Vocalities of Violence: Acousmatic Sound and Trauma in Latin American Cinema (1999-2016)

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Introduction

Fue un ruido como si toda la casa estallara.
Y me arrastré y salí… y empecé a caminar.
Y después te encontré.[1]

There was a noise as if the whole house burst.
And I pulled myself out, and left… and started to walk.
And then I found you.

The story offered by the protagonist, Laura, in Gabriela David's 2001 feature film, *Taxi, un encuentro* foregrounds multiple layers of sound that are implicated in the disruption and recuperation of her character's subjectivity: on the one hand, the rupturing noise brought about by a murder-suicide in her family that has the force to displace Laura through time and space, and on the other, the agency of her voice as she summons and organizes these events within her spoken narrative. While the primary events of the accident are scattered across sensorial registers, Laura recuperates the event through its acoustic footprints and re-signifies these sounds within her own voice. In speaking to her friend Gato, a patient listener, Laura comes into a process of agency over her family trauma.

For sound scholar Jonathan Sterne, it is hearing, rather than seeing, that which "places us inside an event" through immersion into the acoustic sphere (*Audible* 15). In a similar vein, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener highlight the intimate, affective links that settle through the ear in the cinematic experience which "probe deeply into the

[1] *Taxi, un encuentro*, Dir. Gabriela David, Argentina, 2001, 1:25:19.

spectator's (and listener's) inner self" (148). In these relational and affective capacities, Laura not only absorbs and internalizes external sounds that work to dismantle her, but also articulates her own acoustic field that ultimately implicates herself and her witness in a process of healing.

This dissertation project explores the soundsphere as an invisible entrance and conduit for marks of violence in Latin American films representing post-conflict, post-dictatorial regimes, and postcolonial legacies in this rapidly globalizing region since the late 1990s. Within this set of films, which range from contexts in Argentina, Mexico, Peru, and Cuba, the concept of the acousmatic, or "unseen" sounds, becomes foregrounded as a central link between sound studies and trauma studies, and as an impulse behind transnational cinematic production and circulation as these sonic strategies, displaced sounds, and polyphonic voices become entangled in a collective cultural acoustic body. In various forms, the acousmatic element of disruption or sonic rupture plays a key role in reconfiguring narratives, deconstituting and reconstituting subjectivities, and inviting listeners that can engage with these stories and their transmissions of trauma beyond the scope of the visual narrative and into the interstices of soundscapes, the voiceover and voice-off, and embodied voices. This introduction serves to interrogate the various theoretical and cultural frameworks at stake within this larger multidisciplinary project.

Acousmaticity and Sound

A central concept that unites cinema, sound, and trauma is acousmaticity, which rests upon, and redefines, through sound, the boundaries of presence and absence in a

cinematic context. This tool, used in both classic and contemporary cinema to position sound in relation to an image or body, is widely ascribed to the French musicologist Pierre Schaeffer, who in *Traité des objets musicaux* interrogates the acousmatic, as a qualifier, as a sound that is heard without seeing what causes it (91). Greek etymology roots the term in the *akousmatikoi*, the students of Pythagoras who listened to his lectures behind a screen. For Michel Chion, the French composer who famously localizes the acousmatic as a specific cinematic tool and experience, the purpose of the Pythagorian screen was to reduce visual distraction and magnify the listening experience of the discourse through this dissociation between sight and sound (*Guide* 12–13). Using this framework of sensorial splitting as a point of departure for film studies, Chion proceeded to identify the acousmatic processes in cinema, possible with the advent of sound, through the device of the *acousmêtre*, a neologism for acousmatic being (*Voice* 21). Rather than isolate sound as a discrete mode of perception, Chion's work aims to foreground the exchange between both the audio and the visual and the qualities of sound, particularly those that operate in misalignment.

The *acousmêtre*, the invisible sonic body born of the splitting between cinematic image and sound, encapsulates more broadly the set of paradoxes that result from a body's articulation of sound, not only like that of Pythagoras himself, but also in the cinematic world, in which characters, objects, or the environment speak, or make sounds, but remain unseen or beyond visual focus. The result is a unique sensorial dynamic between image and sound in the form of a "contract" that deconstructs the illusion of natural sensorial cohesion of the medium (Chion, *Audio-Vision* 215–216). Chion's framework acknowledges that acousmatic sounds, or voices, operate within contradictory

parameters with respect to the cinematic image, "as if the voice were wandering along the surface, at once inside and outside, seeking a place to settle" (Chion, *Voice* 23).

This project will identify and explore the ways in which this unstable, liminally articulated vocality communicates trauma not only through language or content, but also by means of a structural splitting of voice and body that conveys new meaning through an ongoing process of realignment with the narrative and its affective, visual, or sonic components. In other cases, the *acousmêtre* foregrounds misalignment or dissonance, in which a character or collective group is shown to reconcile, within the acoustic plane, certain fragmentation of subjectivity due to structural violence, crisis or loss. In these cases, the "contract" between sound and image reveals the acoustic cracks in the cinematic body through which sounds, voices, and echoes seep through time and space.

The temporal and spatial boundaries invoked by the acousmatic will serve as a broad point of departure in this dissertation, ranging from case studies of soundscapes, the voiceover or voice-off, and the very corporeality of different speakers. These acoustic ruptures occur against the grain of what film scholar Mary Ann Doane calls the "fantasmatic body" of cinema, or a projection of sensorial unity that becomes nascent when image and sound become synchronized (33–34). Sound, however, particularly as an indicator of the spatial boundaries of the image, produces its effects in its very moment of articulation by planting itself not only within but beyond mere visual confines, thus revealing what cannot be experienced visually (Doane 39). These processes hold implications for trauma, in terms of irreconciliation, witnessing and re-presencing, which will also be analyzed in this project for their relationship to the interstice, at times

forcefully constructed, between the visual and sonic imprints constituting the cinematic medium.

While both Chion and Doane's work have consciously centered, respectively, on the temporal and spatial constructions of the combinations of sonic and visual sensory inputs, earlier approaches to the addition of sound to cinema and its consequential dynamics, particularly those guided by Western film traditions, displayed mixed reactions and at times resistance to the use of sound in film. For example, film critic Béla Balázs registered disappointment in the development of sound film due, at the time, to its apparent unrealized potential and subsequent degradation of the medium of film itself (196). For Balázs, within the physiognomic minutiae of silent film, a pure, universal type of cinematic voice emerged that revealed to the spectator an unknown aesthetic and affective world by showing the "face of things" within the landscape, bodies and the human face (197). These physiognomic gestures preserved meaning, thoughts or feelings of a different order to those conveyed by language. Gertrud Koch and Miriam Hansen highlight the similarities between Balázs's account and Walter Benjamin's notion of the optical unconscious, wherein the visual sense perception is enhanced by the filmic camera through psychoanalytical and affective dimensions (172). As the subsequent chapters demonstrate within different sonic contexts, the filmic medium also generates an acoustic "face" (or, rather, acoustic faces) that become entwined, superimposed over, or repressed in the audio-visual dynamic.

Alternative contemporaries of Balázs in the Russian film school, namely Sergei Eisenstein or Lev Kuleshov, had praised the combination of the audio-visual in early sound film through the practice of montage, a dialectical process in which the intentional

juxtaposition of images (or of sounds, in our case) signifies beyond the shots themselves as the audience senses the conflict between those elements and creates a new concept in their mind. Eisenstein, taking a more optimistic tune to the advent of sound, expressed that sound film is intellectually discursive insofar as its motivating force is like a monologue, or rather, an opportunity for one to hear their thoughts spoken out loud (107). Eisenstein's usage of the term "counterpoint" as a means of describing sound's ultimately subordinate relationship to the filmic image, despite acknowledging its key functions in meaning-making, precedes Michel Chion's revindication of the use of sound. On the other hand, Rudolf Arnheim, another famous critic, expressed concerns that sound was not compatible with montage because it introduced an inherent temporality into an optical "scenery at rest" (34). However, decades later, Chion would revindicate sound's temporalization of the image through animation, linearization or vectorization of time (*Audio-Vision* 13–14). The temporal qualities offered by sound are, as will be explored, fundamental in tracing representations of trauma through belatedness or temporal disorder.

Chion's analysis of sound's added value, or enrichment properties that manifest in combination with visual media, consolidate Balázs' early acknowledgement of the potential of the use of sound as a semiotically and spiritually generative force in the cinema. Though cautious of its addition to early cinema, Balázs acknowledged sound's potential ability to aid in revealing the mystical "face of things" that was already made possible by the camera. In order for it to accomplish its own acoustic gaze, Balázs suggested the development and use of sound practices must follow the model of gestural emphasis, and teach the spectator to navigate its apparent formless, chaotic noise:

> Only when the sound film will have resolved noise into its elements, segregated individual, intimate voices and made them speak to us separately in vocal, acoustic close-ups; when these isolated detail-sounds will be collated again in purposeful order by sound-montage, will the sound film have become a new art. (198)

The suggestion of an acoustic "close-up" offers a template often used in visual perception practice that can instead be applied to the realm of sound insofar as it invites a more profound and intimate sonic relationship between the film and the audience. While Balázs does not dwell on this potential for an acoustic physiognomy—which within the realm of the cinema, opens a discussion for a politics of what is visible, heard, and hidden beyond sensorial reach—it is Chion's *acousmêtre* that opens new avenues for how to listen, as it lays bare just as much as it conceals.

In Latin America, the period of silent cinema's transition into sound was marked by a shift in continental relations in which Hollywood consolidated its reign over the Latin American film market (Paranaguá 38). In other words, in addition to reactions on the formalist consequences of sound's relational influence to the cinematic image, the development of new technologies and aesthetics coincided with a network of economic interests that impulsed a cinematic market intrinsically linked to global colonial power dynamics and resistances. For example, film historian John King observes the advent of sound film in Latin America as both culturally empowering and restraining. For King, the generative possibilities of sound were of an ideological nature:

> The coming of sound generated optimism throughout Latin America among cineastes who were fighting a tenacious rearguard action against

> the Hollywood invasion of the 1920s. Though the image could be understood everywhere, surely language and music were specific to particular cultures? (31)

However, King recognizes that, at least economically, these cultural resistances were not always feasible. Despite the new possibilities for exchange and expression in the sonorous plane, few regions in Latin America were able to fully account for the expenses of the necessary technology, rendering them vulnerable for United States market intervention (31). In this way, the consolidation of early sound cinema in Latin America generates, concurrently, a platform for global cultural relations of a transnational, yet also neocolonial nature that would become heavily critiqued in the militant cinema movement of the 1960s and 70s. These influences also carry into contemporary forms, wherein temporal, spatial, political and cultural dynamics come into force through the interstices of sounds. As will be explored in numerous examples in this project, the sonic can become both a placeholder and a space of expression for colonial legacy, inscriptions of trauma, and its resistances.

The possibility of thinking through acousmaticity in the scope of Latin American cinema and in relation to trauma studies is facilitated by Brian Kane's recent work, *Sound Unseen*, where he argues that the process of locating an acoustic body in the absence of a readily identifiable source involves, by nature, a culturally contextual type of listening. The acousmatic is not only a question of formalist dynamic within the cinematic medium, but is also motivated by audience perception and the cultural conditions that inform the acoustic regime in question. In this way, "reading" the *acousmêtre* supposes conditions not only of production, but also reception, to inform the boundaries of acousmatic sound

and its semiotic capacity. Kane explains the unique ontological nature of the acousmatic, which is bound by the ever-shifting triangulations between the variables of source, cause, and effect:

> …[E]ven to use the word *is* is itself an infelicity, for the *being* of an acousmatic sound *is* to be a gap. Acousmatic sound is neither entity nor sound object nor effect nor source nor cause. It flickers into being only with spacing, with the simultaneous difference and relation of auditory effect, cause, and source. With tongue planted firmly in cheek, one could refer to acousmatic sound's ontology as a non-ontology, a *nonontology*. (149)

With this framework, Kane argues that locating an acoustic body in the absence of a readily identifiable source involves a culturally contextual type of listening. While Chion's work puts forth a set of useful conditions of approaching and understanding acousmaticity in the cinema, Kane adds that "at a certain point, a theory of acousmatic sound must give way to the social and historical agents who employ it as a practice" (9). These contextual considerations provide us with the tools to open our ears in new ways, with an invitation to access different cinematic stories and narratives by witnessing how these are told through their acoustic impact. Where violence or trauma is "vocalized" from a position of displacement, it simultaneously signals to and hides itself, remaining in a position of continual cultural haunting that also solicits new sensorial modes of engagement from local and global audiences alike.

The very discipline of sound studies depends upon these contexts of production and listening and is used not only across spaces, but also as a means of accessing the past,

and preserving, or challenging, the present. Sterne, for example, affirms the power of the sonic as an alternative cartography and historical path (*Audible* 3). Using a Foucaldian approach that considers the genealogy of sound as it traverses, and unites, body and culture, Sterne's project aligns with Kane's methodology insofar as it considers sound through a position of exteriority:

> The history of sound is at different moments strangely silent, strangely gory, strangely visual, and always contextual. This is because that elusive inside world of sound—the sonorous, the auditory, the heard, the very density of sonic experience— emerges and becomes perceptible only through its exteriors. (*Audible* 13)

One question this project seeks to address is, in what ways does the Latin American cinema movement in the period since the turn of the century project or create acoustic subjectivity through the use of acousmatic sound? Sound's ability to traverse the worlds within and beyond the screen allows us to approach these contexts not only in isolation, but also as a cultural collective acoustic expression that responds to forms of violence unique to the postcolonial moment in question.

Tendencies in Latin American Cinema

When thinking of sound through exteriority, or through the interstices of time and space in the cinematic experience, we might also consider the "acousmatic" more symbolically in terms of an unacknowledged, rather than merely lacking a visual anchor, source of sonic expression that is produced and circulated within the Global South but is not yet fully explored within the scope of film studies and its interdisciplinary connections.

Sound art, for example, has recently been elevated within the specific contexts of globalization, postcolonialism, and decolonization that mark the work of Global South artists (Groth 2020). Meanwhile, sound studies in Latin America have been explored in the musical sphere (Borge 2018), in relation to sound politics (Cardoso 2019), and in the larger media sphere (Bronfman and Wood 2012).

Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes, in their recent publication entitled *Remapping Sound Studies*, connect sound, exteriority, and Otherness in the regions of the Global South, which they define as "a set of global externalities produced through colonialism and neoliberalism" (3). They recover these geopolitical externalities within the construction of a cartography where sound that is both in and from the South manifests not within the binaries of colonial logic (namely, as being rooted in difference) but rather "as diverse sonic ontologies, processes, and actions that cumulatively make up core components of the history of sound in global modernity" (4). Steingo and Sykes acknowledge the potential of decolonization theory as a point of dialogue in their project, which points to the development of the sound studies discipline as a Western narrative in many structural facets, including the philosophies and technologies that have composed the field (7).

In this vein, more work has been done to explore alternative geopolitical sources and hosts of the acoustic, particularly where colonial legacies remain intact within political and sensory regimes. For example, Vlad Dima's recent scholarship on the use of sound in films by Senegalese director Djibril Diop Mambéty points to sound's capacity as a mediator of the postcolonial during the Third Cinema movement of the 1960s and 1970s, where both postcolonial subjects and spectators may "[reappropriate] both a lost

space and a complex identity through sound" (2). Like Mary Ann Doane, Dima emphasizes that such sonic spaces are generated in different forms, but manifest through dialogue (1).

Third Cinema's legacy in the Global South, consolidated through a variety of film projects across regions, was led forth by Argentine directors Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their famous 1969 manifesto "Hacia un tercer cine" ("Towards a Third Cinema") in which they propose a cinema of subversion that challenged colonial cultural regimes held in place by current cinematic perspective and practice. This cultural and political movement, consolidated over years of pan-regional productions, came to be collectively known as the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC). A cinematographic paradigm of the architecture of this initiative came in the form of *La hora de los hornos* (1968), a four-hour documentary-based film that relies on montage, text, and even specific moments to pause the film for the audience to engage in discussion. Collaborative, and incomplete in the sense that it represents an open-ended militant act, the film came to symbolize many of the goals of NLAC as a decolonial project. Here, sound is used dialectically with the image to generate revolutionary messages against the grain of conventional synchronous film styles.

Exploring the cultural processes of the NLAC is pertinent when discussing the emergent cinema since the 1990s across Latin American countries. Terminologically, the "New Latin American Cinema" is traditionally relegated to the political cinema of the 60s and 70s, whereas "New Cinema" which will be applied to the case studies in question means to encompass, broadly, the transnational quality of recent Latin American cinematic production that engages with, and between, local and global moments, spaces,

aesthetics, and epistemologies. The resulting dynamic is a cinema that rests in a state of between-ness, which Kathleen Newman positions through the lens of a "contact zone" that implies relationships between decentered subjectivities, decentered capitalism, and politics (10).

The vernacular of both the NLAC period of cinema and today points to both intersection and disparity. Zuzana Pick observes the NLAC's supranational goals of "decentering" traditional models of cinema to forge new social, political, and aesthetic affiliations (2–3). As an ideological project that remains unfinished, NLAC films constantly challenged static notions of identity and aimed to rework the political and cultural imaginary through audiovisual dialogues. In contemporary cinematic production, this has led to a decentering of national cinema in favor of transnational productions. Paul Schroeder Rodríguez notes the following regarding the transnationalist quality of the "new" cinematic landscape since the 1990s which serves strategically on the levels of production and distribution:

> …[W]hile today cultural nationalism is still evident in many specific films, the tendency over the past two decades has been for filmmakers to create transnational products through casting, setting, narrative, and aesthetic choices that facilitate the films' marketing to international audiences and help satisfy the differing economic and political interests of the co-producing parties. ("After" 89)

The aesthetic development of this New Cinema was made possible in part by technological advancements that permitted editing in sound or color (Aguilar, *Other Worlds* 14). Stylistically, the New Cinema since the late 1990s tends to rely on codes of

realism that are applied to a preoccupation with the present (Aguilar, *Other Worlds* 27). The NLAC movement of the 1960s and 1970s, in its own historical moment, borrowed heavily from Italian Neorealism, a compatible framework for documentary-style films that involved on-site location shooting and the use of non-professional actors. In this way, directors assumed a capacity to use film to access the true realities of the nation without embellishment or heavy manipulation. This aesthetic influence rejected the heavily stylized New Wave cinema of the French tradition, whose artistic experimentation and content often catered more to the concerns of intellectuals or the bourgeoisie than to expansive working class or culturally marginalized audiences. However, stylistic choices in contemporary times look back to New Wave influence; for example, David Oubiña points out the possibility of an aesthetic connection between Lucrecia Martel not only with neorealist directors, yet also with Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, a leading figure of New Wave cinema in Argentina in the mid-twentieth century (13).

The aesthetic shifts from the New Wave, or *nueva ola*, to the NLAC to today are marked by a series of extreme political and economic burdens that have generated a necessary transformation in production and practice. Stifled under censorship during the wave of right-wing dictatorships, many Latin American directors were forced to depart from realistic depictions and instead rely on neobaroque representations (Schroeder Rodríguez, "After" 91). This style had maintained continuity in terms of decentering narratives and subverting dominant cultural epistemologies, a type of fragmentation that would also serve as the foundation of 1990s cinematic narratives and beyond. Paul Schroeder Rodríguez goes so far as to suggest that neobaroque tendencies, particularly

during the era of widespread dictatorships and political repression, are in fact another "phase" of the political NLAC:

> Regardless of country… the neobaroque NLAC's shared critique of teleological narratives (in particular of the nation) justifies its study as a continental movement whose aesthetics may be distinct from those of the militant NLAC, but whose radical critique of existing power structures unfolds out of, and indeed elaborates on, the militant NLAC. ("After" 105)

In effect, the prominent cinematic tendencies in Latin America operate as bridges between each other, maintaining certain continuities while also adapting and responding to present conditions. John King highlights that one key point of transition between the NLAC movement and the period of the New Cinema has involved a departure from explicit political connotations to a cultural, even mystical, "process of introspection" (256).

These changes in lenses between national production and reception and concerns of identity have consequently included a reconfiguration of the continental narrative gaze. At the turn of the century, anthropologist Néstor García Canclini had revisited the question of the precise denomination of a "Latin American Cinema" in light of the transformed system of voices and images resonating audiovisually through and between the conglomeration of national borders. For Canclini, the ontology of a Latin American Cinema holds roots in cultural identity, a dialogical and dynamic formation that takes into account both the self and the other. The resulting ongoing identitary narrative that results from these encounters is, much like the capacity of cinema, a "coproduction" ("Will" 257).

The films included in this project, to greater or lesser extent, all involve levels of coproduction that mark their transnational capacity, that is to say, as beneficiaries of capital or creative influences external to the country of origin (Tierney, *Transnationalisms* 1). Much historical scholarship on Latin American cinema has placed emphasis on singular contexts of development, marked by national boundaries or specific film directors rather than a collaborative industry (Paranaguá 16–17). Countries such as Brazil, Mexico and Argentina forged the earliest dominant industries since the 1930s and remain among the strongest in the region in terms of production. On the other hand, these national pockets of production are paradoxically constituted by a tethering of transnational networks and continental strategies (Paranaguá 15). With this in mind, this dissertation will argue for an attention to the dynamics within the acoustic realm that participate in identity reflection and performance. Although the links between the transnational and the acoustic in Latin American cinema remain largely unexplored, the interstices created by the acousmatic open to us a new approach to recent cinematic production and the shared, if not conflicting, sensibilities within these spaces.

Trauma and Listening

Argentina, Mexico, Peru, and Cuba are not homogenous in their respective contexts of cinematic production and reflection, with the former two countries having historical visibility in regional and international circulation. Nor do their geopolitical contexts, postcolonial experiences, systems of structural violence, and cultural responses to these operate in the same way. Scholar Cathy Caruth's treatment of trauma studies as a potential cultural cross-link paves an important path for interrogating this pluralistic set

of audio-visual representations that "speak" in a collective cultural setting. For Caruth, the space of exchange in a testimony given between a speaker and listener permits an "ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves" (*Trauma* 11). Here, "departures" refers to part of the paradox of trauma which involves a "leaving of its site" that occurs in simultaneity with "a repeated suffering of the event" (*Trauma* 10).

For our purposes, the *acousmêtre* provides a unique metaphoric compatibility with cinematic expressions of trauma insofar as they communicate a formalist rupture between image and sound in addition to its new significations. The audience, who participates visually, also participates as listeners. In non-cinematic forms of testimony, psychiatrist Dori Laub elevates the role of listener, specifically one who engages actively in co-constructing a traumatic event with the speaker ("Bearing" 57). This co-construction is fundamental for the birth of a narrative, for on the other hand, "[t]he absence of an empathetic listener, or more radically, the absence of an addressable other, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story" ("Bearing" 68). If sound strategies are finding new ground to explore aesthetic and communicative potential, there is thus a need for an audience who can serve as an empathetic listener to these stories.

Reformulating our approach to different sensory modalities, specifically towards the realm of the acoustic, permits not only a revised relationship to our surroundings through aural perceptual mediation, but also contains ethical implications as the ear becomes trained not to hear, but to *listen*. This is a specific engagement that French scholar Jean-Luc Nancy describes not as an understanding of the sense produced from a given auditory phenomenon, but rather a "straining toward a possible meaning, and

consequently one that is not immediately accessible" (6). In the cinema, this desire for wholeness and integration within the fantasmatic body is projected within the space of the screen, where sound, image, and audience also work together to co-construct meaning.

On the other hand, the *denial* of this sensorial unity—which occurs when sound does not appear to correspond to a visual referent—is a key point of departure for a dialogue with trauma studies. Many of the films in this project show us how acoustic input prepares the ear for a crisis of understanding in which the sound to which we strain to "listen" to does not occur in relation to a resonant body that is immediately identifiable to the eye. This disembodied acoustic phenomenon underscores Nancy's distinction between hearing and listening by soliciting a desire for union between source and sound, a sense of wholesomeness between emitter and emitted, while denying the eye this mode of grounding what is heard within a pre-constructed system of identification.

The resistances to meaning-making afforded by the *acousmêtre* go hand-in-hand with the ineffable characteristics of trauma. Laub, for example, asserts that traumatic events occur outside of temporal and spatial orders, rendering them elusive yet always current ("Bearing" 69). On a larger cultural scale, trauma and processes of collective memory are also shown to occur through fragmentation, discontinuity, and dislocation of people, history and culture (Genschow and Spiller 13). Both individual and collective senses of rupture are mediated through cultural expression and a desire to make sense amidst traumatic disturbance. Caruth, paving the way for analysis of film studies and trauma, identifies the notion of a speaking wound in the realm of literature: "the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is

not otherwise available" (*Unclaimed* 4). As the following chapters explore through case studies in soundscape, voiceover and voice-off, and voices linked to bodies in the cinema, trauma is both inscribed and expressed through the sonic, whether through diegetic wounds or through the very rupture of audiovisuality itself.

Each section shows, through heterogeneous examples, how the mark of traumatic experiences creates and escapes language in contexts of violence and otherness in Latin America. If narrating trauma risks a certain reduction of the experience upon its integration into the confines of a symbolic economy (Laub, "Event" 91), it also paves the way for creative acknowledgment of its inaccessibility. The literary, or in this case, filmic nature of language comes forth through the piecing together of a narration that gives expression to what perhaps cannot be fully known, but still somehow experienced affectually.

With this in mind, the organization of the following chapters is not meant to confine different types of sounds into limited categories, but rather to provide a starting point to approach the range of acoustic expressions and subjectivities created across spaces ranging from larger sonic environments to specific utterances, including the breaches between interiority and exteriority that sound is able to generate that make it a useful sensorial access point to cultural expressions of structural violence. These points of departure include soundscapes, voiceover and voice-off, and (in)visible speech as different means of interrogating sound modalities, and primarily acousmatic sound, as techniques that reflect cultural preoccupations in the last few decades in Latin America, as well as raising their potential as acoustic links between sounds in other geographic and temporal contexts. Using these questions as a base, this project will show how sound

studies, in combination with questions of trauma, can be put into dialogue transversely with sonic experiences or systems of power dynamics in other cultural contexts. Ultimately, this dissertation assumes that since sound occupies a unique position that can go beyond linguistic confines, it holds the potential to create common spaces between the cultural contexts in which it is both expressed and heard.

The corpus of films I analyze in detail is not exhaustive and I aim to highlight their similarities, as well as their differences, in their use of sound strategies and expressions of different forms of violence. Some films have received scholarly attention to their sound frameworks, such as those by Lucrecia Martel, while many have been subject to less attention to these aspects. The range of films I include as case studies are the following, in chronological year of release: *Garage Olimpo* (Dir. Marco Bechis, Argentina, 1999), *Amores perros* (Dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, Mexico, 2000), *La ciénaga* (Dir. Lucrecia Martel, Argentina, 2001), *Taxi, un encuentro* (Dir. Gabriela David, Argentina, 2001), *Y tu mamá también* (Dir. Alfonso Cuarón, Mexico, 2001), *Paloma de papel* (Dir. Fabrizio Aguilar, Peru, 2003), *Días de Santiago* (Dir Josué Méndez, Peru, 2004), *La niña santa* (Dir. Lucrecia Martel, Argentina, 2004), *La mujer sin cabeza* (Dir. Lucrecia Martel, Argentina, 2008), *Ciudad en rojo* (Dir. Rebeca Chávez, Cuba, 2009), *El traspatio* (Dir. Carlos Carrera, Mexico, 2009), *La mosca en la ceniza* (Dir. Gabriela David, Argentina, 2009), *La teta asustada* (Dir. Claudia Llosa, Peru, 2009), *La mirada invisible* (Dir. Diego Lerman, Argentina, 2010), *Infancia clandestina* (Dir. Benjamín Ávila, Argentina, 2012), and *Santa y Andrés* (Dir. Carlos Lechuga, Cuba, 2016).

The first chapter, “Soundscapes,” introduces sonic worlds that I broadly categorize into natural or rural sounds, urban sounds, and music. Here, I use musicologist Murray Schafer’s definition of soundscape and its subsequent interrogations in the field of sound studies as a basis of interrogation for sound contexts represented in recent Latin American cinema and how collective or individual trauma becomes projected into shared sonic exteriors. Because soundscapes are loose visual references for the sounds they produce, I highlight the acousmatic quality of the spaces whose sound sources are not easily located, or are displaced physically, psychologically, or artistically. If soundscapes serve as representations or articulations of violence or trauma, I aim to show how their acousmatic quality can be considered as a fundamental interstice that bridges both individual and collective subjectivities, and wherein identity and filmic narratives can become negotiated and expressed.

The second chapter, “The Voiceover and Voice-off,” focuses on more technical strategies of cinema in which temporary or permanent vocal displacement serves a narrative, editorial or artistic purpose. Here, I use Michel Chion’s conceptual template of the *acousmêtre* to show how this device operates in the specific context of Latin American films that present narratives involving gender violence, stories that rely on the spectral connections between characters made available through radio and recordings, and finally stories that are born upon the foundations constructed by an inherently displaced voiceover that acquires authority over events. In this section, I show through various case studies how the use of voiceover and voice-off techniques are cinematic strategies whose foundation of rupture becomes a unique means of signaling to

characters' struggles with isolated or structural forces, which can be either upheld or defied in the realm of the sonic.

