine. This last image of the brothers became the icon of their status as *desaparecidos*, appearing on protest signs along with the slogans "Por nuestros niños hasta la vida" and "Con mi corazón en

Yambo.” At the beginning of the sequence, the sound of the projector appeals to the nostalgic connotation of analogue technology and the tradition of looking at family pictures together. Similarly, the linear succession of images from baby pictures to silly adolescent shots appeals to the progression of family life. Within this context, the long, static stare of the camera at the last image stresses the rupture of loss. Emotion accumulates as the camera lingers and the viewer wonders what the director might be thinking in her abrupt silence. The film’s remediation of the archive allows the viewer to connect with the story at an emotional level. These photographs contain the director’s last memories with her brothers. They speak to that which continues, replayed, remediated, and yet cannot come back fully, in the same familiar and loved form.

To elaborate on the political meaning behind the uses of affect in *Yambo* and how this aesthetic trend is situated within a global discussion about documentary film, I turn to the words of Laura Poitras. In 2015, there was a full house (approximately 2,000 people) at Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana in Quito for EDOC’s opening night. The crowd gathered to watch Poitras’ film *Citizenfour* and to participate in a live video conference about the film with its protagonist—Edward Snowden. *Citizenfour* portrays Poitras’ journey with Snowden as he reveals the U.S. government’s massive domestic and international surveillance program to the director, and to journalists Glen Greenwald and Ewen MacAskill. *Citizenfour* forms part of Poitras’ post-9/11 trilogy that also includes *My Country My Country* (2006), and *The Oath* (2010). In an interview, Poitras states, “I think there is an emotional divide between what we intellectually know about the world and how we feel about that knowledge. In my work I want to try to close that divide”



(Cornell and Poitras). Of her portrayal of the effects of the U.S. government's response to 9/11, she explains:

We could talk about all these things from a theoretical perspective, but they actually have real-world consequences for people. I like to get as close as I can so we can understand how things play out on individual lives. And then from those primary documents, I'm very interested in making the audience connect on an emotional level to what they're witnessing (Cornell, Poitras).

The effect of Poitras' approach in *Citizenfour* is to normalize Snowden, to present him as someone not unlike the viewer and therefore to incorporate within the affective and sensorial register of the viewer the reality of surveillance that Snowden reveals. *Con mi corazón en Yambo* utilizes a similar method. The film reinserts affect and the senses into the telling of history and also historicizes affect. León Febres Cordero's "anti-subversives" police unit tortured and killed her brothers. She wants her viewers to understand that this policy had, as Poitras notes, "real world consequences" for her family (Poitras). The police violence and coverup are institutional crimes that played out within the emotional and embodied lives of the Restrepo family. In addition to the creative use of archival materials, the use of nature within the film—the emphasis on the water of the family pool, the tree in the family's yard, and Lake Yambo, where Santiago and Andres' remains are believed to be—also expresses the affective experiences of the family's losses and battles for justice. The director wants to open that experience up to her viewers, so that they will have an ethical connection to the story. She wants to bridge the gap between what people "intellectually know" about the Restrepo case and how she and her family have lived the experience of her brothers' disappearance.

In my comparative analysis of *Con mi corazón en Yambo* and *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*, I demonstrate the ways in which the films utilize palimpsestic memory to insert Ecuador into a hemispheric Cold War narrative that has tended to focus on the Southern Cone context. I call attention to the uneven experiences and contradictory discourses of neoliberalism that preach democratic sovereignty while practicing intervention. Together, *Roldós* and *Yambo* portray the ways in which repressive regional politics played out across diverse national contexts. The Pinochet Dictatorship in Chile and its close alliance with the other Latin American dictatorships and U.S. interests played a role in Ecuadorian politics, and vice versa. Rather than moving forward with Roldós' nationalist economy, Ecuador shifted towards privatization, increased resource extraction, dependency on U.S. loans, and the opening up of the economy to international investment.

My analysis of Roldós' presidency offers a new perspective on the transition to democracy by focusing on the president's alternative political platform, which advocated for national sovereignty and human rights, but did not fit into the more traditional socialist profile of non-conservatives during the 70s and 80s. For example, I draw attention to the fact that Roldós' Carta de Conducta initiated the first major regional agreements around the topic of human rights. He was also the first president to recognize the country's pluri-lingual and plurinational population in his political platform. Moreover, my historical analysis of León Febres Cordero's repressive government serves to destabilize the notion of democracy as the one and only avenue for justice. While Febres Cordero was elected democratically and was supported by the U.S. as the

candidate to support order and freedom, he was extremely authoritarian and implemented policies that were abusive to the citizens, including the “anti-subversive” campaign surrounding the context of the Restrepo brothers’ death. Especially when brought into dialogue with Roldós’ fate, the reality surrounding Febres Cordero’s human rights violations (brought forth by the film *Con mi corazón en Yambo*) demonstrates that discourse around democracy does not fully reflect history.

