

Latin American Women's Documentary Cinema:
Contexts, Processes, and Forms
1975-1994

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Declaration

I, Lorena Cervera Ferrer, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

All translations provided are my own unless otherwise stated.

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Abstract

From the 1970s, Latin American women began making documentary films with clear political intents. These films shed light on the precarious conditions that characterized women's entry to the workforce and other labour struggles, on reproductive rights and women's role in production and reproduction, and on the inevitable questioning of identity that results from migration and displacement. However, the historiography of Latin American cinema continues to ignore the legacy of these filmmakers. This thesis acknowledges and re-signifies women's documentaries and reclaims their contributions to film history. Moreover, it provides a new lens through which to revisit the history of Latin American documentary while also adding to the scholarship on Latin American women's filmmaking through both theoretical analysis and creative practice. In the written component, I propose three approximations to the study of Latin American women's documentary cinema between 1975 and 1994. To do so, I have curated a selection of nine documentaries produced during these decades that illustrate some of the thematic interests, modes of authorship and production, and formal strategies and aesthetic devices employed by women filmmakers. Ultimately, I contend that this corpus of work was produced during a formative moment for women's and feminist cinema. The analyses of these films have informed the making of the creative component. The short documentary *Processing Images from Caracas* traces the archive of activist, filmmaker, and photographer Franca Donda and the film collectives that she was part of, Cine Urgente and Grupo Feminista Miércoles. It also shows how Latin American women's documentaries and other relevant materials that could make up an archive of women's and feminist cinema are at the brink of disappearance and foregrounds the urgent need to create such an archive.

Link to the Short Documentary *Processing Images from Caracas*

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/tz0bp829yq89ics/Processing%20Images%20From%20Caracas.mp4?dl=0>

Impact Statement

In this statement I address both the demonstrable and the potential impact that my research has made/could make. First, throughout my PhD, I have published three articles in academic journals, some of which have been cited by other researchers; I have presented at several conferences, including Visible Evidence and LASA; and I have been invited to teach seminars at institutions such as FLACSO in Ecuador. Thus, the dissemination of my work is already contributing to broader scholarly discussions on Latin American women's cinema and is helping restore the value of and spread knowledge about women filmmakers. Second, I was the primary organizer of the conference *Cozinhando Imagens, Tejiendo Feminismos. Latin American Feminist Film and Visual Art Collectives* that took place online in April 2021. This event brought together scholars, artists/filmmakers, and activists based in Latin America, the United States, Europe, and the United Kingdom. Its reach and impact is demonstrated by the fact that Professor Julia Lesage invited us to edit a special section for the journal *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*. Moreover, for this conference, we created English subtitles for *Cosas de mujeres*, one of the documentaries included in my thesis, so now it can be programmed at international events. Third, informed by my experiences as a PhD candidate and my approach to practice-based research, I co-directed *#PrecarityStory* (2020). This short documentary has been shown and discussed in academic and non-academic spaces, including film festivals such as Alcances –where it received two awards– and by media outlets such as *Málaga Hoy* and RNE. Finally, the potential impact that my research could have is twofold. I intend to turn my written thesis into a book and my short documentary into a feature-length film. My thesis looks at an area of research that has never been extensively explored. Thus, publishing a book will make a contribution to knowledge and could also animate the material preservation of women's films. In addition, it could push for public discussions on issues that range from women's role in production and reproduction to the effects of displacement on women's lives. These discussions could raise awareness and improve our understanding of gender inequalities in contemporary societies and encourage policymakers to tackle them. I intend to use my short documentary to get funding for the making of a feature-length film and, once this is finished, I will distribute it via both film festivals and academic events in order to spark collective thinking about film archives, which ultimately could benefit how film institutions build and maintain their archives and how countries preserve their film legacy.

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Introduction

From the 1970s, Latin American women began making documentary films with clear political intents. These films shed light on the precarious conditions that characterized women's entry to the workforce and other labour struggles, on reproductive rights and women's role in production and reproduction, and on the inevitable questioning of identity that results from migration and displacement. However, the historiography of Latin American cinema continues to ignore the legacy of these filmmakers. The criteria that film scholars have used to establish the canon of the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC) and, more specifically, Latin American documentary cinema, has tended to leave out a number of films, filmmakers, and collectives that should be revisited and acknowledged (Rich 1997; Tedesco 2014). Overall, this research aims to contribute to the re-historicization and theorization of Latin American cinema from a feminist perspective by reclaiming the value of a selection of documentaries made by women. Moreover, this thesis provides a new lens through which to revisit the history of Latin American documentary while also adding to the scholarship on Latin American women's filmmaking through both theoretical analysis and creative practice.

In the written component, I propose three approximations to the study of Latin American women's documentary cinema between 1975 and 1994. To do so, I have curated a selection of nine documentaries produced during these decades that illustrate some of the thematic interests, modes of authorship and production, and formal strategies and aesthetic devices employed by women filmmakers. In these explorations, I inscribe the selected films within the national cultures from which they emerged and the transnational political discourses and cinematic modes with which they engaged. I also offer formal analysis and, through the use of a range of theoretical tools, re-signify these films. The task of re-signifying unfolds as a means to ascribe new meanings to images and to recognize the symbolic value in films that have been, in most cases, overlooked or overshadowed. The re-signification of these images reveals, more broadly, how women's (documentary) cinema negotiates and challenges well-established ideologies and imaginaries, and serves as interruptions of patriarchal discourses. Ultimately, I contend that this corpus of work was produced during a formative moment for women's and feminist cinema. Broadly, the question that motivates this thesis is how to inscribe the corpus of women's cinema in film history without uncritically reproducing the same methodologies that cast a shadow on marginal cinemas and alternative film practices. How do we re-write a history of Latin American cinema that acknowledges the diverse contributions of women documentary filmmakers?

The first approximation that I propose was influenced by the Cuban revolution and the Marxist underpinnings of militant cinema, but slipped into feminist practices and discourses to deal with women's labour struggles. These films explore the double shift, the incorporation of women into factories, and the status of domestic work. Here I include *The Double Day* (Helena Solberg, 1975), *Amor, mujeres y flores* [*Love, Women, and Flowers*] (Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva, 1984-1989), and *Porque quería estudiar* [*Because I Wanted to Go to School*] (María Barea, 1990). The second approximation focuses on the work of the feminist film collectives Cine Mujer in Mexico and Colombia and the Venezuelan Grupo Feminista Miércoles, that emerged from the 1970s burgeoning women's movements. The films I have selected aimed at fuelling public debates on issues such as reproductive rights, motherhood and the reproduction of patriarchal ideology, and the need to question and expand ideas about womanhood. These are *Cosas de mujeres* [*Women's Issues*] (Rosa Martha Fernández, 1978), *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* [*I, You, Ismaelina*] (1981), and *Carmen Carrascal* (Eulalia Carrizosa, 1982). During the second half of the 20th century, extreme violence across the region caused, directly or indirectly, mass migration. Amongst those who left were a number of filmmakers who continued to make films from abroad. The third approximation looks at how diasporic experiences facilitated the subjective turn in documentary and includes: *Susana* (Susana Blaustein Muñoz, 1980), *Journal inachevé* [*Unfinished Diary*] (Marilú Mallet, 1982), and *El diablo nunca duerme* [*The Devil Never Sleeps*] (Lourdes Portillo, 1994).

As a practice-based thesis, the research conducted, the methods applied, and the analyses of the selected films have informed the making of the practical component, the short documentary *Processing Images from Caracas*. This is to say, the making of this film builds from the three approximations developed in the written component. This short documentary traces the archive of activist, filmmaker, and photographer Franca Donda and the film collectives that she was part of, Cine Urgente and Grupo Feminista Miércoles. It also demonstrates how Latin American women's documentaries and other relevant materials that could make up an archive of women's and feminist cinema are at the brink of disappearance. From the realization that women's cinema has been, predominantly, denied proper archival value, my initial research question was expanded. It was no longer only concerned with how to inscribe women's documentaries within film history, but it also foregrounded the urgent need to protect these materials and create such an archive.

A Feminist Perspective on Latin American Political Cinema

Within the broader context of the 1960s radical film cultures and the possibility of formulating new cinemas, Latin America witnessed the emergence of new political cinemas that were named with different labels, including militant, third, and imperfect cinema, amongst others. These ideas were discussed and developed through a community of filmmakers formed around cine-clubs and film festivals, and were articulated in manifestos such as ‘Cinema and Underdevelopment’ (Birri 1962), ‘The Aesthetics of Hunger’ (Rocha 1965), ‘For an Imperfect Cinema’ (García Espinosa 1969), and ‘Towards a Third Cinema’ (Solanas and Getino 1969).¹ Committed to ‘artistic innovation and social transformation’ (Burton 1986: IX), the NLAC became the umbrella term to refer to these cinemas.²

The making of these political cinemas unfolded from the public discourse of the revolutionary hero foregrounded by the triumph of the Cuban revolution in 1959, which inspired radical filmmakers to make socially and politically committed films. Indeed, in that same year, the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC) was constituted to promote the making of films across the region that could educate and politicize largely illiterate populations.³ During these years, documentary was often prioritized as the cinematic form that could most effectively denounce oppression, bear witness to the continent’s poverty, and agitate against neocolonization. These films provided counter-narratives, stories of liberation, decoloniality, and socialism, fulfilling the expectations of festivalgoers who, in a post-1968 scenario, still longed for change. Besides, these filmmakers were also intellectuals who theorised about the significance of their counter-cinema and wrote manifestos that were of great value as primary sources with which to write the history of Latin American cinema. Moreover, the making of political cinemas aimed to counter the influence of Hollywood’s ‘monopolistic control of film distribution and exhibition’ (Shohat 1991: 45).

¹ The festivals that enabled the emergence of the NLAC were the Viña del Mar Film Festival in Chile in 1967 and 1969 and the First Muestra de Cine Documental Latinoamericano in Venezuela in 1968.

² The emergence of the NLAC took place due to the region’s particular historical context. In the second half of the 20th century, Latin America witnessed how revolutionary struggles were undermined by brutal dictatorships. Authoritarian right-wing regimes ruled in Paraguay (1954), Guatemala (1954), El Salvador (1961), Honduras (1963), Brazil (1964), Bolivia (1964, 1971), Argentina (1966, 1976), Chile (1973), and Uruguay (1973). Many of these regimes were supported by the Operation Condor. Officially implemented in 1975, this was a campaign of political repression and state terror led by the USA, whose aim was to eradicate communist or Soviet ideas.

³ One of the founders of this institution was Julio García Espinosa who, along with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, had directed *El Mégano* [*Charcoal Workers*] in 1955. As Stephen Hart suggests, this film ‘was the blueprint for the politicized formula of filmmaking’ (2015: 35) that led to the emergence of the NLAC. Both Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, and also Argentinian Fernando Birri and Colombian Gabriel García Márquez, studied film at the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* in Rome in the early 1950s, where they learnt about Italian Neorealism. Later, they adapted this socially-engaged and humbly-produced film movement to Latin America.

The great success of these films and ideas within both Latin American and international film festivals consolidated a canon comprised primarily of films made by male filmmakers, such as Argentinians Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, Bolivian Jorge Sanjinés, and Chilean Patricio Guzmán, amongst others. Whereas some women filmmakers, like Colombian Marta Rodríguez and Cuban Sara Gómez, are recognized as part of the NLAC, so many others are still ignored, proving that ‘the revolutionary militant lens has underestimated even other forms of engagement, such as the prolonged impact of feminism on film’ (Paranaguá 2003: 76). As Zuzana Pick has pointed out, ‘in terms of representation, the films of the movement have perpetuated if not explicitly endorsed traditional images of women. By underscoring class as the primary instance of social relations, the films of the New Latin American Cinema have rarely taken into account gender-specific forms of social and political oppression’ (1993: 66). Not only were women underrepresented and women’s issues overlooked, but women filmmakers were also excluded from directorial and other above-the-line roles.

If the 1960s was dominated by struggles of liberation that inspired radical filmmakers to make a revolutionary political cinema, the 1970s witnessed how autonomous women’s movements questioned and contested the role of women in society and inspired women to make feminist films. From this decade, an increasing number of women filmmakers made documentaries that fitted into, diverted from, and ultimately diversified the practices, politics, and aesthetics of the NLAC. Yet their contributions continue to be overshadowed. Amongst the reasons why the study of women’s documentary cinema during these decades has received little scholarly attention, I consider necessary to highlight and briefly summarize three of them. First, the prominence of the NLAC and its disregard for challenging the (under)representation of or involving women inadvertently cast a shadow that continues to obscure the work of Latin American women filmmakers. Second, unlike Anglophone and European countries, the development of women’s documentary cinema was neither accompanied by the creation of a circuit of women’s film festivals, nor by academic research or film criticism that paid attention to this phenomenon.⁴ Instead, women’s cinema was exhibited primarily through non-cinematic circuits, such as the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist *Encuentros*. Third, the rejection of realist codes by feminist film theory fuelled the marginalization of documentary amongst international feminist film scholars and left a large number of documentaries made by women ignored (Juhasz 1994; Waldman and Walker 1999; Warren 2010; Mayer and Oroz 2011).

⁴ *Cocina de imágenes*, the First Film and Video Exhibition made by Latin American and Caribbean Women was the first Latin American women’s film festival organized in the region and took place in Mexico City in 1987. For a detailed exploration of this event and its significance see Oroz 2022.

Why Latin American Women's Documentary Cinema between 1975 and 1994?

Although the study of Latin American cinema has shifted from a pan-Americanist to a national focus (Noriega 2000), the written component of this research problematizes national boundaries and traces links amongst women filmmakers and their work in different countries. Despite its Latin American scope, I acknowledge the importance of not dismissing national singularities (Paranaguá 2003; Mestman 2016). Thereby, I pay attention to the contextual specificities in which the films analysed were made. I inscribe each film as part of a complex cinematic and historical milieu, informed by both national events and circumstances and transnational flows of ideas and praxis, as well as by an array of film cultures and political discourses. The resulting approach offers a constellation of films that are broadly tied together by a set of criteria that has prioritized shared thematic interests, authorial modes, production practices, political intentions, formal devices, and aesthetic strategies. But I have also made an effort to include productions made by women who come from various countries (Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina, and Chile) and, especially, those that have received little scholarly attention. Including both short and feature-length films, this selection ranges from student or independent works, made with scarce resources, to films that have been supported by consolidated industries. In particular, this research places documentary as the axis. The focus on documentary responds to the great influence that this film form had in the region, especially amongst women; and the existence of a great legacy that has been overlooked.

Alison Butler defines women's cinema as those films 'made by, addressed to, or concerned with women, or all three. It is neither a genre nor a movement in film history, it has no single lineage of its own, no national boundaries, no filmic or aesthetic specificity, but traverses and negotiates cinematic and cultural traditions and critical and political debates' (2002: 1). The works selected in this thesis fit this definition. All of them are made by, addressed to (albeit not exclusively), and are primarily concerned with women. Although I explore the work of self-proclaimed feminist film collectives and other feminist filmmakers and I regard the selected films as feminist, I have chosen not to use this word in the title because several Latin American women filmmakers do not identify as such. This is the case of Marta Rodríguez and Lourdes Portillo, to name two. Moreover, for many Latin American women, feminism was seen as an Anglo-American and European ideology whose campaigns had no relevance to their everyday struggles. As addressed in Chapter 2, the feminist agenda that

dictated which issues were prioritized by women's movements often obeyed the needs and concerns of white middle- and upper-class urban women, which led to the othering of those who did not fit within these categories.

Recent studies of women's cinema have demonstrated that women filmmakers were either excluded or pushed out of directorial roles, particularly after the entrenchment of Hollywood's studio system in the 1920s and the commercial development of national film industries that followed in other countries.⁵ These studies have also shown that women's cinema did not completely disappear, but it was and continues to be largely overshadowed. Revisionist projects have shed light on numerous women whose work in roles above- and below-the-line has been dismissed from film history. Patricia White notes that 'reclaiming women filmmakers' work within mainstream industries and in national and alternative film movements entails the re-evaluation of concepts of film authorship and criteria of film historiography' (1998: 125). Contributing to the collective endeavour of writing the history of Latin American women's documentary cinema requires a similar approach which, on the one hand, disrupts the centrality of the director and, on the other hand, acknowledges the accounts of women filmmakers, interrogates the sources available, and draws from materials that have been previously neglected. The way I propose to avoid reproducing approaches that deify single directors is by exploring an array of films made by different filmmakers, rather than focusing on the filmography of individual directors. Besides, there is a more down-to-earth reasoning behind this decision, which has to do with the fact that women's filmographies are frequently full of gaps. Most of the women included in this thesis had to combine their career as filmmakers with other tasks conventionally attributed to women, from motherhood to domestic work. Thus, a filmography that is consistent and prolonged in time was something that only few of them were able to achieve.

Although adopting a gendered analytical framework may fall into ghettoising women and their work (Martin and Shaw 2017: 2), there are several reasons why the focus on women's documentaries is timely and relevant. Latin American women filmmakers made films that covered issues rarely explored by their male counterparts, often related to female identity and women's struggles. Besides, they implemented practices that emphasized the creation of safe spaces where women could feel comfortable to speak out and established collaborative relationships between filmmakers and film subjects. This is not to say that all women

⁵ Amongst these studies, The Women Film Pioneers Project (WFPP) was initiated by Jane Gaines to restore the contributions of women film pioneers to silent cinema. Whereas Barbara Quart has demonstrated how the advent of sound and the corporate studio system promoted the exclusion of women behind cameras (1989).

filmmakers have the ability to establish intimate bonds with the subjects represented in their films or the reality they inhabit. They are not part of a homogenous category. However, I argue, women filmmakers often made films differently.⁶ In addition, some of the documentaries made by Latin American women during this period were produced independently or with scarce means and have been denied proper archival value. Even though the digitization of 16mm prints and original videotapes by Latin American film institutions and universities has greatly contributed to the dissemination of documentaries made by women, this process was often conducted with technologies that are not suitable for long-term preservation. Besides, many of these institutions operate with not enough funding, which translates into a series of deficiencies that critically affect their archives. The neglect has been such that some films are on the brink of disappearance, such as in the case of *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*. Rescuing women's documentary cinema from complete erasure is, therefore, an urgent matter, as is recognizing its value and claiming its place within the history of Latin American cinema.

The films that compose this constellation were made between two significant moments. In 1975, the World Conference on Women, organized by the UN and held in Mexico City, was a catalyst for women's movements and feminist cinema across the region. As a matter of fact, Helena Solberg's *The Double Day*, which is the first film I analyse, premiered in this conference. Furthermore, over these years, the five feminist film collectives included in this thesis were formed and many women documentary filmmakers began or consolidated their careers, such as Marta Rodríguez, Marilú Mallet, Lourdes Portillo, and Susana Blaustein Muñoz.⁷ In the 1990s, the popularization of video cameras granted access to filmmaking to large numbers of women. Since then, documentary has diversified. Moreover, the last film included in this selection, Lourdes Portillo's *El diablo nunca duerme*, was released in 1994. This year is important, particularly within the context of Mexico. On the one hand, the Zapatista rebellion took place in Chiapas and, on the other hand, the North American Free Trade Agreement was launched (Carvajal *et al.* 2013). These events represent a closing moment of 'traditional ideological and partisan slogans [...] [and gave rise to] a new cycle of mobilizations that refunded activism at an international level' (p. 18). The rapid technological developments

⁶ The singularity of women's filmmaking has been pointed out in the first issue of *Women & Film*, where Susan Rice wrote a review of Kate Millett's *Three Lives* (1970) highlighting 'the intimacy that this female crew seem to have elicited from its subjects' (1972: 66). Similarly, and referring to Grupo Ukamau's film *Banderas del amanecer* [*The Flags of Dawn*] (1983), co-directed by Beatriz Palacios, Isabel Seguí emphasizes its 'ability to penetrate private spaces and the backstage of political direct action with an unprecedented closeness' (2018b: 111).

⁷ These collectives are the International Women's Film Project co-founded by Brazilian Helena Solberg, Cine Mujer in Mexico and Colombia, the Venezuelan Grupo Feminista Miércoles, and the Peruvian WARMI Cine y Video.

also changed the ways in which activist campaigns were produced and distributed. For instance, women's and feminist activism began employing a variety of artistic disciplines, some of which could be delivered more quickly in line with the fast cycles of the then emerging online platforms.

Although the organization of the selected films begins with the earliest one and ends with latest, this research does not offer a linear account of history. As a matter of fact, I question the linearity with which documentary scholars such as Bill Nichols and Pablo Piedras have historicized documentary, especially when they contend that the history of documentary has evolved towards a greater closeness with reality or an increased subjectivization. Thus, this is not a chronological or evolutionary taxonomy. Nor does it include all the variations of documentary made by Latin American women during this period. Furthermore, the boundaries that separate the proposed approximations are porous and often overlap. However, by drawing connections between contexts, processes, and forms amongst films produced in different countries by Latin American women, this research provides a way of thinking about documentary in given contexts and contributes to the work of recovering and acknowledging women's cinema. Furthermore, this research has enabled the development of a creative practice that draws from the analyses of these films and pays tribute to the overlooked work of Franca Donda and the Venezuelan film collectives that she was part of, Cine Urgente and Grupo Feminista Miércoles.