The third chapter, "Vocal Faces and Interstices," analyzes the acousmatic expression of identities constituted by trauma by focusing on how voices that are visually grounded in shots are doubly marked by both presence and absence in their articulation. In this way, I use case studies to show how the acousmatic can be used as a framework not only to signal to visual anchors but also to that which is beyond the corporeal body or the confines of the semiotic. In these examples, I analyze how acousmatic voice is used in a range of cinematic expressions of repetitions, resistances, and returns of trauma, in particular through the use of ventriloquism as a framework of acousmatic voice, vocal disjunction, and realignments.

In their conjunction, these sections aim to address the possibility of new interdisciplinary dialogues through close readings, or rather, close listening, to a range of sonic moments that have circulated across both local and global audiences. A key concern throughout is how to open up new possibilities for listening to how these stories are recounted, sometimes within and at times beyond language, and to acknowledge the power of the sonic in creating new avenues for cultural identity development and performance in the global sphere where sounds and voices are, more than ever, able to reach out to those who are willing to listen.

Chapter 1: Soundscapes

...Hay gente que no quiere escuchar.
Entonces le quitamos la luz para que no vea nada, y sólo nos escuche.
Necesitamos que nos escuche, Cirilo, y así algún día todos vamos a tener luz.[2]

...Some people don't want to listen.
And so we take out the lights so they don't see anything, and they can only listen to us.
We need them to listen, Cirilo, so that one day we can all have light.

Carmen's words from Fabrizio Aguilar's *Paloma de papel* (2003) carve out a political path that is not trodden through the aid of the eye, but rather that emerges from the acoustic underbelly of a denied visuality. The sounds of revolution cut through the dark void, straining for semantic understanding with no grounding in what is embodied or familiar to the eye—an eye that is structurally blind to these voices. For Carmen, the revolutionary soundscape competes for attention against the pre-existing sensorial realities instituted under Peruvian state violence. A fuller, more just construction of sensorial imagery, rests in the power of the sonorous outline of society, in its space, vibrations and voices. The rupture, and new overlap of this *soundscape*, pushes to give new meaning to all that it encounters. In this chapter, I will use musicologist Murray Schafer's theories of soundscape as a point of departure to explore frameworks of natural, urban, and musical soundscapes as heterogeneous threads of acoustic narration sewn on foundations of rupture. I will show through various case studies how these spaces can push for innovative forms of listening to the echoes of traumatic violence, loss, and decay

[2] *Paloma de papel,* Dir. Fabrizio Aguilar, Peru, 2003, 52:18.

that mark the boundaries of the New Cinema. Specifically, I will analyze different forms and languages of soundscape in the films *Paloma de papel*, *La ciénaga*, *Santa y Andrés*, *Ciudad en rojo*, *Días de Santiago*, *Taxi, un encuentro*, *Amores perros*, *Garaje Olimpo*, *El traspatio*, and *La mirada invisible* and discuss how acoustic subjectivities related to violence or trauma are created through their sonic environments.

Although many of Schafer's explorations of soundscape include technologically or anthropomorphically motivated sounds, like bells, whistles, horns, or sirens, many sounds come to the foreground through conscious attention to the environment and the naturally forming sounds around us (Schafer 10). While the term *soundscape* holds a nomenclatural relation to *landscape*, implying auditory construction and space rooted in non-anthropomorphic forces, considering all modes of auditory environments, including biophonic, geophonic and anthrophonic sounds lends to a more complete positioning of the acoustic within a specific place and time, forming a larger ecology of soundscapes (Krause 17). It is impossible to hear all at once, through all spaces and across time, but this chapter will piece together specific moments of aurality across Latin America's New Cinema to mark the ways in which collective trauma makes itself palpable across environments, and, consequently, may be witnessed through new modes of listening.

Paloma de papel (Dir. Fabrizio Aguilar, 2003) is one of many films in Peru in the last few decades that reflect on the events of internal armed conflict of 1980–2000 between the repressive armed forces of the state and the militant Maoist group Sendero Luminoso (or "Shining Path"). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report estimates the death of nearly 70,000 Peruvians, and highlights the racialization of this violence that affected rural and linguistically diverse populations, primarily indigenous

communities. Aguilar's film re-presents the conflict through the eyes of a child, and the trauma instilled upon himself and his collective community after years of political and racial tensions.

Indeed, in the political conflicts highlighted by *Paloma de papel*, a sensorial reconstruction by means of sound is not a fixed producer of a concentrated, static experience for the earwitness. The effect, we must recognize, depends not merely on the elements of production, but also reception, or who participates in this sensorial ecology between the visual and the auditory. Is it a mere call to the state to end institutional repression, or is it also for the revolutionaries, who hear themselves speak out? Is it a message that reaches Cirilo, the next generation of listeners? Does this intertwining and separation of sound and image occur in the present, during the civil war, or become displaced from time?

This dynamic sensorial negotiation between (and beyond) the visual and the auditory, must necessarily undergo a constant process of historicization, in the same way as any isolated sensory interaction within a given time and space. Sound, and by extension, the system of sounds that form a soundscape, are always expressed in specific determined spaces and the sociohistorical contexts that dictate how they are produced and received (Woodside 2). This space may be geographically determined, or may lend its foundation to a psychological or metaphysical imaginary stitched together through an acoustic weaving.

The cinematic space, in particular, is one where the soundscape resonates beyond the boundaries of the diegesis across both spatial and temporal dimensions. On the one hand, as Doane has observed, the spatializing qualities of sound and voice construct new

spatial reference points within the cinematic boundaries based on the perceived location of their utterances (36). The space or world that is conjured by sound has been scrutinized as dynamic and subject to conditions of experience (Sterne 2012; Kane 2014). Through the notion of vocalic space, sound scholar Steven Connor mediates diverse understandings of voice and of body across social contexts, which extends to the filmic environment by sound's spatializing capacities:

> Vocalic space signifies the ways in which the voice is held both to operate in, and itself to articulate, different conceptions of space, as well as to enact the different relations between the body, community, time, and divinity. What space means, in short, is very largely a function of the perceived powers of the body to occupy and extend itself through its environment. (12)

In this sense, thinking through space serves as a key point of departure for understanding the relationship between body and voice or sound. If, following both Doane and Connor, we widen our understanding of the spatial conditions of a body—or environment—that produces voice, or through which a voice produces itself, we may follow this path of sonority not only within and through the films in question, but also as a means of bridging with the bodies beyond them.

As a contrast to the spatializing properties and conditions of different modes of vocality involved in the construction of a soundscape, we can refer again to Chion's observations on the possibilities of temporalization offered by sound when put into contact with a visual cinematic image. According to Chion, such a sonorous ignition and motoring of temporality occurs through temporal animation, linearization and

vectorization of the image (*Audio-Vision* 13–14). In this way, not only does sound signal to new spaces, but it also assigns temporality to them through its unavoidable reverberations, passing through the diegesis, the space of the screen, and the space of the "theater" where the relationship of production and reception is in constant formation.[3]

Chion envisions this entwined spatio-temporal dynamic by attempting to isolate the *a priori* characteristics of the image and sound that are respectively present in a filmic moment. For Chion, the audiovisual contract and its gestaltic reconfiguration of meaning supposes previous qualities in both parties that prevail upon each other. For instance, the temporal impact of a sound upon an image depends not only upon the type of image that grounds it, but also of the specificities of the enunciated sound itself (*Audio-Vision* 13-14). In the case of the isolated image, Chion conceives of its characteristics not merely in terms of visual content but rather the image's metaphysical qualities of presentation, such as staticity or degrees of movement prior to the introduction of sonorous dimensions (*Audio-Vision* 14). Depending on the level of the suggested temporality of the image in question, sounds in a variety of profiles or "textures" may hinge upon or deter from the temporal signification previously present in the image: "The two may move in concert or slightly at odds with each other, in the same manner as two instruments playing

[3] For Doane, these three spaces linked by sound refer to "traditional" cinema viewing, where the theater serves as a specific space for spectatorship. Cinema viewing, as a cultural practice, is constantly redefining its own spaces of participation as digital technologies permit new viewing flexibilities and socialities. For more on these shifts, see Belton, John. "If Film Is Dead, What Is Cinema?" *Screen (London)*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2014, pp. 460–470; Elsaesser, Thomas. *Film History as Media Archaeology: Tracking Digital Cinema*. Amsterdam University Press, 2016; Klinger, Barbara. *Beyond the Multiplex Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home*. University of California Press, 2006.

simultaneously" (*Audio-Vision* 14). This spatio-temporal dialogue between the visual and the auditory permits a dialectical relationship between sensorial elements, which undergo a constant process of formation in relation to the presence, and re-presencing, of other elements.

With this in mind, we can identify a soundscape by isolating the audio from the audio-visual and reconsidering its characteristics in relation to the image that it surrounds and through which it moves. In the 1970s, as the sound studies discipline was still nascent, Schafer neologized soundscape from the roots of its disciplinary flexibility, a quality maintained today across scholarly work in cultural studies and beyond:

> The soundscape is any acoustic field of study. We may speak of a musical composition as a soundscape, or a radio program as a soundscape or an acoustic environment as a soundscape. We can isolate an acoustic environment as a field of study just as we can study the characteristics of a given landscape. (7)

While broad, Schafer's conceptualization of soundscape permits many more precise attunements. Sterne, for example, revisits Schafer's theorization as a "total social concept to describe the field of sounds in a particular place, or an entire culture" (*Sound* 91). However, despite gesturing to the possibility of regional specificities, or sonic environments, Schafer's term has also been criticized for its prescriptivist agenda, revealing certain ideological selectivity over the importance of some sounds over others, and how they are meant to be listened (Kelman 214). These debates on the determined nature of soundscape, in relation to its performative qualities and reception, suggest that

it is a fluid sonorous field that depends not only on the spatio-temporal source of emission, but also the conditions of listening over and through time. In other words, soundscape functions as a perceptually constructed system that is susceptible to its conditions of both production and reception.

Schafer classifies three types of sounds that loosely compose the soundscape. Keynote sounds—created by natural or urban geographies and climates— serve to "outline the character of men living among them" (9). These are sounds that come to occupy a discursive relationship with the spaces in which they occur. The sound of a river in a small town, chirping birds, or the echoes of a motorway are what Schafer considers as the "ground" of the sonorous figure-ground relationship that provides the acoustic outline of life.[4] In contrast, sound signals are sounds that emerge to the foreground, calling conscious attention to their vibrations, such as acoustic warning devices: bells, a car horn, or the sound of bullets. Thirdly, there are soundmarks, a unique sound to a specific area or community that is ascribed significance according to its community reception:

> Some soundmarks are monolithic, inscribing their signatures over the whole community. Such are famous church or clock bells, horns or whistles. What would Salzburg be without its Salvatore

[4] Michel Chion's term "ambient sound," or "territory-sound," positions these sounds in a similar manner, insofar as "they serve to identify a particular locale through their pervasive and continuous presence" without drawing desire to attend to a specific visual source (*Audio-Vision* 75). Schafer's usage of "keynote" evokes a more musical framework, where the musical key will outline the character of the piece, just as a soundscape might influence its environment (9).

> Mundi, Stockholm without its Stadhuset carillon, London without Big Ben? (239)

Identifying a film soundscape disrupts these categorizations due not only to technological fluidity (considering the breadth of tools and editing within and beyond the diegesis), but also intercultural collaborations. Once inscribed inside the filmscape—the loose boundaries between screen and spectator—the soundscape becomes uprooted from one place, or one discourse, and becomes replanted alongside a new image, thus carrying the potential to resonate across spaces and signification. Much like the globalization of cinema problematizes debates on national cinemas by deconstructing specific political and cultural boundaries of film production, this notion of a traveling and collaborative construction of sound calls for a permeable framework of sound, and an emerging need to think transacoustically.

In becoming disconnected and re-wired from one particular "source" in the service of audiovisual re-presentation, these traveling sounds become, in a way, transacousmatic; they are heard anew after continuous displacement and passage through modes of production and reception across time and space, flitting through new visually identifiable (or otherwise signaled) sources and evading permanent attachments to one corporeal or fantasmatic body. Schafer plants this idea through the lens of technology, which allows for "the complete portability of acoustic space. Any sonic environment can now become any other sonic environment" (91).[5] In addition, as we have briefly

[5] For a technological approach on sounds that traverse media, see Stefan Helmreich's chapter "Transduction" in Novak and Sakakeeny's *Keywords in Sound,* 2015, pp. 222–231.

mentioned previously, Kane observes that a vibrant undercurrent of acousmaticity exists precisely through such unstable linkage that is created through both simultaneity and difference in a relational capacity (149). This Derridean *modus-operandi* of acousmaticity can be applied to filmic soundscape and the shifting subjectivities that result from an ongoing clashing of space, time, and participants. The constant visual shifting of camera perspectives, for example, may by default upend the suspected acousmatic source that accompanies the image. Alternatively, a shift in acoustic volume forcefully spatializes the visual plane, amplifying new distances while, at the same time, inviting a strain to access that which is disappearing through this sensorial reconfiguration.[6]

Chion positivizes this evasive relationship by conceptualizing sound, or in our specific case, a soundscape, as a perceptual field that overlaps with a visual image through an "added value," which he defines as:

> the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression, in the immediate or remembered experience one has of it, that this information or expression 'naturally' comes from what is seen, and is already contained in the image itself (*Audio-Vision* 5).

[6] For more on the implications on shifting acoustic volume, refer to the following sources: Henriques, Julian. *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing*. London and New York, Continuum, 2011; Cusick, Suzanne G. "Music as Torture / Music as Weapon." *TRANS Revista Transcultural De Música*, vol. 10, 2006; Goodman, Steve, et al. *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. MIT Press, 2010.

In recognizing the role that sound plays in deepening the spectator's affective experience of the image, Chion also invites a reverse consideration of this sensorial relationship in which the image acts as a constant spatializer of film sound, seeking its own grounding. The departure from visual primacy in this regard leads toward what David Howes describes as *intersensoriality*, or "the multi-directional interaction of the senses and of sensory ideologies, whether considered in relation to a society, an individual, or a work" (9).

Soundscape, thus, is best conceived not as an exclusively acoustic perceptual field, but rather as a dynamic space involving multiple sensorial and affectual interactions that accommodate both spatial and temporal disjunctions while, at the same time, inspiring their renegotiation. It is precisely within the kneading and tearing between the visual and the acoustic elements offered in a filmscape where we may come to identify new configurations of meaning, however culturally and sensorially accessible it may be.

Sounds of Nature

It is convenient to begin by analyzing Argentine filmmaker Lucrecia Martel's use of sound which has received much attention in the field of Latin American cinema studies, particularly for its experimental configurations. The acoustic narrative offered in *La ciénaga* (2001) has been a fundamental point of departure for inquiries into the potential reaches, and uses, of sound not only in Argentina but also other Latin American cinemas. Within Martel's larger corpus of films, scholar Gerd Gemünden identifies a challenge to visual primacy taking place through a filmmaking centered on a "radical reorganization of time and space":

> Martel's highly original use of sound has become a widely acknowledged trademark of her films. All her films include densely layered soundscapes in which human voices, ambient noises, and ominous or eerie sounds create a thick and often disorienting environment. Sounds are usually heard before their sources are seen, if they are seen, and identified, at all. (24)

The emphasis on soundscape as a means of outlining not only what is heard, but strained to be heard, is for Martel an intentional acoustic design. In an interview with David Oubiña, Martel offers an unconventional take on audiovisual planning, rethinking a narrative based on its acoustic qualities rather than using them as a mere supplement to visual storytelling: "Para mí, el origen de la narración es la oralidad. No la oralidad entendida como un tipo que se sienta y empieza a contar, sino como la situación en donde algo es contado… Es el sonido el que te conduce" (60).[7]

Indeed, *La ciénaga*'s acoustic molding, and moments of acousmaticity, are key components in the narration of anxiety and loss. Eleonora Rapan and Gustavo Costantini frame the disjointed plot as a tragedy, evoked from the very opening scene in which thunder rolls invisibly through the sky in a classically tragic exposition (4). On the other hand, the constant rumbling extending through and beyond the visual plane carries with it a tragic history that is already passing, in a natural sort of testament to the disturbances faced by Mecha's family, both in financial and social relations. That the thunder does not

[7] "For me, the origin of narration is orality. Not orality understood by what is felt and begun to be told, but rather the situation in which something is told… It's the sound that drives you." (My translation)

occur just once, but rather remains hauntingly enveloped within the film's images, positions it not as a dramatic expository trope, but rather as a keynote event that signals across time as it returns in scattered moments.

The film plants the viewer's ear and gaze in Argentina's Salta region, following an extended family's vacation led under the matriarch, Mecha, in a crumbling estate in a once-prosperous pepper farm. The stifling space of the house and its land, which is amplified not only by camerawork but also sound play, evokes an atmosphere of "sedentary disintegration" where a drive to maintain order backfires into lethargic paralysis (Aguilar, *Other Worlds* 47). Indeed, in the face of probable bankruptcy, the family prefers to operate as if they remained in the "old times" (Oubiña 48). The crisis faced, or rather, forcibly ignored, by Mecha's family alludes to the culmination of Argentine President Carlos Menem's policies throughout the 1990s, which promoted a cycle of labor that favored growth of the upper class and the illusion of "modernity," which relied upon destructive policies of foreign investment, free trade and deregulation (Garibotto, *Rethinking* 73).

The "world" of *La ciénaga*, shown from the beginning to be in a state of disintegration, is born from these transformations, establishing within the family network a set of "codes and affects, certain material and conceptual tools, and a given time and space" (Aguilar, *Other Worlds* 1–2). The characters are zombie-like, indifferent, and unable to interpret and navigate their surrounding space (Aguilar, *Other Worlds* 44). These codes of stagnation or disinterest can also be linked to the policies in the 1990s following the military dictatorship of 1976–1983 in which Menem's commitment to

dismantling judiciary initiatives for human rights investigations generated a culture of forgetting that resonated highly within the general film industry.[8]

La ciénaga's release in the recession era leading up to the market collapse thus hints at the boundaries between the "good old days" for the family's income and the stagnant, unkempt reality in which they find themselves in a mnemonic bind. While *La ciénaga*'s allegorical status has been debated, accounts of the New Cinema's relationship to the realities it interrogates have acknowledged a shift towards more realist or direct references (Page, *Crisis* 182).[9] In this way, the stories may narrate through ambiguity and a disruption of conventional realist models to "work with indeterminacy and open up the play of interpretation" (Aguilar, *Other Worlds* 17). Using these unstable semiotic platforms as a point of departure, we can thus strain to listen not only within *La ciénaga*'s contextual inscription as a film born of crisis, but also to the ruptures and disintegration to which it refers through its own environmental orality.

At the time of the film's release, Guillermo Ravaschino released a review citing the ambient sense of "tense calm" influencing the world and soundscape that is provoked through the thunder's subtle acting of re-presencing ("La ciénaga"). In this paradox of "tense calm," the implications of the thunder are doubly underscored in the soundscape:

[8] For a detailed analysis on the transition between the cinema produced in the immediate aftermath of the dictatorship and that of subsequent years, see Ximena Triquell's article "Del cine-testimonio al cine-testamento: el cine político argentino de los 1980 a los 1990" in *Changing Reels: Latin American Cinema Against the Odds*, edited by Rob Rix and Roberto Rodríguez-Saona, pp. 59–74.

[9] While *La ciénaga* does not tend to be situated in direct reference to the dictatorship, Martel does comment that her second feature, *La niña santa*, inquires into the inexplicable culture of negation surrounding its politics and historical aftermath (Enriquez 2008).

on the one hand, the thunder disturbs the image in the act of audibly calling attention to itself as an omnipotent force over the estate. However, in between these articulations, in the moments of inaudibility, the thunder is able to imply itself through an exteriority, that is, silence, which in turn conjures a constant expectation of stormy weather. Apart from a tonal function, it is thus possible to listen to these ominous rumblings as they occur in relation to images, other sounds, and even unto themselves in a process of self-designation.

In their analysis of *La ciénaga*, Rapan and Costantini propose that we may listen to the thunder as part of a temporal trajectory and a warning of ominous events to come (4). This prediction comes to fruition when considering the end of the film and the death of Luciano, the young cousin who falls off a ladder when he is curious to see the always-invisible barking dogs beyond the wall. We might also listen to the thunder as a narrative tool of fragmentation that reinforces the disjunction of sound and image throughout the rest of the film; rather than aligning with the temporal and visual sequences of the film, it joins forces on its own acoustic terms. Near the end, within the very scene of Luciano's death, the thunder does not explicitly return to fulfill any sort of teleological function in the narrative trajectory. However, it can be heard through other moments, such as when the children are out hunting, or when Momi, Mecha's daughter, professes at the end of the film that she was unable to locate the Virgin spotted by locals by the water tower. In the former case with the hunters, the thunder consolidates its sonority in the expanse of the humid forest, but does not burrow in this visual origin; rather, it enunciates itself disguised as another sound—gunshots—which offers a comparable audible shock to the

sterile, lifeless imagery of the hunting ground.[10] The sense of foreboding tragedy hinted by the thunder, thus, becomes enveloped in a chain of non-linear sounds rather than confined to one consistent audible form. In this sense, both the echoes of the thunder in addition to the gunshots become linked to, and reinforce, the unstable and tragic environment in which the family finds themselves (Dillon 59).

The last instance of thunder occurs at the end of the film, when Momi declares that she "didn't see anything" in her search for the Virgin that allegedly had been sighted nearby. This audible declaration of a visual lack both generates and reinforces the instability of the visual plane that is put into question throughout the film. The denial of the visual is, on the one hand, doubly reinforced by a claustrophobic framing (Beck 3) and a glue of "indifference" between characters and their surroundings (Aguilar, *Other Worlds* 44). At the end of the film, the visual plane becomes structurally dislocated through Momi's words, where sound and image are marked as counterpoints (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 77). The sounds of thunder over the pool conjure a similar audio-visual situation to the first scene, involving tumultuous weather and scraping chairs, and culminating in Momi's speech, which she gives facing away from the camera. A last instance of thunder serves as a key rupture in the film, leaving one last acoustic scar that seals over these decadent series of events.

The relation of the natural soundscape to the spaces it embodies is thus unstable at best, and irreconcilable. Jay Beck's analysis of sound in *La ciénaga* even proposes that it

[10] In *Óyeme con los ojos*, Ana Forcinito refers to a broader series of sonorous "explosions" against the family backdrop, including vocal outbursts, the unanswered telephone, barking dogs, and the rolling television that further destabilize the narrative within the soundscape (78).

has little connection at all, operating autonomously as its own sound event unto itself (2). This mode of listening approaches sounds as ontologically isolated "sound objects" (*l'objet sonore)* described by Schaeffer in *Traité des objets musicaux* (1966), or as "aural objects" which Christian Metz describes as sounds that function unto themselves, and autonomously from their visual counterparts (24). In this way, Beck argues, "Martel's use of aural objects works to sever the phenomenological link between the sounds and their sources and to question the social construction of sounds and their meaning" (3).

By isolating sound in this way, it comes to adopt a new dialectical relationship with the image, forming a complex narrative layer that is a template for stories of violence or trauma, or even PTSD which will also be explored in subsequent case studies. The parallel lies in a similar tension of occurrence; an event, or sensory perception, exists unto itself, but also occurs in relation to other events or perceptions. In the case of *La ciénaga*, the thunder, considered as its own aural object, declares yet resists linguistic boundaries; as it occurs enveloped in an image, it also generates a certain damaged narrative that challenges or rewrites the capacity of the semiotic.

If the thunder in *La ciénaga* occupies a position as a keynote sound, outlining on the one hand the unpredictable Salta climate, and on the other, acting as a grounding soundscape for the unstable story of socio-economic decay that unfolds there, it can also act as a geophonic sound signal in other regions and their representations. When used as a cinematic sound strategy in the Cuban film *Santa y Andrés* (Dir. Carlos Lechuga, 2016), for example, the thunder does not serve to delineate geographical specificities or serve as an insecure spatial outline, but rather lends its sounds to the narrative as an active, more

predictable force of rupture through minimal and condensed, rather than constant and erratic, repetitions.

Santa and Andrés centers on two protagonists in rural Cuba in 1983, where a forum for peace event is taking place as an initiative of Castro's government. Santa, an advocate from the group *El foro por la paz*, has been assigned by the state to watch over Andrés, a blacklisted gay communist writer, in his home during the days of the forum to ensure he does not intervene or try to speak out against the Cuban revolution in the presence of the foreign delegates.[11] The film plants an introductory textual context emphasizing the political climate in which religious people, artists, homosexuals, and writers are condemned to exile, imprisonment, reform or ostracization for their anti-regime ideologies.

In *Santa y Andrés*, it is the wind, rather than thunder, that acts as a natural force and keynote sound in both the beginning and ending scenes, marking a return that Andrés manages to use for certain subversive benefit. In the first scene, Santa makes her way through the countryside to Andrés' small remote home on the hill. The wind, which is heard through friction with the prairie and trees, serves both a tactile as well as aural function (Schafer 22). As there is little in the countryside fields to physically block or redirect the wind, it plants an atmosphere of paradox: rural Cuba rests on a fringe, an accessible point for far-reaching contact, yet at the same time capable of reaching back

[11] Ironically, the film itself faced censorship for similar denunciative political messages, being excluded from Cuba's 38th International Festival of New Latin American Cinema, and also pulled from the 18th Havana Film Festival in New York. See Gámez Torres, Nora. "Already banned in Cuba, film gets censored in U.S." *Miami Herald*, 17 March 2017.

and beyond. Through a political lens, Andrés' home outside of the village is thus marked by the wind as a precarious space that is charged with his latent transmission of anti-Castro speech, and it is Santa that must act as the barrier. To this end, she sets up her chair just outside the house with a vigilant eye and ear. The soundscape, masked in the peaceful isolation indicated by birds, bugs, and leaves, is in fact constructed by undercurrents of fear and political battles instilled upon the listener from the very start.

The force of the wind as it exerts friction with the ocean is, on the other hand, a sound that projects outwardly, breaking rather than outlining the boundaries of the marginal. In the last moments of the film, Andrés, escaping the clutches of the government that wishes to imprison him, finds through his susceptibility to his social weathering and ostracization the strength to latch himself onto the current. Using the very space that the wind carves out for him in the sea, he is able to combat an acousmatic force that carries secrets, rumors, and threats to his life by allowing the soundscape to push him away towards his freedom.

Unlike *La ciénaga*'s consistent acoustic presence of an ambiguous, cloudy climate, in *Santa y Andrés* the soundscape alters its voice more dramatically between sun and storm, a testament to the duality of the protagonists. On the second day of Santa's duty, her tumultuous relationship with Andrés takes a step towards trust when it begins pouring rain. Andrés invites Santa to stay in the house, and she refuses, standing determinedly in the fierce rain, until a violent burst of thunder forces her inside.

Here, the language of the thunder calls attention to the characters in multiple semiotic modalities. First, the heavy haptic rain is not sufficient to compel Santa to come inside, but the sudden sonorous detachment of intangible thunder provokes a fear in her

that is greater than that of Andrés, the social "other." In this way, rupture is paradoxically the basis for the bond between both characters because of its reorganization of the spatial plane; Santa finds herself transcending the boundaries into Andres' private space, where he feeds her and invites conversation. Second, the thunder as an unseen sonorous release of latent energy is evocative of Andrés's history as an oppressed homosexual in Castro's Cuba. Not only is it an extreme outburst that suggests (as the government might believe) an uncontrolled pent-up passion, but it occurs hidden from sight as a sort of sensorial deviance. Somehow, everyone "knows" about Andrés' sexuality because, despite not being first-hand witnesses, they are able to reconstruct the image, and full story, for themselves.

This narrative template relying on duality and reconciliation is not unique to Cuban cinema. We may recall, as an iconic example, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío's 1993 *Fresa y chocolate* for similar thematic threads and issues of homophobia in the socialist state.[12] *Fresa*'s role in the Cuban film industry in the waning years of the Soviet bloc is regarded as one that calls for tolerance of thought (Chanan 11) and a platform for "terms of reconciliation" (Santí 416). The so-called "Special Period" of the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union brought bankruptcy, scarce resources, limited funding through the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC), and civil unrest (King 275). In light of societal navigation of these political and economic shifts, *Fresa* relies on sound primarily as a channel for dialogue that manifests

[12] For an account relating the themes of visuality, vigilance and censorship in *Fresa* compared with *Santa y Andrés*, see Domínguez, Francisco Almagro. "Vocación Totalitaria." *Diariodecuba.com*, 20 Mar. 2020, diariodecuba.com/cultura/1494010359_30902.html.

as both a cinematic tool in addition to an ideological strategy. On the other hand, nearly two decades later, *Santa y Andrés* delves deeper into the semiotic layers beyond words themselves into the language of soundscape and, as will be explored in subsequent sections, through music and voice.