My analysis focuses on the use of an aesthetics of doubt in *Roldós* and *Yambo* to demonstrate the illusory nature of official portrayals of democracy. The films bring together contradictory national (Chile and Ecuador), regional (Latin America) and international (U.S., in this case) discourses to demonstrate that the concept of democracy is heavily influenced by political and economic interests. For example, I analyze the editing schemes, which intersplice sequences exploring national and regional Latin American political context with archival footage demonstrating interventionist U.S. policy and leadership. After outlining the mass disappearances in El Salvador under the presidency of Napoleón Duarte, *Roldós* includes an excerpt from a press conference in which Ronald Reagan explains that he would rather allow for some violations than lose ties with Latin American heads of states. Preceding this footage, the film highlights closeups of family members holding photographs of the disappeared in El Salvador. These images contrast starkly with Reagan’s dismissal of the violations as minor and not worth the price of losing political ties. *Yambo* establishes a similar dynamic. As the director’s father describes in voice over the family’s disappointment and sense of betrayal when the conservative party they had believed in response to their pleas for help with

silence and rejection, the camera zooms in on the face of Vice President George Bush at Leon Febres Cordero's presidential inauguration. In the post-Cold War neoliberal period, the idea that democracy is the best/only form of government to protect human rights (and transition out of repressive dictatorships) assumed hegemonic status (Scott 129).

According to this logic, democracy promised to bring Latin American societies and economies into the "future" represented by U.S. political and development models. By constructing spatiotemporal palimpsests of the rhetoric of democracy in the U.S. with the experience of democracy in Ecuador, *Roldós* and *Yambo* force into view the political and economic interests, and the violence, hidden by the hegemonic rhetoric around democracy. In this way, the films contest the concept of "qualitative transcendence" at play within the post-Cold War imaginary (Scott 129).

*Con mi corazón en Yambo*, *La muerte de Jaime Roldós*, *Nostalgia de la luz*, and *Abuelos*, like many others in Latin America and globally, insist that until the past is faced in its entirety by connecting the dots between sites of violence and by changing the economic system in a fundamental way, accountability remains a pending labor. The impossibility of pastness under the present system correlates with the impossibility of justice under the present system. Like the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, the loved ones and allies of the disappeared in these films express the impossibility of justice as the impossibility of getting their loved one back. Until accountability in the form of systemic change has been achieved, the dignity of those who came before will continue to demand justice. By putting *Nostalgia de la luz*, *Abuelos*, *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* and *Con mi corazón en Yambo* into conversation with the fluid body of films and filmmakers that

form the Encuentros del Otro Cine International Documentary Film Festival intellectual community, I have strived to underline the intercultural nature of my corpus. As I have indicated above, one of the most important forms of labor these films perform is engage the public in an active denouncement of state-sponsored violence across socio-historic, geographical and cultural contexts.

Although the current Black Lives Matter movement addresses a different context of state-sponsored violence, I would like to allude to the words of Katie Wright. She is the mother of Daunte Wright, the 20-year-old black father who was shot by white police officer Kimberly Potter in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota on April 11, 2021. She states: “Unfortunately, there’s never going to be justice for us. The justice would bring our son home to us, knocking on the door with his big smile, coming in the house, sitting down eating dinner with us, going out to lunch, playing with his 1-year-old, almost 2-year-old son, giving him a kiss before he walks out the door. So, justice isn’t even a word to me. I do want accountability” (“Family of Daunte Wright”). Katie Wright’s articulation of the impossibility of justice shares the implication of active demand inherent in the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo’s concept of “*aparición con vida*” (Bevernage 45). Inherent in their demand to get their children back alive is a “[differentiation] between distinct uses of history ranging from ‘history as an active relation to the past’ to ‘history as a discourse of hegemonic power’” (Bevernage 43). Similar to the way the multiple scales of perception in *Nostalgia de la luz* speak to a tense and incomplete totality, a nostalgia for an experience of time that does feel broken, Katie Wright recognizes that she will never get her son back. There will always be a missing piece/peace because the disappeared cannot

come home. Likewise, the video footage of Santiago and Andrés Restrepo in *Con mi corazón en Yambo* is only ever a few seconds long, rewound and paused to give time for the director to offer her reflections. By bringing stories like that of Daunte Wright into public conversation with other cases of state-sponsored violence, like those portrayed in *Nostalgia*, *Abuelos*, *Roldós* and *Yambo*, documentary film opens up a space for the public to recognize and collectively acknowledge the irritation of pending accountability—the ethical impulse to actively exercise one’s memory. The past can’t be put back together again, and therefore justice seems unattainable, but the act of making connections between legacies of violence starts to open un the possibility of philosophical and structural change.