A Brief Outline of Other Latin American Women's Documentaries

The written component of this thesis explores nine films produced in a period that spans nearly twenty years, from 1975 to 1994. However, prior to and during these decades, many other documentaries directed by women were also made. In the following paragraphs, I offer an overview of some of these absences with the intention of encouraging other researchers to continue with this line of enquiry; this is to say, to revisit, acknowledge, and re-signify these other documentaries made by Latin American women. It is important to emphasize that the following overview only includes *some* and not *all* of these films. In my research trips I realized that women's cinema is particularly elusive and, as I insist throughout this introduction, was often deemed of no archival value. Therefore, very likely, there are other films yet to be found or, in the worst cases, there are films that have already disappeared.

In Latin America, women began directing documentaries in the 1920s with the Mexican sisters Adriana and Dolores Ehlers. Apart from the work of these pioneers, there is very little

research on women's documentary cinema until the 1950s, when two key figures, Mexican Carmen Toscano and Venezuelan Margot Benacerraf, began directing films. Toscano made *Memorias de un mexicano* [*Memories of a Mexican*] (1950) re-using her father's archive, which was shot between 1897 and 1946, to represent Mexican everyday life during Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship, the Mexican Revolution, and the post-revolution years.⁸ Later, she used the remaining archive to make *Ronda revolucionaria* [*Revolutionary Round*], a film that remains unreleased. Benacerraf directed *Reverón* (1952), a short documentary film about the artist Armando Reverón, and *Araya* (1959), a poetic observation of the traditional methods of extracting salt from the sea off the Araya peninsula. This feature-length documentary received the Cannes International Critic Prize (FIPRESCI) in 1959, shared with Alan Resnais' *Hiroshima mon amour* [*Hiroshima, My Love*]. Despite its great success in one of the bastions of international cinema, 'Araya's historical place in the formative history of both Venezuelan national cinema and the New Latin American Cinema movement is still contested' (Burton 2000: 51). I position *Araya* as a film that opened the way for women to make films in Venezuela and, more broadly, Latin America, but also exemplifies the exclusion of women's cinema from Latin American film history.

In the 1960s, Cubans Sara Gómez and Rosina Prado, Colombians Gabriela Samper and Marta Rodríguez, Brazilians Helena Solberg and Ana Carolina Teixeira Soares, and Argentinian Dolly Pussi began making documentaries too. Over this decade, Sara Gómez directed several short documentaries for ICAIC, including *Historia de la piratería* [*History of Piracy*] (1962), *Iré a Santiago* [*I'm Going to Santiago*] (1964), and *En la otra isla* [*On the Other Island*] (1968). However, it is her last film, *De cierta manera* [*One Way or Another*] (1974), finished after her sudden death, that gained her international recognition. In this film, she addresses issues of gender, race, and class in the years after the revolution.⁹ Despite its importance for a thesis like this one, I have not included Gómez's work in this research for different reasons. Possibly the most important one is that she is receiving increasing recognition and there are several publications on her filmography, including the edited collection *The Cinema of Sara Gómez: Reframing Revolution* (2021), where other documentaries such as *Y tenemos... sabor* [*And We Have Taste*] (1967) and *Mi aporte* [*My Contribution*] (1972) are also

⁸ Salvador Toscano is considered the founder of Mexican cinema and is credited as co-director of this film *post-mortem*.

⁹ Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Hasta cierto punto* [*Up to Certain Point*] (Cuba, 1983) also represented the culture of *machismo* in Cuban society and within the film industry. In one of the scenes, Lina (Mirta Ibarra) asks to the (fictional) director of the film: '¿Por qué no hay ninguna compañera trabajando con ustedes? ¿Ellas no pueden hacer ese trabajo? Y más tratándose de una película sobre el machismo?' [Why aren't there any women working with you? Can't they do this job? Even more because this film is about *machismo*].

analysed.¹⁰ Another Cuban filmmaker (even though from a Spanish origin) was Rosina Prado, who directed films such as *Ismaelillo* (1962), *Palmas cubanas* [*Cuban Palms*] (1963), *¿Qué es lo bello?* [*What Is Beautiful?*] (1965), *La llamada del nido* [*The Call of the Nest*] (1966), and *El zoológico* [*The Zoo*] (1968), produced by ICAIC too. Colombian Gabriela Samper has a very extensive filmography, mostly comprised of short ethnographic documentaries such as *El Páramo de Cumanday* [*The Cumanday Paramo*] (1965), *El hombre de la sal* [*The Salt Man*] (1969), *Festival folclórico de Fómeque* [*Fómeque Folk Festival*] (1969), and *Los santísimos hermanos* [*The Holy Brothers*] (1969) that were produced by Colombian television channels. Over this decade, Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva began the making of *Chircales* [*Brickmakers*] (1966-1972), an exploration of the exploitative labour conditions imposed upon a family of brickmakers in Bogotá's suburban area of Tunjuelito. *Chircales* became very successful within the emerging circuit of film festivals in both Latin America and elsewhere and is considered one of the canonical films of the NLAC. Helena Solberg's first film, the short documentary *A entrevista* [*The Interview*] (1966), combines sound interviews with middle-upper-class women with images of a bride getting ready for her wedding. This juxtaposition points at women's role in society and their complicity in the *coup d'état* that overthrow the labour government of João Goulart in 1964. I regard this film as the first feminist documentary made in the region. Another Brazilian filmmaker, Ana Carolina Teixeira Soares, also began her career during this decade, directing *Indústria* [*Industry*] (1969), *A fiandeira* [*The Spinner*] (1970), and *Getúlio Vargas* (1974), amongst others. In Argentina, Dolly Pussi directed the short documentaries *El hambre oculta* [*The Hidden Hunger*] (1965), *Pescadores* [*Fishermen*] (1968), and *Operativo* [*Operative*] (1969).

In the 1970s, more women entered documentary filmmaking. This was the case of Peruvian Nora de Izcue, who made films such as *Así se hizo la muralla verde* [*This Is How the Green Wall Was Made*] (1970), *Runan Caycu* (1973), *Color de mujer* [*Woman's Colour*] (1990), and *El viento de todas partes* [*The Wind from Everywhere*] (2004). To this day, De Izcue continues making documentaries and is the Peruvian woman filmmaker with the largest trajectory. Some filmmakers that would consolidate their career in fiction cinema began making documentaries during these years. This is the case of Mexican Marcela Fernández Violante and Argentinian María Luisa Bemberg, who directed films such as *Frida Kahlo* (1972), *El mundo de la mujer* [*Woman's World*] (1972), and *Juguetes* [*Toys*] (1978). In Brazil,

¹⁰ Cumaná, María Caridad, Susan Lord, and Víctor Fowler Calzada (eds). *The Cinema of Sara Gómez: Reframing Revolution*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021.

Susana Amaral directed *A Semana de 22* [*The Week of 22*] (1970) and *Sua Majestade Piolin* [*Her Majesty Piolin*] (1971). In Chile, the Unidad Popular period allowed women to enter directorial roles. Besides Marilú Mallet, this was the case of Valeria Sarmiento, with films such as *Un sueño como de colores* [*Colour-Tainted Dreams*] (1972), *Poesía popular: la teoría y la práctica* [*Popular Poetry: Theory and Practice*] (1972), and *Nueva Canción Chilena* [*New Chilean Song*] (1973). Later, she directed *El hombre cuando es hombre* [*A Man, When He Is a Man*] (1982) and *El planeta de los niños* [*The Planet of Children*] (1992), amongst others. Angelina Vázquez became a member of Equipo Tercer Año and was part of the team behind the canonical documentary *La batalla de Chile* [*The Battle of Chile*] (1975-1979), directed by Patricio Guzmán. In exile, she directed films such as *Presencia lejana* [*Distant Presence*] (1982), *Apuntes nicaragüenses* [*Nicaraguan Notes*] (1982), *Fragmentos de un diario inacabado* [*Fragments of an Unfinished Diary*] (1983), *Notas para un retrato de familia* [*Notes for a Family Portrait*] (1989), and *Empresarias de Madrid* [*Businesswomen from Madrid*] (1989). In Venezuela, there were several documentaries made by women during these years, including those by Inga Goetz, such as *Ebena* [*Ebena: Hallucinogenic Ecstasy among the Yanoama*] (1971) and *Uriji Jami* (1971); Franca Donda and Josefina Jordán's *¡Sí Podemos!* [*Yes, We Can!*] (1972) and *María de la Cruz* (1974); Josefina Acevedo's *Un nuevo modo de vivir donde nada parece al pasado* [*A New Way of Living Where Nothing Seems Like the Past*] (1974) and *Escuela de Caracas* [*School of Caracas*] (1975); Ana María Casullo's *El agua en la historia* [*Water in History*] (1975), *Expedición al Tukuko* [*Expedition to Tukuko*] (1975), and *Palma Africana* [*African Palm*] (1976); and Solveig Hoogesteijn's *Puerto Colombia* [*Colombian Port*] (1975). Mexican Lourdes Portillo also began her career over these years with her film *Después del terremoto* [*After the Earthquake*] (1979). And, as already mentioned, both the Mexican and the Colombian Cine Mujer and the Venezuelan Grupo Feminista Miércoles were funded.

In the 1980s, Ecuadorian Mónica Vázquez made several documentaries, including *Camilo Egeas, el pintor de nuestro tiempo* [*Camilo Egeas, the Painter of Our Time*] (1983), *Madre Tierra* [*Mother Earth*] (1984), *Tiempo de mujeres* [*Women's Time*] (1987), and *El sueño verde* [*The Green Dream*] (1988). In Colombia, Camila Loboguerrero, Gloria Triana, and Maddy Samper also began making documentaries. In Peru, Mary Jiménez directed *Del verbo amar* [*About the Verb To Love*] (1985). In Mexico, Maricarmen de Lara directed *No les pedimos la luna* [*We Don't Ask You for a Trip to the Moon*] (1986), which follows the creation of a women's union after the collapse of a clothing factory during the earthquake that devastated large parts of Mexico City in 1985. Ana Rotberg and Ana Díez Díaz directed *Elvira*

Luz Cruz, Pena Máxima [*Elvira Luz Cruz, Maximum Penalty*] (1985), about a young mother who was accused of killing her children. And, the first indigenous woman filmmaker, Teófila Palafox, made *Leaw amangoch tinden nop ikoods* [*The Life of an Ikood Family*] (1985) and *Las ollas de San Marcos* [*The Pots of San Marcos*] (1992). In Venezuela, Liliane Blaser directed *Octubre* [*October*] (1980), *8 en torno al super-8* [*8 around the Super-8*] (1981), *Sobre la mujer* [*About the Woman*] (1981), and *Convivencia* [*Coexistence*] (1989). In Argentina, Carmen Guarini began her career with *Buenos Aires, crónicas villeras* [*Buenos Aires, Villeras Chronicles*] (1986) and *A los compañeros, la libertad* [*To the Companions, Freedom*] (1987). In Puerto Rico, *La Operación* [*The Operation*] (1982), directed by Ana María García, shed light on a US-led campaign of forced sterilizations during the 1950s and 1960s. In Chile, Carmen Castillo directed *Los muros de Santiago* [*The Walls of Santiago*] (1983), *Estado de guerra: Nicaragua* [*State of War: Nicaragua*] (1984), and *La flaca Alejandra* [*Skinny Alejandra*] (1994). Other film collectives were also formed over these years, including the Brazilian Lilith Video and the Peruvian Warmi Cine y Video. In Nicaragua, women gained access to the industry through María José Álvarez's *Lady Marshal* (1990) and *No todos los sueños han sido soñados* [*Not all Dreams Have Been Dreamed*] (1994). Surprisingly, most of these films remain very little known and only some of them have been analysed in depth. Thus, there is a need for more research to be conducted on Latin American women's documentary cinema.

Bridging Documentary and Feminism

This research draws from an array of theoretical tools, both Western and Latin American, and it is placed at the intersection between documentary and feminism. It is not the purpose of this thesis to define what documentary is, primarily because it 'has never been only one thing' (Nichols 2017: 14), but a dynamic practice shaped by theorists, filmmakers, subjects, programmers, audiences, discourses, institutions, and also technology in a given historical context. Nonetheless a working definition is helpful. At its bare minimum, documentary is an ever-expanding art-form concerned with what we accept as real. Here I regard documentary filmmaking as a process of truth-crafting that often, but not always, relies on people performing themselves, is set on location, and/or addresses events –whether personal or historical– that belong to the world we inhabit. Thus, a broad understanding of documentary and the acknowledgement of its fluidity has enabled me to curate a wide range of films. When grounding my discussions in documentary studies, my understanding is informed by Stella

Bruzzi's idea of 'documentaries as performative acts whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming' (2000: 7). This is to say, it is in the encounter between filmmaker and the documentary subjects where the truth in documentary filmmaking lies. As soon as that encounter is recorded in a given medium, film or digital, inevitably there is a grammar imposed upon it, which delineates the edge of a frame, the angle of each shot, and its composition. Besides, in the editing, the linearity of time and the cohesiveness of space are constructed often to create a sense of continuity and realness. The encounter between filmmaker and subject is then shaped into a story that, nevertheless, can shed light on aspects or perspectives and better the understanding about the world we live in.

This thesis looks at both conventional and experimental practices in documentary filmmaking. To do so, it draws from theoretical discussions on the status of documentary and stems from the work by scholars Julianne Burton, Michael Chanan, Alisa Lebow, Paola Margulis, Laura Marks, Maria Luisa Ortega, Pablo Piedras, Michael Renov, Jorge Ruffinelli, and Antonio Traverso and Kristi Wilson, amongst others. These scholars offer useful theoretical tools that have allowed me to inscribe the selected films within broader debates on documentary's capacity to ignite or fuel movements of resistance and its effectiveness for social action; on the political value of representing affect and emotion; and on how the subjective turn in documentary filmmaking expanded the codes and conventions that had traditionally governed it. Ultimately, this thesis joins those who in recent years have questioned and challenged documentary's aspiration to capture, reflect, or represent reality. In this regard, although most of the documentaries explored in this thesis rely primarily on realist aesthetics, I am interested in how they also render visible their discursive devices and push the boundaries that define this art-form.

More specifically, this thesis draws from the different understandings of feminist documentary, from those films that are congruent with the women's movement (Lesage 1978) to those that 'counter the prevailing (stereotypical) images of women with radically different representations' (Nichols 2017: 130). My understanding of feminist documentary is also informed by Domitilla Olivieri's consideration as films that are '*haunted by reality and regarding feminist issues*, namely, issues of gender, power, and processes of inclusion and exclusion' (2012: 8) and by Shilyh Warren's emphasis on their relation to "'otherness"—racial, ethnic, religious, national, and otherwise' (2019: 11). Feminist documentary emerged from the Women's Liberation movements that took place in the USA during the 1960s and developed in the 1970s through the production of films that contested patriarchal imaginaries of women, disseminated knowledge about women's issues, and raised consciousness (Warren 2010).

Within this context, feminist filmmakers aimed at representing *different* women through the making of documentaries that were distributed through an emergent circuit of film festivals dedicated to the exhibition of women's films. Alongside this, a number of journals began publishing articles that paid attention to this phenomenon, contributing to the development of feminist film theory. However, from the mid 1970s, the so-called realist debate began questioning the validity and efficacy of realist codes in feminist counter-cinema (Mayer and Oroz 2011). Teresa de Lauretis describes:

The accounts of feminist film culture produced in the mid-to late seventies tended to emphasize a dichotomy between two concerns of the women's movement and two types of film work that seemed to be at odds with each other: one called for immediate documentation for purposes of political activism, consciousness raising, self-expression, or the search for "positive images" of woman; the other insisted on rigorous, formal work on the medium—or, better, the cinematic apparatus, understood as a social technology—in order to analyze and disengage the ideological codes embedded in representation (1990: 288-289).

These two positions were labelled as the American sociological and the British/European psychoanalytic approach (Chaudhuri 2006). The former was articulated through the magazine *Women and Film* and its criticism on how cinema's patriarchal imaginaries of femininity and distorted representations of women are reproduced and perpetuated in the real world. Instead, many of its contributors proposed employing the screen's reflective potential to provide representations of *real* women. In this regard, Charlotte Brunsdon writes, 'if women are misrepresented in classical cinema, the answer is a realist one – to represent women more truthfully, to show real women' (1986: 52). The latter's opposition to realist aesthetics was sparked by the key essays that formulated feminist film theory.¹¹ In 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), Laura Mulvey offers crucial criticism of Hollywood cinema's male gaze and the representation of women as objects of desire. Besides, this essay also raised the need for an avant-garde women's cinema. Drawing from French theorists such as Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, and Christian Metz, Mulvey's influential text turned psychoanalysis – as well as semiotics and structuralism– into the dominant theoretical tool for feminist film

¹¹ The development of feminist film theory was also informed by the critique of realism posed by Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, editors of *Cahiers du Cinema*, and their focus on the construction of meaning in film.

criticism. Other prominent feminist film theorists, including Claire Johnston and Eileen McGarry, were more openly hostile about the use of realism in feminist cinema. In another key essay, 'Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema' (1973), Johnston criticized the understanding of cinema as a medium with any reflective potential and accused of essentialism the aim of providing representations of *real* women. For Johnston, cinema manufactures reality through the production of signs, which can be decoded through psychoanalytical and semiotic tools. And, she argued, film approaches such as *cinéma vérité* are just embedded within capitalist and patriarchal ideology. She wrote:

In rejecting a sociological analysis of woman in the cinema we reject any view in terms of realism, for this would involve an acceptance of the apparent natural denotation of the sign and would involve a denial of the reality of myth in operation. [...] Women's cinema cannot afford such idealism; the "truth" of our oppression cannot be "captured" on celluloid with the "innocence" of the camera: it has to be constructed/manufactured. New meanings have to be created by disrupting the fabric of the male bourgeois cinema within the text of the film (1999: 33-37).

However, over these years, much confusion existed around feminist documentaries and realist aesthetics. As Shilyh Warren has pointed out, Claire Johnston and Ann Kaplan used the term 'vérité' or even 'cinéma vérité' vaguely to refer to 'talking-heads, long takes, and handheld camera work' (2010: 14) and harshly discredited its potential for a feminist counter-cinema. Whereas Kaplan said that *cinéma vérité* was 'one of the simplest and cheapest of films forms' (1988: 125), Johnston argued that 'to people outside, what a lot of *cinéma vérité* movies do – women talking endlessly about their experiences – often has no effect at all. It doesn't do any work in terms of presenting ideas or actually engaging the audience at any level. It encourages passivity' (Kay and Peary 1977: 396).¹² This rejection on any type of realist aesthetics translated into a disregard of documentary by feminist film criticism, which left a great number of women's documentaries overlooked, as mentioned previously. According to

¹² *Cinéma vérité* has often been confused with Direct Cinema. *Cinéma vérité* is a term coined by French anthropologist Jean Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin during the 1960s. Inspired by Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Pravda*, their filmmaking approach sought to interfere in reality or, as Erik Barnouw says, to precipitate a crisis, acting as provocateurs (1993: 255). Direct Cinema was a documentary approach developed in the USA and Canada by filmmakers such as Robert Drew, Richard Leacock, D.A. Pennebaker, and Albert and David Maysles, amongst others, on the basis that a reduced size of the film crew and lightweight equipment could become imperceptible for those being filmed, or what they called a 'fly on the wall.'

Waldman and Walker, ‘this wedding of the critique of realism with the goals of feminism was a crucial development that had enormous consequences for the direction of feminist film theory and the marginalization of documentary within it’ (1999: 8). B. Ruby Rich also notes that early feminist documentary films were ‘effectively (if excessively) discredited by academic theories that claimed all realist practices were rendered inherently contaminated and retrogressive by their willful [sic] reliance on filmic “transparency”’ (1998: 299).