While Martel and Lechuga's films contrast in geography, year and socio-political references, specific keynote sounds like thunder or wind serve as linguistic placeholders linking stories in oppressive contexts, which become re-projected within both films' soundscapes. Both sonic environments outline rural, isolated areas that appear to challenge Schafer's idyllic acoustic portrait of the countryside. Debates on the scope of soundscape as a set of relations between sound, source, listeners, and other sounds has led to poststructuralist critique framing Schafer's notes on the rural as an idealized projection of how sounds were or should be, rather than accepting "their internal contradictions and complexities" (Kelman 223). Rather than offer a clean link to the past through an ambience of peaceful rurality, both *La ciénaga* and *Santa y Andrés* invert the idealized soundscape to reveal its dark underbelly of spectral resonance, vigilance and foreboding.

In this way, the films confuse any idyllic notions by indirectly confronting the realities of globalization, economic pressures in an increasingly transnational context (both films rely on transnational funding) and political decisions that re-define national boundaries at the turn of the century.[13] While, on the one hand, Latin American cinema

[13] For more on the collapse of independent cultural and economic spheres, see Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1991, pp. 4–5. For an account on the "*conciencia de globalización*" ("awareness of globalization") marking this global moment, see Daniel Mato's article

directs its gaze towards quotidian micropolitics (Schroeder Rodríguez, *Comparative* 250), this introspection is not confined to the urban as a locus for globalized practice. Indeed, Martel and Lechuga's films serve as reminders of the resonances of political transformations in rural areas, although abandoning all pretense of idealization or nostalgia. The cinematic rural landscape, apart from physical terrain, holds an affective, communitarian capacity that Catherine Fowler and Gillian Helfield describe as a "land imagined or remembered as a dream and that finds its most visceral evocation through the imagery of earth and sand and flesh and bone" (6-7). As *La ciénaga* and *Santa y Andrés* demonstrate, the natural soundscape is not always idyllic, but still points to the weight of both present and past. From the tumultuous climates of Salta and rural Cuba, an excavation of the soundscape's reverberations reconfigures the presentation of these spaces not as projections of national harmony, but as geographical soundboards for the acoustic shadows casted by regional social discord.

Urban Sounds

Schafer's determined critique of the urban soundscape is rooted primarily in its congestion and obfuscation of the aural extractability offered by natural, organic spaces. Indeed, to talk about one soundscape is to imply others, which may vary in frequencies and transmissions depending on the stories and participants involved. Regarding the tight compression of sounds produced not only by nature or humans, but also technology,

"Producción transnacional de representaciones sociales y transformaciones sociales en tiempos de globalización" in *CLASCO, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales*, 2001, pp. 131–132.

Schafer positions the urban as a sort of acoustic chaos: "Today the world suffers from an overpopulation of sounds; there is so much acoustic information that little of it can emerge with clarity...it is no longer possible to know what, if anything, is to be listened to" (71). In a critique of Schafer's tendency toward urban prejudice, sound designer Sophie Arkette proposes that while such acoustic instability may generate or reflect crises of identity, the identity of a city itself remains constructed through its acoustic contrast to its rural counterparts (162). If, to speak of rural or urban soundscapes is to imply the other, it is also possible to put into dialogue the acoustic representations or interrogations of violence in each. In addition, the value of referring to a globalized context of connection on an economic or cultural level lies in revealing an acoustic (or acousmatic) ecology and the potential for the transmission of stories of trauma across environments.

Schafer's critique of excess noise does not refer to the danger for sounds (and, consequently, voices) that become lost in their competition within the urban space. Carlos Fortuna notes that since urban sound's "sonorous continuum" operates in a constant battle of frequencies, it holds the potential to "diminish the individuals and render their history insignificant" (46, My translation). An excursion through the urban soundscape and a recuperation of sounds hidden away within the acoustic density of the city thus offers a means of combating the silencing of their significance as articulations of struggle in Latin American cities.

Rebeca Chávez's 2009 *Ciudad en rojo* offers a glimpse of urban uprising in Santiago de Cuba.[14] The film is loosely based on José Soler Puig's novel *Bertillón 166*, a

[14] Notably, Chávez is the second female director of a fictional feature length film in Cuba since Sara Gómez, whose *De cierta manera* was released in 1977 posthumously.

1960 prize-winner of the first Concurso Literario Hispanoamericano (now known as Casa de las Américas), which was founded shortly after the revolution to promote cultural ties between Cuba and the rest of the continent. Unlike the retrospective gaze of *Santa y Andrés* upon the challenges of social unity after the revolution, Chávez's film centers on the systems of violence in place prior to Castro's government in the 1950s in a recreation partially based on her own experiences with the 26th of July Movement in Santiago (Chávez). The plight to remove Fulgencio Batista was synonymous with a disavowal of cultural and economic imperialism, and the 1953 attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago elevated Castro as an upcoming political figure.

The film follows the protagonist Waldino and his encounters with a diverse set of characters related to the fight against Batista within Santiago. While the space of the sierra is associated with much of Castro's revolutionary activity, Chávez's film highlights the urban space as one of insurgent capacity (Hatry 55). On the one hand, Lechuga's *Santa y Andrés* upholds the capacity of rural margins as a subversive space for denunciative speech. On the other hand, the characters in Chávez's portrayal of Santiago in *Ciudad en rojo* utilize the buzz of the city as a means of hiding their plans from the authorities.

In spite of the seemingly opposing gazes towards the revolution (with the characters in *Ciudad en rojo* pushing forward, and *Santa y Andrés* looking backward), the soundscape in both cases serves as a channel for critique and a catalyst for change. In Chávez's film, Waldino introduces himself through a voiceover speaking of the people of Santiago, which overlaps with a black and white montage of what he calls a "modern city." Amidst shots of city walkers, shoppers, vehicle traffic, and store services, images

of a darker reality intercede in segments: armed guards, civilians lined up against a wall, and a man loading a gun. This historical portrait is enveloped by Waldino's reflections and soft music, but the first noticeable interruption of present events is decidedly marked by a car driving away. The sound of its horn coincides with a prominent shift in the visual aesthetic, effectively activating the use of color in the shot, and consequently, present immediacy and enhanced sensorial input brought about by modern culture.

Traffic sounds also figure into the scene of the women's march against the murders under the Batista regime. Images flit between frontal shots of women marching forward with signs, of armed guards ready to fire, and of curious passersby. The soundscape implicating the people in the city center implies traffic that alternates between a smoothness of movement and impatient congestion. As if mirroring the acoustic space, the women march peacefully in a quiet and undisturbing hum, while the police form a barrier and cock their guns against the silent protest. For the young women protesting, the police are not obstacles for their revolutionary vision, but Batista's defenses, by treating them as an obstruction to the present order, convert their silence into a physical mass that becomes manipulable and subject to castigation and control.

Another example of the relationship between the city, sound, and control (or lack thereof) is the Peruvian film *Días de Santiago* (Dir. Josué Méndez, 2004) which incorporates the urban soundscape as a similar reflection of struggles against institutional violence, particularly as it channels into the protagonist, Santiago, through his post-traumatic stress disorder in an explicit reference to trauma. The film is among the first to focus on the psychological effects on perpetrators of state violence in Latin America, rather than victims (Tompkins 147). After serving in the military during the internal

armed conflict between the Peruvian state and the Sendero Luminoso (1980–2000), Santiago returns to civilian life in Lima, straining to manage psychological distress resulting from the conflation of past and present, and confronting ongoing violence among his family dynamic. One cinematic projection of his PTSD's reconfiguration of memory and the present is the alternation, and confusion, between black and white images and those in color (Tompkins 149).

Much like *Ciudad en rojo, Días de Santiago* utilizes a sequence early on that contextualizes some of the acoustic patterns of the narration. Like its Cuban counterpart, the introduction in Lima relies on a voiceover to introduce the protagonist and his surroundings. Prior to hearing Santiago speak for the first time, however, we learn much of his character through his relation to the soundscape. In the scene, Santiago has briefly and unsuccessfully tried to learn about his options for a degree program. Once he has left, we see a black and white close-up of Santiago's face in profile as he passes through the city. The visual frame, while spatially suffocating, is enveloped by a concentration of sounds including tinny metal music from the street, passing cars, and horns. The acousmatic sounds conflate with the visual reference to offer a sensorial portrait of chaos. The film uses this introduction as a platform to highlight a series of frustrating incongruencies; namely, Santiago's desire for order manifests as a patriarchal impulse that conflates his role as head of the family with his responsibilities as a military man (Saona 168). The acoustic insight into Santiago's headspace is only a preliminary glimpse of his experience with this crumbling system, which will be further explored through examples of vocal disjunction in Chapter 2.

The vehicles in *Días de Santiago* also offer insight into the capacity of the urban soundscape to reconfigure relationships between past and present. The opening credits are grounded in the passing sounds of vehicles. Soon after, there is a close-up shot of Santiago walking through the city and the traffic sounds become more emphasized, gesturing to the chaos around and, as we will come to learn, within him. Santiago's passage through Lima and the combination of various shots of the city spaces elicit a sense of disjunction that is consistent with his PTSD (Tompkins 156), which will be analyzed further in subsequent sections. A contrast can be made with Santiago's exposure to the rapid energy of the city and the stagnant area of his home, where, interestingly, an old car without wheels is parked.

Vehicles also come into the foreground both acoustically and visually in the film *Taxi, un encuentro* (Dir. Gabriela David, Argentina, 2001), which capitalizes on the disjunctive power of the Buenos Aires soundscape as a means of dialoguing past and present events in a context of trauma. *Taxi, un encuentro* opens with a shot of a corner store in the capital city where the frame of the street space is layered with collages of visual and sonic activities signaling a passage of time. The screen fades to black to accommodate the opening credits, but the urban soundscape remains. Suddenly, we hear three gunshots. The visual plane re-opens to the desolate street at night, and we see someone running towards the empty corner to call an approaching taxi. The driver is Gato, a car thief in Buenos Aires who lives with his physically disabled father in the outskirts of the city. Gato has stolen the taxi in order to sell its parts, but ends up taking it for a spin to make money as a cab driver. The film cuts between shots of him telling these

recent events of his life to an unrevealed audience, and scenes of pick-ups and caricatures of local *bonaerenses* with him in the cab.

One night, on a route, we see Gato tuck away his unused gun in the front seat, who is then startled by the sound of three rapid gunshots off-screen. He stops at the same street corner from the opening scene, and picks up Laura, a teenage girl that is badly wounded. We later learn that Laura was involved in the shooting heard in the beginning; her unemployed father had committed suicide after killing her mother and wounding Laura with a revolver. The film testifies to the poor living conditions of both Laura and Gato's home contexts, which, like the families in *La ciénaga*, have been directly impacted, if not more disproportionately, as a result of the structural violence entwined with the economic depression of the era. Towards the end of the film, Gato's audience for his monological narrations about taxi activities is revealed to be Laura herself.

The cinematic events unfold through an acousmatic weaving of images that are grounded in street sounds, traffic, and movement, that is to say, constant displacement. Meanwhile, the gunshot motif serves as a constant interruption of the image that, by means of the sharpness of its own acoustic being, severs the visual and forces a reconstitution of the image. The sounds of gunshots, which are littered throughout the film, can be listened to differently depending on the type of visual context that is or has been offered. The opening credit scene, for example, introduces the accident at Laura's house exclusively through this sound, with a black screen as the only visual referent. The visual and acoustic context provided throughout the film becomes reconstituted when the gunshot sounds return out of temporal sequence, and through different visual planes. This scattered belatedness re-presences as Gato first hears the accident in the taxi. Later, as he

analyzes the bullet he and his father recover from Laura's body, the sound of the first gunshot cuts again through the screen, this time enveloped in an image of Gato's face in the taxi that was not previously shown from this perspective, although the sound remains the same. The accident itself is never fully witnessed, and is only pieced together through the aural clues in the soundscape that weave together a narrative image.

One year prior to David's *Taxi, un encuentro*, which highlights Buenos Aires' acoustic backdrop of urban violence, *Amores perros* (Dir. González Iñárritu, Mexico, 2000) broke into international film circuits through its depiction of the harshness of loss in the Mexican capital at the turn of the century. Mexico City's expansive urbanity has been classified as a conglomerate of three types of sub-cities: pre-Colombian, industrial, and informational or communicational (Canclini, *Imaginarios* 82–86). Combined, they offer a portrait of the city as multifaceted and transient that marks an identity in flux.[15] If urban representations across films in Havana, Lima, and Buenos Aires share a certain pattern of sonic reverberation, the portrayal offered by *Amores perros* also leaves its mark in the transacoustic footprints of neoliberal pressures.[16]

The sounds in this film, which permeate the boundaries of public and private spheres, also work against the image to incite affectual discomfort. In *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Latin American Cinema*, Laura Podalsky analyzes affect within a

[15] For a more detailed account of the molding of Mexico's urban imaginary through social dynamics, see García Canclini's *La ciudad de los viajeros: travesías e imaginarios urbanos: México, 1940–2000*. Primera edición (FCE-UAM), nueva edición, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Fondo De Cultura Económica, 2013.

[16] For a North American account of the tendency of urban sounds to homogenize across industrialized cities, see Emily Ann Thompson's book entitled *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933*. MIT Press, 2004.

larger disciplinary turn overlapping with the period of the New Cinema in which she highlights a difference in the arrangement and reception of sensorial dynamics, where new sensibilities are articulated in cultural productions like films (7). For Podalsky, *Amores perros* provokes feeling and reflection on the level of a sensorial appeal constructed not by its content so much as the structural and stylistic forces behind the narrative and action (85).

The motif of dogs throughout the film has been observed as an analogy of the animalistic behaviors of the characters whose hypermasculine tendencies reflect either a nation in crisis (Borreye 2) or a nation as a disintegrating family (Podalsky 87–88). The film is structured around three vignettes that center on the stories of diverse sets of characters who become linked through a violent automobile accident. If traffic soundscapes vary in their acoustic narrations of the stories of trauma that we have discussed so far, *Amores perros* explores the event of a crash as a sensorial experience that paradoxically ruptures and unites. Despite the fact that Octavio and Valeria, the two victims involved, come from opposite positions on the socio-economic spectrum in Mexico City, the collision effectively "suspends" these identities and strips away the constructs of neoliberalism to expose the bare life of both parties (Reber 88). Apart from the accident itself, the figure of the animal, symbolized primarily through Octavio's dog Cofi, serves as a key narrative and metaphoric link between all three vignettes (Thakkar 11). Podalsky observes that in the first vignette, which recounts the family troubles of Octavio, a young lower-class man in love with his brother Ramiro's wife Susana, relies on recurring dogfighting scenes that enter into a mirrored dialogue with scenes of the

family conflict to reinforce Octavio and Ramiro's precarious home life, socio-economic situation, and crisis of masculinity (87).

Apart from the images of dogs that intercede as narrative elements, the soundscape that they create hovers within the spatial foundation of the distress of the characters. Aside from the environment of the dogfights themselves, and the recurring sounds of barking throughout the streets, the mirrored acoustic of violence also takes place specifically within an unseen soundscape that generates its animality through the overt lack of visual reference. The second vignette, which focuses on Daniel and Valeria's affair, utilizes this type of sound most explicitly. Valeria, an ex-model that is confined to a wheelchair in the apartment after the car accident, is immersed in the sounds of her dog, Richie, who has fallen under the open floorboards of the house. Podalsky summarizes the ongoing trauma reflected in Valeria's subjectivity as the listener to this disembodied soundscape:

> Her ability to perceive her dog's continuing predicament through aural means alone leads her to imagine Richie suffering not only gradual starvation, but also being eaten by marauding rats. Lost in a dark and fathomless maze, Richie comes to symbolize all of Valeria's latent fears about the end of her modeling career and the uncertainty of her relationship with the still-married Daniel. Through its deliberate manipulation of what we see and what we hear, the film manages to draw the spectator into Valeria's feelings of panic, suspicion, and paranoia and, in the context of the larger film, position the unseen events occurring

> beneath the floor as a metaphor for the ongoing suffering and violence underlying society as a whole. (91)

The unnerving sonorous presence of Richie's whining and scuffling serves as a contrast to the aggressive sounds of barking, growling, and dogfighting within the gritty public spaces outside of Valeria's high-end apartment purchased as a gift from Daniel. In this sense, it is possible to note a sliding scale of acoustic backdrop that adjusts according to class environment and specific preoccupations. On the one hand, Octavio is surrounded by aggressive barking, or an exertion of acoustic power in order to gain status. Meanwhile, Valeria, who since the car accident is no longer able to serve as a visual object of consumption, neither as a high-status model nor as a trophy for Daniel, is subject to a less amplified crying that echoes her crisis of physical and social decadence.

While the animalistic soundscape in this portrait of Mexico City serves as a connecting point across the human experience of living and suffering, there is also a non-naturalistic acoustic backdrop that operates as a cold, technological echo of the lack of connection in the capital's society. The growth of the city leading up to the twenty-first century, as a result of industrialization, transnational investments and transnationalization of Mexican business, resulted in a reconfiguration not just of cultural urban space, but also a communicative one (Canclini and Liffman 210). Paradoxically, the emphasis of global connectivity on an economic level is projected in *Amores perros* through class division and interpersonal disconnection. Within the soundscape, these ruptures are provoked through an excess of noise whose sonorous weight eclipses communicative meaning.

The telephone as an instrument of soundscape in *Amores perros* testifies to the strain between Daniel and his ex-wife, and also with Valeria. Prior to his separation, the home phone rings multiple times, but there is no response on the other end. We may recall that *La ciénaga*'s representation of the telephone creates a similar interruption in the flow of communication; its constant ringing throughout the house, coupled with Mecha's screams for someone to answer it, are a testament to a lack of communication between characters and with the outside world (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 108). In *Amores perros*, the silence of the other end of the phone conjures the image of Valeria, Daniel's lover, who announces her recurring presence through these sonorous disruptions that, in their underbelly, have little to say outside of their interruptive function. This serves as an acoustic foreshadow of the difficulties they will encounter in maintaining the relationship.

When Daniel is finally able to connect with Valeria's voice on the phone, he is sitting in bed with his wife immersed in noise. He answers his ringing cell phone over the sound of the television, telling his wife that he is unable to hear much over all the noise. She responds by saying the same, reinforcing their lack of intimate communication in light of an excess of other superficial transmissions. Under the pretense of speaking to his brother, Daniel is able to leave the immediate area so that the soundscape becomes reconfigured, and he is able to listen more genuinely to Valeria's voice, though the audience remains blocked from it.

If, following Canclini's terminology, Mexico City's urbanity is defined in part by its dynamic communicational cityscape marked by increased developments in transportation and communicational technologies, it also is subject to a process of

decentralization (*Imaginarios* 86–87) that in *Amores perros* manifests as a fragmented social capacity and misalignment of communicative attempts.[17] In the case of the first vignette, Octavio uses the telephone as a means of manipulating the soundscape through a conscious acoustic disruption. After having to listen to the acousmatic sounds of Susana and his brother Ramiro having sex, he intervenes by knocking on the door saying there is a phone call for Susana. In this way Octavio effectively invents an interruptive soundscape, unheard by Ramiro and Susana, to combat the painful acoustic reminder that they are a couple. The plan, however, is ineffective; despite his plan to use the telephone to lure Susana to him instead of Ramiro—a symbolic initiative that parallels Octavio's perceived emotional connection with Susana—the effect of the soundless telephone actually results in Susana rejecting Octavio's advances and complex of masculinity. In this way, the soundscape in *Amores perros* acts as a disruptive player in idealized narrative fantasies (Sánchez-Prado 41).

In these cinematic contexts, the representation of acoustic undercurrents in urban contexts is a key point of departure for attuning to the stories of crisis that emerge within these spaces. Sounds that seem to transcend specific cities acquire, within these films, a meaning of their own as a product of, or instigator of, personal or collective disturbance. At the same time, soundscapes of either rural or urban regions in Latin America testify to social, political and economic changes with resounding effects on local populations.

[17] *Amores perros* can also be viewed as a precursor to later technological developments that outline more recent imprints of capitalism and the digital in Latin America. For more, see García Canclini's article "Cómo investigar la era comunicacional del capitalismo" in *Desacatos*, no. 56, 2018, pp. 90–105.

Music

If, as we have explored so far, the soundscape has been a key component in relating stories of struggle across geographies, and also making possible their relation to each other, it is also useful to consider the role of music within these dynamics. Schafer considers music as a key link between diverse landscapes, whether pastoral or urban, not only as a space for performance, but also as sonic influence (104–105). On a macrocosmic scale, the world itself for Schafer is a musical composition brought about by the tuning of local and global soundscapes (5).[18] Within the following cinematic representations, music can fulfill the role of a soundscape, and in this way, participate in sonorous channels of trauma from a spectral instrumental body. These case studies show how this type of musical testimony operates in two distinct manners that point to trauma by either resisting or aiding in its narration.

One of the reasons *Amores perros* successfully circulated internationally was for its emphasis on youth culture and by directing itself towards a young audience (Shaw, "Amigos" 107). Specifically, its soundtrack has been noted as an important component of its transnational capacity and audience reception, particularly due to its "music video aesthetic" constructed by the use of the bands Control Machete or Nacha Pop (Shaw, "Amigos" 107). The original soundtrack composed by Gustavo Santaolalla, the Argentine

[18] For more on the concept of soundscape compositions, see John Drever's article, "Soundscape composition: the convergence of ethnography and acousmatic music" in *Organised Sound* vol.7, no. 1, 2002, pp. 21–27; Hildegard Westerkamp's article, "Linking soundscape composition and acoustic ecology" in *Organised Sound* vol. 7, no. 1, 2002, pp. 51–56; and Barry Truax's "Soundscape composition as global music: Electroacoustic music as soundscape" in *Organised Sound* vol. 13, no. 2, 2008, pp. 103–109.

musician renowned for numerous internationally acclaimed films, serves as a cohesive glue between the three vignettes (Shaw, "Amigos" 106). Regarding the general musical sphere of the film, Paul Julian Smith affirms that the sound design "takes the film and the listener out of themselves to new and unexpected places" (72). In this way, the musical soundtrack contributes to the film's points of identification in both local and global audiences, showing a range of faces through the soundsphere.[19]

As *Amores perros* shows, music can be used strategically as an instrument of obfuscation or erasure that, in this case, comes into conflict with the masculine voice. For example, in the first episode, Ramiro brings Susana a stolen Walkman as a gift. After a long day of caring for their sick child, Susana ecstatically accepts, and puts on the headphones as she begins to passionately kiss Ramiro. The Walkman as a personalized, mobile tool in the context of consumer culture notably permits the construction of individualized soundworlds (Bull 82). As a tinny version of Illya Kuryaki's 'Coolo' plays over their physical intimacy, Susana immerses herself in a soundscape that effectively transports her into a realm free from the challenges of (largely unsupported) caregiving, momentarily marking a sorry-free moment of youth.

However, as Paul Julian Smith notes, Ramiro is not privy to Susana's immediate acoustic bubble (43), and it is he that aggressively interrupts it. Susana asks him not to yell or he will wake the baby, but she is forced to confront the sounds of reality: Ramiro ignores her and purposefully goes to the baby in a selective, inappropriately timed

[19] For more on the role of popular music in the construction of Latin American subjectivities, including in contexts of crisis or violence, see Juan Pablo González's book *Pensar la música desde América Latina: Problemas e interrogantes*, Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2013.

affirmation of fatherhood. The sounds of the Walkman lose their hold over Susana's environment, which becomes dominated by Ramiro's shouts and her baby's cries. In effect, the Walkman perfectly symbolizes the tumultuous relationship between Susana and her husband; Ramiro's emotional control over her guides her joys that temporarily erase her miseries, and his dominant, masculine voice overrides the temporary illusion created by the musical soundtrack. Ultimately, it is her husband's voice that Susana is obligated to return to, which is demonstrated at the end when she accepts Octavio's money yet chooses to run away with Ramiro.

If the uniqueness of the Walkman lies in its participation in the construction of an individual acoustic realm, radio contrasts as a soundwall of shared environments (Schafer 93). In various films across the context of the New Cinema in Latin America, the radio emerges as a strategic tool of acoustic concealment in depictions of political perpetration or subversion. These films show how musical transmissions through radios, cassettes, or CD players, as nonanthrophonic soundscapes, can be manipulated by human means to exert or resist violence. Marco Bechis' *Garage Olimpo* (1999) occupies a unique position along the borders of the New Cinema movement for its explicit historical gaze towards the recent dictatorship. As Jens Andermann observes, it demarcates a boundary between a cinema that focuses directly on the influence of the past, such as the wave of documentary films led by Albertina Carri and others, and that which centers on specifically present preoccupations ("Argentine Cinema"). Andermann positions this body of films in relation to the larger New Cinema movement in relation to their historical gaze:

> Even though these films diverged both in their politics and their aesthetic approaches, they nevertheless coincided in an attempt to focalize on the country's recent past with the same inquisitive, ethnographic gaze to which cinema was submitting its own present of national crisis: rather than to bring history closer by enticing viewers to empathise with the plight of their characters, these films would maintain a distanced curiosity allowing the past to emerge in its strangeness, its discontinuity towards the present as manifest in gestures and in speech habits… ("Argentine Cinema")

The use of the radio in the film, rather than pointing to discontinuities with subsequent film production, however, shows the points of overlap in the creation of soundscapes.

Garage Olimpo tells the story of María, a young activist and literacy teacher, who is kidnapped and tortured during Argentina's military dictatorship in the infamous *Olimpo* detention center in Buenos Aires. Her tenant, Felix, is complicit in the activities of the center, and she is able to accept his love for her as an advantage for small favors to survive her experience as a prisoner. The film is semi-autobiographical and includes pieces of sensory information recalled by Bechis during a detention in 1976. Bechis notes that

> The sound is what is autobiographical. I was held, for about ten days, in the Club Atlético, one of the camps they had in the city. […] Since I was blindfolded I didn't see anything, only once did I lift the blindfold and through some bars I saw a corridor. When I was freed and I went to Italy I sketched that corridor and with that sketch I made the stage set. The set is exactly what that sketch looked like; I gave it to a set designer and I said I

> want this. It's an exact reconstruction of what I saw from under my blindfold. And as for the sound, it's not that I listened to those exact songs, that radio, it's not that I heard those exact things, but what is exact is the thickness and the quality of the sound of that place, that is very much like what I remember. (Gallotta, "Entrevista," quoted in Kaminsky)

The cinematic reconstruction results in a compiled sensorial experience for the spectator as if they themselves were blindfolded or privy to only certain pieces of visual information (Kaplan 114; Kaminsky). On a macro-scale, the blindfold also recuperates and challenges a collective attitude in Argentina of willed blindness towards state violence (Manzano 164).

Apart from scopic techniques meant to reveal and conceal aspects of the narrative, the film's use of sound at times eclipses its visual counterpart. When many shots fade to black, the sounds tend to continue, and it is through these acoustic avenues that violence in the film is often intuited (Kaplan 114). The radio in this sense is a key foreboding transmission. In one shot, the radio plays over a cropped image of María's naked body on a table. In a lengthier sequence, the guards lead in a new group of blindfolded victims, with a suffocating camera composition in the hallway. A radio sits in the narrow entryway and plays the lively "Vola vola" by Peppino di Capri as the prisoners are shuffled in, and plays as one of them is kicked on the ground. The song and the prisoners both weave around into the next room, where guards are playing ping-pong as the newcomers are forced to march up the stairs. If the act of playing games to the radio feeds in to the quotidian habits of the guards, reinforcing their capacity for monstrosity (Ravaschino, "Garage"), it is the last space revealed to be occupied by the radio that

addresses the complicity of those outside the center; the faint tinny echoes of the radio leak through a shot of the garage wall and a man pushing a cart on the sidewalk outside.

This acoustic current strategically employed by the prison center serves to maintain its power within and beyond its walls through a control over what is audible and what is not. Not only are the prisoners unable to decipher their acoustic surroundings (they rely primarily on touch as a concrete guide through the center), but those outside the center are also unable to hear the torture within it. On the other hand, even if the excess of music gives itself away as a consciously imposed acoustic obstruction, it becomes possible for both the detention center's perpetrators and acoustic witnesses to hide in plausible deniability. In this way, the radio emerges not only to conceal violence, but also to perpetuate it. The song by di Capri, meanwhile, calls attention to a rhythm of energy and life, in what Chion would describe as an "anempathetic" sound that in conjunction with its visual counterpart, projects a state of "indifference" (*Audio-Vision* 8) that resonates with the complicity of the general public.

Like other soundscapes, music's power to conceal the inner workings of state violence also contains potential as a force of resistance. In *Santa y Andrés*, Santa's first visit to Andrés' cottage is marked by a soundscape of wind that becomes doubly acoustically marked by the song "Viento" ("Wind") by Martha Strada, the famous Cuban ballad singer who escaped to Miami in 1992. Shortly after Santa's arrival, Andrés loads a large cassette tape just outside his front door, touched by wind and Santa's vigilance. "Viento" starts playing as an awkward mark of acousmatic divide between the two characters; she sits outside, shaking her foot while he drinks from a mug looking out the window.