## APPENDIX:

### CINEMEMORIA—ORGANIZATION DESCRIPTION

Cinememoria is a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to the creation, preservation and promulgation of audiovisual patrimony in Ecuador. The organization was formed in 2001 by a group of Ecuadorian cineastes, photographers and writers invested in creating an audiovisual sector that fomentes innovative, critical, and diverse perspectives.

Cinememoria has been successful in fulfilling these goals through three distinct avenues: the Encuentros del Otro Cine (EDOC) international documentary film festival, which annually brings to Ecuador a high-caliber program of contemporary documentary films; written publications and public forums on decisive issues in the audiovisual community; and finally, via capacitation workshops for Ecuadorian documentary filmmakers and students of journalism, communications, and cinema.

Cinememoria has its only office in Quito, Ecuador. The corporation maintains three full time employees throughout the year, including the administrative secretary, the programming director and the executive director. Additionally, Cinememoria contracts 15-20 individuals to assist with the festival during the months of March to June. Like their full-time workmates, these employees work at a rate approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  that of their equivalents in the private or governmental audiovisual sector. A firm belief in the work of Cinememoria, rather than economic remuneration, motivates the corporation's employees.

Since its foundation in 2001, Cinememoria has played a key role in national initiatives in the audiovisual field. The corporation was actively involved in the implementation of a national cinema law (2006), which helps to protect and promote Ecuadorian filmmakers in the process of production and distribution, and the establishment of a National Cinema Council (2006), which accords funding and training to Ecuadorian cinema projects. The Ecuadorian National Cinema Council is one of the few national cinema councils to support the production of fiction and documentary cinema equally. This achievement is largely a result of Cinememoria's work in increasing the prolificacy, level of professionalism and cultural dialogue in relation to documentary film production in Ecuador. The avenues through which Cinememoria works to achieve these goals include the EDOC film festival, capacitation workshops, theoretical conferences, film screenings, and yearly publications.

Since its first program in 2002, the Encuentros del Otro Cine (EDOC) international documentary film festival has grown exponentially and achieved national and international acclaim. The 2014 festival hosted 120 documentary films and attracted 19,831 participants. The festival is highly accorded especially for its mindful selection of films, which reflects a distinguished level of professionalism, diverse perspectives and relevant contemporary topics. The renowned director Albert Maysles (director of *Gimme Shelter* and *Grey Gardens*, among others) commented, "I attended the festival with my son. We found it to be one of the best. Good films, a great deal of enthusiasm and excellent perspectives that demonstrate growth" (2006). Because of its commitment to quality cinema and critical intellectual topics, EDOC has attracted prominent guests from



the international documentary community including legendary filmmakers such as Fernando “Pino” Solanas (Argentina), Lourdes Portillo (Mexico), Joaquim Jordà (Spain), Helena Trestiková (Czech Republic), Marcel Łoziński (Poland), Ross McElwee (U.S.), Jay Rosenblatt (U.S.) and Natalia Almada (Mexican American), among others. Chilean documentary filmmaker Patricio Guzmán, keynote speaker at 2002 EDOC festival and director of Cinememoria’s 2005 filmmaking workshop for 50 Ecuadorian students, stated that “In the midst of garbage television and weak cinematographic programming in Ecuador, the success of the EDOC festival is undeniable; it is a festival that calls forth an intelligent public that renews the oxygen in the theatres” (2006).

As Guzmán insinuates, the EDOC festival creates for its public a sort of participatory seminary in the audiovisual field as well as in imperative contemporary topics of discussion. Each year, the festival includes a retrospective on the work of an influential documentary filmmaker, an international section dedicated to the most intriguing and successful documentary films of the past year, a section on films made in and about Ecuador (“Cómo nos ven, cómo nos vemos”), and several other sections whose topics vary from year to year according to film submissions.