As a response, documentary theorists and filmmakers vindicated the use of realism as a valid aesthetic choice (Juhasz 1994) and rejected the claim that women’s documentary cinema was ‘naïve, unsophisticated, and complicit with the ideologies of patriarchy’ (Warren 2010: iv). Jane Gaines pointed out that feminist film theory was problematically elitist, mystifying, and limited to upper-middle-class white women (1986). bell hooks located the racism of feminist film theory in its dependence on psychoanalytic theory, which places sexual difference above any other form of difference (1992). Echoing these ideas, Ella Shohat insisted that feminist film theory ignored historical contexts by universalizing tendencies of film analysis and overlooked other sorts of women’s oppression beyond those determined by gender (1997).¹³

Contexts, Processes, and Forms

Although, overall, I also question the usefulness of just relying on inherited conceptual frameworks that focus on textual analysis (Grant 2001) and I regard as limiting the pervasiveness of psychoanalysis in the study of film, I do not interpret the two different perspectives on the realist debate as mutually exclusive. Thus, in the study of Latin American women’s documentaries, I pay attention to both textual and extra-textual elements. Given the variety of theoretical tools that this thesis draws from, the theoretical framework is expanded in each chapter. However, in the following paragraphs, I offer an overview by, first, looking at the broader historical contexts that informed the making of the selected films; second, I pay attention to the authorial modes and production practices; and third, I outline the tools and concepts that have been used in decoding formal strategies and aesthetic devices.

¹³ The critique of realism as a valid formal strategy for a counter-cinema also affected the NLAC, whose political documentary tradition had largely relied on realist aesthetics. As Alexandra Juhasz points out, ‘well before, during, and after the creation of a feminist avant-garde film tradition in the 1970s, there was a long and rich tradition of a “naïve,” window-on-the-world type of political documentary production that includes much of the work of the Third Cinema’ (1999: 200). Ella Shohat also refers to Third Cinema in relation to feminist cinema, ‘in their search for an alternative to the dominating style of Hollywood, such films shared a certain preoccupation with First-World feminist independent films which sought alternative images of women’ (2011: 55).

First, when looking at historical contexts, this research builds on the seminal article ‘An/Other View of New Latin American Cinema’ (1991), in which B. Ruby Rich initiated a process of re-writing the history of the NLAC, arguing that this film movement is more complex and diverse than has been acknowledged. Moving away from the canonical texts, Rich proposes that the different events that took place in the region shifted its subject matters and aesthetic approaches, opening up the possibility for women to make films. In particular, I look at how a series of debates and ideas motivated by the surrounding contexts informed the content of women’s documentaries. These were related to the rapid expansion of capitalism and women’s entry to the workforce, the dissemination of ideas on gender inequality and second-wave feminism, and the relations between extreme violence, mass migration, and the questioning of identity. To do so, I draw from the Domestic Labour Debate and feminist interpretations of Marxist ideas on the development of a class consciousness; the significance that the UN World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City in 1975, had for the development of women’s movements and feminist cinema; and how diasporic experiences foregrounded subjectivity and eventually resulted in new hybrid cultures, identities, and films.

Second, the analyses of the selected films are informed by the call for the inscription of modes of production within film criticism as well as the feminist emphasis on the process (Rich 1990). When looking at how women made films politically, I focus on the authorial modes and production practices deployed. Making films politically often involved developing modes of authorship that broke apart from auteurism. The consideration of the film director as an auteur emerged in the 1950s through *La politique des auteurs*, first published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Based on the romantic idea of the artist-director as the creative agent of a film, auteurism displaced the hitherto central role of the scriptwriter and distinguished the individually creative style of the ‘*hommes de cinéma*,’ as François Truffaut called the *auteurs*, from the mere technical capacity of the *metteurs-en-scène* (1954: 27). John Caughie writes that auteurism establishes that film, although produced collectively, is ‘essentially the product of its director [...who expresses] his [sic] individual personality’ through recurrent thematic and/or stylistic elements (1981: 9). Auteurism has permeated film studies in such a way that it continues to animate a director-centred approach even when a film has been made by self-proclaimed collectives. Instead, many of the documentaries included in this thesis embraced collective and collaborative creative processes that had the potential to de-patriarchalize the ways of making films. The establishment of horizontal relationships and consensual decision-making not only amongst the crew members, but also with the film subjects favoured the building of trust and the development of emotional bonds. Moreover, when grounding my discussions on the

processes, my analyses draw from a feminist interpretation of Paulo Freire's *conscientization*. This is a useful concept to explore how women implemented practices that aimed at raising awareness as well as creating tools for self-knowledge. Similarly, the use of the camera as a 'technology of confession' (Lebow 2012: 124) and, more broadly, filmmaking as a process of introspection and self-discovery allow to explore still forming or newly acquired identities, traumatic events, and repressed memories.

Third, the analyses of the selected films apply an array of tools and concepts to decode the formal devices and aesthetic strategies deployed in women's documentaries as well as to explore how these films produce effects. In particular, a critical feminist approach to psychoanalytic theory has proven to be very helpful in the analysis of how sound and image construct meaning. By employing theoretical tools mostly used for the analysis of fiction films, this thesis demonstrates how documentaries can also invite more complex and sophisticated close readings. For instance, I draw from feminist thinkers such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray and engage with concepts such as abjection and feminine writing to think about the symbolic value of the selected texts. These ideas have facilitated the exploration of how these films appropriate and re-signify objects that have historically been exploited by patriarchal forms of signification and also how they disrupt the aesthetic canon of women's bodies. Another key scholar has been Laura Marks and her work on hybridity, excess, and haptic visuality to address the relation between modes of production and representation as well as the way these strategies can establish a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image. Similarly, I have recourse to Laura Podalsky's book *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2011) and its focus on the political significance of the sensorial and emotional in order to address, on the one hand, the relationships of care established between filmmakers and subjects and, on the other hand, how these relationships were then represented on the screen. The selected documentaries are not only concerned with raising awareness on how gender determines the role women have in a given society, but also how gender is constructed and performed. Stemming from the work of British psychoanalyst Joan Rivière on the masquerade and its developments by theorists such as Efrat Tseëlon and Judith Butler, I look at how the performance of femininity can have a disruptive potential. I also draw from the work on queer cinemas that scholars such as B. Ruby Rich, Richard Dyer, and Thomas Waugh have produced to look at representations of non-normative sexual identities. In the study of sound, these analyses are informed by the work of several scholars, including Trinh T. Minh-Ha's practice of *speaking nearby*, Annabelle Honess Roe and Maria Pramaggiore's idea of vocal plurality, Mary Ann Doane's writings on the role of the voice-

over, and Kaja Silverman's strategies to liberate women's bodies from the fetishization of classical cinema.

The knowledge acquired from these analyses has informed the development of a creative practice that draws from these contextual debates and ideas and modes of authorship and production, and employs some of the theoretical tools deployed throughout this thesis. *Processing Images from Caracas* unfolds from the discussions on the possibility of instrumentalizing documentary for social and political campaigns within the context of Venezuelan feminist activism. It also ascribes political value to the representation of affect and emotion by establishing a bond with the archive, foregrounding the emotional attachments developed during its making, and emphasizing my own vulnerability. Besides, the film stresses issues of performance and performativity by mixing different formal approaches, rendering visible its discursive devices, and through my presence as researcher-filmmaker. In particular, Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and Laura Mulvey's ideas on the spectral quality of photographs have been applied not only to the analysis of *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*, but also to the making of *Processing Images from Caracas*.

Practice-Based Research and Collaborative Methods of Creating Knowledge

In the introduction to the book *Practice as Research. Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, Estelle Barrett argues that 'practice-led research is a new species of research, generative enquiry that draws on subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies that have the potential to extend the frontiers of research' (2010: 1). Besides 'practice-led,' there are two other ways of bridging practice and research, 'practice as research' and 'practice-based research.' The difference amongst these three approaches lies in the balance and relations between the practical and written components. As part of the PhD Documentary-Track programme, my approach can be described as practice-based. Here, the written component has served as a foundation on which to build my creative practice. This is to say, the documentary produced is the result of the research conducted, the methods applied, and the analyses of the selected films, and has expanded the research question.

The initial idea for my creative practice was very different to the film that I eventually produced. This film was supposed to include interviews with women documentary filmmakers from different Latin American countries and images from their films. During my first research trip to Colombia and Peru in 2018 I filmed interviews with some of the filmmakers that are part of this thesis and gained access to some of their films. For the making of this documentary,

I intended to conduct a second research trip to visit other Latin American countries and continue filming interviews and accessing women's films. However, the outbreak of Covid-19 forced me to drastically reformulate this initial idea. Instead, and after considering different possibilities, I decided to focus on one country. As international borders opened up in 2021, I began planning a research trip to Caracas in order to trace the archive of activist, filmmaker, and photographer Franca Donda and the film collectives Cine Urgente and Grupo Feminista Miércoles. For nearly four weeks, I filmed interviews with different contributors, I visited public and private archives, and I gathered different types of materials. The most important discovery was Donda's photographic archive. During this trip, I was given thousands of negatives taken by Donda, some of which are included in *Processing Images from Caracas*. Thus, the film that accompanies this thesis sheds light on the work of this overlooked photographer and filmmaker and reclaims the value of her photographic and film legacy. The decisions behind its making as well as the relations between theory and practice in the development of the creative thinking, production practices, and aesthetic approach are explained in Chapter 4.

A device used in this film is the interview, often in the form of semi-structured conversations with the contributors. The interview as well as other oral history techniques have also been employed as a research method for the written component. As Isabel Seguí compellingly puts it, in Latin American cinema, 'women disappear in the transit from oral records to written histories, which is to say, in the passage from unofficial to official history' (2018a: 11). Thus, a methodology that pays attention to the testimonies of women filmmakers and researchers allows the recovery of valuable information about their personal and professional experiences, which are often intertwined. Despite the fact that eventually I did not include the interviews filmed during my first research trip in the final film, the filming of these interviews informed both the written component of this thesis and the conceptual and aesthetic approaches behind the making of *Processing Images from Caracas*.¹⁴

Moreover, my filmmaking skills have enabled me to explore and interact with the interviews as well as the selected films in a different way. The possibility of re-watching these interviews allowed me to grasp all those details that exceed verbal communication. This is to say, I was able to pay attention to facial expressions, gestures, and body language. Attention to

¹⁴ I intend to publish the interviews I filmed in Colombia and Peru in a website currently being built as part of the research project ColectiVIS-ART, led by Professor Sonia Kerfa. Hosted by the Grenoble Alpes University, this website will also include a database with information about Latin American film and visual art collectives. All this content will be open-access.

non-verbal communication provided a more complex understanding of these women's accounts. Also, I actively engaged with the images and sounds of the selected films through the vast possibilities of digital editing, from pausing at and re-watching specific moments to selecting and re-editing certain scenes. This way of interacting with the interviews and films has proven to be very useful in helping me recognize some of the key elements developed in the close readings.

Besides conducting and filming interviews, I needed to visit the countries addressed in this thesis in order to gain access to high-quality copies of women's documentaries and other materials.¹⁵ My visit to *Fondo de Documentación Mujer y Género Ofelia Uribe de Acosta*, located at the Colombian National University, during my first research trip had great importance. This *Fondo* manages the Colombian Cine Mujer archive, which comprises not only this collective's filmography, but also the largest collection of Latin American films made by women. However, accessing some of the selected films has only been possible thanks to the kindness and camaraderie of Latin American scholars. Although during my first fieldwork trip I only conducted archive research in public institutions, for my trip to Venezuela I realized that the archive of women filmmakers remains predominantly in private houses. The economic and political crises that have affected the country in recent years also means that the Venezuelan film archive is increasingly scattered or cannot be accessed. Despite the difficulties encountered, during my fieldwork in Caracas I was able to locate and access valuable material, some of which appears in *Processing Images from Caracas*.

Another reason behind wanting to conduct fieldwork is because it enables the grasping and sensing of the contextual elements that informed the making of the selected films. It also allows building stronger bonds with people. As an interjection, I would like to point out that I am a Southern European woman living in England and studying in London with no personal connections with Latin America, besides having studied in Colombia. Thus, conducting fieldwork was, therefore, a crucial part of my research process and my practice since it bettered my understanding of the contexts in which these films were made and allowed me to develop closer relationships with women filmmakers, researchers, and the contributors to my short documentary. Through these processes I was able to implement collaborative ways of creating knowledge that take inspiration from the communal cultures foregrounded by women across Latin America and the film collectives included in this thesis. These collaborative methods of

¹⁵ In Colombia I visited Patrimonio Fílmico, the Cinematheque, and the National University. In Peru, I visited the Catholic University. In Venezuela, I visited the National Library and the Central University.

creating knowledge are also respectful of the communitarian approach quintessential to feminism. In line with this interest, in my analyses, I extensively refer to the work published by other scholars about the selected films.

Literature Review

The boom in documentary productions experienced from the 1970s was followed by a growing academic interest that consolidated documentary as a field of inquiry through the work of a number of scholars primarily located in universities from the United States (Rotha 1936; Barsam 1973; Waugh 1984; Nichols 1991, 1994, 2001; Barnow 1993; Renov 1993, 2004; Rabinowitz 1994; Winston 1995; Plantinga 1997; Bruzzi 2000, 2020; Chanan 2007; Aufderheide 2007; Cowie 2011; Lebow 2012; Piotrowska 2013; Piedras 2014). The scholarship in this field deals with the relation between documentary and the historical world; the functions of truth-telling; the ethical complexities of representing real people and events; the ever-changing forms and aesthetics; and the impact of technology, amongst many other issues. They also trace the history of documentary through key films and filmmakers yet directed or produced mainly by European and Anglo-American men. Concomitantly to the development of documentary as a field of study, feminist film theory unfolded in the 1970s through a set of key texts (for example, Johnston 1973; Mitchell 1975; Mulvey 1975; De Lauretis 1984; Silverman 1985) that, as mentioned previously, led to a debate on the validity of realist codes in feminist counter-cinema (Lesage 1983; Kaplan 1983; Kuhn 1994; Rabinowitz 1994; hooks 1996; Juhasz 1994; Shohat 2003; Warren 2010; Mayer and Oroz 2011). In recent decades, a number of works have rescued and explored women's or feminist documentaries, but again focusing primarily in Anglo-American or European contexts (Waldman and Walker 1999; Lin Tay 2009; Mayer and Oroz 2011; Olivieri 2012; Warren 2010 and 2019).

As Julianne Burton writes, 'nowhere have the manifestations of documentary been as multiple and their impact so decisive as in Latin America' (1990: 6). However, the bibliography on Latin American documentary cinema is scarce (Traverso and Wilson 2014) and, despite some important efforts to include documentaries made by women, it focuses on films made by men. Some of the most comprehensive works are Julianne Burton's *The Social Documentary in Latin America* (1990), Paulo Antonio Paranaguá's *Cine documental en América Latina* (2003), Jorge Ruffinelli's *América Latina en 130 documentales* (2012), David William Foster's *Latin American Documentary Filmmaking* (2013), Antonio Traverso and Kristi M. Wilson's

Political Documentary Cinema in Latin America (2014), Vinicius Navarro and Juan Carlos Rodríguez's *New Documentaries in Latin America* (2014), and María Guadalupe Arenillas and Michael J. Lazzara's *Latin American Documentary Film in the New Millennium* (2016). Other scholars have tangentially addressed the history and theory of Latin American documentary cinema in works that are, nevertheless, wider in their scope (King 1990; Martin 1997; Noriega 2000; Haddu and Page 2009; León Frías 2013; Hart 2015; Mestman 2016). Moreover, most of these works offer a historical account, but pay little attention to formal elements.

In the last decade, Latin American women's cinema is receiving increasing scholarly attention. B. Ruby Rich and Zuzana M. Pick's emphasis on women's contributions to the NLAC and, more broadly, Latin American cinema has been expanded in a number of important works. These revisionist projects have shed light on numerous women whose work in roles above- and below-the-line has been dismissed from film historiographies. Using a variety of methodologies and epistemologies, these studies rediscover this invisibilised work and restore women's contributions to film history. For instance, Nair and Gutiérrez-Albilla's anthology *Hispanic and Lusophone Women Filmmakers: Theory, Practice and Difference* (2013) focuses on critical discourses and filmic and cultural representations across decades by examining the work of both Hispanic and Lusophone filmmakers. Coincidentally, the same year in which I started my PhD, two books with the same title, *Latin American Women Filmmakers*, were published. Deborah Martin and Deborah Shaw's anthology and Traci Roberts-Camps' monograph clearly demonstrate the growing scholarly interest in Latin American women's cinema. Although both books have made an effort to include documentary films, their focus lies mainly on fiction cinema.

The historical marginalization of documentary within the history of film continues to invalidate this art-form as a subject on its own. Consequently, the study of women's documentary is usually either included in broader analyses alongside fiction films, such as the works just mentioned, or it focuses on individual filmographies, single countries, or sub-regions.¹⁶ This has been the case in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay (Longfellow 1984; Bettendorff and Pérez Rial 2014; Ramírez-Soto and Donoso 2016; Bossay and Peirano 2017; Margulis 2020), Brazil (Félix 2014; Tavares 2011; Holanda and Tedesco 2017; Tedesco 2018), Bolivia and Peru (Barrow 2017; Seguí 2018a, 2018b, 2020, 2022), Colombia (Goldman 2000; Arboleda Ríos and Osorio 2003; Martin 2012; Suárez 2012), Cuba (Cumaná and Lord 2013;

¹⁶ See also Paulo Antonio Paranaguá's article 'Cineastas pioneras de América Latina' (1996), Patricia Torres San Martín's 'Cineastas de América Latina: desacatos de una práctica filmica' (2014), and Rosa Linda Fregoso's 'Mujer y cine en América Latina: Proyectando una visión alternativa de la nación' (2016).

Cumaná, Lord, and Fowler 2021), Mexico (Millán 1999; Fregoso 2001; Rashkin 2001; Aceves 2013; Oroz 2016 and 2018; Rodríguez 2019), and Venezuela (Schwartzman 1992; Raydán 2010; Monsalve Peña 2012). Pablo Calvo de Castro's article 'Mujeres tras las cámaras en el documental latinoamericano. Conclusiones de un estudio transversal de la evolución histórica' (2019) is the only piece of research surveying women's documentaries from a Latin American perspective, but it does not provide formal analysis.

This thesis joins the efforts of this growing number of scholars who are unearthing Latin American women's cinema. My contribution puts the emphasis on documentary, thus this is the first work of such a nature to be produced in both English and Spanish literature. I position this research as a continuation of the five main publications that have animated it. First, Julia Lesage was one of the first scholars to give value to Latin American feminist cinema through a number of texts, including 'Women Make Media: Three Modes of Production' (1990), where she organizes Latin American women's media in three distinctive modes of production – independent, collective, and mixed-gendered– to demonstrate how this corpus of work speaks to women 'across national boundaries' (p. 344). Second, Diane Waldman and Janet Walker's edited collection *Feminism and Documentary* (1999) brought together these two fields through a selection of essays that put an end to the neglect of 'both the representations of women in the classics of the documentary tradition and the contributions of women to the documentary form' (p. 4). Third, Shilyh Warren's PhD thesis *Real Politics and Feminist Documentaries: Re-Visioning Seventies Film Feminisms* (2010) and book *Subject to Reality. Women and Documentary Film* (2019) recast realism as a complex set of codes and conventions that have the potential to disrupt, resist, and challenge hegemonic ideology and patriarchal values. Fourth, Sophie Mayer and Elena Oroz's *The Personal is Political: Feminism and Documentary* (2011) puts the emphasis on the political value of feminist cinema and argues that 'feminist documentary began with the aim of making history: making visible women's stories on the one hand, and, on the other, changing the circumstances of oppression that had silenced those stories' (2011: 18). And fifth, Deborah Martin's chapter on Colombian women's documentary proposes 'an alternative genealogy [...], taking women's documentary as a new critical category and arguing that it constitutes a tradition within Colombian film-making which has previously been overlooked' (2012: 141). This thesis draws from these works and proposes Latin American women's documentary as a critical category that employs a sophisticated set of aesthetic devices, both realist and experimental, that ascribes political significance to the representation of women's identities and struggles.

Similarly, the practical component of this thesis draws from the work conducted by three filmmakers who have completed practice-based research in recent years. Iris Zaki's PhD thesis 'Open Conversation in Closed Communities. Subjectivity, Power Dynamics and Self in First Person Documentary Practice about Closed Communities' (2017) at Royal Holloway University addresses the creative processes and methods employed for the making of three short documentaries, *My Kosher Shifts* (2010), *Women in Sink* (2015), and *Café Tekoa* (re-titled *Unsettling*, 2018). In particular, I was interested in what she describes as the *abandoned* camera. This technique involves leaving the camera on its own filming at enough distance to enable the creation of an intimate space, which removes, to some extent, the awareness of being filmed and the distractions of having a film crew (Zaki 2017). Sophy Romvari's *Still Processing* (2020) is a short documentary accompanied by an exegesis produced as part of the MA in Fine Arts at York University, in Canada. This work is illuminating in how 'creative art research is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns' (Barrett 2010: 4). Romvari's attention to the therapeutic possibilities of photographic processing and filmmaking, to emotional responses, and the vulnerability of the filmmaker has enabled me to explore the sense of loss as well as to build an emotional bond with the archive. Onyeka Igwe's completed her practice-based PhD 'Unbossed and Unbound: How can critical proximity transfigure British colonial moving images?' (2021) at University of the Arts London. Specifically, her research confronts and challenges the propaganda films produced by the British Empire through the Colonial Film Unit by developing a methodology for making moving images that transfigures colonial legacies and disrupts hegemonic ways of knowing through critical proximity. As part of her thesis, she produced the trio of works titled *No Dance, No Palaver* (2017-2018), *the names have changed including my own and truths have been altered* (2019), and *No Archive Can Restore You* (2020). Her work inspired me to think about the importance of situated experiences of the archive and the possibility of interspersing multiple ways of knowing.