Once a frontal shot of the radio itself is shown, however, the music abruptly stops. Andrés comes to flip over the tape and the music starts again from the beginning, arming anew its musical barrier. Shortly after, Andrés casually enters the outhouse, briefly evading Santa's eye, and shoves a file of documents away next to the toilet. The music, like in *Garage Olimpo*, projects an environment of the quotidian, dissuading Santa's suspicions that entering the outhouse might imply anything except for Andrés relieving himself. At the same time, the music is loud enough that, coupled with the visual obstruction of the wall, Andrés is able to secretly dispose of his incriminating writing. Shortly after one of Andrés' friends stops by, an extreme long shot of the cottage and surrounding countryside is marked by the soundscape of the natural wind in addition to the same song, whose transmission offers a pushback against the government's vigilance.

As this last example shows, the "anempathy" of musical tracks that are meant to be rooted in the diegetic space does not render them incompatible with other acoustic currents operating within the soundscape. Although the songs participate in a process of concealment, either in contrast to or in conjunction with visual dynamics, exploring additional acoustic layers can offer an additional point of access to the power dynamics in force.

These acoustic layers can form a soundscape in competition, where acoustic obfuscation or confusion occurs through sounds that battle with each other. An example of this occurs in a particularly sensorially busy scene in Carlos Carrera's 2009 *El traspatio*. The film centers on the city of Juárez, Mexico, the site of an expansive *maquiladora* industry, which witnessed an exponential increase in economic potency in the 1990s, and, on the other hand, a substantial amount of femicides. The factories,

though notable for unfair working conditions, attracted women workers in search of forms of economic security and independence in a city marked by economic disparity and a dominant culture of patriarchy (Monárrez Fragoso 95). The ending credits of *El traspatio* cite 87 murdered women in Juarez in the year 1996 and 362 in 2007, a 316% increase that implicates a structural violence beyond that of mere local criminality, but rather one involving the neocolonial power dynamics involved with the presence of foreign corporations.

El traspatio projects a double narration that intersects the investigations of Blanca, a local police officer looking into the murders, and the experience of Juanita, a young indigenous woman who travels from Chiapas to Juárez to work at the factory. While Blanca faces many challenges within the judicial system rooted in corruption, corporate interest and impunity, Juanita adjusts to cosmopolitan rhythms in addition to the strict biopolitical operations of the *maquila*. For example, women at the factory are put on birth control and told they will be fired if they get pregnant.[20] Despite taking advantage of the freedoms she does encounter with her new income and lifestyle, Juanita ends up succumbing to the extreme structures of masculinity that define her social boundaries. Her new casual partner, Cutberto, lives in conditions of poverty and toxic masculinity that conditions the development of a possessive attitude towards her, and later his complicity in her murder.

[20] For a more detailed analysis of biopolitics and the body in *El traspatio*, refer to Emily Hind's article "Estado de excepción y feminicidio: El traspatio/Backyard (2009) de Carlos Carrera y Sabina Berman" in *Colorado Review of Hispanic Studies* 8, 2010, pp. 27–42.

A key scene where soundscape acts as a link between Blanca and Juanita's trajectories begins as the sirens launching Blanca's criminal raid downtown morph into the *norteño* tune of Julio Preciado's "Que te quise mucho" in the *discoteca* where Juanita dances with another man. Cutberto arrives and aggressively confronts the pair, and he ends up throwing a bottle at the wall. While Juanita continues to dance to the festive *norteño* rhythm, the semantic layer of the song recounts a love betrayed and feeds into Cutberto's damaged pride. Shortly after Cutberto shows signs of acting on his pent-up frustration, the sound of the police sirens drives a wedge even further into the musical soundscape, transforming it into a confused acoustic chaos. What results in the image is a conflated choreography of the dancers in the *discoteca*, Cutberto's physical loss of control, and the scurried formation of the police outside of the building. In this way, the collision of soundscapes meshes together characters and contexts, juxtaposes the police and their targets, and foreshadows the dissonance between investigative capacity and judiciary results. The end of the film remains inconclusive, as Blanca is stripped of her police status and Juanita's eventual murder at the hands of Cutberto and the criminal gang remains unsolved within a system of impunity.

This violent entanglement of soundscapes implicates music as a permeable current susceptible to semiotic reconfiguration in relation to other sounds. Another film, *La mirada invisible* (Diego Lerman, Argentina, 2010) addresses the potential for an opposition of soundscape currents that do not reach a leveled collision due to a persistent dominance of certain sounds that render others silent. However, the musical soundscape, when operating with the goal to promote order through the acoustic (such as the example shown in *Garage Olimpo*), can also encounter pockets of sensorial resistance that in this

case are led by the protagonist. Lerman's film primarily develops within the enclosed spaces of the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, where the main character, María Teresa, is a teacher during the waning years of the military dictatorship. The school, run by Mr. Biasutto, operates through a rigid panopticism in order to discipline its students and prevent subversive behavior that might mimic, within the macrocosmic space, the political resistance against the regime. Mr. Biasutto grants María Teresa the task of espionage within the school, principally as a means of catching a suspected smoker in the bathroom, and professional lines become blurred when she surrenders to the pleasures of vigilance.

The soundscape of the school reflects the order of the visual; in the opening scene, the students' only acoustic footprint comes directly from their march through the halls as they follow María Teresa.[21] When they collectively stop, there is no other sound in the building and they do not speak; redundantly, María Teresa calls for silence as the first one to use her voice in the film. Within these silent spaces, the gaze emerges as a form of communication, primarily triangulated between María Teresa, Mr. Biasutto, and a student of interest, Marini (Montenegro 134–135). In addition, the reduced activity in the soundscape reveals how much María Teresa's increasingly ambiguous intentions regarding Marini contrast with Biasutto's clearly delineated masculine and administrative power over her.

[21] The scene also incorporates an extradiegetic film score. For a concise discussion on the transcendent capacity of music between diegetic and extradiegetic spheres, see Robynn Stilwell's chapter entitled "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic" in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema,* edited by Daniel Goldmark, et al, Berkeley, University of California Press, pp. 184–204.

Music, apart from voice as a source of instructional or disciplinary value, is a salient feature of the soundscape in this film that operates within the acoustic regime of the school, insofar as it corresponds to the nation's political program. Whereas silence amplifies the voices of order and subsequently highlights any subversive speech, patriotic music serves as a key feature of acoustic order. In a scene where María Teresa silently smells the back of Marini's head in the classroom, the soundscape of a class choir session permeates the atmosphere, diffusing this sensorially risky act. Under the organization of the choir music—the patriotic "Aurora," a song for the flag—the image switches to a series of empty shots of the school in neat, symmetrical composition. A brief shot of María Teresa singing with the students behind glass doors consolidates the acoustic as the dominant sensory order. However, it is María Teresa that breaks it when the scene abruptly cuts to show her erasing a board, whose brushing sounds cleanly wipe away any trace of the patriotic choir.

The singing of "Aurora" recalls the introduction to the film in which the national anthem plays over the opening credits and as a sort of spectacle for the entry of the students who march into the main hall. Notably, a version of "Aurora" also plays in *Garage Olimpo*, during the finale scene that shows the "death flight" in which an airplane disposes of the prisoners' corpses in the ocean, an extreme form of political order known to be used during the dictatorship. Towards the end of *La mirada invisible*, the track also returns, this time as a choral orchestration of the entire school assembly in the main hall. In the acoustic shadows of the song, there is a silent exchange of looks between Biasutto, María Teresa, and Marini. Like in the previous song, María Teresa leads the acoustic interruption by pushing open a set of doors. This sonorous gesture opens up the path for

the sounds outside of the *colegio*—the rhythms of increasingly aggressive political protest against the invasion of the Malvinas islands—to enter the space of the school and corrupt the sensory regime. In a climactic conclusion, the drumming sounds outside the walls end up spacing themselves into a pulse consistent with the sounds of a heartbeat, which palpitates while María Teresa stabs Biasutto after he sexually assaults her in the bathroom. In this way, María Teresa's revenge is consolidated, in part, by her body's absorption of a counter-hegemonic soundscape to set the stage for a new political order, foreshadowing the end of the Malvinas War and the reign of the military dictatorship that Biasutto stands for.

The aforementioned examples reveal the diverse capacities of musical soundscapes as key channels for the narration of violence, either explicitly or indirectly. Music, like natural and urban soundscapes, is able to vocalize internal or collective contexts, and also highlights the role of soundscapes as a system of sounds, obstructions, interruptions or amplifications that within and across films are put into dialogue as sensorial access points to past and present traumas. All of these types of soundscapes, in their geographic or cultural heterogeneity, are points of departure through which we might draw connections across the New Cinema and its diverse sonic worlds.

Chapter 2: The Voiceover and Voice-off

Era de noche gritaba,
Los cerros remedaban
Y la gente reía.[22]

That night I screamed,
The hills echoed
And people laughed.

The opening moments of Claudia Llosa's *La teta asustada* (2009) rely on the technique of voiceover to introduce the film's story of generational trauma among the indigenous community of Manchay affected by Peru's internal armed conflict. Whereas the first chapter of this dissertation explored various films in which the sonic environment participates as a sounding board of trauma and its narrative forms, this chapter analyzes how the cinematic techniques of voiceover or voice-off implicate characters through their own displaced vocalization, that is, speaking as invisible bodies that relay experiences with violence and trauma through detached voices. This chapter explores how voiceover or voice-off dynamics come to form stylistically marked patterns of articulation by means of gendered voice, projected recordings, or in an expositional capacity, which in their conjunction reveal the sonic tensions between disembodiment and agency in the face of marginalization and traumatic circumstance.

The "wandering" quality of Chion's *acousmêtre*, or a lost voice that seeks to reconnect or settle, is also addressed by Caruth in her analysis of Freud's account of the

[22] *La teta asustada*, Dir. Claudia Llosa, Peru, 2009, 1:20.

dream of the burning child. Here, a father dreams that his recently deceased child, whose body is in the next room, speaks to him in the night by calling out, "Father, don't you see I'm burning?" and the father is woken by his child's voice only to find the body partially on fire from a candle (*Unclaimed* 9). Caruth emphasizes the role of the voice in connecting both parent and child in light of loss, in addition to the urgency of the need to listen to these wandering, spectral voices: "It is this plea by an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken" (*Unclaimed* 9). In this way, the child's voice settles, or establishes a presence, insofar as it permeates into the depths of his father's dream, and has the strength to wake him.

Within film, the edges between presence, absence, life, and death are also constructed through the power of the voice. The built-in state of simultaneous presence and absence of the voice not only defines its external boundaries with the cinematic image, but also operates within the voice's own relationship to itself. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida approaches the phenomenological value of the voice as a channel of "immediate presence" that, at the same time, constitutes an erasure of the body of the signifier (77). This aporetic structure of self-presence is classified, through voice, as both an impulse of desire and an obstacle to its realization.

From a psychoanalytical standpoint that is communicable to film studies, Mladen Dolar asserts that voice neither pertains to language nor to the body, but rather "floats" in a topology between both (73). These metaphysical characteristics of voice become re-projected within the *acousmêtre*, the cinematic form of voice that forever seeks a "possibility of inclusion" with an embodying image (Chion, *Voice* 23). This potentially unsettling hovering stems from a voice that floats through the body of the visual plane of

the film, ever teasing of a wholesome, synchronized embodiment that would strip the acousmatic of its mystical ineffability. While for Chion an acousmatic voice in the cinema will always hold the potential to become disacousmatized, or rejoined in the body, Dolar approaches the liminal state of the voice as one that is, by nature, permanently acousmatic, and thus cannot be "disacousmatized": "The source of the voice can never be seen, it stems from an undisclosed and structurally concealed interior, it cannot possibly match what we can see" (70). These tensions of anticipated connection or disconnection are prevalent across contexts of voiceovers and voice-offs in which characters constantly mark, through voice, their relationship to the visual realm, to their bodies, or to the known or unknown.

Opposing debates on the acousmatic voice's potential to be disacousmatized are reconciled by Brian Kane, who offers an epistemological analysis of acousmatic sound that does not treat it in isolation to other sensory registers, but rather accounts for these modalities as a means of making sense of the acousmatic (224). Within the cinema, the call to avoid exclusive sensorial experiences is fundamental to engage holistically with the *acousmêtre* that imparts its sound by leaning not only on auditory, but also visual and affective articulations. In the case studies in this chapter, both voiceover and voice-off serve as vehicles of these sensorial tensions and entanglements that articulate the deconstitutive and reconstitutive nature of trauma represented in Latin American film production.

While I proposed in the first chapter that a film's soundscape shares characteristics with Chion's spectral *acousmêtre* insofar as it "speaks" non-anthropomorphically, Chion acknowledges a hierarchy of perception of the sonic that

privileges human voice over other sounds (*Voice* 5). This vococentrality guides the ear to human voices, which are articulated prepositionally. Voiceover and voice-off, though often used interchangeably, delineate subtly different vectorized paths for voice in relation to the image with which they are juxtaposed. Kaja Silverman characterizes the voiceover by its corporeal transcendence and superimposition over events that preserves its ontological integrity (48–49). At the same time, voiceovers retain an inherent capacity to interact with the image over which they speak, through a spectrum of dislocation (Silverman 48). The sensorial, authoritative potential of the voiceover can be bridged with the voice-off, which "exceeds the limit of the frame, but not the limits of the diegesis" in order to communicate with the narrative (Silverman 48). Silverman argues that voice-off oftentimes is used as an invisible spatial outline of subsequent frames in the narrative as a "structuring absence" rather than serving to challenge visual primacy through the threat of absent visual markers (48). On the other hand, Mary Ann Doane describes the articulation of a voice-off as a direct denial of the boundaries of the visual (37). These debates and distinctions, while useful in delineating the boundaries of voice and its relationships with and beyond the diegesis, highlight the challenges of locating sound's origins and trajectories, particularly when disembodied from the image (Le Fèvre-Berthelot 2), and ultimately underscore cinema's capacity to homogenize both visual and acoustic spaces (Doane 38).

These acoustic and spatial grammars are the backbone for both voiceover and voice-off, two common profiles of acousmatic sound that are used in recent Latin American cinema as a means of disruption and reconfiguration of the affectual, often traumatic relationship between space and time. The effects of these vocal influences upon

the frame reflect a doubling of violence, not only within the very mechanism of the cinematic structure, but also in its content in which experiences with violence are recounted or negotiated.

The voiceover and voice-off, on a formalist level, have been used historically in Latin American cinema, serving different narrative purposes ranging from aesthetic to temporal. The era of the Golden Age witnessed voiceovers tasked with providing historical commentary contextualizing the social structures of the time, such as in Emilio Fernández's *Río escondido* (Mexico, 1948) and Luis Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (Mexico, 1950). Dramatic, mystical effects were also constructed such as those in the voiceover of Asunción's character in *La guerra gaucha* (Dir. Lucas Demare, Argentina, 1942), a cinematic adaptation of Leopoldo Lugones' nationalist epic from 1905. Notably, the feminine voice comes to occupy the acousmatic space, not to provide authoritative commentary, but rather as a muse and support for the war of independence.

These types of experimentations in national film spaces led to more aesthetic and psychologically conditioned voiceovers in the New Wave cinema, where we might identify even more creative emphasis on the "audio" in the audiovisual. Argentine auteur Leopoldo Torre Nilsson's reliance on the voiceover throughout films such as *La casa del ángel* (1957), in which the voice of a young woman, Ana, flits about the narrative space, shows a disembodied echo that emphasizes her broken subjectivity after a traumatic experience with sexual assault.[23] On the other hand, the era of political cinema in

[23] For more on Torre Nilsson's "Gothic Trilogy" launched by *La casa del ángel*, see *Latin American Cinema: A Comparative History* by Paul Schroeder Rodríguez, University of California Press, 2016, especially pp. 154–161.

subsequent decades tended to employ a neorealist acoustic, which, in contrast with the national omniscience claimed in early cinematic voiceovers, centered on more specific community or character perspectives to highlight social issues. The famous political film *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Dir. Gutiérrez Alea, Cuba, 1968), for example, relies on voiceover as a means of revealing Havana's "public face" through the vocalized observations of the voyeuristic main character, Sergio, ultimately combining the subjective with the objective in both visual and acoustic presentation (López 9). Meanwhile, the more stylistic *La hora de los hornos* (Dir. Solanas and Getino, Argentina, 1968) employs an artistically arranged documentary-style presentation of injustice that incorporates sound play as a disturbance and voiceover as a social commentary meant to persuade the audience and call them to action.[24] The device of the *acousmêtre*, over these periods, is revealed to have undergone a constant process of development that renders it subject to the conditions of the period in which it is used (Chion, *Voice* 57) and aurally perceived (Kane 225).

If we analyze the New Cinema's development in relation to prior film movements and their conditions of expression, it is possible to listen to the voiceover, or the voice-off, as key sonic articulations with formalist roots in their historic formulations and tools of voice that reflect current preoccupations. Films recounting worlds of traumas through vocal disjunction with images bring forth affective negotiations of pain, their generative processes and their resistances to meaning. Ruptures of social, political and economic

[24] For a detailed account of the documentary genre in Latin America, see Burton, Julianne. *The Social Documentary in Latin America*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990.

nature are chaotic in their effects of undoing but leave an identifiable radius of voices circulating in the wreckage that search for sense and remaking.

Gender, Voice, and Violence

This chapter's epigraph introduces *La teta asustada*'s usage of voiceover in the first scene which vocalizes multiple layers of trauma whose sonorous tensions and overlaps come to occupy the narrative. The film recounts the experiences of Fausta, a young Quechua woman marked by the Peruvian Internal Armed Conflict (1980–2000) and intergenerational trauma passed through psychological and corporeal channels. The legacy of the political conflict remains in effect years after its formal legal resolution. Between the attacks of the militant Maoist group *Sendero Luminoso* and the repressive state armed forces, Peru's death toll reached 69, 280 people, with concentrated violence against racially and culturally marginalized communities. According to data collected in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as many as 40% of victims of the armed conflict were located in the department of Ayacucho alone, a region with a predominantly indigenous composition. 79% of victims lived in rural areas, and while only 16% of the total national population spoke a native language other than Spanish as their mother tongue, these linguistic groups constituted 75% of victims (Final Report).

The cultural expansion of trauma studies has led to increased attention marginalized groups and racial trauma, referring to the "events of danger related to real or perceived experience of racial discrimination" that are often supplemented by oppression against additional identity markers including gender (Comas-Díaz 1). *La teta asustada* interrogates different social and cultural spaces of oppression and resistance by

following the protagonist, Fausta, as she travels from her rural village to cosmopolitan Lima to work as a housekeeper for an upper-class musician in the hopes of earning enough money to bury her now deceased mother Perpetua, who was a firsthand witness of the armed conflict.

The opening scene evokes a traumatic disjunction between voice and bodies as Perpetua sings through a black screen about the violent oppression of the Quechua people in the war, the murder and mutilation of her husband, and of her rape during her pregnancy with Fausta. In this opening scene, as a cinematic experience, we encounter Doane's psychoanalytical "sonorous envelope" related to sound and the maternal, where "the mother's soothing voice, in a particular cultural context, is a major component… which surrounds the child and is the first model of auditory pleasure" much like the auditory experience in the movie theater (44). Fausta, unborn, would have not only been subject to the physical violation, but also to the resonating effects through the traumatized voice of her mother in the sonorous envelope. This familial, feminine relationship revolving around sound and violence also emphasizes certain cyclicality demonstrated by the women's trauma and how it manifests through memory. Sara Barrow observes the power of song as a means of reiterating the past between women:

> Song, it would appear, and the repetition of ancient songs for us and for other characters within the film including the wealthy woman for whom Fausta goes to work as a housekeeper, is used to suggest the 'constant return' of repressed memory in allegorical form." ("New Configurations" 210)

Indeed, Perpetua also transmits her individual trauma through the acoustic inscriptions of her own song, but she also serves as a vocal representative of others in her community (Bernales and Gómez 96).

The power of the voice, first enunciated acousmatically by her mother, is gradually recovered and embodied by Fausta throughout the film, who rarely speaks at all but finds solace in song, owing to her need for poeticization where she feels endangered by initiating regular speech with strangers. When she goes to the city to work in Aida's house, she sings the folkloric "song of the mermaid" and is convinced by her upper-class employer that every time she sings, she will earn a pearl. However, in the end, Aida's intentions are revealed to be of a nefarious nature. Fausta's voice, and her sung fairytale, become stolen by Aida and trapped within the voiceless musicality of the piano of the house.

In *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, Adriana Cavarero distinguishes between two layers of voice—vocality and speech—both of which constitute Fausta's song. In a critique of speech's negation of the primacy of voice within the logocentric, or symbolic order, Cavarero reaffirms that the acoustic voice itself is that which makes speech possible, serving as the "idea's acoustic sign," a primal passage for self-expression (40). Aida's use of Fausta's song for her final piano performance thus subjects Fausta to two layers of silencing: on the level of speech, by dismantling the lyrics from the tune, and through vocal denunciation by stripping the ownership of Fausta's voice over these words. Dispossessed of vocal autonomy, Fausta is equated with the instrument of the piano itself. This process of appropriation—and exploitation of her indigenous background—becomes synonymous with Fausta's dehumanization. *La teta asustada*, in reiterating this double-silencing, thus inserts Fausta into a situation of vocal coloniality that

echoes the inability of indigenous communities to speak on equal footing with other Peruvians.

Perpetua's voice, which is positioned first as a voiceover, articulates these ruptures from a position of disembodiment owed to trauma and its transmission. Shortly after the first shot reveals Perpetua's body as the singer, Fausta's acousmatic voice sings a refrain in response, with Fausta delaying her entry into the visual frame where she continues projecting her voice into Perpetua's ear.[25] The connection between the women, marked in part through the feminine body through *la teta asustada*[26] ("the frightened breast")—an embodied form of trauma said to be passed through a mother's breast milk—replicates itself within the acousmatic registry.

A different example of the dynamic between voice-off, song, and gender dynamics occurs at the beginning of Lucrecia Martel's second feature, *La niña santa*. This film also opens with a melodious voiceover of the poem *Vuestra soy* by author Santa Teresa de Jesús, which manifests first over the opening credits and then over a shot of a group of schoolgirls that includes the protagonist, Amalia, in whom the song imparts a sensation of spiritual eroticism rather than a confined sense of maternal comfort. The young woman, Inés, who sings the song to the students is revealed visually, only to turn away from the camera to cry through the affective, excessive power of the song. The melody and lyrics plant from the beginning an acoustic echo of the nascent sense of sexuality in Amalia, towards Jano,

[25] Fausta sings "Every time you remember when you cry, mother, you stain your bed with tears of sorrow and sweat" (3:11–3:23).
[26] For more on the concept of *la teta asustada* in the Quechua community, see Theidon, Kimberly Susan. *Intimate Enemies: Violence and Reconciliation in Peru*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, pp. 44.

a middle-aged doctor, with whom Amalia's mother Helena also shares the desire for intimacy.

In turning away from the camera to partially hide her tears, Amalia's teacher indicates that this sensorial overload is somehow both acceptable (because her tears remain visible), yet inappropriate (because of her action of turning away). Here, the connection with Santa Teresa becomes symbolically relevant as the theme of sexuality enters the narrative fray; sex, and specifically, feminine desire, is in this context built upon an excess of feeling that makes it both desirable in and of itself, while at the same time shameful due to its existence beyond socially constructed, measurable limits of sensorial affectivity. For Amalia, religion and sexuality conflate as she dedicates herself to "saving" Dr. Jano after he grazes against her body in the street during an outdoor concert, imposing an invisible physicality much like that of the Theremin that envelops the soundspace. These unstable currents of desire, their obstructions, and their rerouting fall not only on the visual plane, but also the acoustic as a marker of gender and power relations (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 32).

If *La teta asustada* connects mother and daughter through the haptic impression of voice left by its passage through the protective void of a dark image, *La niña santa* projects a feminine acoustic of distortion. The dynamics of motherhood within Martel's body of films have largely been observed in terms of crisis, paradox, or ambivalence (Clancy 1). On an acoustic, or specifically acousmatic level, *La niña santa* emphasizes the haptic inscriptions on the bodies within and beyond the film through the use of soundscape or voice in a womb-like envelopment (Clancy 5). At the same time, this sensorial link is corrupted by what Joanna Page considers an "excess" of vision, sound, or touch that Martel tends to employ as a tool to challenge conventional phenomenological relationships to

reality (*Crisis* 187). In particular, *La niña santa* relies on an excess of the acoustic (and acousmatic cues), such as that marked by Amalia's mother Helena's tinnitus, which, in turn, obstructs her capacity to see or interact with her surroundings (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 21). As a result, both Amalia and her mother become caught up in a matrix of desire for Jano, the doctor of hearing who is participating in a conference at the hotel owned by Helena.

In the case of the opening song in *La niña santa*, Amalia's catechetic teacher's vocal link with the spiritual plane summons a paradox that can only result in affective excess: by singing to God, she feels both presence and absence, not only of her voice, but also of an ineffable spirit. This inaccessible relationship with God runs parallel to a desire to reconnect with the real and become a wholesome Self, a projection of contradiction also seen in the relationship between mother and child. At the same time, both mother and child come to occupy the same role as desiring women (not only through a visual gaze) that is catalyzed by Dr. Jano. Dominique Russell positions this projected double gaze as one that becomes channeled through the doctor: "While Helena exudes a knowing sexuality, her 'affair' with Jano is nearly as imaginary as her daughter's. If Amalia misconstrues molestation for romantic interest, Helena confuses attraction with grand romance" ("Lucrecia" 3). Etymologically, Jano's relationship to the Roman God Janus— "god of doors, limits, and thresholds"—assigns him a duplicitous masculinity that contributes to defining the boundaries and roles of mother and daughter (Aguilar, *Other Worlds* 86–87), ultimately calling attention to the film's subversive feminist gazes and voices.

Amalia, drawn to Jano not only through visual pleasure, responds to an acousmatic spiritual "call" by magnetizing her sexual interest towards Jano (Aguilar, *Other Worlds* 91; Clancy 6; Russell). Meanwhile, Jano, apart from his consolidated sexual relationship with

Helena, becomes in the acousmatic registry the recipient of Helena's broken re-articulations during her hearing test. Through headphones, Helena listens to another doctor speak a series of words to her and she repeats them through a microphone that becomes projected back to Jano. The phonetic consistency of words becomes broken when Helena mishears the word *madres* and re-articulates it as *males* (Clancy 4), testifying to the fragmentation of her relationship with both Amalia and Jano. This scene, particularly through its acousmatic modalities, speaks to the larger role of sound in the film, which Stephen Hunter observes as an agent of paradox, misunderstanding, and conflict:

> It chronicles, in a dozen variants, the disconnect between what is said and what is heard. The movie, in other words, is a farrago of missed communications, sometimes humorous, sometimes tragic, always dispiriting. Is that the voice of God or random noise? Is that a sexual entreaty or a deviant's touch? ("Holy Girl")

In *La niña santa*, the relationship of the acousmatic to the visual realities in which it participates—as acousmatic callings through voice and instrument—underscores the sensorial, sexual, and spiritual disjunctions in a film marked by patriarchal violence and its subtle resistances, both visual and acoustic.[27] Amalia's first physical encounter with Jano during the street concert mirrors the acoustic and material contradictions scored by the Theremin in the sonic plane, which imposes an invisible physicality inscribed through that which is heard and felt but unseen. On the other hand, her vocation is passed between

[27] For more on the patriarchal gaze in Martel's Salta trilogy and its resistant gazes, refer to Ana Forcinito's *Óyeme con los ojos: cine, mujeres, visiones y voces.* Casa de las Américas, 2018, pp. 73–112.

bodies through voice, from a spiritual void rendered accessible through song and its embodiment in Amalia manifested through sexual awakening and maternal tumult. Martel herself describes the construction of (mis)communication in the film as one that exists within the fluid nature of boundaries between body, voice, and mind, in which there exists "an impossibility of separating a corporeal experience—an experience of the senses—from an experience of the mind, from fantasy" (Taubin, "Vocational" 174), rendering music, the sexual and the spiritual as acousmatic planes for reconstituting meaning and navigating encounters reaffirming patriarchal violence.

The acousmatic projection of voice from the spiritual or maternal as authoritative positions holds the innate power to inscribe affectivity within their listening subjects, precisely through their position of displacement. On the one hand, in *La teta asustada*, Perpetua effectively narrates the trauma passed down to Fausta, conjuring this violence once more within the ineffable vocal sphere where Fausta aurally absorbs these conditions of her own inherited trauma. The mystical, excessive power of this transmission is also emphasized in *La niña santa*, where the catechetic feminine voice calls forth the spiritual vocation that is filtered through Amalia's body, channeled as sexual energy, and redirected within the haptic sphere.