Additionally, the festival creates a standard of professionalism and a space for exhibition for budding filmmakers and film viewers. The retrospective and international successes sections make available both the canonic and cutting-edge work in documentary. The other sections go to show that smaller-budget films made by less widely-recognized directors are equally important and can be just as astonishing in terms of aesthetics and professionalism. Though the films come from all over the world (as of

today 80 different countries), the EDOC festival has been especially effective in attracting films from Latin American directors, including Mary Jiménez of Perú, Maria Valencia Gaitán of Colombia, Everardo Gonzalez, Jacaranda Correa and Lucía Gaja, all of Mexico, Gonzalo Arijón of Uruguay, Andres DiTella of Argentina, Carmen Castillo of Chile, Joao Moreira Salles of Brazil, among many others. The strong Latin American presence creates a sense of self-representation as well as dialogue in a national, regional, and international context.

This environment of discussion and the development of a space for distribution and recognition of documentary filmmakers has contributed a great deal to the success of the Ecuadorian documentary sector in the past ten years has been aided to this environment. In 2010, Ecuadorian director Carla Valencia's film *Abuelos* won the people's choice award at the EDOC festival and went on to participate in the prestigious documentary festivals IDFA and BAFICI, as well as to take the "Hug" Prize for best documentary film in Biarritz. In 2011, Ecuadorian director María Fernanda Restrepo's film *Con mi Corazón en Yambo* made its premiere at EDOC, where it won the people's choice award. The film went on to win "Best Documentary" at the Havana Film Festival, UNASUR in Argentina, Taiwan International Film Festival and NEFIAC Latin American Film Festival at Yale. In terms of the box office, it was the fourth most successful film in Ecuadorian history. In 2013, both Ecuadorian documentaries *El Grill de César*, directed by Darío Aguirre, and *La Muerte de Jaime Roldós* (2013), directed by Lisandra Rivera and Manolo Sarmiento, were awarded "Best Documentary" at the 26th Festival of Latin American Cinema at Toulouse. This double honoring was a gesture toward not

only the quality of each of the films individually, but also the development of Ecuadorian cinema more generally. *La Muerte de Jaime Roldós* premiered at the 2013 EDOC festival and recently won the prestigious Gabriel Garcia Márquez prize for journalism, the national honor “Rumiñahui de Oro,” and the Audience Choice Award at both Chicago Latino Film Festival and DocBarcelona. Having an outlet in which to project one’s work and a community of filmmakers, critics, and viewers who provide feedback and standards of quality are elements essential to the fomentation of any kind of cultural production. The EDOC film festival and Cinememoria’s other avenues of work respond to these needs and by doing so, fosters critical audiovisual memory in its public. Cinememoria’s work, however, is not limited to the festival. In fact, an important merit of Cinememoria is that the corporation reaches beyond its festival program in order to make a positive impact on the capacitation of filmmakers, the production of new projects and the development of theoretical reflection in the audiovisual sector.

Capacitation workshops include the 2005-2006 Radar Workshop (in conjunction with the Muchacho Trabajador Program) and the 2005 Cine Documental Workshop with Patricio Guzmán. The Radar Workshop invited thirty high school students from Cuenca and Quito to participate in a yearlong technical workshop that resulted in the creation of seven student-directed documentaries, one of which was recognized at the “Festival Petites Vues” in France. The Cine Documental workshop trained fifty Ecuadorian students in both the technical and theoretical aspects of documentary film with Guzmán, a legendary Chilean filmmaker. Additionally, in 2006 Cinememoria and The European Documentary Network (with funding from the Jan Vrijman Foundation) organized the

workshop “Making (An)other Cinema Works in Progress.” Twelve Ecuadorian filmmakers were able to develop their film ideas with dialogue and assistance from Bert Janssen (Humanist Chanel of Holland) and Jordi Ambros (producer of Cataluña TV3). After participating in the workshop, Julián Larrea’s film *Tu Tierra* went on to secure funding with the Jan Vrijman foundation. Carla Valencia’s *Abuelos* was then selected to participate in the DOCTV pitch in the Morelia Film Festival.

In 2009, Cinememoria also organized the project “Young journalists attend EDOC”, which invited thirty high school students and five teachers from various provinces of Ecuador to participate in five days of the EDOC festival. In 2010 the corporation was able to invite eighty students (age 16-18) and twenty teachers. Both years the student selection was made through high school journalism clubs and the students chosen to participate demonstrated exceptional interest in communication, social issues and artistic expression. Following the “Young Journalist” project, the students presented debates and presentations on their experiences at their respective schools. Many of the students had not previously visited the capital and the EDOC experience was a wonderful way not only to become familiarized with the journalistic voices of their own country but also enter into a dialogue with the international audiovisual community’s most up-and-coming films and filmmakers. Both years the young journalists’ interest and perspective was enriching for all involved and Cinememoria hopes to bring an even larger number of students to the 2015 festival.