Chapters Outline

In this research, I propose three approximations to Latin American women's documentary cinema between 1975 and 1994. Moreover, this thesis is accompanied by the first documentary ever made with Franca Donda's archive, and includes both photographs and films. In Chapter 1 I develop the first approximation, which is informed by Marxism and militant cinema, but focuses on films about labour struggles that affect women workers, such

as the double day, the incorporation of women into factories, and the status of domestic work. These films are: *The Double Day*, *Amor, mujeres y flores*, and *Porque quería estudiar*. On the one hand, I explore how the production practices employed in the making of these films allowed the creation of safe spaces that facilitated the act of speaking out amongst previously marginalized subjects and I argue that these encounters encouraged a process of *conscientization*. On the other hand, I look at how women's voices were then constructed and interwoven within feminist discourses that brought to the fore questions related to women's role in production and reproduction. *The Double Day* constructs a collective portrait of women across Latin America through images and testimonies of factory workers, indigenous women, and activists. I situate this film within contemporary feminist ideas on women's work and the exploration of the two streams of the so-called Domestic Labour Debate. *Amor, mujeres y flores* provides a women-centred analysis of the class struggle through the stories of the women workers of the Colombian flower industry. Here women's poetic voices signal the development of a class-consciousness that, although rooted in conventional Marxist ideas, begins to recognize other forms of oppression related to their condition as women. *Porque quería estudiar* is primarily articulated through the voice of Graciela Huayhua Collanqui, a woman from the Peruvian countryside who moved to Lima to work as a live-in maid at a very young age. I focus on how the inclusion of Graciela's harrowing testimony and the ways in which it is formally represented in the film facilitated a process of consciousness-raising by creating a mirroring effect.

Chapter 2 focuses on how feminist ideas and praxis shaped the making of Latin American feminist cinema through the works of three self-proclaimed feminist film collectives, Cine Mujer in Mexico and Colombia and the Venezuelan Grupo Feminista Miércoles. This chapter contextualizes these collectives, characterizes their modes of authorship and production, and briefly addresses their history and filmography. I also analyse three documentaries, *Cosas de mujeres*, *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*, and *Carmen Carrascal*. Broadly, these films address issues related to reproductive rights, motherhood, and womanhood. *Cosas de mujeres* is a hybrid film that relies on performance, testimony, and observation. By mixing realist and experimental aesthetics, this documentary produces effects that appeal to the sensorial. Specifically, I focus on how the concepts of excess and abjection disrupt the aesthetic canon of women's bodies. *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* explores issues about motherhood and the relations between production, reproduction, and oppression through the story of a woman potter who died shortly after giving birth to her 24th child. Although this film mostly relies on realist aesthetics and was made with scarce resources, I argue that it also employs sophisticated

devices that point at the dissonance between rural women's experiences and feminist ideas. Here I focus on how the different media, footage and photographs, and the use of disembodied voices draw attention to the documentary's negotiation between ideology and indexicality. The third film included in this chapter is *Carmen Carrascal*. Its mode of production relied on the slow process of building relationships of trust through which the film crew gained access to the private space of Carrascal's home and to her personal story. This bond was then reflected on the screen through images that evoke haptic visuality and establish a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image. Ultimately, I position these films as emblematic examples of a formative moment in Latin American feminist cinema.

Chapter 3 maintains that diasporic experiences of women filmmakers foregrounded the subjective turn in Latin American documentary. Drawing from the work by scholars Alisa Lebow and Pablo Piedras, I borrow the term 'first-person documentary' as an elastic label that allows to include an array of documentary films in which the degree of filmmaker's presence varies. More specifically, this chapter explores *Susana*, *Journal inachevé*, and *El diablo nunca duerme*. *Susana* is an unconventional audio-visual self-portrait that brings non-normative sexualities to the forefront and, at the same time, attempts to promote understanding and respect for difference. Specifically, I look at *Susana*'s transgressive representation of lesbian pleasure and desire and I address issues such as the self-other distinction, the primal homosexual mother-daughter bonds, and the extension of nurturing loving relationships from mother-daughter to women-sisters, through the analysis of devices such as photographs and the choice of language. *Journal inachevé* is narrated in the form of an intimate diary and explores Mallet's complex identity in exile. Through interactions with her then husband, the Australian filmmaker Michael Rubbo, with her mother and brother, and with her fellow Chilean exiles, *Journal inachevé* captures a paradoxical, both privileged and unfortunate, family environment. Here, I resort to the concept of the masquerade to explore performance in documentary. I also look at how the representation of boundaries and the possibility of crossing them evokes feelings of ambiguity and disorientation and invokes the transformative possibilities that liminality opens. *El diablo nunca duerme* mixes different genres, the thriller, the road movie, the investigative documentary, and the Mexican melodrama, to satirize the documentary form by searching for an unattainable truth. Drawing from Gloria Anzaldúa's idea of the in-between and Ed Morales' conceptualization of Latinx identities, I look at issues of performance and performativity as expressed by Portillo's character. In this analysis, I argue that *El diablo nunca duerme* incorporates but also disrupts storytelling techniques associated with the hero's quest and the Mexican melodrama.

Chapter 4 focuses on the practical component of this research by reflecting on different aspects related to the making of the short documentary *Processing Images from Caracas*. Specifically, I address the conceptual development, the relations between theory and practice, the influences of non-fiction researchers-filmmakers and other relevant scholarly research on Latin American archives to my practice-based approach, the process of making this film, and its result. Ultimately, this chapter offers a critical reflection and presents how both the filmmaking process and the resulting film can generate critical discourses and contribute to the production of knowledge on Latin American women's documentary. The aim of the film is to *make sensorial* one of the main arguments presented throughout this thesis. It shows how Latin American women's documentaries and other relevant materials that could make up an archive of women's or feminist cinema are at the brink of disappearance and foregrounds the urgent need to create such an archive.

Chapter 1. The Construction of Women Workers' Voices

Amid the radical film cultures that emerged during the 1960s, Latin American filmmakers began making films that exposed and denounced situations of poverty, oppression, and violence caused by brutal dictatorships and the rapid expansion of capitalism. These films aimed at encouraging struggles of liberation by sparking audiences to change the world around them. Their success not only amongst national audiences, but also within the emerging circuit of international film festivals helped the constitution of the NLAC canon. However, in its origins, most of these canonical filmmakers failed to challenge the (under)representation of, give voice to, or involve women. Following these moments of contestation and also inspired by the possibility of formulating new cinemas, from the 1970s, an increasing number of women filmmakers began incorporating feminist practices, politics, and aesthetics into the Marxist tradition of militant cinema. In this chapter, I argue that the study of militant cinema has left out a number of films made by women about women's labour that provide, if not a feminist, a counter-patriarchal interpretation of the class struggle. To do so, I explore three documentaries that, broadly, address the double day, the incorporation of women into factories, and the status of domestic work. These are: *The Double Day* (1975), directed by Brazilian Helena Solberg; *Amor, mujeres y flores [Love, Women, and Flowers]* (1984-1989), directed by Colombians Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva; and *Porque quería estudiar [Because I Wanted to Go to School]* (1990), directed by Peruvian María Barea. The focus of my analysis lies on how the production practices employed in the making of these films allowed the creation of safe spaces that facilitated the act of speaking out amongst previously marginalized subjects. These encounters aimed at the development of both a class and a kind of women's consciousness. In addition, I explore how women's voices were then constructed and interwoven within feminist debates that brought to the fore questions related to women's role in production and reproduction.

Militant Cinema, Conscientization, and *Testimonio*

The term militant cinema was developed by filmmakers Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas in their essay 'Militant Cinema: An Internal Category of Third Cinema' (1971), written after the release of *La hora de los hornos [The Hour of the Furnaces]* (1968), to describe a type of political filmmaking that seeks to provoke change through the discussions that arose in the encounter between film and audience, in what they called 'cine-acto.' Militant filmmakers believed that 'the most important thing was not the film and the information in it so much as

the way this information was debated’ (Fernando Solanas cited in Chanan 1997: 372). Prior to this, Fernando Birri’s manifesto ‘Cinema and Underdevelopment’ (1962) had also highlighted the potential of instrumentalizing cinema for social and political action. For Birri, critically filming the reality of the Latin American people ‘generates a creative energy which through cinema aspires to modify the reality upon which it is projected’ (1986: 90). Drawing on Paulo Freire, film scholars Julianne Burton and Michael Chanan argue that Birri’s approach proposes a means of achieving *conscientization*.¹⁷ Burton also notes that the realist and critical images Birri refers to ‘are not a simple reflection of reality, but become in the film-act a reflection upon it – first by the filmmakers and then for the audience’ (1990: 39).

Feminist activists also shared Freire’s ideas in relation to ‘the power of consciousness raising, the existence of oppression and the possibility of ending it, and the desire for social transformation’ (Weiler 1991: 455). For instance, the consciousness-raising groups that emerged in the USA in the late 1960s aspired to achieve social change by relying on experience and feeling as a basis for political action. As Weiler explains, these groups were concerned with ‘the discussion of shared experiences of sexuality, work, and participation in the male-dominated left movement [...] and focused on collective political change rather than on individual therapy’ (p. 456-457). For consciousness-raising to happen, women need to voice their experiences in an honest and open manner as well as respectfully listen to others. In order to facilitate the process of speaking out and listening, feminist collectives developed specific methodologies to ensure the creation of ‘free spaces’ where a mediator leads a series of discussions that will, ultimately, radicalise women ‘to participate in whatever action is necessary to change our society.’¹⁸

¹⁷ *Conscientization* [*conscientização*] was developed in Paulo Freire’s most influential work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). He draws on Hegelian philosophy and existentialism to propose a philosophy of praxis. For him, those who are oppressed can acquire the means to acknowledge the responsibility of and learn the mechanisms to liberate themselves through education. However, this type of education differs from what Freire terms ‘banking education,’ which refers to the transmission of political, social, cultural, and economic values as normalized within a given society in order to ensure the reproduction of the ruling class’ ideology and the existent division of power. On the contrary, Freire’s pedagogy puts an emphasis on the development of a critical consciousness that can transform the status quo. To achieve this, educators must create a learning environment based on principles of active participation and equality in order to facilitate the co-creation of knowledge. Through reflection and dialogue, the participants discover themselves as hosts of an oppressor and initiate a process of self-knowledge. Ultimately, they become capable of transforming not only their position in the symbolic and material universe, but also of transforming that universe itself. It is important to note that Freire’s concept of oppression was related to class and that he developed his pedagogy from his work with illiterate peasants and workers in Brazil.

¹⁸ ‘Introduction to Consciousness Raising’ (1976). *New York Radical Feminists*, <https://archive.org/details/FeministConsciousness-raisingGroupGuideTopics/NYRFIntro4Last76.8CR.jpg>. (Accessed 18 March 2022).

In Latin America, the influence that the literary genre known as *testimonio* had during this period also brought to the fore the sharing of personal experiences, particularly of those who had been previously marginalized, especially women (Moya-Raggio 1987; Beverley 1989; Marin 1991; Gugelberger 1996). John Beverley situates the emergence of *testimonio* within the broader historical context of the 1960s:

Unlike the novel, *testimonio* promises by definition to be primarily concerned with sincerity rather than literariness. This relates *testimonio* to the generic 1960s ideology and practice of “speaking betterness,” to use the term popularized in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, evident for example in the ‘consciousness raising’ sessions of the women’s liberation movement; Fanon’s theory of decolonization; the pedagogy of Paolo Freire (one of the richest sources of testimonial material has been the interaction of intellectuals, peasants, and working people in literacy campaigns); Laingian, and in a very different way Lacanian, psychotherapies. Testimonio, in other words, is an instance of the New Left and feminist slogan that “the personal is the political” (1986: 14-15).

In *testimonio*, the mediation by a narrator that, on the one hand, gives value to and facilitates the telling of life-stories and, on the other hand, shapes them into a cultural artefact is key. Similarly, the women filmmakers included in this chapter applied testimonial practices and consciousness-raising processes to the making of documentaries.¹⁹ Moreover, these filmmakers also acted as educators in a Freirean manner. They recognized the political nature of cinema and its transformative potential and assumed a responsibility towards the deeply unequal societies they lived in. Instead of focusing only on how the film could spark discussions during the screening, they put the emphasis on the filmmaking process and worked alongside documentary subjects through the exchanging of experiences and ideas and the co-creation of knowledge in order to stimulate critical thinking and collective action.

The emergence of militant cinema in the 1960s coincided with the development of new technologies that allowed recording synchronous sound on location.²⁰ Rather than recurring to

¹⁹ Feminist documentary filmmakers of the 1970s in the USA also translated the practice of consciousness-raising to the film medium (Lesage 1978; Kaplan 1982-1983; Warren 2008).

²⁰ New lightweight 16mm cameras and portable, battery-powered, and synchronized tape recorders became accessible for documentary filmmakers. A film did not need to be shot with a heavy, bulky, and expensive 35mm camera, nor the sound had to be recorded in a studio. The film crew became smaller, more mobile, and was able to record synchronous sound on location, which allowed filmmakers to use their subjects’ voice as the main narrative device. Subsequently, filmmakers became interested in getting closer to reality by following the daily

the authoritarian and omnipresent voice-over hitherto used in documentary practices, filmmakers were able to record the voice of ordinary people *in situ* (Mestman 2013), which contributed to ‘democratizing the documentary modes of address’ (Burton 1990: 62). However, in the early days of militant cinema, the lack of access to these technologies meant that the documentary subjects continued to be denied a voice of their own, hence their stories were still interpreted by an external voice-over, which contradicted ‘the political cinema’s goal of “giving voice to the voiceless”’ (Traverso 2013: 11).²¹ Despite being a core principle for many political filmmakers, the claim of ‘giving voice to the voiceless’ has been contested in recent years as it implies that a filmmaker is in the position to grant or revoke someone else’s capacity to speak and that someone else does not have a voice of their own. In particular, filmmaker and scholar Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s work is illuminating in her criticism to documentary’s aim of speaking *by, for, or about* since these positionings negate the epistemological value of the subjects’ experiences. Instead, she proposes speaking *nearby*, described as ‘a speaking that reflects on itself and can come really close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it’ (Minh-Ha cited in Chen 1992: 87). She expands, ‘by not trying to assume a position of authority in relation to the other, you are actually freeing yourself from the endless criteria generated with such an all-knowing claim and its hierarchies in knowledge’ (Minh-Ha cited in Balsom 2018).

When women gained access to directorial roles in the 1970s, the sound recorder Nagra had become increasingly available and, right from the start, women filmmakers showed a commitment to voicing others. However, the existence of a technological device that allows recording voices *in situ* neither means that women can speak out, nor that they can critically interpret the conditions in which they live, particularly at a time when the vast majority of them did not have access to an education beyond acquiring basic knowledge about how to run a household. Women filmmakers realized that in order to speak *nearby* other women, first they

life of their subjects. These technologies facilitated the creation of both observational and participatory modes of documentary (Nichols 2017), such as Direct Cinema in the USA and Canada and *Cinéma Vérité* in Europe.

²¹ The history of sound in film has been closely related to the exclusion of women from the film industry. Prior to 1929, when the advent of sound took place in the USA, several women worked in the industry as directors, scriptwriters, and editors, amongst other roles. The advent of sound meant the development of the corporate studio system that promoted the exclusion of women behind the camera. Barbara Quart writes: ‘women directors, virtually phased out of the early film industry with the advent of sound, never had the opportunity even historically to move from silence to speech’ (1989: 13). However, the development of portable sound recorders contributed to the re-incorporation of women in the film industry. In the late 1960s, women gradually started regaining a place in the industry, at least within documentary productions, often working as sound recordists. Several pioneers of feminist filmmaking in the USA, such as Joyce Chopra and Nell Cox, started working as ‘sound girls’ for Direct Cinema filmmakers (Warren 2008). Similarly, in Latin America, many women gained access to the film industry by working as sound recordists. This was the case of Colombian Patricia Restrepo, who among other roles, acted as sound recordist in Grupo de Cali.

would need to assume the responsibility of the facilitator who creates a safe environment where women feel comfortable and valued; of the educator who helps other women understand that their situation is embedded within a given ideology and structured through deeply uneven power relations; and of the mediator who through the establishing of equal relationships collaborates in the construction of their voices and represents them fairly. In this chapter I contend that the feminist practices underpinning the making of these films disrupt the idea of ‘giving voice’ and instead embrace the act of listening and the possibility of speaking *nearby*, *with*, or *alongside* those who had been hitherto ignored or silenced.

The Domestic Labour Debate

Cultural norms sanctioning women’s confinement to the household are more than ideological constructions. They express an objective reality in which domestic work is a mechanism subsidizing accumulation. Excluded from the realm of remunerated work, large groups of women have historically been transformed at various times into reserves of cheap labor. Paradoxically, women are subordinated, not because their work is socially inferior or unimportant, but precisely because of its importance. Women’s labor both in production and in reproduction is fundamental to the maintenance of economic and political systems (Fernández Kelley 1986: 6).

The Domestic Labour Debate emerged from the International Wages for Housework Campaign (IWHC), a grassroots movement initiated by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Silvia Federici, Brigitte Galtier, and Selma James at the National Women’s Liberation Conference that took place in Manchester in 1972.²² Federici explains that the objective of this campaign ‘was to open a process of international feminist mobilization that would force the state to recognize that domestic work is work—that is, an activity that should be remunerated as it contributes to the production of the labor force and produces capital, thus enabling every other form of production to take place’ (2012: 6-8). Inspired by the possibility of reinterpreting the history of capitalism and the class struggle from a feminist perspective, Federici contends that capital accumulation benefits from the appropriation of unwaged (women’s) labour, this is to say,

²² Later, a number of organizations were formed in the United Kingdom, Italy, and the United States, including Power to the Collective in Bristol and London, Lotta Feminista in Padua, and Wages for Housework Committee in New York.

domestic work, childcare, and the reproduction of the workforce.²³ She writes, ‘placing the reproduction of labor power at the center of capitalist production unearths a world of social relations that are invisible in Marx but are essential to expose the mechanisms that regulate the exploitation of labor’ (2019: 156). This campaign turned housework into ‘the crucial factor in the definition of the exploitation of women in capitalism’ (2012: 6) and led to important debates on the status of domestic work that, although did not translate into policymaking, continue to be relevant today.

Albeit the contexts in which Federici applies these ideas are often located in medieval Europe during the transition from a feudal and rural to a capitalist and industrial society, June Nash, Helen Safa, and other Marxist feminists demonstrated that the increasing industrialization and the acceleration of capitalism in Latin America during the twentieth century served as a testing ground. In the 1970s, Nash realized the importance of initiating gender studies in Latin America (Babb *et al* 2020), which led to the organization of a conference in Buenos Aires in 1974 and the publication of the book *Sex and Class in Latin America* (1976) and the companion volume *Women and Change in Latin America* (1985), both co-edited with Helen Safa. These works draw from but also problematize Marxism in relation to the analysis of women’s work and argue that women’s access to industrial employment did not result into the development of a class consciousness (Safa 1976: 70). First, because of the ‘little knowledge of the world outside the home [that women acquire as they] pass from dependence on their parents to dependence on their husbands’ (p. 77). Second, due to ongoing responsibilities within the home and the subsequent material impossibility of engaging in any other activity, such as unionizing. Consequently, these feminists warned about the dangers of what later came to be known as the ‘double shift.’²⁴ As Eleanor Leacock and Helen Safa put it, ‘the incorporation of women into wage labor is no panacea if the gender division of labor at the household level remains the same, burdening women with the “double day”’ (1986: xi). Women’s entry into the workforce was then not necessarily seen as a form of emancipation, but as the trigger for a double exploitation.

In this chapter, I draw from these ideas to analyse the representation of women’s work-related struggles in three documentaries. In *The Double Day*, women across Latin America become increasingly aware of women-specific forms of oppression and their double

²³ Federici also refers to the work of Frantz Fanon, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Cedric Robinson to point at the existence of other forms of unwaged labour, such as slavery and other relations of exploitation developed through the process of colonization or structural racial inequalities (2021).