If Martel's film calls forth the tensions of desire located within the feminine voice as they clash with Jano's patriarchal gaze, Gabriela David's *La mosca en la ceniza* (2009) underscores the systemic silencing generated by male desire in the industry of sex trafficking. Building upon the socio-economic critiques of the neoliberal era in the film *Taxi, un encuentro* discussed in the first chapter, David's second feature-length film recounts the experience of two country girls in Argentina who are trafficked for prostitution

in Buenos Aires.[28] In recuperating gender violence as a thematic current in the sonic sphere, David constructs, through the voice-off, an audiovisual gaze that underscores women's search for voice and agency in patriarchally delineated situations of exploitation and oppression.

In the film, Nancy and Pato, a pair of ambitious but underprivileged young women from Argentina's rural interior, are tricked by a procurer who leads them to believe that the girls have consolidated arrangements for domestic work in Buenos Aires. Both protagonists face circumstances of certain economic depravity; while Nancy would like money to take care of her mother, who can no longer support her, Pato wants to both work and have the opportunity to study, which she cannot do in their current rural village. Their arrival to the city with Oscar, a co-owner of the brothel, is marked by the revelation that they were deceived, and that they are now trapped and indebted for transportation and housing costs.

Like David's previous feature, *La mosca en la ceniza* demonstrates a wide set of acousmatic profiles that manifest both formally, as a rupture of image and sound, and through content, echoing the violently dismantled subjectivity of the trafficked women. One of the first acousmatic moments of the film is when Nancy catches a fly from her yard and performs an experiment with a jar of water to revive its drowned body. In a

[28] Since the Palermo Protocols enacted in 2000 against human trafficking, Latin American cinema has experienced a surge in the production of films that depict women that are trafficked and forced into sex work. Among these include *En la puta vida* (Dir. Beatriz Flores Silva, Uruguay, 2001), *Anjos do sol* (Dir. Rudi Lagemann, Brazil, 2006), *La guayaba* (Dir. Maximiliano González, Argentina, 2013), *Las elegidas* (Dir. David Pablos, Mexico, 2015), and *Tan frágil como un segundo* (Dir. Santiago Ventura, Uruguay, 2015) which have experienced both national and international success for their indirect and culturally mediated awareness campaigns.

close up on the jar of water, where the fly walks reborn, the faint cries of a baby grow louder in the acoustic plane. Ana Forcinito suggests that this moment of rebirth, tied in with the film's title ("A Fly in the Ashes"), points towards the possibility of new life even in the worst of conditions and underscoring the perseverance of the young women in the face of their exploitation ("Fugas" 57). In conjunction with the image of the fly's passage between death and life, the sounds of the baby summon, out of temporal sequence, one of the concluding images of the film where Nancy walks down the street with her child, implied to have been conceived in the brothel.

Another suggestive, yet haunting sound takes form in a song that is first heard as Oscar escorts Nancy and Pato to the brothel in a taxi. The cab driver clicks through the radio, and Oscar insists that he play the station with a cheesy love song. We then see and hear Oscar try to sing along, but his lyrics are delayed, almost like an echo (a dynamic that also occurs briefly in *Taxi, un encuentro*). The song itself, which takes an acousmatic form through the radio, becomes partially synchronized with Oscar's character, constructing an association that comes into play as a musical motif. Specifically, in the brothel, when the girls have to line up for the male clients to make their choice for sexual company, this is the song that plays on the radio in the background. The acousmatic evocation connotes the hegemony of the patriarchal over the space of the brothel and the voices of its inhabitants.

In a similar mode to the portrayal of urban decadence in *Taxi, un encuentro, La mosca en la ceniza*'s soundscape, in conjunction with voices, also lends itself to the heaviness of the city for Pato and Nancy. Cars, sirens, and people's chatter and patter evoke a constant presence that, unfortunately, is decidedly ignorant of the activities

behind the brothel's walls and of the girls' off-screen cries for their attention. In a provoking scene after Nancy and Pato's arrival at the brothel, multiple acousmatic layers overlap in an increasingly overwhelming sonorous buildup that ends up diffusing their calls for help. The voice-off, released into the city's busy soundscape, searches for a connection with a listener that can free them from their enslavement to the sex trade and dismantle the brothel's activities. However, the film shows how the girls' disembodied voices become transferred and buried within the wider societal body that suppresses them, rather than affirming or repossessing them.

In this scene, Pato is knocked down by Oscar, where from the floor her eyeline connects to the sound of a siren traveling through the window—a sound that passes by, not meant for her. The camera jumps outside of the building, and pans along its wall as a magnet to the traveling sounds of the house. The image that is conjured through the passing noise is one of Pato being dragged through the hallway, locked into a bathroom and facing continued threats by Oscar and Susana. As their voices diffuse into the city soundscape, the camera passes over the facades of neighboring homes. The images of surrounding routines are incongruous to Pato's cries for help. Two later sound additions—Nancy's breathy cries over her friend, and an extradiegetic orchestral arrangement—pull on the knotted acoustic threads of the diegesis. During the shot, Pato's acousmatic yells spread through space in search of a listener, a wholesome re-connection, but they are ultimately denied a visual nexus by the saturation of noise. Ultimately, the culmination of sounds does not form a coherent and rhythmic dialogue between them, but rather forces them into a state of tension where they slip into hierarchical states of listening value through volume and silencing.

If Chion's notion of vococentrism often eclipses other sounds at work in the cinema, within this particular diegesis, Pato's calls for help fall into a void as they are released from her own body and lose their capacity to cling to any receptive space. Her voice is decidedly unheard by the surrounding citizens who choose to maintain the status quo rather than interfere with the brothel's systematic fulfillment of the desires of local clientele. Through these voice-off dynamics, *La mosca en la ceniza* thus underscores the lack of authority of the disembodied and feminine voice when it is not culturally acknowledged and provided a space to become re-embodied within the affectual receptive space of the diegetic listener.

Spectral Transmissions and Recordings

The aforementioned affective acousmatic passages, through which violence is negotiated multi-directionally through the passages and obstacles of the feminine voice, can be juxtaposed with mechanically produced acousmatic transmissions of affectivity, communications of trauma, and a stake in memory battles. Within the New Cinema, a pattern of radio transmissions and voice recordings across narratives of societal violence emerges as a common acousmatic channel of re-presentation and also of subversion to regimes of social, political, or economic violence within the neoliberal era.

In the early 1930s, Walter Benjamin foresaw the radio's potential as a model of public witnessing "to interviews and conversations in which anyone might have a say" (363). As a dialogical medium, rather than a one-way sonorous projection, these transmissions implicate the listeners in relation to the displaced (or re-situated) sounds or speakers. In the same time period, Bertolt Brecht called for this type of shift in

conceptualization of the radio, not as an interpellative distribution of monological soundwaves, but as a projection of an acoustic sphere marked by exchange and public participation:

> [H]ere is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him. (30)

Such predictions have come to fruition as the radio and other sonic technologies have developed to fulfill social, political and cultural roles within local, regional, and international spheres. Increased momentum of globalized communications has fostered discourse within and between borders, effectively occupying a transnational role in communication (Hochscherf 433). As these media technologies have become more consolidated across the globe, they act as stand-in bodies for disembodied voices (Dolar 63). Within the New Cinema, which projects a range of disembodied voices, the representations of radio and recorded voice circulate within this public, relational dynamic as a medium of communicating or re-presenting violence to their listeners and viewers.

If Latin America's political context prior to the turn of the century—particularly under military governments and their continental partnerships—relied on the radio as a sonic demarcation of self and other, of patriots and insurgents, the contrarian undercurrent offers the possibility of challenging hegemonic political or mnemonic discourse by means of acousmatic projection. While this is evident in the role of music within the New

Cinema's filmic soundscape, which was analyzed in the first chapter as a tool of concealment appropriated across ideological boundaries, the displaced human voice—when articulated as a voiceover or voice-off through radio or other projections of vocal recordings—can also reveal or deny sensorial access to experiences of violence. This double-faceted space of enunciation also carries with it the returns of violence upon its listeners, implicating subjects of trauma and a new acoustic engagement with its dynamics which can be explored films such as *Infancia clandestina* and *El traspatio*.

In comparison to the projection and negotiation of violence articulated through the maternal voice in *La teta asustada*, the vocal passage from mother to child in the Argentine film *Infancia clandestina* (Dir. Benjamín Ávila, 2011) relies on tape recordings as re-presentations of trauma, disrupting and reconfiguring not only the temporality of the film but also the experiences of the child protagonist Juan, who becomes caught up in the activities of his militant leftist parents during the Argentine Dirty War. The film recounts the family's return to Argentina after a time in exile. Juan's parents are part of the Montoneros movement and adopt a new identity to be able to launch a counteroffensive against the military regime in 1979. To this end, Juan receives a new name, Ernesto, a new birthday to avoid suspicion, and must continue through school and the ups and downs of pre-adolescent life with this double identity.

Director Benjamín Ávila, sharing many of Juan's experiences, retroactively dedicates the film to his own mother, who was among the disappeared during the dictatorship. The film is constructed upon fluctuating boundaries between the fictional and autobiographical, individual and collective memory, and memory across generations (Thomas 241–42). On a broader geographical scale, it was also designed for reception

beyond Argentina, holding a place in the Academy Awards for Best Foreign Film (Ghiggia 5).

As a symbolic construction of the past, *Infancia clandestina* relies on testimonial support and archival imagery, however, the use of cartoon and comic drawings perpetuate an alternative gaze to events from the perspective of a child.[29] Intermittent shots of Juan's drawings throughout the film, which coincide with the most violent moments of the narrative, serve as an "aesthetics of remembrance" in which the violence, rather than being downplayed by a shift in representational method, is actually emphasized (Ghiggia 6). The opening scene relies on this alternative, youthful gaze as Juan's family is shown arriving home in their vehicle late at night and are attacked by unknown gunmen in a violent confrontation that takes place four years prior to the main events of the film.

Sarah Thomas notes that the introduction of comic book imagery to represent the ensuing conflict occurs just as Juan falls to the ground when his mother pushes him downward to safety (249). From this point on, flashing shots of rough drawings occupy the narrative, with a soundscape that implies subsequent events through chaotic gunshots, yelling, and screeching tires. A dramatic soundtrack then outlines the images, and the event is concluded as Juan breathes over a textual presentation of historical events. Juan's measured breathing recurs throughout the film, not as a voice-off meant to inscribe linguistic meaning, but rather as an unseen diegetic sound marker between space and time that gives an account of their disjunction and pockets of connectivity. In this particular

[29] For a more detailed account on the increased cultural tendency to incorporate the gaze of the child in cinematic accounts of the Argentine Dirty War, see Verónica Garibotto's article, "Private Narratives and Infant Views: Iconizing 1970s Militancy in Contemporary Argentine Cinema." *Hispanic Research Journal*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2015, pp. 257–272.

scene, as Juan breathes over the events of his own drawings, the audience is haptically implicated in the film through a paradox of identification and distance to Juan and his subjectivity (Thomas 250).

This scene highlights the role that sound will play throughout the rest of the film, particularly in relation to the temporal disjunctions and emotions at stake with respect to the ideological sacrifices made by Juan's parents and their effects on Juan's memories. The displaced, recorded voiceovers left by Juan's parents weave into all forms of imagery, including Juan's drawings, which link the acoustic threads of his past, present, and future. As the opening credits play in conjunction with a series of artistic sketches of different countries and years where the family had been living in exile, Juan's mother Cristina begins a recording whose sound overlaps with the pictures. From a tape recorder in Cuba, she and Juan's father speak to their son about the journey back to Argentina and their continuing fight against the dictatorial regime. Both parents' voices become embodied within an image of them, but take form again in the *acousmêtre* as the image switches to the recording device that will come into Juan's possession. Symbolically, after the death of his father and disappearance of his mother (presumably by the hand of the authorities), Juan will carry this acoustic archive as proof that they had lived and loved him, though their voices will remain forever disembodied.

Gonzalo Aguilar analyzes the fluidity of temporality in the film insofar as the present is not conceived as such, but rather as a time marker used to bring the audience into the past. This leads to a certain level of predictability about the fate of the characters, and consequently, to a tragic yet heroic portrayal of their plight which highlights the affective narrative construction where "what matters are the passions and actions that move the

characters" ("Infancia" 20). The affective implications of these observations are profound; the fate of Juan's parents, who are captured at the end, is effectively signaled to the viewer/listener by their very own vocal inscription into the tapes. In this way, their voiceover serves as a space between life and death, invoking both through the passage of enunciation and implicating Juan into this acousmatic space of memory. By recording their voices, they are accepting the dangers of their future and expressing the same possibility to Juan. Regarding this type of unstable sonic foreboding, Michel Chion goes so far as to note that "When it is not the voice of the dead, the narrative voiceover is often that of the almost-dead, of the person who has completed his or her life and is only waiting to die" (*Voice* 47). On the other hand, the fact that Juan keeps the tapes and listens to them throughout the film is an action that revives the people behind their voices, leaving him (or the audience) to reconstruct the bodies behind these words, or at least the corporeal and emotional impressions that they leave behind.

In this way, the vocal recordings retain the capacity to hold a material impact on the realities in which they return, specifically in Juan's mnemonic gaze. In one early scene, Juan's drawings become a platform of reception to the influence of these spectral voiceovers as a canvas of imaginative potential. His drawing of *El Che* is one that obtains shape through a direct juxtaposition with the acousmatic voice of his father. Their interplay effectively combines their two gazes within a sensorial intersection, resulting in a practice of remembrance that traces Juan's emotional connection with his father. The scene begins with an image of Juan waiting to travel into the country, where the recording of Juan's father's voice ushers the camera to perform a close-up upon Juan's face. The voiceover effectively prompts a transition between an external shot of Juan's face and his internal

headspace. In the scene, we hear Juan's father's voiceover describe the plight of Che Guevara and compare him with Juan himself as he undergoes an identity change in the name of the political battles ahead. The image that responds to these remarks effectively visualizes their description of *El Che* and his many disguises, which are shown to be drawn and erased. Sarah Thomas notes the temporal disjunction suggested by this drawing, which is animated without showing Juan's direct hand in their creation:

> Given that the father's voice-over impels the child protagonist to 'remember the drawings you made me, beautiful, I still have them', their animated presence here can thus be seen to replicate not the initial process of their creation but rather Juan/Ernesto's recollection in the diegetic present of having made them in the diegetic past. Their affective resonance connects Juan/Ernesto to his father through memory in a moment of separation and uncertainty (as the children return to Argentina to meet their parents who are already there), prefiguring the father's eventual loss but underscoring the connections provided by emotional recall. (243)

The relationship between the recorded voiceover and image is, thus, one that suggests the power of the spectral acousmatic to influence Juan's memories of the past and his visualization of events. The recordings also enter into a disjunctive dialogue with Juan's parents when they are both visualized within the body of the film, calling attention to the permeative qualities of their voices as they become immortalized through the act of listening. In the scene where Cristina sings the iconic "Sueños de Juventud" to a group of Montoneros at the house, her voice flits into the realm of the acousmatic as images of the daily activities around the house ensue, involving an idyllic portrayal of the operations of

an arms exchange, the sexuality of Juan's parents, and the idealistic gaze that they hold to which Juan, in turn, looks to through the guide of his mother's song.

The voiceover in *Infancia clandestina* introduces the delicate sonic line between life and death in addition to marking the voice's political capacity as a challenge to the ontological confines of disappearance enacted by the military regime. These dynamics occur within the private realm of Juan's individual memory and come into the collective by means of the wider distribution of the narrative to the audience. Apart from the power of this private recording device, the role of public radio is also indisputably part of the circulation of displaced voices participating in the perpetuation or challenge of dominant political narratives.[30] For example, we may return to the Mexican film *El traspatio*, which was analyzed in the first chapter for its use of competing soundscapes as an acoustic backdrop for the power imbalances and fragmented truths involved in the investigation of femicides in Juárez. Another key sonic force in this film is carried forth by the radio, whose transmissions serve as a constant circulation of truth-telling against the Mexican government's dismissal of the femicides during the 1990s. Working with the image, the radio attempts to provide cohesion of events while paradoxically underscoring its own sonic displacement.

As we have discussed previously, the climactic and chaotic scene at the *discoteca* serves as an acoustic frame through which Juárez's social tensions become magnified and snap within the musical soundscape. It is also important to highlight the recurring presence

[30] For a different context, see Frantz Fanon's 1967 book *A Dying Colonialism* for his account of the use of radio in anti-colonial resistance movements in Algeria against France.

of the radio and its transmission of voiceover that weaves throughout the film, not as a contrast to images but rather as a sensorial subcurrent that both echoes visual events and sets them into motion. The radio, which is the primary space through which the journalist Víctor Peralta speaks in order to communicate news of the crimes and investigations into the local femicides, serves as an acousmatic mirror of Blanca's quest for the truth behind the murders and her desire for a cohesive outline of events. In this way, both characters stand in a displaced position—legally, politically, sensorially, and temporally—from the murders, and the radio connects their parallel journeys in the investigation and diffusion of the truth within and beyond the police forces.

One of Víctor's transmissions occurs after a key moment in Blanca's investigations, demonstrating the capacity of the radio to echo and re-present the past by sonically inscribing it into the present. After Blanca launches the criminal raid downtown, which culminates in the sensorial excess of the *discoteca* scene, the noise becomes eclipsed by Víctor voicing a news announcement that effectively summarizes the results of the raid. The sound of Víctor speaking into his microphone overlaps with alternating shots of him in his office and images of the police capturing a series of gang members, whom Víctor names in each shot acousmatically. The fact that it is Víctor that puts names to the faces and not the police is symbolic of a civilian attempt not only to reconcile the imbalances within the system of impunity that had protected the criminal networks, but also to diffuse this information to audiences that are external to the operations of the police. However, the juxtaposition of Víctor's voice with the images of the gang members is a sensorially structural foreshadowing of narrative misalignment: it turns out that the gang members

were not specifically responsible for the femicides in question, and are rather just pawns in a large-scale criminal organization upheld by local political and economic leaders.

The search for truth and justice continues as a prominent theme throughout the film which Víctor's radio program carries out from an acousmatic position. However, in the same way that Víctor's voice becomes disembodied through his voiceover reports, the evidence also seems to escape materiality and slip away from Blanca's grasp. After Blanca shoots and kills the local corrupt entrepreneur Mickey Santos, a principal criminal behind the network of sex trafficking and femicides, she becomes disillusioned with the politics of Juárez and is shown driving away from the city. Meanwhile, Víctor's final commentary provides an open-ended conclusion to a series of narrative events: the official police report states that Santos died at the hands of narcotraffickers, the transnational factory subsidized by Toyota has left in search of cheaper labor, and a mass grave of women's bodies has recently been discovered in the outskirts of the city. The references to the continued systematic violence, entwined within the political, economic, and social fabric of Juárez, coalesce into a final voiceover where Víctor's voice comes through Blanca's radio. In the moment where he is about to articulate the number of deaths, no number passes with his voice. The dynamic of vocal presence and absence in this scene affirms the role of silence in the symbolic, where it serves as a paradoxical element of the voice (Dolar 153). Víctor is emotionally unable to vocally re-present the death rate and instead, silence monopolizes the acousmatic as a semiotic placeholder for the unnameable.

The moment at the end of the film when Víctor is unable to vocalize a death count is also synonymous with the prevailing structural barriers to cohesively vocalizing the truth. Víctor's acousmatic voice is an invisible, spectral push for justice and one that returns

as an advocate for the deceased, with the radio operating as a channel for these echoes. If, according to Chion, technological developments have permitted the separation of voice from bodies, thus generating a voice that "naturally has reminded us of the voice of the dead" (*Voice* 46), the radio is that which seeks to join the present body of the listener with the concentration of re-projected voices that were torn from their own.

Such a recuperation of voices results in a struggle against the grain of official narratives, and the acousmatic serves as an untouchable source of dissemination. Víctor uses the space of the radio to present as much factual information as possible, including and especially when it is information that is not distributed to the wider population. In this way, his voice is empathetic, as it reaches into spaces beyond itself to ignite a sonic connection with voices that are silenced, and also didactic, as it projects towards the living an impulse of the truth of what happened. Structurally, his voiceovers through the radio end up invoking a documentary-style presentation, implicating the audience in the tension between the factual and the fictional (Tornero 34). Coincidentally, the governor continues to work against these initiatives, and in a symbolic demonstration of his authority over Víctor's *acousmêtre*, he has the radio shut off when it critiques him, pointing to a symbolic silencing of Víctor and Blanca who find themselves with little recourse in the corrupt system of justice. This small moment shows the capacity of the acousmatic voice in radio to disturb the diegesis while also reflecting the power dynamics within; in shutting off the radio, the governor is also perpetuating a systematic silencing of the spectral voices of the women who have been murdered and remain without judicial redress.

Expository Voiceovers and Battles for Agency

As the previous films demonstrate, transmissions project disembodied voices and re-insert them into dialogue with diegetic events, power structures, and listeners. The voiceover and voice-off can also be used in expositional or testimonial capacities that stray from invoking diegetic listeners in favor of a more explicit reference to the audience, or even to the speakers themselves as an auto-affective strategy. For example, in *Ciudad en rojo*, *Días de Santiago*, and *Y tu mamá también*, voiceovers are used to provide specific context for the audience, calling attention to aspects of the story behind their disembodiment. Unlike the radio or recording machines whose acousmaticity circulates audibly within the borders of the diegetic world, these voiceovers are omniscient and convey stories of trauma from a displaced, meta-perspective of events.

For Chion, the privileged place of voiceovers in the cinematic space is determined by their qualities of ubiquity, panopticism, omniscience and omnipotence, which allows for their use as narrative tools to convey authority over presented images (*Voice* 24). As voices that coincide with and beyond the available images, their authority also muddles the order of space and time, offering the capacity to predict, relate, or reflect upon the known or unknown. For example, Waldino's voiceover exposition in *Ciudad en rojo*, whose urban soundscape was explored in Chapter 1, echoes the content of Víctor's first radio transmission in *El traspatio* in that it plants a vocal context around and through the frame of the establishing shots of the city. Both Waldino and Víctor offer commentaries on the cultural peculiarities of Santiago de Cuba and Juárez, Mexico, respectively. Waldino's voiceover in the beginning also lends itself to a documentarist style that dialogues with the use of archival footage at the end of the film (Hatry 54). However, while Víctor's voice is

littered across the order of the narrative of *El traspatio* by speaking (or attempting to speak) over the visual narrative, Waldino's voiceover does not make a return in the final part of the film, an absence that emphasizes the recent death of his character at the hands of Batista officers.

It is in a juxtapositional capacity that we are thus able to listen to Waldino's initial acousmatic musings as pointing towards three temporalities. First, his voiceover serves as a referent of the past, as his voice confines itself to the historical world of the diegesis and each word inscribes itself into this past as they latch onto the passing sequence of images of the city.[31] Second, as momentary articulations of the present, Waldino comments on the demography and unstable geopolitical situation of Santiago as a burgeoning site of political unrest against the oppressive Batista regime; the words of the *acousmêtre* trickle into images of seemingly ordinary city life interrupted by shots of fully armed guards and their heckling of citizens. Third, Waldino's voiceover points towards, or comes from, a yet unseen future where Santiago's revolutionary spirit and fierce governmental opposition lead to the collateral damage of the Batista soldiers against innocent locals and visitors alike. His voice projects his present observations with future and conditional timelines: "¿Tendrán miedo? ¿Los revolucionarios les meten miedo a los santiagueros? Si fuera así hasta ese miedo podría ser revolucionario. Ya veremos al final."[32] Waldino's final comment, meant to direct the audience towards the end of the historical narrative, also

[31] Cory Hahn's *News on Film: Cinematic Historiography in Cuba and Brazil* points to the use of footage that occurs after the revolution to establish the present time in the film of 1958 (222). For more discussion on the film's anachronisms, omissions, and the role of journalistic intervention in the stylistic and narrative structure, refer to pp. 223–224.
[32] "Are they afraid? Do Santiagueros fear the revolutionaries? If that were so, even that fear itself could be revolutionary. In the end we'll see." (1:36–1:54, My translation).

implicates himself, through the use of the collective "we," in the witnessing of the eventual violent clash of political factions. At the same time, his voice generates a tension between its acousmatic projection and extradiegetic omniscience in the beginning with the loss of Waldino's diegetic corporeality in the end of the film, which ultimately prevents him from "seeing" the rest of the events of the revolution unfold. Thus, Waldino's first expository voiceover is, paradoxically, a concluding, final enunciation.

On the other hand, the use of voiceover for dramatic exposition can also be used as a sounding board, or an acoustic prism that permits new possibilities, spaces, and temporalities. The Peruvian film *Días de Santiago*, which was analyzed in the first chapter for how Lima's chaotic soundscape reflects the protagonist Santiago's internal struggles, also utilizes the voiceover technique to show how Santiago navigates, and even combats, these surroundings.

Here, the expository voiceover offers insight into Santiago's PTSD by focusing not on the specific qualities of the city or its politics, but rather by hyperbolically fixating on its possible dangers which, through the plane of the voiceover, are transformed from possibility into a projected presence. Unlike Waldino's character, who is introduced through his voice prior to his image, Santiago is visible in the first few shots of the films, yet voiceless. In the kitchen, a close up shows him eating while his mother, off screen, asks him what he plans to do now that he has returned from the armed forces. Santiago speaks for the first time, briefly, in the degree program office, using his voice in search of a tangible, purposeful connection with his new reality in Lima as a veteran. However, the secretary proves to be of little help, and the programs are not realistic for Santiago's immediate need for economic and personal stability. The subsequent scene uses the urban

soundscape, combined with shots of Santiago, the city, and its people, to provide an outline of Santiago's cluttered headspace, and then his voiceover cuts through as an imposition of order over the sonorous chaos: "La vida es una psicología. Sin orden, nada existe. Uno debe pensar antes de actuar."[33] Santiago's struggle for integration is thus presented as an attempt to avoid his own disintegration (Barrow, *Contemporary* 155).

The *acousmêtre*'s claim to formal authority over image, time, and space echoes the internal traumatic struggle of Santiago as a veteran facing the passage of reintegration into civilian life. Director Josué Méndez confirms the use of voiceover, rather than visual flashbacks, as the primary motor of his haunting memories:

> Las memorias de la guerra sólo están dentro de la cabeza de Santiago, y lo atormentan. Esto se expresa en la película a través de la voz en off del protagonista. El estilo visual del largometraje es ecléctico, la mitad del tiempo la fotografía es a color, la otra mitad blanco y negro. Después de todo, es la historia de un hombre en búsqueda de orden, balance y armonía en un mundo caótico.[34] (Cineencuentro)

Indeed, Santiago's voiceover at the beginning of the film articulates a pattern of ordered, anticipatory thinking which rearranges possible temporalities and situations through a vocal summons. As he rides on the bus, and later walks through the crowd in the city, his

[33] "Life is a psychology. Without order, nothing exists. One has to think before acting." (5:20–5:27, My translation).
[34] "The memories of war are only within Santiago 's head, and they torment him. This is expressed in the movie through the protagonist's voiceover. The visual style of the film is eclectic, half the time the photography is in color, the other half in black and white. Above all, it's the story of a man in search of order, balance, and harmony in a chaotic world." (My translation)

voiceover invokes the regimented mode of perception in the army in which one must foresee all events, people, and possibilities, particularly threats. This concentrated paranoia converges on the gaze of the other, prompting Santiago to call for one to always be "listo para reducir al enemigo con las manos, con la mirada."[35] The demarcation of enemies, suggested through tact and vision according to Santiago, actually becomes subsumed within his very voice, which holds the authority to conjure them within an alternative, hypothetical diegesis. As Santiago walks quickly through the crowd, his voice separates him from the others, and he becomes the object of their gaze. His voiceover picks up its cadence, and his internal impulse to protect himself leads him to call for attention and action. Santiago's own voice inscribes paranoia within his headspace and prompts a montage of hypothetical events where he beats up a variety of people on the street who could be threats to him. In other words, his own voiceover, under the influence of his PTSD, designs a strategic omniscience to protect himself from the society in which he now finds himself.

Part of Santiago's internal crisis is rooted in a mismatched social order in which his conditioned masculinity in the army clashes with the absence of a patriarchal order in civilian life, including his marriage (Saona 168). The result is a fragmentation of language and communication within the nuclear household, a symbol of larger societal failure (Barrow, *Contemporary* 163). Apart from the *acousmêtre*'s automated protection system resulting from Santiago's PTSD, it also serves as Santiago's social motor as he

[35] "[R]eady to subdue the enemy with hands, with the gaze." (5:42–5:46, My translation)

struggles to relate himself to women in light of his wife's loss of reliance and emotional connection to him.