Conferences organized by Cinememoria include the “Segundo Encuentro de Documentalistas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe,” which Cinememoria hosted in 2009 in

conjunction with the National Cinema Council. Eighty filmmakers from Ecuador and other parts of Latin America participated in discussions on contemporary audiovisual issues. This encounter resulted in the collective creation of a declaration for the Latin American and Caribbean film community that underlined the importance of creating documentary films that respond to “our” America and that vindicates the value of memory as a dynamic living legacy that allows societies to continue to move forward. The declaration also emphasized the importance of recognizing the richness and challenges of a pluricultural society. In 2013 and 2014, Cinememoria joined the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in hosting the International Colloquium on Documentary Cinema, which lasted three days and included 200 participants.

Film screenings followed by discussion panels are another important route through which Cinememoria reaches the public. In 2010, Cinememoria teamed up with the Peruvian association “Nómadas” to offer a two and half month long program of Latin American fiction and documentary films for adults and children. With a goal of the regional integration of the Andean community, the series, “Cine en la Frontera Perú-Ecuador” toured 50 different cities on the border between the two countries and offered all screenings free of charge. The series brought cinema to many cities that don’t have access to theatres. Additionally, during October, 2012 and April, 2013, Cinememoria hosted a human rights film series with a special focus on environmental issues. The 2012 screenings were held in the coastal towns of Salango, Ballenita and Muisne, each of which has experienced environmental devastation in recent years, and the 2013 screenings were held in Quito and Guayaquil, Ecuador’s two largest cities. The festival

programming director was accompanied by two film directors and together they guided a question and answer session after each screening. In each town screenings were held in the morning at local public schools and in the evening for the general public. The public was interested to see, on several occasions, their own town represented on the big screen in images from recent times and years long past. The screenings evoked great emotion in the public and on numerous occasions the audience engaged in productive dialogues and moments of reflection on the environmental challenges they face in their communities.

The professional partnerships Cinememoria has established represent another achievement. Cinememoria has worked with sister organizations including Mexican festival AMBULANTE, Chilean festival FIDOCS, and the Argentinean festival BAFICI in the exchange of Spanish subtitles. This exchange allows international films to reach a much larger Latin American public. Additionally, Cinememoria worked with the Peruvian association NÓMADAS to host “Cine en la Frontera” and is currently partnering with the Bolivian association MANOSUDACA to offer the EDOC-Lab. The corporation has also received consistent financial support from IDFA Bertha Fund (previously known as Jan Vrijman Fund) from the Amsterdam Documentary Film Festival (IDFA), the program Movies that Matter from Amnesty International and the HIVOS Foundation. The HIVOS foundation supported EDOC from 2002 until 2012, for the maximum number of years allotted to any cultural organization. Today, the Municipality of Quito, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Culture and the Ecuadorian National Cinema Council are among the central public sponsors. La Universidad Simón Bolívar,

Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales de Ecuador, Universidad de Las Américas Quito and individual donations also make notable contributions.

In 2006, with financial support from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Ecuador, Cinememoria opened its video library to students, professors, and the general public in Quito, Ecuador. As a service to the public, Cinememoria offered access to the collection of films, as well as academic guidance from the festival's programming director for a minimal, symbolic fee. The goal of the videoteca was to preserve and make available to a greater public Cinememoria's growing collection of films. From 2006 to 2011 the videoteca was extremely successfully in fulfilling this goal. The archive contributed to the research of innumerable university thesis projects and educational presentations ranging in discipline from cinema to history, political science, journalism, women and gender studies to environmental studies and communications and a system was created to organize and preserve the vast amount of art and information passing through Cinememoria's doors. Unfortunately, in 2012 the video library closed.

Precisely because the EDOC international documentary film festival has been the most broad-reaching avenue and because it creates the valuable resource of the archive, when the corporation's non-renewable grant with the HIVOS Foundation came to an end in 2012, Cinememoria chose to focus its resources and energy on maintaining the progress of the festival and at that point closed the videoteca to the public. Today Cinememoria secures the majority of the festival funding on a year-to-year basis through the Ecuadorian National Cinema Council, the Municipality of Quito, and the Ecuadorian Ministry of Culture. In spite of the intense year-to-year labor it entails, Cinememoria has

been very successful in its effort to advance the EDOC film festival and has not taken a year off from hosting the festival in 20 years of the corporation's existence. As demonstrated above, the corporation has also been able to continue to offer many additional services to the public. The festival's attendance numbers continue to grow and a greater number of prestigious filmmakers agree to participate in and attend the festival each year. And most importantly, the number of Ecuadorian films to participate continues to increase.



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