²⁴ This concept describes the labour performed at home in addition to the paid work that takes place in the formal sector as theorised by Arlie Hochschild in the book *The Second Shift* (1989).

exploitation. I inscribe this film within contemporary debates on the nature of women's work that brought to the fore the question of women's role in production and reproduction. This film draws from the life-stories of factory workers, indigenous women, and activists to explore the different solutions to the double shift presented by feminists, such as the socialization of domestic work or the need for wages for housework. *Amor, mujeres y flores* provides a women-centred analysis of the class struggle. This film also navigates between Marxism and feminism to demonstrate that women workers of the floriculture industry are developing a class consciousness. Although a militant film that sought to expose and confront structures of oppression that affected the working class, the film slips into a poetic language through which women become not only subjects of the class struggle, but also are increasingly aware of other forms of oppression related to their gender. Aesthetically, the film departs from the conventions of political cinema and incorporates devices that emphasize the possibility of resignification. *Porque quería estudiar* exposes a form of exploitation too often overlooked by the bourgeois feminist movement. Here the live-in maid takes central stage to make visible a profession that remains under alarming levels of precariousness. I contend that this documentary renders visible the ongoing need for voicing and protecting those domestic workers mobilizing in the pursuit of their rights. I position *Porque quería estudiar* as a precursor in the representation of domestic workers as subjects with agency and explore how it was conceived as a pedagogical tool that could encourage girls and young women to speak up about their experiences in domestic service.

1.1. Helena Solberg's *The Double Day*

The UN World Conference on Women, Mexico City, 1975. Before Domitila de Barrios Chungara started speaking in front of a large audience about the experiences of the indigenous housewives from the Bolivian tin mine Siglo XX, the filmmaker Helena Solberg asked her: 'Aren't you afraid?' Domitila responded, 'Are they armed?' 'No, they are not,' Solberg said, 'So what would I be afraid of?' Domitila concluded.²⁵ In *The Double Day*, Domitila is presented as a woman who has lost her fear of speaking out, despite imprisonment and torture. Similarly, other Latin American working women gain confidence to speak out. Drawing from the work by those who articulated the Domestic Labour Debate, but also from the pioneering research on gender in Latin America conducted by June Nash and Helen Safa, I inscribe this film within contemporary discussions on the nature of women's work that brought to the fore the question of women's role in production and reproduction. While some feminists argued that domestic work should become a form of waged labour, others contended that providing wages for domestic work would just continue to confine women to the solitude of the home and proposed instead to socialize domestic work and childcare. *The Double Day* explores these two streams through voicing the experiences, needs, and concerns of Latin American working women. Here I maintain that this documentary bridges the Marxist approach underpinning militant cinema with the emphasis on experience as foregrounded by feminism and address the following questions: can women workers articulate their work-related struggles or have they accepted to be spoken for by their male counterparts? Is it possible that through the process of speaking out women realize that their labour experiences are distinct? Can this process set the ground for disrupting the transmission of capitalist and patriarchal values?

Helena Solberg's work has been analysed by scholars and critics primarily in the USA and, more recently, in Brazil.²⁶ In fact, until a few years ago, Solberg was virtually unknown

²⁵ Author interview with Helena Solberg via Skype, October 31, 2018. A slightly different wording of this event is included in Julianne Burton's interview with Solberg (1986: 90-91).

²⁶ Helena Solberg was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1938. While studying neo-Latin languages at Pontificia Universidade Católica, Solberg became close friends with the founder members of the Brazilian film movement *Cinema Novo*, Cacá Diegues, Davi Neves, and Arnaldo Jabor. In 1966 she made her first documentary, *A entrevista*, which includes sound interviews with middle-upper class women about their role in society and points at their complicity in the *coup d'état* that overthrow the labour government of João Goulart in 1964. In 1971, Solberg moved to Washington, where she became involved in feminist and political filmmaking groups. In the USA, she co-funded the non-profit organization Women's Film Project. Later re-named the International Women's Film Project, this feminist film collective was also formed by Melanie Maholick, Lorraine Gray, Roberta Haber, and Jane Stubbs, amongst others. Throughout its history, the collective produced *The Emerging Woman* (1974), *The Double Day* (1975), *Simply Jenny* (1977) and *From the Ashes... Nicaragua Today* (1982), which received an Emmy Award. Since then, Solberg has continued to make both documentary and fiction films, such as *The Brazilian Connection* (1983), *Chile: By Reason or By Force* (1983), *Portrait of a terrorist* (1985), *Home of the Brave* (1986), *The Forbidden Land* (1990), *Carmen Miranda: Bananas is My Business* (1994), *Brasil em cores vivas [Brazil in Living Colour]* (1997), *Vida de menina [Girl's Life]* (2004), *Palavra (en)cantada*

in the film and academic circles of her own country (Tedesco 2022). A first effort to give value to her filmography was Mariana Ribeiro Da Silva Tavares' PhD thesis (2011). Moreover, two retrospectives have taken place in the last decade, at the film festival *É Tudo Verdade* in 2014 and by the Associação Filmes de Quintal in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasília in 2018. In the latter's accompanying publication, curators Carla Italiano and Leonard Amaral wrote about the urgent need 'to break with the silence around Helena Solberg's work' (2018: 17).²⁷ In this chapter I join these efforts by revisiting one of her most openly political films. *The Double Day* has been 'recognized as the first documentary film about contemporary Latin American women's rights and the first film of such a nature to be made by a woman' (Foster 2013: 55). However, Foster argues, 'the way in which Solberg construes Latin America for a US feminist audience is, in turn, part of the ideological problems the documentary presents' (ibid). Other reviews about this film have criticised its ambitious scope, but have highlighted the importance of including women's first-hand accounts (Janda 1977). Here I contend that *The Double Day* offers a more valuable exploration of women's entry to the workforce than what has been acknowledged and that raises many concerns about women's work that remain relevant.

A Collective Portrait of Women Workers

The Double Day is a 54-minute documentary produced by the International Women's Film Project and funded by an array of international organizations.²⁸ In preparation for the making of this film, Solberg attended a six-week workshop organized by June Nash and Helen Safa in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 1974. In this workshop, women were trained to conduct

[*Enchanted Word*] (2009), *A alma da gente* [*Soul of the People*] (2013), *Meo corpo minha vida* [*My Body, My Life*] (2017).

²⁷ One of the most detailed pieces on Helena Solberg's trajectory and filmography is Julianne Burton's interview in *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America. Conversations with Filmmakers* (1986), which addresses a number of important issues, including how Solberg's family did not expect her to do much in life beyond becoming a culturally-aware housewife. Her decision to go to university opened up new possibilities. During her studies, she met and interviewed public intellectuals, such as Aldous Huxley and Simone de Beauvoir, amongst others, and nurtured her critical thinking. In this interview, Solberg also explains her personal drives, broader inspirations, and the processes and reach of her films from *A entrevista* (1966) to *Chile: By Reason or By Force* (co-directed with David Meyer, 1986). Other works published about Solberg include Regina R. Félix's *The Migrant in Helena Solberg's Carmen Miranda: Bananas is my Business* (2014), Marina Cavalcanti Tedesco's *Cineastas brasileiras que filmaram la revolución: Helena Solberg y Lucia Murat* (2018), and Karla Holanda's *Interseccionalidade em The emerging woman (1974)* (2020).

²⁸ The United Nations Development Programme, the Inter-American Foundation, the Danish International Development Agency, the Norwegian Agency for International Development, and the Swedish International Development Authority. As Solberg states in an interview with Julianne Burton, the Inter-American Foundation later accused her of promoting Marxism and, in an internal report, warned about funding similar films in the future (1986: 89). Almost a decade later, Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva managed to secure funding from this same organization for *Amor, mujeres y flores*, a film also analysed in this chapter. In this case, the Inter-American Foundation requested to be removed from the credits after seeing the finished film.

research on an emerging field that looked at the intersection between class and gender from a Marxist feminist perspective within the context of Latin America. I regard Solberg's participation as fundamental in the development not only of the theoretical framework of the film, but also of its methodology given the fact that these researchers promoted the use of oral history techniques to illustrate broader socio-economic issues.²⁹ Besides, the film also implemented practices initiated by second-wave feminist filmmakers, such as having a predominantly female crew. During its production, this crew travelled from the USA to Argentina, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Mexico to film a range of contemporary women's work-related struggles, from the lack of job opportunities to their double day. Although Solberg tried to film in Brazil, she was unable to do so after the government confiscated the film stock (Burton 1986: 90). Its premiere took place at the UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975 and, after that, it was distributed through international film festivals in France, Germany, the United States, Australia, and India, including the International Filmfestival Mannheim-Heidelberg, the American Film Festival, and the International Film Festival of India.

In *The Double Day*, all crewmembers, apart from the cinematographer, are women.³⁰ This is visually displayed in one of the scenes. Early on in the film, the crew is introduced with shots of each of its members while filming in a landscape that is likely located somewhere in the Bolivian Andean mountains. Their names and roles also appear written on the screen.³¹ On the one hand, this scene exposes the female gaze behind the making of the film. On the other hand, and more importantly, the extra-diegetic entering the diegetic world of the film serves to support one of its claims, women are gaining a central role in the workplace. The story of the crewmembers is then linked to the story of the documentary subjects, turning the way in which this documentary was made into both a reflexive device and a political statement. Moreover, a female-led crew permitted the creation of safe spaces where other women felt comfortable to speak out. As Solberg explained: 'I was quite conscious of wanting a female crew because I

²⁹ This workshop was one of the outcomes of June Nash's research project *Feminine Perspectives on Social Science Research in Latin America* and was attended by anglo, latina, and Latin American graduate students from US universities.

³⁰ As Marina Cavalcanti Tedesco explains, the inclusion of a man (Affonso Beato) in the production of this feminist film responded to the need for an experienced cinematographer given the nature of this particular project, which involved travelling for months without being able to process and review the footage until the shooting had finished. Tedesco also notes that the collective approach in the making of this film was limited because Solberg was the only Latin American woman in the crew (2022).

³¹ Producer Jane Stubbs, assistant editor Joy Galane, second camera operator Christine Burrill, sound recordist Lisa Jackson, still photographer Dolores Neuman, cinematographer Affonso Beato, and director Helena Solberg Ladd.

believed that this would make the Latin American women we intended to interview more comfortable. I also thought that seeing women working as technicians might have a notable impact, as in fact it did' (Burton 1986: 89). In these spaces, women's stories are given value and listened to. Here they voice the gender-specific forms of oppression endured. Solberg also appears in a number of these shots in her role as facilitator in the telling of first-hand life experiences, but also as the mediator in the co-construction of these voices within the film. The semi-structured interviews that she holds with the participants demonstrate that there is an exchange of experiences and ideas. Through these conversations, women are setting the ground for the development of a critical consciousness that is key for disrupting the transmission of capitalist and patriarchal values.



Figure 1. The director and camera operator in *The Double Day* (1975).



Figure 2. The sound recordist and an indigenous woman in *The Double Day* (1975).

‘Factories Don’t Hire Women with *Polleras*’

The images and testimonies of factory workers, indigenous women, and activists draw a collective portrait never seen on screen before. The film begins with a group of workers leaving a factory, in a clear reference to *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895) by Louis Lumière. Yet, in this image workers are overwhelmingly male. Another shot shows a group of women gathering around the film crew. One of them complains about the lack of job opportunities in factories. The editing cuts to the man behind her, who contradicts her and assures that there are jobs in Argentinian factories. This juxtaposition validates gender as a relevant lens as it clearly demonstrates that the experiences of men and women workers are distinct. Other scenes reinforce this validation. The work of the miners’ wives in Bolivia underlines the rigid gender segregation that exists. Men dig the mines, women queue at the grocery shop. Although the comparison might seem frivolous, it is because of the tireless support of their wives that the miners can work. Even more, as the voice-over states, it is because of women’s organization that the miners’ union functions and their basic rights are protected. Despite their crucial role, the film exposes that here women are regarded as inferior not only than men, but also than children. The film also observes indigenous women at work

in the countryside: herding sheep and llamas, tilling land by hand, processing meat and other foods; besides childrearing, cooking, and cleaning. The voiceover asserts: 'in the country, women work harder than men.' These images show a lifestyle that predates industrialization and in which the work of women is deemed of value. However, in this rural environment, the film points at how modernity has left women behind, as noted by Nash: 'in the process of modernization, women's products and services have been ignored, and in some cases eliminated from the market as their handicrafts yield to the competition of factory-made goods' (1976: 4). This idea is expanded by an indigenous woman who says that 'factories don't hire women with *polleras*.' By introducing ethnicity as another form of exclusion in women's access to work, the film is recognizing the existence of distinctive experiences also amongst women.

Discursively, *The Double Day* gives value to women's everyday experiences. What all these women have in common is their double exploitation, as workers and as women. Indeed, the title of the film encapsulates an idea expressed by one of the subjects when describing a woman's day, which is divided between paid jobs outside the house and unpaid domestic labour. However, this is not a film about individual stories, but an exploration of ideas. The film unfolds as a complex, yet also messy, exploration of work-related and other forms of women's oppression, including the lack of job opportunities, the double day, the socialization of boys and girls, and the uneven distribution of power within the family; and locates its causes within both capitalism and patriarchy, even though the latter word is never mentioned. Several women who are not identified by name or country but who clearly come from different backgrounds reflect about their double day. Through these testimonies, the film makes visible different streams of the Domestic Labour Debate. Their voices are punctuated by a Marxist-analytical female voice-over that from the very beginning locates women's oppression in the emerging capitalist economies and refers to the so-called 'economic miracles' in the region as the cause of increasing deprivation for the majority. Echoing ideas by Friedrich Engels, the voice-over highlights the productive nature of domestic work: 'factory owners pay one wage and receive the work of two people.'³² However, the positioning of capital as the primary source of women's oppression is contested. Even though the voice-over insists on the need to

³² 'The emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and remain so, as long as women are excluded from social production and restricted to domestic labor. The emancipation of women becomes feasible only then when women are enabled to take part extensively in social production, and when domestic duties require their attention in a minor degree. This state of things was brought about by the modern great industries, which not only admit of women's liberal participation in production, but actually call for it and, besides, endeavor to transform domestic work also into a public industry' (Engels [1884] 1902: 193).

join the class struggle to achieve women's liberation, some of the women see patriarchy as a separate cause of oppression. In one of the final scenes, female members of a union raise concerns about being excluded from the discussions by their male colleagues. They are afraid of speaking out and, if they do, their voices are often ignored. One of them says: 'we are initiating our own liberation.' This scene adds another layer to the film, distancing it from the claims that the voice-over makes.

The two different streams of the Domestic Labour Debate –the socialization of/wages for domestic work– were at the heart of the discussions amongst feminists in the 1970s. As seen before, the starting point of these debates was that the productive value of domestic work should be recognized. However, the solutions provided were different. Margaret Benston argued that women's liberation could be achieved through accessing jobs outside the home but only by simultaneously socializing the jobs of cooking, cleaning, and childcare, so that women could enter the workforce and other public spheres in equal terms to men. She writes: 'equal access to jobs outside the home, while one of the preconditions for women's liberation, will not in itself be sufficient to give equality for women [...]. A second prerequisite [...] is the conversion of the work now done in the home as private production into work to be done in the public economy' (1969: 21). Thus, Benston argued that women would only have equal access to job opportunities if they are free from the burden of domestic work. Conversely, Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa insisted on the surplus value created by domestic work by providing food, clothes, and comfort, which improves the productivity of those working outside the house (1975). Moreover, women reproduce the labour force. For them, domestic labour and women's role in reproduction are essential parts of life. Thus, they argued, there should be wages for housework.³³ The criticism that this approach received was that welfare payments for housework would only 'shif[t] the dependency of women from their husbands to the state' (Safa 1976: 81). Besides, women's continuous seclusion to the home 'would not necessarily lead to greater class consciousness' (ibid).

Despite these different views, *The Double Day* seems to imply that these two possible solutions are not mutually exclusive. Whereas those women who live in the city and work in factories could benefit from the socialization of cooking, cleaning, and childcare; the domestic work performed by others takes up most of their time and is shown as a direct contribution to their husbands' productivity, as demonstrated by the Bolivian housewives. As mentioned at

³³ In recent years, Federici has pointed at the importance of demanding 'wages for housework not for housewives, convinced that this demand would go a long way toward "degenderizing" this work' (2012: 9).

the beginning of this section, Domitila Barrios de Chungara was one of the housewives of the tin mine Siglo XX who had become involved and eventually led the Housewives' Committee in 1965.³⁴ She is a personification of the possibility for housewives to develop a class consciousness and actively engage not only with those issues that strictly affect their husbands, but with their own struggles in domestic work and the reproduction of the workforce. In the film, Domitila insists on the productive nature of the housewives' work who, as she explains, queue for hours to get food, provide a comfortable place for their husbands to rest, and give birth and raise children who will become future workers. She also mentions that the average life expectancy for men at the mine is 35 years, so when women become widows with several children to look after, they only receive a very small pension that does not cover basic expenses. Domitila sees unpaid housework and the lack of job opportunities for women as sources of women's oppression.

Domitila's conviction and determination was such that Solberg asked her to attend the UN World Conference on Women in Mexico, where the film premiered. Here she confronted the ideas of many of the attendees, notably Betty Friedan –whom Solberg names as one of her main influences– and other liberal feminists (Olcott 2017). She exposed how the nature of their oppression, despite being all women, was different.³⁵ This moment epitomizes one of the criticisms that other writers have made about *The Double Day*, which relates to how the film dismisses national identities and cultural differences and tries to build a class consciousness across Latin American working women on the grounds of their double exploitation. I contend that the problem of the film lies in its attempt to pack very complex ideas that are represented through the stories of several women from different backgrounds. In such a short format, the editing becomes inevitably erratic and the stories are presented in a shallow manner which does not help the viewer grasp such complexity. Besides, women's voices are dubbed, a technique that is associated with ethnographic documentaries that reproduce colonial hierarchies and that

³⁴ In 1967, this tin mine experienced the cruellest killing of workers by military troops in the history of Bolivia. This episode featured in Jorge Sanjinés' film *El coraje del pueblo* [*The Courage of the People*] (1971). In this film, Domitila played herself as a female leader in the struggles of Siglo XX.

³⁵ Domitila was invited to speak in one of the panels. When her time run out, she was asked to stop by the chair but the audience shouted 'let her speak.' From this event, the book *Let Me Speak! Testimony of a Woman of the Mines of Bolivia*, co-authored with Brazilian journalist Moema Viezzer, was written, becoming one of the first books of *testimonio* about women in Latin America. Here Domitila recounts her life in the mines but also her struggles to fight against women's oppression. Domitila also spoke about the making of the documentary. She wrote: 'In 1974, a Brazilian filmmaker commissioned by the United Nations came to Bolivia. She was travelling across Latin America, looking for female leaders, searching for women's opinions about their condition, how they participate in the empowerment of women. In Bolivia, she was interested in the housewives' union, of which she had heard about abroad, and she had also watched the women acting in the film *El coraje del pueblo*. So she asked for permission to the government to come to the mines. She came to visit me. She liked my speech and she said it was necessary that everyone learnt about my story' ([1977] 2005: 164).

objectify the people being filmed (Honesty Roe and Pramaggiore 2018). Thus, dubbing goes against what the film aims to achieve, which is precisely to provide a space for these women to speak out with their own voices. Yet, what remains important is its bold commitment to demonstrating the productive value of domestic work as well as to pointing at the deeply ingrained structural forces that continue to disregard and undermine women's work.

As I have argued, *The Double Day* is a film that is very valuable for many reasons. Despite the long commitment of militant cinema to the representation of workers' struggles, this is the first film made in Latin America that addresses such issues from the point of view of women. With this I do not mean to state that women workers were not represented in militant cinema (although in an overwhelming minority), but that their gender-specific working experiences were unacknowledged. Prior to *The Double Day*, women's work was represented as indistinguishable from men's work. Yet, as this film demonstrates, not only was the nature of women's work distinct, the emerging of a class consciousness among women did not follow the same processes. This is to say, women's entry into the workforce did not facilitate the development of a class consciousness or the integration of women in the class struggle. In most cases, it just triggered a double exploitation.

By exploring different challenges that women faced in their entry to the workforce and proposing possible solutions, the film unveils forms of exploitation that are caused not only by the rapid expansion of capitalism, but also by the deeply ingrained patriarchal values that continue to fail to recognize domestic work as work. It is important to highlight that a notable absence in this film is the daily struggles of *professional* domestic workers –those who do receive wages for their cooking, cleaning, and childrearing; and that, as I will expand later in this chapter, make up the vast majority of working women in Latin America. This absence echoes something even more worrisome, the lack of acknowledgment of the precarious conditions in which domestic service operates within the region by those researchers who pioneered the study of gender in Latin America and by those who formulated the 1970s Domestic Labour Debate.