The voiceover that summons a multidimensional diegesis out of fear of the enemy other re-enunciates itself as a guide for navigating gendered difference and reaffirming social hierarchies that Santiago perceives as disintegrated. For example, upon arriving at a *discoteca* after an argument with his wife, his displaced voice reflects upon his isolation from the younger generation's carefree lifestyle. There is a brief exchange with a group of young women that attend his university who approach him and invite him to dance, however, Santiago, stunned at their openness, refuses. Unwilling to join them under their terms of invitation, he returns to the safety of his monological space in which he begins to reconstruct his environment through his own authoritative vocal boundaries. Under this new lens of power, Santiago speaks over shots of people dancing, talking, and drinking, generating a hierarchy in which he, the observer and speaker, becomes a hero in the wild unknown. As he talks through the necessary steps to absorb the space by analyzing his surroundings and the people's interactions, his motive becomes clear as he talks through the next step: "después escoges al fondo a una que se vea tranquila, sola. Alguien que quieras rescatar."[36]

Like Santiago's voiceover in the beginning of the film which plants the outline of unfulfilled physical defenses, in this scene his voice aims to strategize a dialogue with the girl, Carla, on whom he fixates. Here, his voiceover meshes into the reality he invents as the *acosumêtre* hovers between audible accessibility and inaccessibility to Carla, a

[36] "Next you choose one in the background that looks calm, alone. Someone you want to rescue." (37:51–37:57, My translation)

situation that teases Santiago into a position of dominance. Through the displaced voiceover, he rehearses the phrase "Amiga, disculpa, ¿bailas?"[37] before rearticulating it as an embodied and accessible request. Carla accepts, and Santiago reflects on the next phase of conversation, "Amiga, disculpa, cómo te llamas?[38] before repeating the same phrase in person. What follows after establishing the authority of his omniscient, strategizing voiceover is a unique shift in sound planes in which the conversation flits between the diegesis and meta-space of the *acousmêtre*, with Santiago's multiple, multidimensional voices bouncing off each other as they come into dialogue with Carla's responses. The polyphonic fragmentation of the scene is evocative of Santiago's unwholesome psyche and he uses the safety of his mental diegesis to let the voices play out in the trajectory he desires, namely being able to leave the club with Carla.

However, like the beginning scene where Santiago plots his safety maneuvers and follows his own orders, the scene disseminates into the realm of possibility only, never coming to fruition in the reality outside of Santiago's traumatized perceptions. In both cases, Santiago attempts to recuperate a system of language with material consequences that maintain a logocentric order. However, he ends up consolidating a pattern of linguistic failures, demonstrated by the disjunction of his corporeal paralysis with that of his mental commands. These situations where the masculine self is put into crisis resonate with the strategies of the other men in his family who are abusive; Santiago's brother is consistently violent with his sister-in-law and Santiago's father commits sexual abuse against his little sister, which occurs in a climactic world-breaking moment for

[37] "Excuse me, my friend, want to dance?" (38:34–38:37, My translation)
[38] "Excuse me, my friend, what's your name?" (39:07–39:11, My translation)

Santiago towards the end of the film. The nature of Santiago's constructive voiceover thus clashes with his diegetic reality as a voice that claims an authority that, ultimately, it does not have.

The dissociative state between the *acousmêtre* and the content conveyed in a given film can also be underscored by a particular type of voiceover that Chion names the "commentator" *acousmêtre*, or a voice that "never shows [itself] but who has no personal stake in the image" (*Voice* 21). The lack of disacousmatization of this *acousmêtre* effectively calls attention to the role of the commentator and their authority over the narrative (Chung 110). On one hand, such a mode of vocality shares qualities with the commentator in expository documentaries, which Bill Nichols describes as a mode of presentation built upon the epistemological divide between the voice and the image and a use of sound that holds no indexical relationship to that which is presented (210–211). Whereas the voiceovers in the fictional *Ciudad en rojo* and *Días de Santiago* are united with the bodies of their protagonists and offer certain influence over and through the diegetic narrative, we can identify a clear contrast in Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón's feature *Y tu mamá también* (2001), an internationally-acclaimed road film. Accompanying the narrative is an independent, permanently disembodied voice that offers a distanced commentary of the characters and situations in the film. Rather than manipulate the time, space, or events of the diegetic world, this voice interrogates the undercurrents of violence in more subtle ways.

Although the film's emphasis on music, sex, and drugs broadens the film's global marketability, *Y tu mamá también* does not aim to perpetuate the neoliberal ideologies that motivated globalized youth culture at the time of its release, but rather utilizes

audiovisual cues including voiceover to reveal the hidden structures of inequality within the characters' world (Schroeder Rodríguez, *Comparative* 263).[39] Tenoch and Julio, the two principal protagonists, explore the boundaries of their friendship along social, psychological, and increasingly sexual lines as they embark on a road trip with Luisa, a terminally ill woman who faces her own identity crisis as she reconciles with her relationships, adulthood, and mortality. Along their trip across Mexico, the detached voiceover's youthfully inscribed vocality intervenes over visual events and provides "'wild' insights to identity transformation" (Baugh 63).

Rather than muddle narrative temporalities or situations as an indicator of formalist and emotional ruptures, the complete acousmatic separation of the spectral speaker in Cuarón's film results in a lack of emotional investment on the speaker's part. This does not mean that the affectual impact of the voiceover is limited, however, as the expository commentary serves to "harvest, glean, or compile images from the world with relative indifference to the specific individuals or situations captured in order to shape proposals or perspectives on a general topic" (Nichols 156). The general apathy of the voiceover, performed by Daniel Giménez Cacho, is articulated as a didactic *ennui* that is conditioned by, and resonates with, the structural forces of neoliberal violence at stake in the film. On the other hand, this voice is frequently employed as a means of making visible (or audible) the otherwise speechless Other (Saldaña-Portillo 761). If the film's

[39] See Hester Baer and Ryan Long's article entitled "Transnational Cinema and the Mexican State in Alfonso Cuarón's 'Y Tu Mamá También'" for a more detailed account on the transnational motors and appeal of Cuarón's film, specifically the use of cultural and narrative tropes, the treatment of sex and sexuality, the employment of an international cast, and a unique positioning of Mexico as a liminal space between the national and the global.

status as a road movie explores the "utopia of freedom and mobility, border crossing and coming of age stories" (Sandberg and Rocha 15), the voiceover advances the journey by means of anchoring the past and present realities that Tenoch, Julio, and Luisa deem worthy of escaping.

On the one hand, the voiceover's constant interruptions often adopt a detached, tangential vocal accompaniment to information that the audience is not privy to by visual means (Chung 110). Among this is the knowledge that after Mexico entered into NAFTA, Tenoch's father was able to profit from a corruption scheme, or that the reason for the blocked traffic the trio faces in Mexico City was due to the death of an immigrant bricklayer, Marcelino Escutia, who faced infrastructural obstacles to arriving to work, and that nobody had identified the body for four days. It also gives shape to the subtle and undiscussed differences in class between Tenoch and Julio as they manifest in private spaces, describing how Julio, of a working class, lights matches to hide the smell in Tenoch's bathroom, while Tenoch, of the elite class, lifts Julio's toilet with his foot.

In these ways, the voiceover is able to make visible, through vocal conjuration, the plight of marginalized groups in Mexico City against social and economic forces at the turn of the century (Saldaña-Portillo 770). Another example where the *acousmêtre* offers an expositional gaze that is beyond the knowledge of the protagonists is when it ruminates on a fisherman's family with whom the group spends time visiting the beach and eating. Despite the "idyllic" experience marked by a harmony among heterogeneous characters and backgrounds, the voiceover returns to ground events with an omniscient gaze detailing how the fisherman and his family will end up selling their property to a transnational hotel company and lose their means of livelihood (Saldaña-Portillo 771).

The *acousmêtre*'s detachment also serves as a sounding board for Luisa's character, who is otherwise silent about the cancer in her body. At the wedding scene, where the voiceover introduces some of her backstory, it does not announce her condition, but rather points towards the difficulties in her family life growing up and her unstable relationship with her husband Jano. In the end of the film, the *acousmêtre* also fills the void of her absence when we learn that she had died a month after the road trip. On the beach prior to the film's concluding moments, however, the *acousmêtre* speaks for Luisa even during her last time on screen, voicing a quote on her behalf: "La vida es como la espuma, por eso hay que darse como el mar."[40]

If Luisa's character can be positioned within the story as a maternal allegory of whiteness and imperialism within new Mexican neoliberalism (Saldaña-Portillo 761), it is the masculine voiceover which acquires authority over the story of political decay inherited within the neocolonial order. At the same time, by stripping Luisa of her own last words, the male voice imposes its *logos* over the narrative, temporal and social orders, recalling Kaja Silverman's gendered analysis of the voiceover (Lahr-Vivaz 134-135; Baer and Long 159). Combined, the political and social allegories within the film's microcosmic dynamics are reinforced and challenged when, as Elena Lahr-Vivaz explains, "[t]he voice-overs…fix the significance of the images and the story they convey; in appropriating Luisa's last words, for instance, the narrator effectively silences the potential mediator of a new order" (34). In this way, the *acousmêtre* consolidates Luisa's death, not only by silencing her, but also by inscribing this silence into the

[40] "Life is like foam, so give yourself away like the sea." (1:36:37–1:36:42, My translation)

symbolic fabric left behind that invisibly threads the rest of events; namely, the fact that Julio and Tenoch will not speak to each other after the road trip culminates in a drunken sexual encounter between them.

These types of scenes pit the experiences of the youthful trio against the expositions of the *acousmêtre*, whose epistemological authority sheds light on the "partial truths that are too often ignored" in Mexican society (Baugh 55). In this way, if the identity crises and formation of Tenoch, Julio, and Luisa are reminiscent of modern Mexico (Baugh 52; Schroeder Rodríguez, *Comparative* 263; Saldaña-Portillo 752), the digressions of the *acousmêtre* mold the void that drives the characters by contextualizing the ranged conditions of conflict and violence that compose the Mexican cultural body at the start of the twenty-first century. At the same time, the permanent state of acousmaticity of the commentator reinforces the inaccessibility of such an awareness for the protagonists, and the voice instead offers knowledge exclusively to the audience who listens in order to inspire new levels of sensibilization.

In all of these examples, new spatial boundaries are created within and beyond the diegesis by voiceover or voice-off. Within these interstices, a combination of dynamics involving such disembodiment and sensorial reconfiguration leads to an acoustic reflection of identity politics and power dynamics at play in each context. As this chapter has shown, vocal disembodiment operates within a loose pattern of schemes, participating in representations of gender and violence, showing the role of technology as a mediator of voice, presence and absence, and revealing the internal boundaries of what is visible, audible, and known through the device of the *acousmêtre*.

Chapter 3: Vocal Faces and Interstices

Soy un fantasma que sigue vivo. [41]

I'm a living ghost.

While soundscapes, voiceovers, and voice-offs are more conventional cinematic tools for the genesis and passage of acousmatic sound, this chapter aims to adjust the sonic gaze to specifically visualized bodies and the inner workings of identity constitution in the face of violence, trauma, or loss. In this way, it will show how acousmaticity can be understood beyond a mere framework of visibility or invisibility, but rather as an acoustic inscription carried through the body that signals to absence, the unwitnessed, or the ineffable through repetitions, resistances, and returns. As such, the voice, despite its visual container, only shows its own face through its mediation of that which remains unowned, spectral, or irreconcilable. This chapter will first revisit the films *Infancia clandestina*, *Santa y Andrés*, *La ciénaga*, *La niña santa*, and introduce Lucrecia Martel's third feature, *La mujer sin cabeza*, for the unique vocal repetitions that manifest as a result of disguised or explicit political or social pressures. Second, vocal dynamics that result from the temporal disruptions brought about by traumatic events will be analyzed in *Paloma de papel*, *Días de Santiago*, and *Taxi, un encuentro*. Finally, the way that voice encounters different forms of resistance in the acoustic sphere will be discussed in the films *La teta asustada*, *La ciénaga*, and *Amores perros*.

[41] *Amores perros*, Dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, Mexico, 2000, 2:25:57.

If acousmatic sound simultaneously traverses and constructs the cinematic worlds of the New Cinema in Latin America by calling out through the soundscape or the void between unseen bodies and their articulated experiences, it is also shown to operate through a polyphonic and spectral presence mediating the visible and the invisible, the known and the unknown, and a language of what is unspeakable. These continuous sonorous passages of meaning-making work in tandem with, and in contrast to, the imaged worlds detailed across the cinematic body, clashing and inaugurating an affective entanglement. Within the interstices of vocal disembodiment in the cinematic screen, there can emerge a type of ventriloquial configuration in which a voice is torn from the lips and re-embodied through a process of illusion (Hutton 9). In "Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventriloquism," film sound theorist Rick Altman analyzes the joining of image and sound within the filmic body as a synchronous illusion in which the soundtrack occupies the role of ventriloquist by using the image as its "dummy" to disguise its source (67). In this way, the soundtrack—or, in expanded terms, the film's vocality—speaks through the particular spatial and visual resources available within the audiovisual medium.[42]

Altman's conceptualization of sound, like Chion's, challenges the historical primacy given to the image as a sensorial nucleus for the film audience. However, apart from perceiving soundscapes, music, voiceovers and the voice-off as mere tools of disguise within the image, it is relevant to consider their relationship to processes of

[42] Elsaesser's chapter in his compilation with Hagener, entitled "Cinema as Ear," refers to other conventional means of ventriloquism in practices such as karaoke and dubbing (157). In John King's account of the historical development of cinema in Latin America in *Magical Reels*, he highlights a famous quote by Jorge Luis Borges in a 1945 publication in *Sur* in which the writer critiques dubbing, a marketing strategy for US productions in Latin America, as a "malign artifice" (King 31).

ventriloquism insofar as sonorous articulations, specifically voices conditioned by trauma, are caught in an ambiguous state of ownership wherein the speaker's body carries, through voice, the inscriptions of an unreconciled event of violence or an intrusive force. In this way, even if one visually perceives the body of a speaker, an alternative, attuned form of listening reveals a spectral form of acousmaticity wherein the voice signals to an event, information, or body that is not fully witnessed, that is, unassimilated, fragmentary or disproportionate in its process of emotional or psychological integration.

Through such voices, trauma may become re-articulated within the acousmatic plane by nestling behind the linguistic order. The resulting sonic tension is twofold: on the one hand, we may refer to Elaine Scarry's seminal text *The Body in Pain* which explores, through the lens of torture, pain's capacity to destroy language, effectively dismantling an individual's world by resisting representation. According to Scarry, the destruction of the voice, in addition to the body, is a result of torture-inflicted pain (20). This mirrors the double infliction of pain at the hand of the torturer, who dismantles a victim's selfhood not only through extreme physical violence, but also through the power of their own dominant voice (28). The torturer, through their voice, can extract narratives from their victim, affirming, through the acoustic, their position of power at the expense of the victim's annihilation: "[Their] confession is a halfway point in the disintegration of language, an audible objectification of the proximity of silence—the torturer and the regime have doubled their voice since the prisoner is now speaking their words" (36).

On the other hand, pain channeled through the voice can be considered a generative force, for it impulses an expansion of creative linguistic boundaries (Bourke,

"Pain" 6) and remains, through testimony, an articulation of survival (Felman 42–43). While Scarry's ontological account of pain clashes with contemporary readings that conceptualize pain as subject to discourse and present as a lived modality (Bourke, "Story" 3; Bustan 365), it is useful to lean in to the border that defines a speaker's agency and the accessibility of the truth of the event or surrounding conditions of violence. According to Scarry, it is the destroyed voice that is fundamental in recuperating the bodily event through verbal reports (6–7).

In her account on trauma, Shoshana Felman discusses the ambiguity of testimony, whether written or vocalized, as a dynamic space of power relations between the traumatic event and the writer or speaker:

> If it is the accident which *pursues the witness*, it is the compulsive character of the testimony which is brought into relief: the witness is "pursued," that is, at once compelled and bound by what, in the unexpected impact of the accident, is both incomprehensible and unforgettable. The accident does not let go: it is an accident from which the witness can no longer free [them]self.
>
> But if, in a still less expected manner, it is the witness who *pursues the accident*, it is perhaps because the witness, on the contrary, has understood that from the accident a *liberation* can proceed and that *the accidenting*, unexpectedly, is also in some ways *a freeing*. (23)

Both of these processes are key to understanding and adopting an appropriate listening position to the speakers of the films in question that, in their conjunction, show a heterogeneous array of vocal strategies that both re-present structural issues at stake in

the historical moment, address their capacity for change, and point to the obstacles remaining. If, for Dolar, the voice, phantom in nature, is always marked by ventriloquism as it becomes emitted, unseen, through the disguise of the speaker's body (70), on a larger scale, the ventriloquial moment occurs as a cultural body reconciles with the specific regional legacies of violence, utilizing the cinematic language as a mediator. The past speaks through the present, and voices in crisis speak through the cultural body by reconciling with, or re-imagining, the linguistic tools that remain to them.

When voices are articulated, they tether presence and absence in a chaining process that Derrida observes as an operation of *différance*, a linguistic and conceptual combination of difference and deferral that makes meaning possible insofar as "each element that is said to be 'present,' appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element" (*Speech* 142). Within this deconstructive scheme of metaphysics, presence, or the self, becomes constituted by non-presence, or alterity. If, from a structuralist perspective, the power of the voice as a form of auto-affection is rooted in a proximity between the signifier and signified (giving it primacy over writing, which Derrida will critique through his project of grammatology), Derrida argues that self-presence, gestured by the simultaneity of a self who both speaks and listens, is fundamentally constituted by difference, as a self who relates to itself as an other (*Speech* 78). This conceptualization of self, other, and difference coincides with the passage of voice and serves as a useful model for leaning into the interstices at stake as a person speaks, or as they turn to the body of their voice to recuperate their personhood.

With respect to the oppositions of presence and absence as they relate to image and sound, Cavarero goes so far as to consider the image as a foundation of the metaphysics of presence, insofar as it reduces and objectifies, rather than provides an ontological platform for acknowledging uniqueness (176). The voice, on the other hand, signals difference as a relational process through vibrational resonance, or "the uniqueness of the voice that gives itself in the acoustic link between one voice and another" (182). This process of differentiation within the sonic space also emerges within the New Cinema as a tension with that which remains indiscernible (Aguilar, *Other Worlds* 84).

The displacements within or surrounding a speaker, founded on spatial and temporal gaps, are doubly projected within the cinematic world as they become consolidated into what Deleuze calls a "crystal-image"—an indivisible coalescence of the actual and the virtual, of past and present (*Cinema 2,* 78-79). The circulation of voices that are a consequence of violence and its disturbances are thus articulated in a paradox. On the one hand, as the first two sections of this chapter will explore, voices are unique channels of the repetitions and returns of the event, ever inscribing itself within the ambiguous present of the cinematic moment. On the other hand, as the third section discusses, in various forms, voices can also be acoustic forces of resistance or constant challenges to this affirmed presence. If, for Derrida, speakers are ultimately only able to reiterate previous utterances through the chain sequence of tracing (*Speech* 85), it is also

through the voice's own articulation that agency becomes present, if not lost at the same time, as one works through the event with the tools of body and voice available to them.[43]

It is precisely within this interstice of voice where it is possible to locate the passages of ventriloquism, where an event, information, or identity is carried through voice through repetitions or returns. At the same time, through the multivalent voice, we can also identify resistances in which the speaker enunciates as a means of overcoming pain through their own traumatized body, thus recovering agency through vocal adjustment, challenges to the semiotic order, or by using vocal tools to reaffirm the self and experience within the present as a means of escape from the condemned position of spectrality. The New Cinema movement, with its heightened use of sound strategies and fragmented voices shown in the case studies in question, sets the stage for acousmatic ventriloquism as voices latch themselves onto other bodies, or as events or conditions consolidate their inscription within the vocal body of someone who recounts them.

Altman's history of ventriloquism traces the voice's elusive origin which, for centuries, has lodged itself amidst a Cartesian schism between body and mind, with the corporeal aspect (the "body-voice") being revered for its capacity to reveal hidden truths outside of the logos of the mind (the "head-voice") (78). These hidden truths, for our purposes, reside within the acousmatic sphere, as they may exceed not only visual categorization, but also reside beyond what is or can be knowable. Indeed, ventriloquism—deriving from the Latin *venter* ("belly") and *loqui* ("to speak")—was

[43] Within the context of Holocaust studies, memory, and trauma, Dominick LaCapra famously offers the notion of "working through" trauma as "a measure of critical purchase on problems and responsible control in action which would permit desirable change" (209).

historically not utilized for entertainment but rather as a visceral, guttural speech indicative of spiritual inspiration, or even, from a sinister perspective, demonic possession.[44] Caruth's metaphorical language of trauma "possessing" a victim coincides with this image, or sonic image, of the imbalances of power that come into play as a speaker surrenders themselves to the impact of an event, or to the pressure or coercion to utilize specific language to uphold dominant codes. As we will see in the films in question, these power dynamics can also be generative, if not on a personal level within the diegesis, then on a macro-level within the very cinematic medium which Altman explains in the following manner:

> Cinema's ventriloquism is the product of an effort to overcome the sound-image gap, to mask the sound's technological origin, and to permit the film's production personnel to speak their subconscious mind—their belly—without fear of discovery. (79)

Engaging with acousmaticity using the processes of ventriloquism as a point of departure thus permits a new level of access to the repetitions, resistances, and returns inherent in the voice's role as a mediator of events, self, and other, and of their fluctuating constitutions demarcated through the acoustic.

[44] See Steven Connor's *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* for an expanded analysis of the practice of ventriloquism in different historical and cultural contexts.

Repetitions

As we have seen in the previous chapter, *Infancia clandestina*'s repeated circulation of Juan's parents' voiceovers through his tape recorder reaffirms their simultaneous loss and presence as material, living people. Meanwhile, Juan's voice serves as a channel for his own identity reconciliation as he hovers between his sense of self as Juan and the persona of Ernesto, which he must adopt for his parents to advance in the Montoneros' cause. This identity fragmentation is fractured further when considering the additional names given to Juan among his family and peers, including nicknames like Chango, Córdoba and Pollo (Aguilar, "Infancia" 20). In a cycle of reinforcement of Juan's clandestine identity as Ernesto, Juan is constantly introduced, and introduces himself, under this second name and gradually adopts the existence it comes to construct that eclipses any other versions of himself. The process of naming, begun through his parents' recording and instructions, is handed over in a vocal crossover as Juan's mother states that "your name will be" and the first border agent they encounter reads the name "Ernesto" from the fake passport.

This name travels through many other voices as the film proceeds and "Ernesto" acquires new life and expanded conditions of existence each time. Uncle Beto, a contact of Juan's parents who takes part in Juan's transportation and care during their covert operations, tells him he will have to repeat many times that his name is no longer Juan, but Ernesto. On the first day of school, the director presents him to his class as Ernesto from Córdoba, and he is greeted as such by his classmates in unison. Shortly after, Juan gets into a fight after he refuses to help raise the national flag in an assembly. Beto, reminding him of his duty, asks Juan to tell him the name he uses in school. Juan, upon

affirming the name Ernesto in response, internalizes that he must consciously adapt his behavior to meet the conditions of reality established by this name. Aguilar highlights the eventual conflation between the clandestine fantasy in which Juan is implicated and his reality, which Juan ends up affirming when he proposes that he and María run away to Brazil ("Infancia" 22). The *bildungsroman* trajectory that parallels Juan's political obligations to voice himself as Ernesto increasingly complicates the dual identity he must maintain.

The political realm takes center stage, however, when Juan's grandmother's warning about the dangers of his parents' activity comes true and the house of operations is invaded by the military police. When Juan is brought in for interrogation, he is put to the ultimate test when the interrogator emotionally and physically pressures him to speak his name, calling him Juancito, the ultimate reduction of his original identity to its purest and most infantile form. Juan, however, repeats firmly five different times that his name is Ernesto Estrada, and the last line he elaborates is the script he internalized when adopting Ernesto's persona, including his age and other details. His loyalty to his parents is channeled through these last moments, where he vocally, if not mechanically, maintains the mission of the Montoneros. However, the culmination of fragmented identities and voices—those of his parents, the Montoneros, and Ernesto—condensed into Juan's efforts to maintain their joined narrative, are unable to sustain themselves before the police authority, who wedges them apart by extracting the body of Juan's voice.

Juan, however, does not break the fantasy until he is finally delivered to his grandmother Amalia's house, where, when she asks who is at the door, he articulates in an intimately framed frontal close-up, "Soy Juan" ("I am Juan") (Aguilar, "Infancia" 22).

In this way, he recovers and re-generates his identity as Juan through a vocal plane uninterrupted by political fantasy or pressure. For Altman, this "body-voice"—in contrast to the socially constructed "head-voice," permits the articulation of "a more sincere, personal, and unguarded language no longer watched over by the censorship of a conscious mind" (78). Finally, on a meta-level of vocalization and ventriloquism as a means of identity generation and negotiation, it can also be argued that director Benjamin Ávila is able to "speak" through his film, or through Juan, as many narrative elements resonate with Ávila's personal experience as a child living clandestinely, while others, within a fictionalization or fantasy, offer an outlet for creative impulse (Ghiggia 4).

The doubled vocality channeled through Juan/Ernesto as a sonic mark of a split identity under the forces of political pressure is also apparent in Carlos Lechuga's Cuban film *Santa y Andrés*, which, in addition to the narrative force of its soundscape, emphasizes the power of vocal repetition as a tool of political image and allegiance to the Castro government. Both main characters, Santa and Andrés respectively, are implicated in this vocal regime by perpetuating and challenging its authority through their own voices and silences.

In the beginning, Andrés, a voice of dissent known by the government, silently tears up a newspaper inscribed with the circulating words of Cuban society in an unvocalized, silent gesture of intent to break from its linguistic confines. Subsequently, Andrés hides in the bathroom to dispose of some secret documents in the toilet, which contain his own words that go against the ideological mission of the regime. Santa, a representative of the party who comes to watch over Andrés, asserts her political status primarily through the presence of her body in Andrés' yard. This presence—of both

Santa, physically, and the government, symbolically, is reaffirmed when Santa tells Andrés that she is there to keep an eye on him during the diplomatic event. However, Santa rarely asserts her authority by means of linguistic imposition over Andrés, such as giving commands; rather, she remains more or less firmly quiet except in cases where she rejects his requests or brushes off his attempts to speak casually. For example, she is unwilling to go to the store for him and leave her watch post, despite his promise not to leave the house. The scene also relies on visual cues, such as varying camera perspectives, which ultimately ground both characters within the "invisible power" in force for both characters while at the same time foreshadowing their ability to navigate their differences (Fehimović 416).

Andrés, a writer, continues testing Santa's emotional and political boundaries through his own voice and stories of himself. He speaks to her honestly of the book he had written that the government did not like, and tells her he had spent eight years in prison as the "*escoria*" of the country, an official term used by the Cuban government in 1980 to the group of over 125,000 people who were effectively exiled during the opening of the port of Mariel (De la Nuez 105). Andrés repeats the transgressive, marginalizing term used against himself and the other incarcerated Cubans, a label that doubly ostracizes him as a political dissident and a sexually deviant suspect in the eyes and voice of the regime. Andrés' formal court report makes space in his words as he repeats them by heart due to their lingering corporeal and affectual inscription:

> Mr. Andrés Díaz, of legal age, and whose general information has already been stated here, was working for some time as a writer of literature, stories, novels, and poetry—all of this based on the greatest ideological

> diversionism and written counter-revolutionary propaganda. This material, of scarce artistic value, written always against the interests of our people, against the interests of our martyrs, and of course, against our beloved Commander in Chief, was unsuccessfully attempted to be taken out of this country. (My translation)

Andrés's mechanical repetition of the words re-present their symbolic weight, not only as he hears his own voice condemn himself yet again as an Other, but also as Santa, a new listener, absorbs them as intimate building blocks of their friendship. Although Andrés foregrounds the bitter charge in these authoritative words that are not his, Santa and the audience attune to a new construction of meaning guided by Andrés' personal voice as he tells the story of what happened to him. Meanwhile, Santa, in entering the dynamic with Andrés as an Other, begins to be caught up in a complex of hospitality in which she acts not only as a surveillance figure, but also as a friend who comes to care for Andrés through an "ethical impulse" that transcends her duties (Fehimović 422). This relationship, in contrast to its cultural predecessor *Fresa y chocolate* which attempts to impose a clear resolution between differing characters and ideologies, lays bare through both visual and acoustic means a path for the audience to engage in the emotional and ethical nuances associated with the discomfort of the encounter with a politically determined Other in Cuba (Fehimović 411). In this way, the voice of Lechuga's film not only mediates these encounters in the cultural moment of the diegesis, but also dialogues with contemporary audiences.

Andrés' multivalent vocal repetitions coincide with his prior subjection to ongoing sessions of electroconvulsive therapy to cure him of homosexuality, inscribing

and othering his body not only through the power of words, but also physical torture. As Scarry explains in *The Body in Pain*, the process of "unmaking" of the world of a victim of torture constitutes a split between body and voice, a division of the self comparable to death in which the presence of the body, through its very destruction, is magnified, while the voice, which calls out in pain, is reduced to absence (48–49). Andrés' forced submission to violent processes of unmaking, through the power relations enforced by the language of legal authority, and its attempts to disturb the ontological integrity of his body, results in a fragmented vocality that at times reinforces his marginalized status. Shortly after he tells Santa of his time in jail, he states with disgust that he's never really even been a writer, or even human—only a "*bicho*," a bug beyond the logos of humanity and its physical and political boundaries.