1.2. Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva's *Amor, mujeres y flores*

'During the filming of *Love, Women, and Flowers*, Jorge and I realized that the militant film language of the 1960s and 1970s had become exhausted — it was no longer viable. Jorge suggested that we retain the denunciatory aspect of our films, but that we also look for poetic and magical dimensions' (Marta Rodríguez cited in West and West 1993: 39-44). Co-directed by Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva, *Amor, mujeres y flores* provides a women-centred analysis of the class struggle. It merges the end of an era of militant cinema with a poetic approach that still sought to expose and confront structures of oppression and to empower those who worked under exploitative conditions. Discursively, this film navigates between Marxism and feminism. Aesthetically, it begins to challenge the well-established conventions of documentary. Using a poetic language, women speak to camera about their experiences working in the flower industry. Throughout the film, their voices signal the development of a class-consciousness that, although rooted in conventional Marxist ideas, recognizes other forms of oppression that are specifically related to gender. Even though Marta Rodríguez refers to herself as a militant but not a feminist filmmaker, I regard this film as a feminist interpretation of the development of a class consciousness amongst women workers of the flower industry.³⁶ Specifically, I look at how, on the one hand, Rodríguez and Silva's filmmaking methods facilitated the act of speaking out. On the other hand, I explore how the vocal plurality of this film emphasizes the potential of collective narratives for political action by paying attention to the semiotic value of these voices.

After Colombia's independence from Spain in 1810, Spanish and other European settlers continued to accumulate large estates called *encomiendas*, which were developed from the exploitative conditions imposed upon the indigenous population and African slaves. Later, the set of reforms that eliminated the state's monopoly of tobacco and abolished indigenous reserves during the liberal government of General José Hilario López (1849-1853) benefited the emergence of an incipient capitalist and globalized economy. Free trade of agricultural goods, such as coffee and bananas, and the ongoing exploitation of poor peasants and indigenous and black communities now in the form of cheap labour force facilitated the integration of Colombia into the world market and the shifting from a colonial to a capitalist economy. Yet, numerous violent events —particularly through guerrilla warfare instrumentalized by political parties— and the lack of an efficient transport system obstructed Colombia's capitalist enterprise. However, the history of Colombia is also about movements

³⁶ Author interview with Marta Rodríguez, Bogotá, August 18, 2018.

of resistance and solidarity. Prior to 1810, there were attempts to rebel against colonial rule through the setting up of communities known as *palenques* or the broader uprising movement known as *Comunero*.³⁷ In these various attempts, women had prominent roles as demonstrated by Policarpa Salavarrieta and the ways in which she used her gender to infiltrate within royalist households and spy for the revolutionary cause. Other forms of resistance continued to take place during the 20th century in the form of revolts of both manufacturer workers and peasants. And it was precisely ‘the premature collapse of the popular movements [that] provide[d] the fertile terrain for the country’s degeneration into sectarian violence’ (Pearce 1990: 49) from the 1950s, when Colombia became one of the most violent countries in Latin America.

As militant filmmakers concerned with the making of a political cinema that could not only shed light on the deeply ingrained inequalities of Colombian society, but also change them, Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva focused their attention on the exploitation of peasants, indigenous communities, and workers, as well as on instrumentalizing cinema to galvanize audiences and spark social change. Right from their first film, *Chircales* (1966-1972), they gained a privileged position at the core of the NLAC and were internationally recognized as militant filmmakers. As a matter of fact, Rodríguez’s filmography is one of the most, if not the most, extensive of any documentary filmmaker in Colombia.³⁸ For nearly half of her career, she co-directed with her partner, Jorge Silva, until his unexpected death during the production of *Amor, mujeres y flores* in 1987. Their cinema has been explored by both Latin American and international scholars in notable works (Burton 1986 and 1999; Arboleda Ríos and Osorio Gómez 2002; Wood 2005; Martin 2012; Suárez 2012; Ruffinelli 2013; Núñez and Tedesco 2014). However, the film with which I am concerned in this chapter has received little scholarly attention. Important exceptions are two pieces published by *Jump Cut* in 1993, an article by Ilene Goldman and an interview with Rodríguez by Dennis West and Joan M. West. For

³⁷ The Revolt of the *Comuneros* brought together modest property owners, small merchants, the creole elite, poor mestizos, and indigenous peoples against the increased taxation and other measures that were part of the Bourbon reforms in 1781 (Pearce 1990).

³⁸ Marta Rodríguez learnt about cinema from Jean Rouch while studying in France during the 1950s. Back in Colombia, she studied Sociology and Anthropology with the radical priest Camilo Torres. With him, Rodríguez worked in a research project about the brick makers in Bogotá’s suburban area of Tunjuelito, which led to the production of *Chircales*. In 1965, Rodríguez met Jorge Silva in the cine-club of the French Alliance in Bogotá. Silva had already made *Días de Papel* [*Paper Days*], a Neorealist-inspired short-film about poverty and inequality based on his own childhood experiences. After *Chircales*, they made *Planas: Testimonio de un etnocidio* [*Planas: Testimony of an Ethnocide*] (1970-71), *Campesinos* [*Peasants*] (1970-75), *La voz de los sobrevivientes* [*The Voice of the Survivors*] (1980), and *Nuestra voz de tierra, memoria y futuro* [*Our Voice of Land, Memory, and Future*] (1974-80). These films received less attention in international festivals yet were more politically effective and contributed to opening discussions about the massacre of indigenous population that reached the Colombian congress. Marta continued to make films after the death of Silva, being her latest *Camilo Torres Restrepo. El amor eficaz* [*Camilo Torres Restrepo. Effective Love*] (2022).

Goldman, the film demonstrates the fact that ‘women’s struggles are inseparable from class struggle’ and, therefore, cannot be considered a ‘feminist film in a North American sense’ (1993: 33-38). In the interview, Rodríguez offers an overview of her career and discusses the production of *Amor, mujeres y flores* in detail, focusing on its participative mode of production and the involvement of the documentary subjects in the decision making during both the shooting and the editing processes.

In this chapter, I contribute to the existent literature by exploring how the filmmakers’ particular methodology aimed at helping women workers develop a class consciousness. I also look at how women’s voices poetically navigate from describing to interpreting the struggle of the working class, and how they slip into a feminist discourse that agitates the film’s ideological framework. This is possible due to the film’s reliance on vocal plurality. This is to say, the different ways of representing voices both reproduce and disrupt documentary conventions. Annabelle Honess Roe and Maria Pramaggiore describe vocal plurality as ‘the interactions among narrating, interviewed and overheard voices [...] but also the way that documentary subjects’ “own” voices are not always identical to themselves across contexts, times and places’ (2018: 3-4). In *Amor, mujeres y flores*, women’s voices transit from resignation to agency. This is the result of how the production methods foregrounded dialogical relations, self-knowledge, and critical consciousness. Taking this into consideration, the following questions arise: can the notion of speaking *by*, *for*, or *about* the working class be subverted through participative methods? When subaltern women speak, are their voices reproducing hegemonic discourses? Is it possible to escape these discourses through *conscientization* and resignification?

A Women-Centred Turn in the Class Struggle

Informed by the Marxist discourse of militant cinema, *Amor, mujeres y flores* is a 53-minute documentary primarily concerned with denouncing exploitative relations of production at a time when Colombia became increasingly inserted in global capitalism. In 1961, the Colombian government signed the Alliance for Progress with the USA to enhance free trade and combat communist ideas. This agreement allowed US companies to move their flower industries to the surrounding areas of Bogotá. As a result, Colombia became the world’s second-largest flower exporter, while flowers became the third-highest export revenue, after coffee and cocaine. To maximize profits, flowers were grown inside greenhouses and were fumigated with fungicides and insecticides that were restricted or banned for health reasons in

the USA and Europe.³⁹ Soon, the flower industry came to be known for its exploitative work conditions and for causing poor health, as Colombia's flower workers –mostly women– suffered from health problems associated with pesticide exposure, ranging from conjunctivitis to cancer and miscarriages.⁴⁰ Amid this scenario, Rodríguez and Silva pointed their camera at the flower fields of the savannah of Bogotá.

Although the film has a poetical tone articulated through the voices of both the subjects and the filmmakers, it also relies on conventional devices, such as inter-titles, talking-heads, and indexical images. The inter-titles are used as a rhetorical strategy to introduce a structure based on a problem –women become ill after being exposed to pesticides at their workplace– and a solution –the need for unionising the working-class. The use of indexical images evidences this expository structure. Several sequences show the process of producing flowers on an industrial and globalized scale: the workers arriving, building the greenhouses, laying the pipes, sterilizing the soil, planting the crops, fumigating, harvesting, packaging, transporting the flowers abroad, and finally, selling them at an auction in a market in Holland. The contamination becomes visible through shots of fumes coming out of the soil, workers crying after fumigating, and the attention to their exposed arms and legs. Heavily pregnant women continue to work on their knees arranging with bare hands the same flowers that have been fumigated with highly toxic components. These devices place the film within the evidentiary, authenticating, and persuasive functions of conventional documentary. Their incorporation might be explained by the fact that *Amor, mujeres y flores* was intended for international audiences as it was produced and funded by different international organizations that favoured the well-established codes of this art-form.⁴¹ As a matter of fact, the editing of this film was extremely complicated because of several reasons. Besides the existence of a great amount of material that had to be reduced to less than an hour because of contractual requirements and the passing of different Western editors with whom there were constant cultural and other type of clashes, Rodríguez had to undertake this process while grieving the death of her long-term partner, father of her children, and co-director of the film.⁴²

³⁹ Some of the insecticides used were Endosulfan, a highly controversial agrochemical that was eventually banned globally, and Parathion, which is also highly toxic and whose use has been either restricted or banned in most countries.

⁴⁰ *María, llena eres de gracia* [*Maria Full of Grace*] (2004) is a Colombian fiction film directed by Joshua Marston that also touches upon the work conditions in the flower industry.

⁴¹ Channel 4 and Jonathan Curling's Firefret Productions (United Kingdom), Swissaid (Switzerland), AGKED (Germany), the Inter-American Foundation (USA) –which requested to be removed from the credits because of the film's politics– and the directors' own production company Fundación Cine Documental Investigación Social.

⁴² Author interview with Marta Rodríguez, Bogotá, August 18, 2018.



Figure 3. A woman arranges flowers inside a greenhouse in *Amor, mujeres y flores* (1984-1989).



Figure 4. A flower worker shares her testimony in *Amor, mujeres y flores* (1984-1989).

In *Amor, mujeres y flores*, women become the primary storytellers of the larger socio-economic problems experienced by the working class and, although at the beginning they seem to be alienated and depoliticised, they become active participants in the class struggle. Thus, this film is preoccupied with the development of a class consciousness amongst the women working in the flower industry. Unlike conventional documentaries in which the filmmakers are not supposed to intervene in the historical world of the subjects, Rodríguez and Silva's distinctive filmmaking methodology actively sought to ignite movements of resistance and, in this case, to facilitate the formation of a class consciousness. As Silva said in an interview with Julianne Burton: 'one of the primary goals was to break with traditional documentary methods, which allow the filmmaker to manipulate reality according to personal whim. This is an elitist approach, since it does not acknowledge the possibility of collaboration with the people who are being filmed' (1988: 28). During the making of this film, Rodríguez and Silva screened political films at workers' gatherings in order to spark discussions about work exploitation and ways of overcoming it.⁴³ By looking at the struggles of others, workers could be inspired to reflect upon their situation and carry out their own struggle. This explains why their films often took years to produce, escaping the industrial logic driven by commercial or economic immediate goals. Moreover, some of the women even participated in the editing of the film, at which point, 'some of them asked to be removed from the film entirely. They were afraid of losing their jobs when the film came out' (Rodríguez in West and West 1997: 39-44). Thus, here, Rodríguez and Silva not only exercised collective solidarity, they also involved the workers in the process of representation.

'I Left the Flower Industry Like a Withered Flower'

Although feminism is not a recognized ideological position adopted by the filmmakers, as Deborah Martin has demonstrated in her analysis of *Chircales*, Rodríguez and Silva's films often challenge the representation of women and slip into feminist politics and aesthetics (2012: 149). *Amor, mujeres y flores* transits between participatory, expository, and poetic documentary modes (Nichols 2017) and incorporates feminist and semiotic elements, drifting away from the conventions of militant cinema. This departure is primarily expressed through the voice. The multiple voices in this film respond to both classical documentary approaches – such as the voice of the radio presenter and the talking-head interviews– and feminist

⁴³ 'We went at night because the workers had gazebos and we brought films, for instance, our documentaries shot in Cauca and Sanjinés' films, to show them how the political struggles were, how they took over the land. It was a real learning process' (Rodríguez 2018).

experimental ways of constructing the voice, such as the filmmaker's voiceover and the disembodied voices and poetic language of some of the subjects. In the opening scene, Marta Rodríguez's voice-over poetically names a list of concepts associated with flowers (*happiness, beauty, fraternity, utopia, love, woman, maternity, nature, light, sensuality, ecology, etc.*) while the camera tracks along several carnations of different colours in a slow and circular movement. This extra-diegetic voice-over differs from the voice-of-God type of commentary often used in both conventional documentary films and militant cinema, including the filmmakers' previous films. Her voiceover is not an authoritative male voice that 'speaks from a position of superior knowledge' (Silverman 1988: 48) or that imposes meaning to convey *the* truth which, as Mary Ann Doane notes, reinforces patriarchal structures. She writes, 'in the history of the documentary, this voice has been for the most part that of the male, and its power resides in the possession of knowledge and in the privileged, unquestioned activity of interpretation' (1980: 43). Within the Latin American political documentary, the voice-over often offered a class-based analysis using an otherwise conventional and male voice that insistently used 'el obrero' to refer to the working class, such in the case of *Chircales* (Martin 2012: 154). This was not just because of the Spanish language attribution of gender neutrality to the masculine form, but also because these films were primarily concerned with the struggles of male workers, as addressed previously.

The voiceover in *Amor, mujeres y flores* is neither neutral, nor does it offer any empirical information or analysis. It poetically introduces us to a film in which meaning changes, signalling at the ideological underpinnings of images and the possibility of demystifying signs. The voice-over invites us to look at images beyond their denotative meaning, which underlies the semiotic value that the film aims to explore. In this regard, Ruffinelli writes, 'if for the male imaginary, women are metaphorically flowers, the truth is that in reality they are the victims of the flower. But the myth continues' (2003: 94). In the patriarchal imaginary, flowers illustrate the fragility and beauty of the female body. For feminist artists, such as Judy Chicago, flowers symbolize female genitalia; for others such as Frida Kahlo, flowers are also related to female fertility. Thus, although not a self-conscious feminist cultural artefact, *Amor, mujeres y flores* also re-appropriates and re-signifies an object that has historically been exploited by patriarchal forms of signification. Here, flowers are not only the cause of illness and death, but they point at women's role in reproduction in literal terms, since 'the dangers [women] face are inextricable from their potential reproduction of human life' (Goldman 1993: 33-38). The voices in this documentary attribute new meanings to flowers. For the women workers, flowers are associated with poverty, illiteracy,

abandonment, miscarriages, asthma, and cancer. For the man who owns one of the flower companies, flowers are memories, business, money. In the epilogue, meaning changes again. We see a photograph of Jorge Silva with his camera, whilst Rodríguez's voiceover announces his unexpected death, at the age of 46, on January 28, 1987, during the production of this film. A carnation is left in his honour. This element of *mise en abyme* refers to the extra-diegetic story of the filmmaker, turning the film into a subjective journey. As noted by Goldman, Silva's 'death is a direct result of the production of beauty, either the film or the flowers' (1993: 33-38).



Figure 5. Jorge Silva next to a worker of the flower industry.

Unlike the straightforward political rhetoric employed in militant cinema, the women in this film speak poetically about their experiences in the flower industry, recurring to figures of speech that powerfully and strikingly suggest the commodification of women's bodies and reveal the exploitative conditions in their work environment due to the lack of health safety and other issues. Mariela, a flower worker who developed leukaemia from being exposed to

pesticides, says: 'behind each flower, there is a death.' Other testimonies reinforce this idea: 'women give their lives for flowers' and 'I left the flower industry like a withered flower.' These women speak while looking straight into the camera, directly addressing the spectator. They are placed at the centre of an intimately framed close-up shot. This composition serves to acknowledge that women are gaining a central position within the class struggle, but it can also be a reminder of the lack of centrality of women's specific forms of oppression within the struggles for liberation (McDonough and Harrison 2013). Although it remains unclear whether these voices were scripted, what can be affirmed is that they were co-constructed. This is to say, through the collaborative process implemented in the making of this film, women transit from the description of events and the resignation that nothing can be changed to their interpretation and the acknowledgment of their responsibility as transformative agents of their own reality.⁴⁴ At the beginning of the film, the voices of these women convey the frustration of believing that they have no choice. Towards the end, the documentary subjects are presented as empowered women who are fully involved in the class struggle and articulate their experiences in poetic ways.

The slipping into a feminist discourse is visually represented by switching from the workplace to the intimacy of the home. In this private space, their struggles are no longer strictly related to work but to gender. Here issues such as the double day, abortion, and rape are addressed. Although the development of a class consciousness, according to Safa, inevitably requires women's involvement in the class struggle, it also demands the re-evaluation of women's role within the family and the community (1976: 82). In one of the final scenes, during the strike, a woman says: 'my husband didn't want me to come here at night but I challenged him. In the end he let me come. So I won a victory there.' By adding this statement, the film is acknowledging that women's oppression does not only happen in the workplace but also in the home. However, the way these women find to confront and intervene in their reality emphasizes the film's Marxist discourse. Women's liberation seems to be possible through 'the workers' awakening consciousness to the benefits of unionising' (Goldman 1993: 33-38). The film ends with a series of titles explaining that on May 11, 1987, the workers of Bogotá Flowers Ltd. went on strike and later took over the company. This attempt to take control of capitalist technology under a new form of working-class organization also echoes Marxist ideas that

⁴⁴ After the film was released in Colombia, Marta Rodríguez was accused of making the stories up by members of the flower industry and the government. The premiere of the film at the National Film Theatre in London was followed by similar accusations by members of the Colombian Embassy. However, Rodríguez believes that this film was very effective since some of the pesticides used were subsequently banned (Rodríguez 2018).

were first formulated in the preface of the Communist Manifesto (1872). Yet, as David Harvey has noted, these years might retrospectively be regarded ‘as a revolutionary turning-point in the world’s social and economic history’ (2005: 1) since the strengthening of neoliberalism ‘made traditional forms of labour organization less appropriate and, as a consequence, less successful’ (2003: 172). In the film, eventually, the army entered the installations, evicted the workers, and returned the company to its owners. The final title reads: ‘this is not a defeat, the struggle has just begun. Amelia, a worker.’ This final statement indicates not only that women have developed a class consciousness and are fully involved in the class struggle, but also that they are leading it. It presents an opportunity to imagine a different future.

To conclude, as militant filmmakers aware of the unjust oppressive and violent manners with which Colombian elites have historically treated vulnerable groups, Rodríguez and Silva sought to create a political cinema that could not only shed light on the deeply ingrained inequalities of their society, but also change them. Drawing from Freire’s work but also from Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino’s idea of *cine-acto*, Rodríguez and Silva often screened political films to the subjects of their own films in order to stimulate the formation of community-bonding and the development of critical thinking. Stemming from this consistent commitment to put cinematic processes and representations at the service of movements of resistance, during the years of rapid neoliberalization, Rodríguez and Silva attempted to invigorate the incipient class of women workers. They did so through the practice of collective solidarity as well as by involving their subjects in filmmaking processes. This film also marks the end of an era in the filmmaker’s filmography, not only because of the premature death of Silva during its production, but also because of a shift in political cinema. Departing from the straightforward Marxist discourse of militant cinema and slipping into subjective and poetic approaches, in *Amor, mujeres y flores*, women workers speak poetically about their experiences in the flower industry and become first-hand storytellers of the human consequences of the globalized Colombian industry. Their voices evolve from the description of events and the resignation that nothing can be changed to their interpretation and the acknowledgment of their agency as the means for transforming their own reality. Similarly, the filmmakers’ voice-over does not speak from a position of superior knowledge, nor does it offer a class-based analysis. Instead, it re-appropriates and re-signifies an object that has historically been exploited by patriarchal forms of signification. Yet, the film fails to recognize that the same historical processes that equipped working men with a class consciousness were not always valid for working women.