In a climactic moment where two government officials come to Andrés' house to search for his rumored novel (after reading about it in a written statement from Andrés' mute lover), they confront Andrés at his home and re-establish, through the acoustic sphere, their authority over his body and voice. The two officers chant Cuba's national hymn, and Andrés, through tears, quietly synchronizes his voice to the collective tune. Facing another round of Foucauldian ritual, Andrés experiences control over his body with the voice as an entry point, temporarily dismantling his individual selfhood by subsuming it into the body of the state demarcated through the acoustic boundaries of the hymn. The two officials then proceed to violently assault him while Santa is forced to watch, witnessing with a gaze that is displaced from her initial political stance.

On the other hand, this moment signals an important shift in Santa's narrative trajectory as a representative of law and order, because her confusion over her ideals and

her loyalty to Andrés results in a silence that disturbs her capacity to sing along with the officials. Although she is still under the authority of the regime and is obligated to participate in Andrés' dehumanization by throwing an egg at him prior to his beating by the officials, Santa does not involve herself in the perpetuation of the vocal regime and its logos. In fact, in a brief moment as Andrés is being wrestled into control, Santa tries to stand in between the official and her friend, but she is pushed out of the way. By doing so, she reveals the intimacy that has grown in her relationship to Andrés through her repeated conversations with him and a subsequent exposure to a self beyond the Other which the government meant to demarcate.

Andrés' vocal channeling of the semiotic order of the regime, embellished further through the forced utterance of song, contrasts to the banal, yet almost sinister repetitions within Lucrecia Martel's Salta Trilogy. While in Lechuga's, film ventriloquism occurs as a politically compulsory clash of voice, body and image, Martel explores the misalignment of these sources and their effects in addition to their potential to lose or gain semiotic capacity as the voice travels through bodies. All three films contain creative passages of vocality that operate not only within the confines of each feature, but that also serve as acoustic threads between films.

Released roughly ten and fifteen years prior to Ávila's and Lechuga's films respectively, *La ciénaga* establishes patterns of disturbing repetition—and repetitions resulting from disturbance—as an indirect sonic interrogation of the irreconcilable. As we have explored in previous sections, Mecha's family becomes implicated in the disjunctive soundsphere as a platform of articulation against their historical moment at the turn of the century and sense of invisibilization in a changing and globalizing society. At the same

time, the "fall" of the characters is not enough to overcome their claustrophobic and inescapable conflict (Aguilar, *Other Worlds* 43), which is notable in the impotence of Mecha's vocality as the head of the family unit. If, for Aguilar, the characters are in a "floating" state and unable to become embodied and emplaced in their material reality (*Other Worlds* 43), Mecha's repeated words are a futile attempt to re-ground and consolidate an authoritative voice over the disintegrated social (and economic) structure of the estate. As we have discussed previously, the constant ringing of the telephone and Mecha's repeated insistence that someone answer, even when they never do, is a constant re-affirmation of the disintegrating system of communication constituting the household and its members' symbolic disconnect with society.

At the same time, there is an affectual component underlying the loss of Mecha's semiotic capacity that hints at her experience with violence of both an external and internalized order. Forcinito affirms that Mecha's repeated yelling, particularly as a frustrated release of insults against an Other (if not also as a projection of her own internal struggles) holds a ventriloquial quality as a repetition of a masculine logic of dominance that fails to ground itself in a rational discourse (*Óyeme* 79–80). Mecha's repeated yells and commands, although intended to acquire authority in the fragmented and subsequently competitive soundscape, do not elevate her status, but rather submerge her further in the sea of detached sounds, voices and logics. This decentralization of speech effectively ruptures into a fragmented polyphony that interrupts the stability of narrative action, which is instead guided uncomfortably by sounds rather than images (Russell). In addition, rather than following a generative, reconciliatory trajectory of "working through" this discomfort, Mecha is shown as a figure caught in the mechanism

of denial that LaCapra calls "acting out," or compulsively repeating the past as an evasion or denial of her traumatic situation (48). In this way, Mecha's ventriloquism testifies to her dual position as a keeper of order against a backdrop of chaos, with her voice serving as an entry point to her inescapable state of loss and entrapment.

If Mecha's voice means to recuperate a past sameness and stability within a context that she is unable to acknowledge as different, particularly as her family status decays and the members are subject to aimlessness, Helena's tinnitus in Martel's second feature, *La niña santa,* provides sonic insight foregrounding the state of her own internal ruptures as a woman, mother, and business owner. The spacing designated by the voice, resulting in a porosity between interiority and exteriority, cracks as Helena navigates the logocentric order through failed repetitions brought about by a fractured internal polyphony. That is to say, if Martel's cinema in its conjunction dismantles the notion of the Argentine interior as an idyllic Arcadia (Gómez 80), Helena's case reaffirms the fragmentation brought about by the passage of voices through her own unstable mediation as speaker and listener in the spaces that she occupies. Helena, like Mecha, is on the surface a leading figure of interior space, with her management of the hotel not dissimilar to the local estate headed by Mecha.[45] The physical state of decadence of Hotel Termas is twofold. On the one hand, it reflects the inauspicious economic trajectory of Argentina (Jubis 56). Meanwhile, as an architectural space emphasized through excessive

[45] According to Deborah Shaw, such spaces, which are intimate, local and a conscious preference for Martel, conversely render them more viable for international audiences than the use of national spaces ("Sex, Texts and Money" 169). For more on private spaces and their political significance in Martel's films, refer to Joanna Page's chapter entitled "Espacio privado y significación política en el cine de Lucrecia Martel" in *El cine argentino de hoy: entre el arte y la política* edited by Viviana Rangil, 2007.

focus on surface and depth with little spatial mediation, the hotel structures a fragmented relationship between interiority and exteriority that defies stable meaning (Holmes 82).

The ringing sound of tinnitus (in a constant process of being made and heard through Helena's body) thus positions her as a sonic referent in a hotel full of its own sonic organs, such as creaking pipes.[46] As is noted in the previous chapter, Helena's hearing exam results in a fragmented circulation of voice and words passing between her and the doctors. This vocal splitting is evident from the beginning of the exam, when one of the doctors asks her "Me escuchas Helena?" referring to if Helena can hear *him*. Helena does not respond in the affirmative until he asks again, "Escuchas mi voz?"—if she can hear his *voice*. The cracks between body, voice, and subjectivity constituting Helena's character are redoubled in her exterior surroundings as acoustic projections that, in turn, resonate back to her. The subsequent exchange of words between them that are devoid of significance reveals the wedging between voice and meaning as Helena speaks the doctors' words through her own mouth. The repetition deviates with her final mis-repetition of the word *madres* as *males*, which, conversely, re-introduces signification through difference.

Helena's daughter Amalia similarly undergoes a state of mechanical vocal repetition of the prayers she has come to memorize. Although Amalia channels the scripted content through her voice, the body behind the words is fast-paced and quiet, which paradoxically pulls them into her individual possession while also dulling their

[46] Deborah Martin engages with these sounds, in addition to other cinematic techniques in *La niña Santa,* as elements that in their conjunction uphold conventions of the horror genre ("Wholly" 62). In a similar vein, Amanda Holmes describes the hotel's spaces as reminiscent of "bowels" that evoke a burial site (82).

semiotic significance. For example, at the pool, Amalia whispers a prayer when watching Jano, a symphony that she composes through both gaze and voice. Meanwhile, Helena, sore from her tinnitus, interrupts her slew of words, and Amalia's face is framed in a close up as she chains the prayer rapidly together, as if possessed. Helena, slightly disturbed, asks her "not to speak to her that way" and tries instead to recite a ballad to her, which she is unable to finish because she cannot remember the rest.

The comparison of each woman's vocal repetitions and capacities highlights what Aguilar observes as a difference in relation to the *logos* and the masculine order introduced by the figure of Jano. If, for Aguilar, Helena's character is marked by a state of ambivalence within the gendered, familial, and professional orders in which she is implicated, Amalia submits not to these orders of representation but rather to the divine call that manifests across sensory modes (*Other Worlds* 88). Indeed, on the level of voice, Helena thus negotiates her fragmented relationship to this *logos* through mismatched attempts to align herself to it, while Amalia embraces an alternative perceptual order by subsuming prayer into the corporeal encumbrances of her voice as a channel for the divine in which she is firmly and unabashedly devoted. This divine commitment, combined with her sexual awakening as an adolescent, effectively marks her as a threat to the adult and masculine *logos* (Gómez 76–77).

The tensions marked by currents of acousmaticity are also present in the defining narrative scene in Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza*, where Vero, a privileged bourgeois woman in provincial Argentina, gets into a vehicle accident in the countryside, killing either a dog or a local indigenous boy but not stopping to confirm or internalize her mistake. Like *La ciénaga*, in addition to *La niña santa*, Martel's third film in the Salta

trilogy is constituted by explorations not only of class structures and the crises of bourgeois politics and sociality at the turn of the century, but also the power dynamics of gender that accompany them (Martin, *Cinema* 98). However, the dialogue with Argentina's dictatorship (1976–1983), particularly with respect to violence and spectrality, is less subtle in *La mujer sin cabeza*, as it engages with what Cecilia Sosa describes as "the uncanny resonances of a national trauma" in the realm of grief and politics (253). Vero's personal disavowal of the car accident, in addition to that of her relatives that take action to cover it up, draw parallels with the lingering impunity of those complicit in the dictatorship (Moraña 378).

At the same time, the film reveals the amorphic social mold in which class antagonisms, in this case also motivated by race, become perpetuated in the post-dictatorship neoliberal era. Parallels are drawn with the Menem government, under which a growth in vehicle ownership—and accidents—influences the context of classism at stake in the narrative (Quirós 246). With respect to this dual political and social commentary intersecting two time periods, Martel observes that

> ...[A]n individual will not come out from a situation like that unscathed. This woman is going to carry this on her back like a corpse, like a bag of bones, forever. In Argentina, my country, I see people that still carry the weight of the really bad stuff that they did not denounce back when it happened under the dictatorship. A lot of people decided they didn't want to see, they didn't want to know what was happening. And now the same process is occurring, but it's in relation to poverty. A lot of people pretend

> they do not see that a huge part of the country is becoming poorer and poorer and is undergoing great suffering. (Taubin, "Interview")

Both political and social lenses thus clash together in the moment of Vero's accident and inform her subsequent traumatic response. Following the film's brief introduction, which takes place at the end of a social gathering, the accident slices into the banal narrative through both acoustic and visual disruptions. Vero is shown to be driving along the dirt road, surrounded by the accumulation of bourgeois sounds of the radio music and her ringing cellphone. Suddenly, while the frame is limited to Vero's profile in the driver's seat—obstructing the vision of that which is in front of the vehicle—a thud occurs and the camera shakes as Vero is knocked about.

An intentional denial of the visual marks Vero's accident and its subsequent impact throughout the narrative, permitting only an access to the affective, haptic, and acoustic fragments of the event (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 97). During the accident, and just after, Vero chooses not to look or to return to piece together what happened, which Matt Losada observes as a "sin of omission" or an event that "results in her disconnection from the quotidian stimuli of her comfortably bourgeois existence" (310). From this moment on, the film's sensorial projections adhere primarily to Vero's broken gaze and trauma, which is motivated precisely through a rejection of the visual plane. As a result, sound technique takes center stage in the soundscape, dialogue, and acousmatic voices and sounds (Crum Duran 32).

There are two planes in which sound interrogates and re-configures Vero's reality after the accident: on a socio-economic level, and through gender dynamics. On the one hand, the continuation of her "normal" life repeats itself through bourgeois denial, an active

choice she and her family have the privilege of making and upholding (Moraña 394). Vero's protection of her social facade results in a breakdown and unequal re-distribution of her common duties that become disproportionately burdened upon the lower class. Stacy Crum Duran aptly identifies this shift and exteriorization as a result of her fragmented self:

> Verónica is traumatized and distracted to the point that she can no longer manage the details of her domestic life nor her professional life as a pediatric dentist. Other individuals, the servants, and the administrative assistants in the hospital, for example, assume her responsibilities, and she becomes more vacant and less grounded in her daily life—something that further invokes a feeling of gothic hauntedness in the protagonist. (6)

Vero's interior decentering thus manifests through her external relations and power dynamics. For Deborah Martin, Vero's accident manifests as "the image of a violent collision with the under-privileged social groups she had previously failed to see, [and] afterwards it becomes difficult to ignore them" (*Cinema* 83).

While her class status is projected outwardly and, in more force, to the benefit of maintaining cohesive habits and repeated normality, Vero's gender status suffers more greatly in this process of relational reconfiguration. Forcinito, for example, observes Vero's reconciliation with her voice as a "headless woman": after the accident, she is often shown in shots that block her face, and she recovers throughout the film a voice that is not her own within a gendered mark of vocality. Forcinito points to the intervention of Vero's male relations who end up projecting their own voices through hers, effectively controlling the narrative of the accident in an effort to erase it (*Óyeme* 100). In this way, she notes that Vero's silence, vocal recuperation, and repetitions are marked by gender power dynamics

that consolidate themselves through her broken body and falsely re-piece events together through the collision of their discourse and her voice.

The resulting identitary constitution of Vero effectively consolidates itself into a state of zombiism, which Aguilar identifies across Martel's films as a floating sensation of indifference characterized by oppression and an inability to interpret situations (*Other Worlds* 44). The environments draw parallels with states of PTSD described by Catherine Malabou as "affective barrenness" constituted by emotional distance and disinterest (*New Wounded* 157). Devoid of human qualities, in part through the metaphoric, visually, and acoustically articulated ruptures of her character, Vero is represented as a wounded subject marked by a destructive plasticity, or a trauma that has annihilated the continuity of her character and identity. For Malabou, plasticity is a framework of malleability that underscores the potential to both give and receive form through a process of "natural sculpting" of the subject (*Ontology* 3). However, the underside of this positive identity construction is the capacity for a destruction of the mold that, in a deconstitutive process, splits the subject incongruously into "another existence unrelated to the previous existence" (*Ontology* 37).

Both image and voice within the cinema are able to serve as a platform of constructive and destructive plasticity insofar as they intersect, collide or violently interrupt upon themselves or each other (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 32). In the case of Vero, her implication in the accident scene is one marked by a violent overthrow of sensorial equilibrium and an upset of Vero's stable haptic, aural, and visual relationship to the event which resists re-assimilation. Rather, Vero becomes a *tabula rasa* for the outside narratives imposed upon her by her male relatives, to the extent that her aunt Lala does not even recognize Vero's

voice, which has become indifferent even to itself (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 99). Vero's metamorphosis becomes noticeable, if only to Lala, whose judgment becomes a sounding block of reason that helps maintain the boundaries of who Vero was before and after the accident. Lala's comment grounds Vero's behavior as consistent with people who have suffered trauma who become unrecognizable to others (Malabou, *New Wounded* 48).

Vero's personal changes are reflected in her projection of the changed narratives around her, such as the official police story about the local boy that drowned near the accident scene, or the fact that her husband fixed up her vehicle to hide the imprint left behind by the acousmatic collision. Her state of zombiism and subsequent ventriloquial state is not dissimilar to that of the leading women characters of *La ciénaga* or *La niña santa*, however the vehicle accident—witnessed primarily through acousmatic clues—plays a key role in interrupting and shaping the subsequent narrative, while the other films employ erratic sounds with looser relationships to a tonal sense of foreboding, tension or insecurity. However, in contrast to the acousmatic imprints of the accident as it occurs, subsequent sounds are short-lived and reconnect to their visual sources, a rushed sensory link traced by Vero's psychological impulse to deny trauma or disruption to her banal bourgeois reality (Losada 311). Toward the end of the film, as if to mirror Vero's projection of the narrative facade constructed by her social circle, pop music plays at a gathering with family and friends that does not at all align with the context of events (Losada 312).[47] This anempathetic soundscape projects the force of one potential narrative upon another.

[47] For a more detailed analysis on the regional and popular songs in the film, refer to Stacy Crum Duran's text, *White Privilege, Artistic Echoes, and Sound Experiences in Lucrecia Martel's La Mujer Sin Cabeza (The Headless Woman, 2008)*, especially pp. 50–55.

Ventriloquism, in Martel's third film, thus seeps through Vero as a nefarious acousmatic imprint left by the bourgeois image.

Returns

The acousmatic, when understood beyond a mere visual framework and rather as a multivalent, performative space manifesting within the gaps in space and time and in the unstable vocalization of presence and absence, calls attention to the ventriloquial not only as a coerced pattern of repetition, but also as an entanglement of past, present, and future within the acoustic plane. Listening to ventriloquism as a vocal mark of return that passes through bodies and time resonates with Derrida's notion of a *specter*, a figure bound by presence and absence that, within the realm of perception, sees but cannot be seen. It is within this "visor effect" that acousmatic sound becomes foregrounded as a clashing of worlds (*Specters* 7). The suit of armor that speaks to Hamlet is but a disguising artifact of the identity of the voice he hears as his father. It thus is, and is not, the king. Derrida's example marks a spectrality within a logic of haunting—"hauntology"—wherein the voice is a conflating placeholder for the possibility of speaking for the first, and last time, every time (*Specters* 10). Within the realm of human rights, this (re)articulated voice also points to both existence and nonexistence, or of being and nonbeing that characterizes spectrality (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 182). The use of vocal returns within films that represent, or re-present, diverse experiences with violence is a common denominator between their articulations and negotiations, while also uniting past, present, and future within the vocal plane. Their acousmaticity lies within the temporality and identities that become lost, or recuperated, in the moment of enunciation.

Many early scenes in Aguilar's Peruvian film *Paloma de papel* are marked by a continuity in formalist disjunction, which constructs from the beginning a fragmented temporal and spatial base upon which the narrative is set in motion. The film's depiction of the Peruvian village and its inhabitants prior to the violent arrival of Sendero Luminoso is harmonious in terms of content, portraying a peaceful rural community (Ramírez Andrade 38). Closer attention to the weaving of sounds between these images, however, reveals the retroactive 2003 cultural gaze, already affected by the internal armed conflict, that pieces together events through certain misalignment.[48] Juan, the protagonist, is marked by similar contradictions, as he is caught between the political divides between Sendero Luminoso and his hometown when he is kidnapped as a child and trained to work with the guerillas. His return home from prison, where he has spent time deemed a traitor, invokes his own fragmented subjectivity as past and present collide in his memory of events.

The opening scene pans through a wall of photographs of those affected by the violence of the internal armed conflict, as traditional music becomes synchronized with locals that are playing instruments and holding a ceremony of remembrance. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes elaborates on the photograph's special capacity to articulate life and death through a disruption of temporality, and combined visual, haptic and affectual links:

> The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the

[48] In the same year, Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Report was also released, seeking a productive confrontation between past abuses and present national traumas.

> missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed. (80–81)

Barthes additionally comments that the camera's indexically derived paradox between what was, what is not, and what will not be, is captured not only through specific visual conditions at the time of the photograph, but also through the camera's mechanical click (15). Drawing in the sound as a marker of the frame, and attuning to present sounds surrounding the frame, thus adds to the photograph's affectual imprint. If, for Marianne Hirsch, the present gaze upon the photograph fills in what is not explicitly shown (7), the traditional band music in *Paloma de papel* suggests an acoustic gaze of mourning. The photograph, for Hirsch, is able to be carried between generations in connection with and between memories over time, serving within discursive contexts. In this way, the music playing over the photographs functions as an acoustic "captioning" over the photos, providing what Susan Sontag describes as an imperfect grasp of what the picture itself cannot articulate (84). In effect, the "voice" carried through the mournful tone of the instruments is a ventriloquial placeholder that overrides the inability of the present community, in addition to their lost loved ones from the village attack, from speaking to each other.

In *Paloma de papel*, Juan's recuperation of his own voice coincides with his memories, in which sound plays a key role in the launching and return of events. His abuse as a child at the hand of his stepfather Fermín exposed him to physical violence prior to the political turmoil between the Sendero Luminoso rebels and the Peruvian State. In one

scene, invisible behind the closed door, Juan's cries can be heard as he is hit by Fermín, who is a Sendero Luminoso sympathizer. As Juan eats alone in the barn after his mother brings him food, an explosion is heard in the distance that is so powerful that it disturbs the lightbulb, that is, what indicates what can be seen or not in the space.

Later at night, when he plays outside with his friends, the children voice the shooting sounds of their fake guns as they pretend to kill each other. This playful violence, seemingly innocent, articulates the political reality of the time as the children call each other *terruco*—a reference to Sendero Luminoso terrorists—and pretend to be in the Ronda community watch. Juan even shoots at his friend Pacho, who plays dead and moves his "corpse" in tune with the shooting sounds. The sinister ventriloquism of the childish game comes to an abrupt reveal of its structural source when the group enters the square and see Juan's friend Pacho's father, the mayor, hanging dead in the darkness.

Once kidnapped by the Sendero Luminoso guerrillas—under the arrangements made by his stepfather Fermín—Juan faces an identity crisis not dissimilar to that of Juan/Ernesto during the Argentine dictatorship represented in *Infancia clandestina*.[49] Aguilar's protagonist is told his name is now Comrade Cirilo, and that he can eat once he sings the hymn dedicated to the leader Abimael Guzmán, a vocal ritual performed by the Sendero guerrillas. Among the group that sing together are many other children, and

[49] Children in particular are vulnerable mediators of voice within the cinematic space, as they are subject to the adult-driven processes of production, script-writing, editing and distribution processes. See Carolina Rocha's "Can Children Speak in Film?" for an analysis of these conditions in Brazilian cinema in the late 2000s. For an analysis of the children of Franco in Spanish cinema, refer to Erin Hogan's *The two cines con niño: Genre and the Child Protagonist in over Fifty Years of Spanish Film (1955–2010)*, particularly chapter eight which provides a transatlantic comparative analysis with recent Latin American cinema.

Juan/Cirilo barely keeps his voice in sync with the others as it is now doubly marked by community words and chants that are, and are not, his.

The adults in both *Infancia clandestina* and *Paloma de papel* serve as impressionable influences upon the young protagonists. In the former, Juan/Ernesto, caught up in the Montoneros' cause against the military regime, absorbs the vocal traces of his parents through a combined state of vulnerability and love for them. On the other hand, Juan/Cirilo, when recruited by the Sendero rebels, acquires the guerrilla language through voice and body out of explicit coercion and fear. A key difference in how these respective voices develop occurs fairly early after Juan/Cirilo's kidnapping. Carmen, one of the leaders and combat instructors, tells him that if he runs away she will kill his mother, and that crying is unacceptable. In this way, Carmen takes advantage of Juan/Cirilo's love for his mother and uses this against him to manipulate his voice and self. Juan/Cirilo learns quickly from Carmen's threats, and successfully voices a confident and ideologically scripted response during their weapons training session. Afterwards, he smiles as Carmen and the other children congratulate him.

Juan, however, who still wants to renounce Cirilo, seizes upon an opportunity to escape, but he is forever marked by the forced acoustic imprint left upon his identity. At the end of the violent confrontation between the guerillas and the townsfolk of Juan's village, which results in the murder of his mother, he is taken away by the military to be imprisoned for his association. The film ends where it begins, with the adult Juan returning to the village scene of mourning, following the sounds of the instruments.

A recurring acousmatic force apart from the affective return of the band is the bells which are placed around the village. Installed, by the mayor's request, as "anti-terruco"

bells, they recall Schafer's description of these rural instruments as community signals, which when acting as sirens "speak of disharmony from within" (178). Circular in both form and effect, the bells set up through their acoustic jurisdiction an urgent call to return order to the interrupted present.[50] The bells are thus set up early in the film as a basic communicative system that serves to unite the townsfolk, but also to warn this collective against the threat of the Sendero Other.

Despite the apparent serenity portrayed in the beginning of the film, the geography of the town of *Paloma de papel* had eventually been determined by the military to be an emergency zone (Barrow, "Shadows" 8). Many villages were ordered to form protection and patrols, leading to the mayor's implementation of the bells in the film (Barrow, *Contemporary* 209). Notably, the general absence of state patrols throughout the film is a testament to the Peruvian state's failure to protect rural Peruvians during the armed conflict, specifically pointing to their lack of acknowledgement of indigenous communities as deserving of national protection due to prejudicial postcolonial attitudes (Barrow, *Contemporary* 143–144).

On one hand, particularly in the context of the beginning of the film, the presence of the bells is portrayed as a resonance of childhood (Barrow, "Shadows" 7). Indeed, Juan spends time with the blacksmith playing with the effects of their vibrations when they move their hands against their ears, wing-like. The sounds of the bells weave together a montage

[50] Schafer connects the siren, an evolution of the bell, with its mythological counterpart: "The Sirens… signify mortal danger to man and this danger is broadcast by means of their singing" (178). Adriana Cavarero counters this type of reading with a feminist perspective on the Sirens' capacity to vocalize as an irruption over the logos in *For More than One Voice* (103–116).

of other townsfolk testing their bells in other areas, creating a continuous chorus that foreshadows their emergency return during the moment of the invasion. As soon as he deserts the guerillas, Juan's own sounding of the warning bell marks his long, emotional journey from the child he was prior to his abduction. Under the pursuit of his captors, Juan adopts the centripetal force of the bells as his temporary voice, which has been subdued and warped during his kidnapping, to alert the townsfolk of their impending danger.

Likewise, his grandmother adopts the same force to continue the warning. Juan's grandmother is not capable of speech, and is shown instead to yell or laugh as semiotic placeholders that override logical communication. This early hint towards disruption to order is coupled with a foreshadowing moment where, during the practice phase of the bell sounding, which is musical, Juan's grandmother utters a long yell almost in tune with the bell, morphing her voice with the instrument. This vocal fusion later transforms at the time of the invasion, when at Juan's urgent behest, she uses the full force of the bell rather than utilize her capacity to yell for help. In this way, the bells ring between young and old, passing through time and space through their returns.

Though the townsfolk are able to rally for self-defense, chaos ensues as the children's shooting game returns in the form of reality and material bullets occupy the scene. As an exercise of Sendero authority, Carmen captures the new mayor, and ascribes new significance to the acousmatic bells, stating that they are actually tolling for his funeral. In the subsequent violent confrontation, Carmen shoots Juan's mother, and in turn Carmen's younger sister is shot. There is a clear lack of victors after the battle, and Juan irrupts into cries and yells as he is taken by the state into custody for years until his return to the village.

Paloma de papel's representation of Juan's homecoming and new encounter with his community after the violent battle suggests a quietly hopeful future for the imprisoned protagonist as he smiles at his two now grown-up friends during the memory service. Juan, who was forcibly caught between loyalties and provided dark insight into the complexities of the Sendero Luminoso initiative, contrasts with Santiago's character in Josué Mendéz's *Días de Santiago* as the latter struggles with reintegrating into Peruvian society after years fighting in service of the state forces, rather than Sendero Luminoso. The two films hold other points of dialogue and inversion; Barrow notes that *Paloma* emphasizes the interruption of the internal armed conflict upon a utopian childhood, while *Días de Santiago* places focus on its "dystopic aftermath" ("Shadows" 11).

The use of sound in both films resonates in patterns consistent with these narrative trajectories. *Paloma de papel*'s use of bells as an interruptive force is also one that travels between bodies as it leaves its acousmatic footprint upon a collective body that is politically broken. Here, the sound unites insofar as it implicates the community of listeners, yet it also divides them by marking an exterior threat, an Other, through its acoustic warning. The political ventriloquism that weaves its way through Juan on the side of the Sendero Luminoso forces contrasts with the language internalized by Santiago who fought on the side of the Peruvian military in *Días de Santiago*. While the former film shows the interruption of voice and self for the first time under conditions of political coercion, the latter underscores the traumatic legacy of the continuous rigorous shedding of individuality to the point where returning to civilian society becomes its own interruption.

As the second chapter has discussed, *Días de Santiago*'s portrait of the protagonist's PTSD utilizes the voiceover as an acousmatic marker of his fragmented

subjectivity and his relationship to his exterior surroundings. Santiago's reduced capacity to maintain healthy relationships with family and acquaintances occurs in direct correlation with his prolonged adoption of a voice in service of an authority beyond himself, and which reaffirms its politicality in the moments of its articulation. In a manner similar to the warning bells in *Paloma de papel*, Santiago's alertness neurotically generates a self and other with every breath and gesture in effort to preserve order against threatening alternatives. This leads Santiago on a downward spiral of psychological trauma which the film's technique parallels through dissociative representation (Barrow, "Transnational" 144-145).

In one scene that provides insight into the vocal tensions channeled as a result of Santiago's identity crisis, Santiago is in the kitchen alone and initiates an imagined dialogue with his wife Mari, not through voiceover but diegetically within the real time of the narrative moment. Through his speech (which recalls that of Robert DeNiro in *Taxi Driver*[51]), he conjures her false presence as he responds to her unheard vocal probe: "¿A mí? ¿A mí, me preguntas a mí que cómo me gustaría que fuera?"[52] Here, Santiago doubly draws the boundary between himself and Mari: He imagines her voice implicating him as a listening subject, and with aggressive surprise, refers to himself—"me"—three times with his own voice.

Santiago claims authority over the apparent "dialogue" by framing it into a monologue where he gestures to the kitchen space, anchoring himself in the present

[51] Sarah Barrow also references *Taxi Driver* by discussing the car which Santiago uses to earn money, sleep, and reclaim agency (*Contemporary* 165).
[52] "Me? Me, you're asking me how I wish things were?" (29:07–29:16, My translation)

moment. He gives order to the space through semiotic determination, claiming that everything has its order, and that "sin orden nada existe" ("Without order, nothing exists"). It becomes clear that since his return home, nobody has ever asked Santiago how he prefers things, sparking this aggressive outburst. To reinforce his determination to communicate his demands to the absent Mari, he even pulls out a list of paper, and reads off a lengthy and detailed itinerary including when meals are to be made and what is eaten. The words he chains together become almost melodic as he lists them, but he starts to speak in circles, and the more he does so, the more he loses control over the direction of his words. Although Santiago establishes strong gendered boundaries within the existential order of the quotidian, his authority—already fizzling out as his trauma overtakes his voice—becomes broken as he stops speaking when Mari actually enters the kitchen.

Santiago's unachievable ideal unity in the home returns in the vocal realm again towards the end of the film, in which he is implicated in a chain of violent moments, linked by the screams of women, that illustrate the chaotic decadence of his reality and relationships. Outside his family's house, Santiago aggressively tries to "save" his brother's abused girlfriend by forcing her into his vehicle, causing her to scream out in resistance. Santiago's brother comes out angrily to take her away, and once they leave, Santiago's mother desperately tries to calm him down. However, she then begins screaming as Santiago grabs his gun out of fury, intending to restore order the way he learned in the army. His screaming mother follows him into the house, and the shattering acoustic space then becomes accompanied by the screams of his younger sister behind a closed door. When the image of her being sexually abused by Santiago's father is revealed

to all parties, there is a brief moment where silence then overthrows all other vocal signifiers.

In this way, the lack of acoustic order mirrors the disorganized and disintegrating world surrounding Santiago. The silence of the following, final scene thus tempts absence as the only solution. Santiago sits alone on his bed, caressing the gun against his neck and head, and pulls the trigger three times. While in *Paloma de papel*, the children's fake guns reach their targets through the guide of the sounds of their voices, Santiago's adult Russian-roulette style game with himself does not end in his death but rather in three empty clicks that represent his complete identitary blockage and a paralysis between life and death.

The acoustic manipulation by means of passing bullets between the Peruvian contexts represented in *Paloma de papel* and *Días de Santiago* is a tool that is also used in the Argentine film *Taxi, un encuentro*. As has previously been mentioned, the bullets in Gabriela David's first film play a fundamental role in the constitution of the Buenos Aires soundscape that lends itself to the disentanglement, and reconstruction, of the narrative revolving around Gato and Laura. The film utilizes acoustic and visual strategies to give order and sense to the irrecoverable, or that which goes beyond the jurisdiction of the semiotic (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 246). The characters, their experiences, and their voices come together to create an intimate connection that permits the birth of a narration. On the one hand, the (attempted) murder-suicide committed by Laura's father against her and her mother serves as a fissionable moment marked by a culmination of both gender and socio-economic influences. On the other hand, Gato, subject to the conditions of poverty at the turn of the century in Buenos Aires, becomes implicated as a listener and participant in

both her physical and emotional recovery within this dark underside of the urban metropolis.

The constant return of the sounds of bullets throughout the film speak towards ruptures, which are marked not only by the acousmatic temporal displacements of Laura's imperfectly assimilated traumatic experience in her home, but also as sonorous cracks in Gato's precarious life that underline his own fractured subjectivity as an impoverished taxi thief and driver. At the same time, the bullets return as a tool for the creation, recreation, and intertwining of both of the stories of the protagonists. Gato recounts (to Laura) a run-in he had at the industrial yard with the owners of the car workshop that were supposed to buy the stolen taxi's parts. The image of these events is then shown in a scene which escalates when Gato accidentally shoots one of them in the leg. The image then shifts to show Gato's talk with the unseen Laura, where two close-up shots of him are thrown together in sequence as his voice explodes, twice, into an airy imitation of a gunshot. These traveling sounds refer, simultaneously in advance and retroactively, to when Gato launches two bullets into the air like a declaration of wildness as he escapes the three men. In total (and like Santiago), Gato shoots his gun three times, generating sounds which inversely mirror the gunshots of Laura's violent father; one bullet hits its target, and the other two miss. The three bullets thus serve as an acoustic junction of narrative and the stories carried by each protagonist. This sonic encounter between them works in parallel with the image of their very first meeting, in which Gato helps Laura by picking her up in the taxi in the beginning scene (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 245).

In this sense, the bullets return as indicators of an acoustic threading between the violent backgrounds of each protagonist, carrying much of the weight of the visual and

affective narrative. Furthermore, the acousmatic finds its own harmonic body from, and between, the bodies of the protagonists when Gato rudimentarily operates on Laura to retrieve the bullet lodged inside her. As he holds it up between himself and the camera, his memory of the accident is triggered, granting the audience access to these fragments of his experience.

Throughout the film, Gato's vocal speculations about what happened to Laura are foregrounded through his position as narrator and witness, doubly conditioned by the authority acquired by his masculine voice of order that contrasts with Laura's voice which, as Forcinito points out, is bound by corporeal pain throughout the film (*Óyeme* 246). In this sense, Laura's narrative arc, molded by her trauma, is conveyed as a recuperation of her voice. This process begins through the articulation of pre-symbolic sounds, such as yells or cries that, following Mladen Dolar's account of Lacan, "wait to be listened to (understood)" (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 247–248, My translation). The speaker-listener relationship between Gato and Laura as the story continues becomes inverted, and the fragmented account given by Gato becomes filled in through Laura's voice instead, a necessary acoustic and affective anchor for the reconstruction of the accident that, effectively, summons it into existence (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 248). In this way, Laura is a witness in the present moment that, in the words of Felman, "begets" the truth through her speech process (16). Felman's account of testimony also addresses Laura's inscription of trauma through "pursuit" (22); her cries indicate the accident's overwhelming pursuit of her being, while her subsequent semiotic organization of events reflect the agency she acquires as she is the one that comes to pursue the accident.

Resistances

These various affective tensions underscored by traumatic inscription in the voice's body and signification manifest not only in repetitions or returns, but also through forms of resistance. In the case of Laura in *Taxi, un encuentro*, it is not until the last part of the film where her vocal recovery and ability to tell Gato what happened indicate a hopeful trajectory and a relationship established through the intimacy of listening. Gato, on the other hand, initiates his own process of telling from the very beginning, making sense of the events of his life that led to his aural witnessing of Laura's accident. For both characters, the space to narrate offers them the possibility to summon the event by will, revisit it, and thus "bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred" (Caruth, *Trauma* 151).

On the other hand, in Claudia Llosa's *La teta asustada*, the weight of Fausta's trauma, inscribed individually and through collective bodies, returns not within a space of telling, but rather within vocal gaps—silences—that contrast with the singing that occupies her primary spoken form of communication. As Chapter 2 explains, Fausta's language of song marks her subjectivity first through an acousmatic passage between her and her mother in a transmission of both memory and pain. Fausta's moments of song pave a vocal passage for the returns of stories of her cultural traditions, offering a linguistic strategy of communication not only in her native Quechua, but also within a musical syntax. However, the body behind and within these songs becomes subject to the imbalance between subjectivities between speaker and listener. Fausta's melody, though culturally celebratory, is also encumbered by loss (of herself, her voice, and her tradition) as it floats from her

body into the ears of Aída, whose colonial listening logic organizes the music into a marketable piece.

As has been explored, Fausta's trauma, doubly marked by her intersectional identity as an indigenous woman in post-conflict and postcolonial Peru, leaves its mark not only corporeally—as she keeps a potato in her uterus as protection against violation, fearing the sexual assault suffered by her mother with her in the womb—but also vocally, in her dependence upon musical traditions to navigate her new and unfamiliar space in Lima, and semiotically, in her capacity to use her native language for healing. After the concert in which Aída silences Fausta by confining her literal and figurative voice to the piano to be sold to the metropolitan Lima audience, Fausta sits in the back seat of the car while Aída talks on the phone and to the driver about the success of the song. Fausta, left to new vocal configurations, bravely chooses to participate in this conversation by asking, "les gustó mucho, ¿no?" ("They really liked it, didn't they?), calling forth a dual meaning hovering between affirmation and condemnation that is enough to threaten Aída. In response, Aída forces Fausta out of the vehicle and leaves her in the city late at night (despite her sexual trauma), implying that her employment has been terminated.

Fausta's attempt to resist the forces of the class and racial dynamics in place between her and her employer is unsuccessful in its moment of articulation. However, it marks a turning point in the film leading to its denouement. Fausta later returns to Aída's house in secret to take the pearls that are owed to her, only to faint on her way out from the health effects of the potato. Fausta is able to gather the strength to tell Noé that she wants it taken out of her. The confidence she gains, through her voice, leads her to regain agency over her own body, a decision that coincides with her ability to finally lay her mother's

remains to rest. The ambiguity between life and death that has thus far marked Fausta from fetus to adult is confronted by these paths to physical, psychological, and emotional closure.[53]

The open-ended conclusions of *Taxi, un encuentro* and *La teta asustada* are built upon affective foundations that are directed towards a healing that is partially achieved through audience engagement and an emotional investment that co-constructs the ending they might hope for. This is a process that implicates the viewer through what Podalsky summarizes as a "mobilizing effect" in reference to Elsaesser's scholarship on cultural products related to the Holocaust (84). On the other hand, with respect to Lucrecia Martel's filmic narratives that disturb the potential for neatness, rather than call for closure, Podalsky observes an epistemological dimension to the affective experience that puts into question the stability of knowledge and how the audience comes into what they know through sensorial access (19).

Within the fragmented narrative structure of *La ciénaga*, for example, the acoustic and acousmatic not only affirm the disintegration of the house, family, and the stories and worlds within them, but also project negotiations of self and desire that emerge in tension with the decaying infrastructure of these surrounding spaces. *La niña santa* also shows this clearly through the juxtaposition of the dominant masculine gaze (held by Jano) and those of Helena and Amalia. While Jano's gaze reduces Helena to a sexualized body through framing technique (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 89), we have also explored how she becomes

[53] See Chapter 4 of *Fertile Visions: The Uterus as a Narrative Space in Contemporary Cinema from the Americas* by Anne Carruthers for an in-depth account of Fausta's early witnessing from prior to her birth and the community trauma communicated through the bodily landscape and its spectatorial relationships.

implicated as a passive recipient of his gaze through vocal tethering. Meanwhile, Amalia's gaze (and voice) interrupts within this triangle as an active agent that performs her desire (Forcinito, *Óyeme* 90). Amalia's channeling of deep spirituality is directly linked to her corporeality and sexual desires, and her voice and subjectivity actively position her within a vibratory tension with Jano that mirrors their physical encounter while the Theremin plays. Notably, these resonations irrupt with uncertainty in the final part of the narrative as they pass through as rumors that reach Helena: one of the doctors sexually assaulted Amalia.

As we have discussed, part of Amalia's performance of desire comes through vocally as mutters of prayers that disturb and resist the *logos* of the listening sphere. Martel's character Momi in *La ciénaga*, another young woman exploring her sexuality within the scope of a decaying familial and social space, utilizes her voice in a similar, empowering capacity. Momi's words are the first to be spoken in the film within the foreboding introductory sequence constituted by the stormy soundscape and the fragmented bodies of Momi's family members by the pool. In a whisper that transitions from low and incomprehensible to quietly understandable, she repeats a prayer to God for giving her Isabel, the family maid with whom she lays in bed as they nap.[54] Here, the whisper underscores Momi's desire, grounding her gaze towards Isabel within the realm of the acoustic (Forcinito 81).

[54] For an analysis of representations of queer desire within Martel's films, see Ruby Rich's *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut*, Duke University Press, 2013, pp. 177–180. For an account of Momi's sexuality through the lens of Judith Butler and abject bodies, see Deborah Martin's *The Cinema of Lucrecia Martel*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2016, pp. 44.

In contrast to Mecha's repeated yells that try—and fail—to uphold a dominant, masculine discourse over the crumbling family structure, Momi's vocal registry reveals, to the intimate listener, her secret desires in words whose semiotic boundaries risk dissipation in the whisper. Her tone, quiet against the *logos*, affirms her sexuality, but only just enough so as to almost not be heard. Like Cavarero, Deborah Martin affirms the importance of the voice's sounds over its meaning: "Like much of the speech and sound in the film, the communicative and dramatic function of [Momi's] words recedes in comparison to their musicality and materiality" (*Cinema* 31).

It is not clear whether Isabel, who nudges her arm against Momi as she tries to sleep, understands what Momi is saying or if she is just disturbed by the sounds of the whispering. The possibility of Momi's desire, and also the possibility of its denial, rely on the disjunctive zone between her vocal projection and Isabel's attention as a listener. This relationship becomes reversed when Momi spies on Isabel as she goes to confront her boyfriend, El Perro, at a party. Through the blockage of visual framing and music, Momi is privy to their moving mouths without any clear indication that their words have reached her.[55]

Momi's later attempts at talking to Isabel as they lay in bed are also left without closure as Momi asks her multiple times if she is sleeping, while the audience gets a privileged view of Isabel's open eyes. It is assumed that Isabel is pregnant—the reason she

[55] El Perro serves as a figure that reinforces the dominance of masculinity over the lower-class Isabel who is implied to have left her employment in order to raise his child. Aguilar draws a connection between El Perro's nickname ("the dog") and the unseen dog that provokes Luciano's death as a manifestation of "a threatening and sinister otherness" (*Other Worlds* 135).

must leave her employment at the end of the film—a realization that only comes through fragmented visuality and denied aurality. As Aguilar describes, "The people are rendered inaccessible through frames, distances, and silences" (*Other Worlds* 135). Words and their sounds, like images (such as the image of the Virgin confirmed to have been seen by locals), guide the regimes of knowing in the film, in addition to the projection and fulfillment of desire, but only through sensorial experiences and interactions that are not fully witnessed by the audience.

In Momi's case, however, her vocal resistance occupies a space that re-writes the capacity of meaning-making through whispers and concealment. On the other hand, Isabel's experience as a lower-class mestiza woman renders her voice less subject to empowerment. When she approaches Mecha to explain, in a form of resignation, that she will need to leave the house to go to her sister's (presumably to raise the child), Mecha erupts upon her words by firing her instead, stripping her further of any agency she has over the terms of her precarious living situation.

Momi's words, however, hide resistance in a double-meaning that contrasts not only with the exaggerated volume of Mecha, who seems to lose semiotic capacity each time she yells, but also with the attempts of vocal resistance in *Paloma de papel* by the child soldiers in Sendero Luminoso. Like Mecha, Juan/Cirilo and his Sendero comrade Modesto resort to yelling as a signifying reaction to the disintegration of their worlds which comes to interfere directly with their identitary and corporeal subjectivities. Modesto, a politically fervent boy who was inducted at an early age to the Sendero Luminoso group and grew up with their political language and order, serves as a contrast to Juan/Cirilo, who has a more limited capacity to internalize the collective ideological voice of the guerrillas.

Modesto's violent leg injury in a mine explosion reflects the strength of his long-term adoption of the Sendero Luminoso cause, and the effects of his ventriloquial submission are shown to run deeply in his vocal logos. Modesto cries out in pain, but the words enveloped in these corporal encumbrances deny his pain; he repeats that he is not crying, and he asks that in the name of the cause that they shoot him so that he does not have to live in paralysis—not only physically, but also vocally.

Scarry's approach to pain not only as resisting language but also as an active destructive agent describes the conflict in Modesto's body as he cries out, reverting to a child-like state that is "anterior to language" (4). The strength of the signification of his ideological script clashes with the reality of his bodily pain, and Modesto begs to be killed so as to not compromise his body, which must remain in service to his voice (and that of Sendero Luminoso). Modesto is able to hold, within his vocal space, the weight of mismatch between meaning and reality until the Sendero group shoots him.

These vocal reinforcements of the materiality of the body manifest as auto-affective reactions as these characters cling to themselves and their being as evasive strategies of their dissolution. In other words, the emphasis on presence through voice, whether as a tool to affirm or challenge the social and political conditions of subjectivity, underscores the risk or fear of becoming lost, spectral, or a mere acoustic shadow of being. In this way, the specter, through its ontological fading, invokes the acousmatic as a sonic grip on the world that it is leaving—or that it is leaving it—behind. Such a revenant figure, for Derrida, "begins by coming back" (*Specters* 11).

This sense of "coming back" constitutes the narrative of the final vignette of Iñárritu's *Amores perros* and is grounded through the vocal sphere as an attempt to resist

symbolic death. While the first two stories of the film have been studied for their soundscapes and acousmatic elements that figure into power dynamics and social relations, the final part centers on El Chivo, who struggles to find purpose and integration in the world that morally crumbles around him. He is shown in brief returns throughout the entire film, weaving his way through the streets almost invisibly and witnessing slices of the stories of Octavio and Susana and of Daniel and Valeria, including the accident that binds these characters. Latin American film scholar Dolores Tierney calls El Chivo a "revolutionary revenant" or a ghost that has been shunted out of both his family and society in the transition from professor to guerrilla fighter to hitman ("Residual" 259–260). Even his ragged physical appearance confines him to a state between life and death, a symbol of the defeated political revolutionaries he once represented to confront the now-dominant bourgeoisie (Reber 283). Brent Smith, who borrows from Benedict Anderson to describe El Chivo's marginal, subversive relationship to this capitalist-driven Mexico, also emphasizes the political significance of his spectrality as a failed attempt to dismantle the dominant, economic-driven temporality of the nation:

> El Chivo exists as a ghostly, liminal figure, residing in the interstices between the 'homogenous, empty time' and the zero-time of the nation. El Chivo's past as a guerilla, which we first learn of through a conversation between Gustavo and Leonardo, invokes to an extent the rhetorical figure of revolution in the PRI's revolutionary nationalism's imagining of the national past. (275)

The dialogue between Gustavo, who means to hire El Chivo to kill his brother, and Leonardo, El Chivo's police friend, refers to the Mexican Dirty War, the backdrop of

Alfonso Cuarón's recent film *Roma*, which foregrounded the 1971 *Halconazo* massacre that killed 120 people.[56] The *Halconazo* was preceded by the famous premeditated attack in Tlatelolco against student protesters against the 1968 Olympics, where conflicting news reports concealed the nature of the attack in defense of the Mexican State. Lasting from roughly 1964 to 1982, the period of political tensions between the conservative Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and leftist groups resulted, according to the Association of Relatives of the Detained, Disappeared, and Victims of Human Rights Abuses in Mexico, in the forced disappearance of 1,200 people.

Like in the cases of Argentina and Peru, collective memory dynamics in the aftermath of the Mexican Dirty War have also been affected by processes of impunity, a political legacy that additionally carries into the events of *El traspatio*. El Chivo, though not "disappeared" in the same way as some of his comrades may have been, remains a spectral figure that has been re-written out of formal society and its history.[57] As Paul Julian Smith points out, the Dirty War is the only historical reference in *Amores perros*, and Gustavo confuses "guerrilla" to mean the Zapatistas rather than the Dirty War of decades prior, a mix-up that underscores the national amnesia at the turn of the century towards Mexico's violent history (38).

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[56] Other filmic accounts that have received critical acclaim include *Rojo Amanecer* (Dir. Jorge Fons, Mexico, 1990) and various documentaries including *Trazando Aleida* (Dir. Christiane Burkhard, Mexico, 2007) and *Flor en otomí* (Dir. Luisa Riley, Mexico, 2012).

[57] Other groups have also been left out of formal accounts, for example, women revolutionaries in Mexico. For more on their participation and the role of the audiovisual in voicing their stories, see Viviana Beatriz MacManus's article "'Ghosts of Another Era': Gender and Haunting in Visual Cultural Narratives of Mexico's Dirty War." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* vol. 24, no. 4, 2015, pp. 435–452.

Amores perros recounts that El Chivo's participation as a young revolutionary, presumably against the long-standing PRI is, ultimately, what led to his conflict with his family. His daughter Maru has also forgotten him, thinking he is dead, at his own behest. However, El Chivo still haunts in the shadows of his family, while never achieving the state of fatherhood he might have. Ignacio Sánchez-Prado draws a connection between El Chivo and Daniel, from the second story, in that both men have abandoned their families, and both are given the opportunity to make amends, which depends upon a telephone call that neither uses successfully (40–41).

When looking through personal pictures, El Chivo cries out as he compares his old picture side-by-side with a more current one, in a vocal gesture of the long, painful passage of time that separates the mere millimeters between each photograph. In another photo of his estranged daughter's graduation, El Chivo's placement of his own portrait over the face of the stepfather who replaced him in the family emphasizes his commitment to reconciling with Maru and denouncing his current job. As a hitman, he is a mediator between life and death, yet he has become trapped between them. Wishing to choose life, he shaves, cleans his body, sticks a picture of his new face on the graduation photograph, and enters his daughter's empty house.

El Chivo resists the ghostly void in which he is trapped not only by adjusting his appearance, but also by leaving for Maru the altered graduation picture (a promise for what lies ahead) and a wad of cash earned on the job (leaving behind the past). Apart from these material clues of his presence in the house, in the vocal realm, he also attempts to leave his acoustic imprint. It is only after listening three times to Maru's voicemail system that he gets the courage to call and leave a message to her. Though she does not answer the phone,

El Chivo speaks to her as if she were there listening. He calls himself a "living ghost" and explains the day he left her in the name of the revolution, so that he could share the world with her. He confesses it was his own idea to let Maru believe he was dead, but tells her "Voy a regresar a buscarte en cuanto encuentre el valor para mirarte a los ojos."[58] In this sense, his monologue, which will eventually reach her ears as a disembodied, acousmatic message, is the closest step he is able to take to become fully present to her. When the voicemail beeps off, his last words saying that he loves her are cut off, and Maru will never hear them. However, El Chivo's tragic story shows his newest attempt to fight with purpose and love as his own voice, which will be received by Maru for the first time in her memory, inscribes the possibility of a future where they can reunite in person. The fact that the film does not confirm whether Maru listens to the message, and ends with El Chivo walking away from both camera and city, leaves open the possibility of this reunion.

These examples are not exhaustive, but highlight a series of channels where acousmaticity manifests beyond the duality of the mere seen and heard by pushing the boundaries between presence and absence, self and other, individual and collective, the known and unknown, and processes of becoming or undoing. Voice, in these experiences, is a performance of paradox in which acousmaticity is born as an edgeless boundary of such interstices which are constantly in motion, whether moved by the speakers themselves or the structural dynamics in which they act as acoustic subjects.

On the one hand, ventriloquism and the elusive, multifaceted vocal body serves as a point of departure for which to interrogate different levels of agency and strategies to

[58] "I'll be back to find you once I have the courage to look you in the eyes." (1:29:46–1:29:53)

navigate trauma and violence within the sonic sphere. Meanwhile, the voice that simultaneously belongs, and does not belong, to the speaker, is articulated through various patterns such as repetitions, returns, or in contexts of resistance to its conditions of production. This range of sonic mirrors shows the ways in which bodies can echo and channel voices, identities, and the acoustic imprints of violent events. In their conjunction, what these examples indicate are similarities, as well as differences, in how pain, loss, and agency are navigated through vocal spaces in various cinematic contexts, in addition to showing the necessity of adjusting the ear and conditions of listening to access the new meanings that are created, or destroyed, within the acousmatic polyphony beyond the mere referent of the visual body.

Conclusion

Vos no tenés que hablar fuerte, porque ellos te escuchan.
Afuera no.
Por más que grites y grites, no escuchan.[59]

You don't have to speak loudly, because they can hear you.
But not outside.
As much as you scream and scream, they cannot hear.

The contradiction observed by Nancy and Pato's imprisoned acquaintance in the brothel in *La mosca en la ceniza* underscores the power within acoustic regimes, particularly on the side of reception. The brothel owners do not need to work hard to silence the trafficked girls under the comfortable assumption that, within the general acoustic jurisdiction of the neighborhood, most people choose not to engage, or do not know how to listen to the voices that are calling out for help. We may return here to reflect once more on Jean-Luc Nancy's distinction between hearing and listening, where the latter implies a confrontation with sense, and everything beyond its signifying capacity (32). Within the emergent "empire of the senses" identified by David Howes that marks a shift in how sense is made across disciplines, geographies, and cultures, it becomes necessary to re-visit sensorial experiences while understanding the role and limitations of language in addressing them (4). As the numerous examples of Latin American cinema explored here have demonstrated, through a variety of formalist dynamics and styles, acousmatic sound and voice fall into the tensions between meaning-making and that which resists or

[59] *La mosca en la ceniza*, Dir. Gabriela David, Argentina, 38:28.

reconfigures signification, creating unique platforms for storytelling and representative strategies of specific structural conflicts.

This dissertation has introduced a multidisciplinary framework that considers sound, cinema and trauma that provides insight (if not "insound") into the ways in which acousmatic sound operates as a platform of creative expression, resistance, or compliance with different power dynamics since the neoliberal era of cinematic production in Latin America. Each chapter has considered a range of acousmatic representations and has discussed different possible ways to approach them, considering their cultural contexts of production and the stories they condition.

Although sound, and particularly acousmatic sound, resists categorization, this project has organized chapters within a layout of spaces and affects, which are effectively what sound creates upon, and for, its listeners. It begins with sound environments and ends with circulating voices that reconfigure the spheres of acoustic subjectivity formed in cinematic practice, ultimately implicating speakers, listeners, and generating co-constructed stories. In their conjunction, these chapters connect the invisible acoustic spaces and the voices that channel them across films from Argentina, Mexico, Peru, and Cuba that represent emergent or unique experimentation, if not patterns, in sound practice as it relates to stories of violence or trauma in recent decades.

It is difficult to approach the aesthetic patterns of cinematic production within the New Cinema movement in Latin America without remembering that its key points of overlap involve a project of decentralization, whether politically or aesthetically. The shift towards different affective appeals, which Podalsky analyzes in a range of films from the same period, forms a part of this transition, in that their "sense-making

potential" marks a contrast with historical productions (7). As the case studies in this dissertation show, sound strategies in particular are emerging as key tools of interrogation and expression of identity within Latin American cinema. In turn, these films, using their transnational bases in conjunction with new modes of technological accessibility, reach further into the global mediascape, implicating listeners beyond their original contexts. If, as Kane reminds us, engaging with acousmatic sound involves listening *in* context, then this project aims to bridge sensibilities by providing some context *with* which to listen as a step towards a stronger, more intimate relationship with some of the cultural bodies that are speaking in the twenty-first century.

I would like to conclude with a discussion on the practice of listening launched by Lisbeth Lipari, whose scholarship explores its ethical dimensions through a reading of Levinas. Lipari revisits Levinas' ruminations on the encounter with an Other through visual means, that is, through their face, which Levinas considers as the manifestation of alterity:

> The other is a face precisely because faces manifest exteriority, otherness outside the self. Moreover, because faces both reveal and conceal, the face of the other reminds us that there is always already more, as yet unseen. (Lipari, "Rhetoric's Other" 232)

Using this intimate encounter as a point of departure, Lipari reflects upon the way we engage with an Other specifically through the acoustic, or through their voice:

> The voice of the other, unlike the face of the other, is invisible and cannot be seen. It has not one but many surfaces, and it reverberates with the echoes of all the other voices past and present, heard and unheard. As

> sound, the voice of the other is a wave of energy that surrounds me, enters me. ("Rhetoric's Other" 233)

This type of listening recalls Schaeffer's early approaches to acousmatic listening, or "reduced listening"—a means of making sense of sound which, as Chion reasons, is possible by engaging not only with its cause, but also its characteristics, which with practice can come to be identified (*Audio-Vision* 32). However, Lipari's approach, which, in a nod to Levinas, she calls "listening otherwise," suits the nuances between meaning, experience, and ethics: "To listen otherwise is to welcome the other inside, but as an other, as a guest, as a not-me. It doesn't insist on understanding or familiarity, or shared feelings" (*Listening* 56). Listening, then, is another means of negotiating that which is inaccessible or resists comprehension.

These reflections, in their totality, can point to how ongoing cinematic practices in Latin America, particularly those that interrogate heavily charged experiences with violence and its legacies, might inscribe their invisible sonic imprints upon their listeners. They also mark the work that remains to be done in revisiting what has already been "told" through sonic tools, in addition to paying close attention to how these strategies are emerging in new films, and also across geographic and cultural spaces in Latin America that have not been discussed in this project. The case studies I have used here serve to open and expand upon the relationships that can be drawn between cinematic representation in the region, cultural trauma in the postcolonial moment, and frameworks of acousmatic sound that hold the capacity to influence, in their conjunction, new forms of sensorial engagement with the multi-textured sounds and voices that speak through to us.

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