1.3. María Barea's *Porque quería estudiar*

In 1983, during the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist *Encuentro* in Lima, one of the proposals was enthusiastically cheered by the audience, to organize a continental strike of domestic work. Although the status of domestic work was at the core of feminist debates, the labour conditions of the *professional* domestic worker in its different variants (as live-in or hourly-paid maid) were often excluded from the priorities of bourgeois feminist movements.⁴⁵ Instead, research on women's work paid attention to those working in the incipient industries or to the unrecognized domestic and reproductive labour of the housewife, as demonstrated throughout this chapter. In this section, I revisit *Porque quería estudiar* (1990) in the wake of current endeavours to make visible a type of work that remains under alarming levels of precariousness. I contend that what this documentary does is to render visible this vastly feminized profession as well as the ongoing need for voicing and protecting those domestic workers mobilizing in the pursuit of their rights. Directed by María Barea and produced by WARMI Cine y Video, this film is primarily articulated through the voice of Graciela Huayhua Collanqui, a woman from the Peruvian countryside who moved to Lima to work as a live-in maid at a very young age.⁴⁶ Like many others, she worked under the exploitative conditions that characterized domestic work. Yet, against all the odds, she was able to escape and, thus, she became aware that the abusive experiences she had endured in the isolation of her employer's house were not rare. On the contrary, they were the norm. In the following paragraphs, I position *Porque quería estudiar* as a precursor in the representation of domestic workers as subjects with agency. This documentary was conceived as a pedagogical tool that could animate young girls to speak up about their experiences in domestic service. In particular, I focus on how the inclusion of Graciela's harrowing testimony and the ways in which it is formally represented in the film facilitated a process of consciousness-raising by creating a mirroring effect.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the world's region 'with the largest proportion of domestic workers' (Higman 2015: 33); the vast majority of whom are women (Moya 2007; Higman 2015). This also means that in most Latin American countries, domestic work constitutes the single largest female employment sector. The different tasks involved in this

⁴⁵ By 'professional' I mean those who work in domestic service for other households, even though this work is not always paid (such in the case of some live-in maids who only get accommodation and food in exchange for their work) and as opposed to those domestic workers who perform unpaid domestic labour in their own home.

⁴⁶ A previous documentary on domestic work is *La trabajadora invisible [The Invisible Worker]* (Clara Riascos, 1987) by the Colombian Cine Mujer. Here, domestic work is addressed from three perspectives, that of the housewife, the live-in maid, and the hourly-paid worker.

type of work have traditionally been perceived as *natural* women's responsibilities and disregarded as proper work, devaluing the bargaining position of domestic workers when it comes to demand rights and the improvement of work conditions (Mantouvalou 2012; Herceg-Pakšić 2019).⁴⁷ Moreover, it is a type of work that lifts the burden of domestic labour from the shoulders of middle- and upper-class women and it is often managed by female employers. Some of these women participated in the bourgeois feminist movements, often without acknowledging that they were reproducing in the privacy of their homes the gender-based forms of oppression that were denouncing publicly. Away from public scrutiny, it is precisely the fact that this type of work happens in the privacy of a household where live-in maids are isolated from the world which allows extreme power imbalances between employers and workers.⁴⁸ Besides, the proximity to and even the intimacy with the family members creates confusion, which very likely makes it even more difficult to understand one's own situation as a form of exploitation.

WARMI Cine y Video and the Visibilizing of Peruvian Women

Similar to most Latin American countries, in Peru, the colonial legacy of ruling white or whitened elites continued long after independence, not only in the realms of the economy and politics, but also in the cultural sphere. Inevitably, decades if not centuries of racial tensions erupted during the 1980s in the form of extremely violent confrontations between the militant Maoist revolutionary group Sendero Luminoso [Shining Path] –in its attempt to re-instate Incan culture– and the Peruvian military. This brutal decade was followed by pressures from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to implement radical neoliberal reforms, which were developed through State repression during Alberto Fujimori's regime (1990-2000). Over these years, mass migration from rural areas to the city of Lima drastically changed the demographics of the country. Amid this context, several filmmakers attempted to grasp these

⁴⁷ In recent years, international human rights law has recognized that domestic workers are prone to grave abuse. In 2011, the UN created the International Labour Organization and promulgated the Domestic Workers Convention to set out standards for paid domestic work in private houses. Although some argue that certain forms of domestic work could be considered modern slavery, this categorization is contested which affects the possibility of criminalizing the employers' conduct (Mantouvalou 2012; Herceg Pakšić 2019).

⁴⁸ Live-in maids perform a number of tasks –cleaning, laundry, gardening, cooking, childcare, care for the elderly, etc.– in exchange for very little pay or, even, no pay at all. They often do not have protection such as legal contracts, maximum amount of working hours, minimum pay, holiday or sick leave, health care, social security, trade union representation, labour inspections, or maternity benefits. Moreover, they often live under inadequate conditions, with no privacy or proper meals. Their freedom of movement and schedule are controlled by their employers, who can request their assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They are subjected to different forms of abuse –including emotional, physical, and sexual– by their employers and/or their children. Women and girls –as young as eight or nine years old– make up the overwhelming majority of domestic workers. They are often migrants, whether from rural areas or other countries or continents (Mantouvalou 2012).

rapid changes by making films that could be used as tools to understand these processes. One of these filmmakers was María Barea, and her work in WARMI Cine y Video (1989-1998). Funded by Barea, Amelia (Micha) Torres, and María Luz Pérez Goicoechea in 1989, WARMI Cine y Video was the first Peruvian collective exclusively formed by women filmmakers.⁴⁹ It was primarily concerned with instrumentalizing cinema to create consciousness-raising tools to empower subaltern women –such as those women and girls who lived in slums, worked in domestic service, or were involved in gangs– through participative methods. Moreover, these films recognized the value that sharing testimonies has to understand one’s own experiences as driven by systemic factors, but also to show the possibility of agency (Seguí 2022). During its nearly ten years of existence, WARMI Cine y Video produced the short-documentary *Porque quería estudiar* (1990), the feature-length film *Antuca* (1992), and the episode *Hijas de la violencia* [*Daughters of War*] (1998).⁵⁰

The bibliography on Peruvian cinema is rich and extensive (Godoy 2013; Bedoya 2015; León Frías 2016; Malek 2016; Barrow 2018). Yet, as Isabel Seguí notes, the Peruvian cinematic canon has been mostly developed through the journal *Hablemos de Cine* and its ‘colonial and masculinist perspectives and praxis [...] [which] ascribed value mostly to those works that emulated European auteur cinema while sidelining “other” ways of making films’ (2020: 322). This tendency has resulted in a harmful disregard for women’s cinema, with few exceptions that focus on the fictional texts of filmmakers such as Claudia Llosa (White 2015; Barrow 2017) or on the overlooked contributions of women documentary and below-the-line filmmakers (Cavalcanti and Núñez 2014; Seguí 2018). Current curatorial work is revisiting and acknowledging women’s cinema. For instance, these valuable efforts have rescued the

⁴⁹ Prior to founding WARMI Cine y Video, María Barea already had a large trajectory in the Peruvian alternative film industry, working along Luis Figueroa at Cine Club Cuzco and as producer in films such as *Los perros hambrientos* [*Hungry Dogs*] (1975). She was also involved in the Bolivian Grupo Ukamau, in films such *El enemigo principal* [*The Principal Enemy*] (1972). Inspired by Jorge Sanjinés’ participatory practices, she directed *Mujeres del planeta* [*Women of El Planeta*] (1982), which was awarded at the Leipzig Documentary Film Festival and was one of the episodes in the series *As Women See It*, produced by the German production company Faust Films. Later, she became a founding member of Grupo Chaski, where she experienced a constant exclusion from the creative decisions in what she describes as *machismo-leninismo*. Here she worked in two of the three films produced by the collective, *Miss Universo en el Perú* [*Miss Universe in Peru*] (1982) and *Gregorio* (1985). Barea was also commissioned to direct the films *Andahuaylas, suenen las campanas; Andahuaylas, ciudad hermana* [*Andahuaylas, the Bells Ring; Andahuaylas, Sister City*] (1987) and *Porcon* (1989-1992). Other members and collaborators of WARMI Cine y Video were Sonia Llosa, Jorge Vignati, Mark Willems, Lieve Delanoy, Gudula Meinzolt, Horacio Faudella, and Petruska Barea (Seguí 2022).

⁵⁰ Based on a script developed from the testimonies collected in *Porque quería estudiar*, *Antuca* follows a peasant girl who after the death of her father is sent to her godmother’s house to work as a domestic servant. Despite the losses, abuses, and violence that she endures, she learns about her rights thanks to the support and solidarity of fellow young women who are part of an association of domestic workers. *Hijas de la violencia* is one of the six documentaries produced by Brenda Parkerson and commissioned for the program *Girls Around the World* (1999) about the stories of 17-year-old girls across the globe.

extraordinary work of Peru's first woman documentary filmmaker, Nora de Izcue who, in the 1970s, after having children and divorcing, embarked into a filmmaking career that continues until this day.⁵¹ However, apart from Isabel Seguí's doctoral thesis and publications, the work of WARMI Cine y Video has been excluded from the historiography of Peruvian, Latin American, and women's cinema.

Specifically, the documentary selected for this chapter has never been the focus of a lengthy analysis despite the increasing scholarly interest in cinematic representations of the domestic worker in Latin American cinema, which is unfolding as a new strand of criticism.⁵² This interest echoes what Deborah Shaw has called 'a new thematic genre of filmmaking' (2017: 124). Unlike other films and television programs in which the domestic worker is always represented as a nameless character orbiting around and servicing the lives of the main protagonists, Shaw argues that in the new millennium, Latin American cinema is bringing to the fore the complex subjectivities of these previously marginalized women. These works have focused on, on the one hand, the asymmetry in the patron-maid power relations as a colonial reiteration reinforced by existing inequalities based on gender, race, and class. On the other hand, they shed light on the domestic worker's personhood in an attempt to re-humanize those who for a long time have been deemed of no value (Osborn and Ruiz-Alfaro 2020). Indeed, in the conclusion to the anthology *Colonization and Domestic Service*, Victoria K. Haskins and Claire Lowrie write:

Any movement towards a decolonizing agenda requires recognizing not only the structures of oppression that confined and continue to confine domestic workers, but also recognizing domestic workers past and present as human beings with the capacity to shape their own lives and the ability to make whatever efforts possible, on their own terms as far as possible, to realize that potential (2015: 350).

Maids Rise Up to Confront Colonial Legacies

Porque quería estudiar is a 30-minute documentary whose main objective is precisely to make visible the hardship that *professional* domestic workers endure due to the lack of legislative protection and the cultural legacy of colonial attitudes towards service. In a country

⁵¹ Author interview with Nora de Izcue, Lima, August 4, 2018.

⁵² See, for instance, Randall 2018; Osborne and Ruiz-Alfaro 2020. Furthermore, Rachel Randall's forthcoming book *Paid to Care* looks at representations of paid domestic workers in post-dictatorship Latin American cultural production.

where domestic workers continued to be looked down on and exploited by those who have the power to change their situation, the only possibility of hope is for women to support each other and organize themselves. But this documentary does not only capture the process of consciousness-raising amongst domestic workers, it also demonstrates how to use film as a pedagogical tool in a Freirean manner. The initial idea was born from a shared preoccupation of two middle-class women, María Barea and the Italian aid worker, Vittoria Savio. For Barea, the making of *Mujeres del planeta* had brought awareness about the discrimination that Andean women suffered in domestic service. Barea and Savio travelled together throughout the region of Cajamarca collecting testimonies from domestic workers. They also gathered testimonies from a night school attended by rural women who worked as live-in maids in Lima. After securing funding from a number of German and Italian organizations, these testimonies led to the production of two films, this documentary and the feature-length film *Antuca*.⁵³ Both films were supported by the Instituto de Promoción y Formación de Trabajadoras del Hogar [Institute for the Promotion and Training of Domestic Workers] (IPROFOTH).

The documentary takes place at two significant locations. There are a number of observational scenes that illustrate the daily life of women, girls, and children in rural areas. These images highlight communitarian ways of living by portraying collectives rather than individuals. There are images of girls milking cows, women loosening the soil with a hoe while also looking after their toddlers, cooking in an open fire, harvesting maize, etc. Women talk about the lack of opportunities and the scarcity of resources. Because of the adversities of rural life and the increasing violence perpetrated in these remote areas, young girls are sent to Lima to work as live-in maids. One of them is Claudia, a little girl who returned to the countryside after a brief and exploitative experience in domestic service. A close-up of her smiling while weaving a jacket for her doll cuts to a close-up of another girl in the streets of Lima whose contrasting expression is one of confusion and fear. The film also shows the city of Lima at a time when it was rapidly changing due to mass migration from rural areas. Here we see buses arriving at the city bringing women who carry their belongings in *aguayos* –a traditional cloth used in Andean communities. Other scenes show the protagonist, Graciela, working as a live-in maid in a modern middle-class house. While wearing her uniform, she cleans the table, sweeps the floor, and dusts. She also shares her testimony in an interview where she adds a number of other daily tasks –including babysitting, ironing, and cooking. Other images show

⁵³ These organizations are: Latin American Movement for Latin America (MLAL), Aktionsgemeinschaft Solidarische Welte (ASW), Terre des Hommes, and Kirchlicher Entwicklungsdienst Bayern.

couples or groups on women, often with children, in public spaces; and Graciela walking with a friend who has undergone similar experiences. We also see images of girls in a classroom watching and discussing Graciela's testimony. This particular scene will be the focus of my analysis.



Figure 6. Claudia, a little girl who returned to the countryside after working in domestic service in *Porque quería estudiar* (1990).



Figure 7. A little girl on the streets of Lima in *Porque quería estudiar* (1990).

Graciela's touching testimony serves as the backbone of the film which, formally, is represented in two ways. First, she speaks of her experiences while sitting in a kitchen. The camera zooms in and out, from a medium-shot to an extreme close-up of her face. She is centered in the frame, looking at the person behind the camera. Her testimony is poignant. She explains that she is the eldest of five siblings and was not able to study because of her gender. Without opportunities, she moved from Cuzco to Lima to work as a live-in maid in exchange for being enrolled in a night school. This is a common false promise used by urban wealthy households to attract the cheap labour force of uneducated rural girls. Once in Lima, Graciela was isolated from the world, psychically abused, and denied payment. She cries while speaking about being taken away from her childhood, her family, and friends. But she also shows strength and courage in the face of these extremely difficult circumstances. She has understood that her situation is not an isolated form of exploitation, but a systemic one; and she is ready to help others.⁵⁴

Fragments of this interview appear broadcasted on a television, in black and white but with a blue tint, while being watched by other girls who like Graciela are working under the exploitative conditions that too often characterize domestic service. These girls are located in the classroom of a night school arranged by the IPROFOTH, which is an environment where they feel safe and protected. Although the initial idea was to use Graciela's testimony just as part of the research process for *Antuca*, Savio recognized the potential that the screening of this material could have for girls in similar situations. This is to say, broadcasting Graciela's testimony on a television ascribes value to the telling of first-hand life experiences. Indeed, watching her speaking so openly encouraged other girls to reflect and talk about their own stories. When they speak, there is a disarming likeness amongst them. They all come from poor families in the countryside, did not have an opportunity to study because of their gender, and many had to run away from their employers. At this moment, there is a recognition of the systemic factors that lead young girls to end up as exploited domestic workers.

Mirroring Effect

Sophia A. McClennen has written about the use of 'the spectator shot' in the filmography of Grupo Chaski –Barea's previous filmmaking experience which organically informed some of the aesthetic choices in her later films. Unlike those filmmakers who made films for

⁵⁴ María Barea and the rest of WARMI found Graciela Huayhua Collanqui's testimony so inspiring that they offered her the leading role in *Antuca*.

international film festivals, the intended audiences of these film collectives were the same communities in which the films were made. Thus, for them, using cinema as a sort of consciousness-raising tool was a fundamental part of the process. And illustrating this process became a recurrent aesthetic strategy. McClennen refers to ‘the spectator shot’ as the intercutting of close-up shots of the faces of viewers while they watch images of films and television shows.⁵⁵ However, in Chaski’s films, the images showcased do not strictly belong to the everyday life of those who watch them. They are clips from the Miss Universe contest, violent scenes of Hollywood films, telenovelas, and other cultural artefacts that ‘highlight the pervasive existence of mass media culture and the problematic ways the consumption of this culture influences the Peruvian people’ (2011: 103).



Figure 8. Graciela shares her testimony in *Porque quería estudiar* (1990).

⁵⁵ These scenes appear in Chaski’s filmography: *Miss Universo en el Perú* (1982), *Gregorio* (1984), and *Juliana* (1988).



Figure 9. An extreme close-up shot of Graciela in *Porque quería estudiar* (1990).

In *Porque quería estudiar*, what the spectators within the film as well as those who watch the film witness is not the neoliberal hypodermic needle at work, but a harrowing testimony that has a mirroring effect. Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage describes the formative process through which the infant begins recognizing their own separate image by looking at a mirror, which is the genesis of self-consciousness. This reflected image 'exert[s] a profound influence on how we view ourselves and our place in the world' (Holohan 2017: 456) as it initiates a process that unfolds as the basis for the formation of the ego and the subject. Holohan argues that there are overlaps between the theories of Paulo Freire and Jacques Lacan in relation to the formation of the subject, the notion of incompleteness or lack, and the possibility for transformation. Despite crucial differences in their understandings of the subject and its role within the symbolic and material world, the psychoanalytic process can be used for an affective critical pedagogy. He expands, 'by attempting to unearth and radically question the images with which we identify, as well as the broader socio-symbolic order that constructs and confines the limits of these images, critical educators can begin to make a space for envisioning the not-yet-imagined' (p. 460).

The representation of the act of looking at Graciela's testimony on a screen has a mirroring effect that seeks to achieve both identification and detachment. The isolation experienced by these girls since leaving their family home creates a series of psychological

effects expressed in the form of emotional blockages and a great difficulty to communicate (Barea and Meinzolt 1992: 19). This isolation happens at different stages and levels. Often these girls arrive at the city without being able to speak Spanish, they don't know how to go back to their homes, they get lost in the city, and when they enter a house as maids, they are secluded from the outside world. These successive forms of isolation represent an entirely different way of life to the communitarian world they come from, which makes the adjustments needed to adapt even harder. Thus, the image of Graciela on television acts as a mirror in which the girls recognize themselves. Witnessing Graciela voicing what she has gone through and opening up about her own traumatic experiences offers a chance to examine and understand themselves in a process of self-discovery. Moreover, watching these images in a safe space that invites them to communicate about their own personal and distinctive experiences facilitates a process of detachment. Thus, the sharing of their testimonies also distances them from Graciela's image and enables the re-construction of their own identity and self-worth. For these girls, the possibility of gaining awareness about their own situation introduces an opportunity for mobilization and change. Here, the 'spectator shot' acknowledges the mirror effect of the screen not only as a tool for self-reflection, but also as an instrument for collective awakening and transformation.

To conclude, despite being the largest source of women's employment in Latin America, the work of the *professional* domestic worker was excluded from the research conducted by those who pioneered the study of gender in the region. Amidst this invisibilization, *Porque quería estudiar* is a remarkable film because it gives value and recognition to the experiences and testimonies of live-in maids. By doing so, it points at the structures of oppression that repeat patterns of abuse perpetrated on girls and women and that perpetuate exploitative relations rooted in colonialism. Although not naming it explicitly, *Porque quería estudiar* unveils what can be considered a form of modern slavery. The film also goes beyond the exposition and denunciation as it acknowledges the domestic worker and voices the exploitation endured. Most importantly, it shows that there are resources at hand that can help them take control of their own lives. What is absent in this film is precisely the employer. Unlike other films about this topic, in *Porque quería estudiar* the affective relationships established with employers are not explored. Instead of presenting a conflict between two parts, the film demonstrates the importance of community building by looking at how relationships of friendships, camaraderie, and solidarity amongst girls who have suffered the exploitative relations in which domestic service operates creates a collective agency. Thus, neither is this a film about Graciela as an individual, her personhood, or subjectivity; nor does

it explicitly address the political, social, cultural or economic structures that sustain this form of exploitation. Instead, it focuses on the process of self-awareness and consciousness-raising through community practices and a mirroring effect.

Chapter 2. Towards a Feminist Cinema⁵⁶

Amid the 1970s international protests around the struggle for reproductive rights, feminist ideas and praxis travelled across countries and were received, interpreted, and developed in conversation with national spaces and cultures. Within this context, three self-proclaimed feminist film collectives emerged from the burgeoning Latin American women's movements. Cine Mujer was the name chosen by two of them, one founded in Mexico (1975-1986) and the other in Colombia (1978-1999) that, nevertheless, did not learn about the existence of each other until 1981, when they met at the First Latin American and Caribbean Feminist *Encuentro* in Bogotá. The third collective is the Venezuelan Grupo Feminista Miércoles (1979-1988).⁵⁷ Despite their importance, their pioneering work has been largely excluded from the historiographies and criticisms of both Latin American cinema and transnational feminist cinema. Thus, this chapter contributes to the collective endeavour of writing the history of Latin American feminist cinema by providing a more complex understanding of feminist documentary and exploring the ways in which it produces effects and triggers political change. To do so, firstly, I inscribe these collectives within the singular characteristics of the Latin American women's movements. Secondly, I briefly address their history and filmography. And thirdly, I offer formal analysis that pays attention to the relations between modes of authorship, production practices, and aesthetics in three of their films: *Cosas de mujeres* [*Women's Issues*] (1978), *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* [*I, You, Ismaelina*] (1981), and *Carmen Carrascal* (1982).

Broadly, the question that motivates this chapter, and my thesis as a whole, is how to inscribe the corpus of women's cinema in film history without uncritically reproducing the same methodologies that cast a shadow on marginal cinemas and alternative film practices. How do we write a history of Latin American feminist cinema that acknowledges the complexities of feminist film collectives, such as the ones addressed in this chapter? The analyses of the selected films draw from Laura Podalsky's book *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2011), and its attention to the sensorial and emotional. Her approach is very useful as a theoretical tool to understand how feminist documentaries expanded what is understood by political cinema. On the one hand, I look at the

⁵⁶ Parts of this chapter have been expanded and published in three articles and a video-essay. See Cervera 2020a, 2020b, 2022a, 2022b.

⁵⁷ Whereas the Mexican collective chose the name *Cine Mujer* to pay homage to Dziga Vertov's *Kino Pravda*, translated into Spanish as *Cine Verdad*; the reasoning behind the naming of the Colombian collective obeyed a more down-to-earth logic as it brought together the two keywords that defined its activity. Whilst Grupo Feminista Miércoles choose its name in reference to the day of the week when its members used to meet at Franca Donda's flat in Suapure Street in Caracas.

relationships of care established between filmmakers and subjects. On the other hand, I explore how these bonds were then represented through formal devices and aesthetic strategies to encourage viewers to connect emotionally with the subjects too. Ultimately, I position these films as emblematic examples of a formative moment in Latin American feminist cinema.

The Latin American Women's Movements

In Latin America, greater acquisition of women's rights was achieved during the 1970s thanks to women's access to education and the workforce, the migration from rural areas to cities, the political discourse of emancipation, and the circulation of feminist ideas, which galvanized women to organize themselves and challenge traditional gender roles. This feminist efflorescence was catalysed by the UN World Conference on Women, which spurred the development of women's movements across the region (García and Valdivieso 2006; Olcott 2017). However, within these contexts, second-wave feminism was 'mostly understood as an imported imperialist dogma that prioritized issues of sexual liberation over more pressing class-based and social justice agendas' (Olcott cited in Aceves 2013: 5).⁵⁸ And, as this conference exposed, 'women from the popular classes were badly underrepresented' (Olcott 2017: 6). This is to say, second-wave feminism tended to universalize the experiences and priorities of urban white women from middle- and upper-class backgrounds. As a consequence, most women – including black, indigenous, rural, working-class, lesbian, and trans women, amongst others – were othered by second-wave feminism and largely excluded from its demands. For instance, the struggle for reproductive rights over these years did not pay attention to exposing and denouncing forced sterilizations imposed upon poor and indigenous women. Instead, as this chapter demonstrates, it prioritized the decriminalization of abortion.

The intricate coexistence of different cultures and races and the high levels of economic and social inequality make Latin America a distinctive place. Gradually, bourgeois feminists realized that their preoccupations were too confined to their class and privilege, and fostered the need for broader women's movements. As a result, Latin American feminist and women's groups increasingly became intersectional *avant la lettre*, particularly in relation to class and

⁵⁸ The cycles of feminist protests and demands were described as waves by journalist Martha Lear in 1968. Whereas the first-wave refers to the suffrage struggles that sought to gain voting and property rights in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the second-wave took place throughout the sixties and seventies and commonly refers to the struggles for reproductive rights, job opportunities, the status of domestic work, and domestic and sexual violence. These struggles were conducted primarily by white middle-class women living in capital cities of developed Western countries. Thus, the timeframe ascribed to these waves does not correspond with the sequence of events that took place in many Latin American countries where, for instance, women's suffrage was not achieved until the mid-twentieth century and reproductive rights are yet to be won in many countries.

race (Campos Carr 1990).⁵⁹ In 1981, the First Latin American and Caribbean Feminist *Encuentro* took place in Bogotá and stressed the need to incorporate ‘the region’s most vulnerable women into the project of feminism’ (Feijóo cited in Vargas 1992: 201). Supported by the UN, these events continued to happen until 2014, becoming ‘a barometer for measuring the evolution of the movement’ (Vargas 1992: 202) and generating a space where women from different countries and backgrounds discussed women’s oppression and launched transnational initiatives and campaigns. Furthermore, through these *Encuentros*, feminist ideas and cultural artefacts, such as the films made by feminist film collectives, were distributed, exhibited, and discussed.⁶⁰

The Making of Feminist Documentary

The collectives addressed in this chapter supported the contemporary women’s movements with audio-visual content to, broadly, contribute to the feminist aim of changing women’s lives. The making of feminist films attempted to activate public debates on women’s issues and to intervene in social, cultural, legal, and political contexts. Similarly to feminist film collectives elsewhere, these groups implemented modes of authorship and production that had the potential to de-patriarchalize the ways of making films through the establishment of horizontal relationships, the dismantling of the hierarchies associated with above- and below-the-line roles, and by involving the protagonists in the decision-making. Their filmographies offer representations of *different* women, politicize personal experiences and domestic spaces, and promote processes of consciousness-raising. As mentioned before, these collectives initially explored issues related to second-wave feminism, such as abortion rights, domestic work, and the representation of women in the media. Yet, from the 1980s, the women’s movements became more diverse and inclusive and, as a result, the women’s identities explored in their films changed, giving epistemic advantage to those women located in the margins, on the outskirts of cities and rural areas. It was then that subaltern women, often in

⁵⁹ In 1989, black lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term ‘intersectionality’ to recognize multiple forms of women’s oppression, not only related to gender, but also to race, class, sexual orientation, etc.

⁶⁰ Celebrated every two or three years in different countries across Latin America, the objective of these *Encuentros* was to ‘organize a meeting of Latin American women, committed with a feminist practice, to share experiences and opinions, to identify problems, and evaluate the different practices already developed and plan tasks and projects for the future’ (Navarro 2011). Moreover, in 1987, the lesbian feminist network was created and in 1992, the first meeting of black women took place. Since then an organization of indigenous women has also been formed. The Latin American women’s movements have been addressed in works such as those by Campos Carr 1990; Safa 1990; Vargas 1992; Gargallo 2004; and García and Valdivieso 2006.

their roles of mothers, wives, and artisans, became the protagonists of Latin American feminist documentaries.⁶¹

Like most Latin American filmmakers during this period, the women behind these collectives were white and came from educated, urban, middle- and upper-class backgrounds, but most of them did not have formal education in film. Instead, they learnt about film by attending cine-clubs or working with other filmmakers. Their political education was acquired through joining left-wing groups or political parties but, eventually, they created their own collectives due to the lack of support from male comrades to what were considered ‘women’s issues.’ Unlike other Latin American political films, the films produced by these collectives were rarely showcased at film festivals, whether Latin American or international. Thus, as mentioned above, the development of feminist cinema was not accompanied by the creation of a circuit of women’s film festivals that exhibited these films or by scholarly research and film criticism that paid attention to this phenomenon. Instead, they were primarily distributed through alternative and non-cinematic circuits, such as unions, women’s associations, schools, universities, prisons, and film clubs, and also through transnational networks, such as the feminist *Encuentros*. In the case of the Colombian Cine Mujer, its filmography was also showcased through television channels and some of its films were well received in Colombian film festivals.

Despite the rejection of documentary by 1970s feminist film theory, Latin American feminist filmmakers continued to privilege this form. As a matter of fact, the realist aesthetics employed made these cultural artefacts more accessible to subaltern audiences who did not necessarily possess the cultural capital with which to recognize and understand experimental films. Despite relying on realist aesthetics, these films are also innovative and disruptive in its own distinctive ways, not only in relation to the formal strategies deployed but also to the ways in which they were produced. Thus, focusing solely on the aesthetic elements of marginal cinemas and alternative film practices can trivialize the complexities of these cinemas. Besides textual analysis, in the following paragraphs, I pay attention to the unique extratextual conditions in which these films were made as well as to the particular contexts in which the collectives that produced them emerged. I contend that the little attention given to these films has inadvertently provoked their material wear up to the point that the precariousness and fragility of their archives are worrisome. This chapter is then a first step towards the recovery

⁶¹ A predecessor of this shift, as seen in Chapter 1, is *The Double Day* by Helena Solberg.

and restoration of the symbolic value these films have and, by doing that, hopes to animate further steps on their material preservation.

Cosas de mujeres is a film made in close alliance with the Mexican women's movement and was part of a collective effort to push for a public debate that could lead to the decriminalization of abortion. This film relies on performance, testimony, and observation, mixing realist and experimental aesthetics in order to break cinematic illusions and produce effects that appeal to the sensorial. Specifically, I focus on how the concepts of excess and abjection disrupt the aesthetic canon of women's bodies. *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* is also a film made in close alliance with the Venezuelan women's movement and the women potters of Lomas Bajas. It explores issues about motherhood and the relations between production, reproduction, and oppression through the story of a woman potter who died shortly after giving birth to her 24th child. Although this film mostly relies on realist aesthetics and was made with scarce resources, I argue that it also employs sophisticated devices that point at the dissonance between rural women and feminist ideas. Here I focus on how the different media, footage and photographs, and the use of disembodied voices draw attention to the documentary's negotiation between ideology and indexicality. The third film included in this chapter is *Carmen Carrascal*, which was made through a close alliance between the filmmakers and the film subject. Its mode of production relied on the slow process of building relationships of trust through which the film crew gained access to the private space of Carrascal's home and to her personal story. This bond was then reflected on the screen through images that evoke haptic visuality and establish a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image.

2.1. Cine Mujer in Mexico and *Cosas de mujeres*

Mexican women's cinema developed throughout the 20th century, although with significant gaps (Rashkin 2001). However, it was not until the mid-seventies when a self-conscious feminist cinema emerged after a group of university students formed Cine Mujer. Within this context, two other events contributed to the formation of this collective: the massacre of Tlatelolco and the UN World Conference on Women. Following a summer of demonstrations and strikes against the government of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz and the Mexico City Olympics, on October 2, 1968 armed forces killed hundreds of students who were protesting peacefully in Plaza de las Tres Culturas, in Mexico City, in what came to be known as the massacre of Tlatelolco. This event was represented in the landmark documentary *El grito* [*The Scream*] (1968), directed by Leobardo López Aretche and produced by students from Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC), a film school at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). As a result of this episode, and according to Marcela Fernández Violante, who had graduated from this film school and later became its director, the CUEC foregrounded cinema's responsibility in social struggles (Rashkin 2001).⁶²

Furthermore and as seen in the previous chapter, in 1975, Mexico City hosted the UN World Conference on Women, which boosted feminist movements across the region. During these years, the struggle for reproductive rights became a priority amongst Latin American feminists. In 1976, the Coalition of Feminist Women organized the first conference for the decriminalization of abortion in Mexico, 'where it was argued that the termination of pregnancy was an exclusive decision of women and free abortion on demand should be provided in all public health institutions' (Gargallo 2004: 111). Mexican feminists used various strategies to make this issue more visible, ranging from dressing up in black clothes in public protests to mourn all those women who had died in clandestine abortions to organizing demonstrations for voluntary motherhood on Mother's Day. These initiatives led to a national debate from which a bill of law to legalize abortion was submitted to the Chamber of Deputies and eventually refused by president José López Portillo in 1979 after a fierce campaign of opposition by the Catholic church.

Inspired by these events, Mexican Rosa Martha Fernández, Brazilian Beatriz Mira, and Frenchwoman Odile Herrenschmidt founded the first self-proclaimed feminist film collective

⁶² Amongst these groups, *El Taller Cine de Octubre* (1973) focused on the struggles of the oppressed and became a precursor of feminist militant cinema through productions such as *Mujer así es la vida* [*Woman That's Life*] (1976-80). This film explores the role of women in the revolution and was made by the two female members of this collective, Trinidad Langarica and Lourdes Gómez.

in Latin America, Cine Mujer (1975-1986), while studying at CUEC.⁶³ The history of this collective is divided into two periods in which eight films were produced. During the first period (1975-1980), the founder members made films that address issues such as abortion, domestic work, and sexual violence. These are: *Cosas de mujeres*, the Ariel-winner *Vicios en la cocina, las papas silban* [*Vices in the Kitchen, Potatoes Whistle*] (Beatriz Mira, 1978), and the docudrama *Rompiendo el silencio* [*Breaking the Silence*] (Rosa Martha Fernández, 1979). In the second period (1981-1986), Beatriz Mira and Ángeles Necochea, amongst others, took over the collective and five new films were made, focusing on women's gatherings, prostitution, and labour exploitation. They are: *Es primera vez* [*It's the First Time*] (Beatriz Mira, 1981), *Vida de Ángel* [*Angel Life*] (Ángeles Necochea, 1982), *Yalaltecas* (Sonia Fritz, 1984), *Amas de casa* [*Housewives*] (Ángeles Necochea, 1984), and *Bordando en la frontera* [*Embroidering on the Border*] (Ángeles Necochea, 1986).⁶⁴

Although there are significant differences between the two periods, it has been argued that overall the collective subscribed to the ideas of second-wave feminism and was also informed by the NLAC (Millán 1999; Oroz 2018). In this regard, 'the mode of collective work adopted by the CUEC students responded to a motto typical of the militant practices of that period, although it was linked directly with the distinctive dynamics of the second-wave feminism agenda' (Oroz 2018: 83). Moreover, it shared the concern for representing overlooked women's issues with feminist filmmakers from elsewhere (Millán 1999). However, and in line with what Israel Rodríguez has argued, I contend that Cine Mujer, as well as the other feminist collectives addressed in this chapter, was primarily influenced by and worked in alliance with the Latin American women's movements (2019). Particularly from the 1980s – which in Mexico coincides with the celebration of the First National Women's *Encuentro* – women from different backgrounds challenged homogenising and whitewashing feminist ideas and pushed for the creation of broader women's movements. As mentioned previously, the Latin American women's movements shifted from prioritizing concerns of white middle-class women to addressing those issues that affected *popular* women, taking an intersectional

⁶³ Not only the founding members had different nationalities but also had studied or worked in different countries and were informed by different cultures. Rosa Martha Fernández had studied psychology in France during the convulsive 1960s and television production in Japan, where she learnt about feminism. Beatriz Mira had worked in the film industry in France and England. And Odile Herrenschildt had studied cinema at the Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques in Paris.

⁶⁴ Other members included Ellen Camus, María del Carmen Lara, Carolina Fernández, Sonia Fritz, Lilian Liberman, Laura Rossetti, Guadalupe Sánchez, Eugenia María Tamés, Pilar Calvo, Sibillie Hayem, Amalia Attolini, and María Novaro.

approach that acknowledges multiple forms of oppression experienced by hitherto othered women.⁶⁵

Both the history and filmography of the Mexican Cine Mujer have been addressed by a number of scholars (Millán 1999; Rashkin 2001; Aceves 2013, 2014; Oroz 2016, 2018; Rodríguez 2019). Yet, the variety of strategies and devices deployed in its films as well as the continued relevance of the feminist issues raised allow for new detailed analysis. The following section contributes to the existent literature by offering a formal analysis of *Cosas de mujeres* to demonstrate how this feminist documentary combines realist and experimental aesthetics and makes use of sophisticated devices and strategies to produce effects that appeal to the sensorial. Specifically, I pay attention to how the concepts of excess and abjection disrupt the aesthetic canon of women's bodies and become visual strategies that have the potential of confronting the audience in its understanding of reality and of unsettling its moral values.

A Hybrid Film on Clandestine Abortions

He gave me an injection to sleep, but I didn't fall asleep completely. Then I felt that he was on top of me. I couldn't do anything because I fell asleep and when I woke up, he told me it was all over. I felt an intense rage because my body had been used without me wanting it. Besides, I felt like shit, completely rubbish.

This quote is an extract of the testimony intercut throughout the film *Cosas de mujeres*. Placed at the centre of the frame and lit with chiaroscuro lighting, a woman looks at the camera and shares the distressing story of being raped by a doctor during a clandestine abortion procedure. Her testimony underlines that although the illegality of abortion affects all women, those from the lower classes often suffer the worst consequences. Directed by Rosa Martha Fernández, this film was produced by Cine Mujer as part of the coursework for the CUEC in 1978 and in close alliance with the Mexican women's movement. Besides, it is a film that inserts the Mexican struggle for the decriminalization of abortion within the 1970s transnational campaign for reproductive rights (Oroz 2018). Indeed, abortion became the burning issue of 1970s feminism and several films were made about it in different countries,

⁶⁵ The word 'popular' has a slightly different meaning in Spanish, as it refers to the working-class or, more broadly, the lower classes, the poor, the dispossessed, and subaltern.

contributing to public debates on this particular issue.⁶⁶ In this regard, *Cosas de mujeres* ‘functioned as a didactic tool to promote discussions’ (Aceves 2014: 333) that could reach beyond the women’s movement and enter public spheres dominated by men, such as the media and the government. As a matter of fact, the title of this film has a sarcastic tinge that refers to the resistance and reluctance on the part of men to listen to or struggle for those issues that were considered ‘women’s issues,’ as raised before.

Cosas de mujeres is a 42-minute black-and-white hybrid film that denounces the life-threatening conditions to which women, particularly those from lower classes, are subjected to due to the illegality of abortion. As part of the research process, Cine Mujer began collecting testimonies of women from different backgrounds who had had illegal abortions, yet in very different conditions. It is worth mentioning that Rosa Martha Fernández is a psychologist whose research methods primarily rely on interviewing and whose work is deeply informed by her own personal experiences. Thus, besides drawing on contemporary debates, *Cosas de mujeres* is also imbued with Fernández’s experience.⁶⁷ Narratively, this film includes three different parts: a fictionalized short film that follows the story of a university student, her friend, and an invisible network of women who support her search for a clandestine abortion; a distressing testimony of a woman who was raped during an illegal abortion procedure; and documentary footage that offers information about the state of abortion in Mexico from medical and political perspectives. Each of these three narratives employs different realist strategies, namely observational footage, talking-head interviews, press clippings, continuity editing, and a voice-of-God type of commentary. However, each of these narratives also makes use of audio-visual devices that exceed conventional realist aesthetics, including sound effects, chiaroscuro lighting, and unconventional camera angles, amongst others. I contend that these devices break the cinematic illusion and have the potential to engage the viewers in an experiential manner.

The mixing of forms blurs genre boundaries and exceeds classifications. The impossibility of categorization has been central to feminist theory and practice through the concept of excess, which refers to those ideas that unsettle normative categorizations and problematize existing hegemonic structures (Olivieri 2012: 9). By combining different formal

⁶⁶ Some of the feminist films made on abortion are *It Happens to Us* (Amalie R. Rothschild, USA, 1972), the slideshow *La realidad del aborto [The Reality of Abortion]* (Eulalia Carrizosa and Sara Bright, Colombia, 1975), and *Whose Choice?* (London Women’s Film Group, UK, 1976), to name a few. Preceding these films, in Chile, Pedro Chaskel directed *Aborto [Abortion]* (1965) to address the risks of conducting abortion procedures under precarious conditions and to educate about contraceptives.

⁶⁷ Author interview with Rosa Martha Fernández, in Zoom, April 4, 2021.

approaches, the film opens up a negotiation between the real event and the different possibilities of representation, drawing attention to its own construction. For Laura Marks, hybridity, whether cultural or cinematic, is necessarily ‘unpredictable and uncategorizable’ (2000: 7). She writes: ‘by pushing the limits of any genre, hybrid cinema forces each genre to explain itself, to forgo any transparent relationship to the reality it represents, and to make evident the knowledge claims on which it is based’ (2000: 8). This mixing of forms was, according to Fernández, a necessary approach despite going against the cinematic language – either conventional or experimental– of the time.⁶⁸ On the one hand, the indexical value of documentary footage gives validity to or ‘authenticate[s] the fictionalisation’ (Bruzzi 2000: 153) and allows adding a class perspective. On the other hand, the fictional part emphasizes the importance of friendship and networks of solidarity and positions the female body as a site of alternative epistemologies.

Friendship and the Testimonial Interview

The short film follows the story of Pat (Patricia Luke), a university student who seeks support to procure a clandestine abortion. Her friend Ángeles (Ángeles Necoechea) introduces her to an invisible network of women who via phone calls provide useful information. By foregrounding friendship and solidarity, the film mirrors its collective mode of production and deconstructs the classical cinema signification of women as objects of heterosexual male desire. This short film primarily relies on realist aesthetics. The framing favours the rule of the thirds or the centrality of the subjects. The shots are mainly static but, at times, the camera pans from one character to the other or follows them handheld in a Direct Cinema style. The position of the camera tends to be eye-levelled with a few exceptions in which higher angles unsettle the viewer’s position. The lighting is natural but, again, in few instances, employs a chiaroscuro effect that intensifies the dramatism and evokes theatricality. The editing also follows a continuity approach through techniques such as shot-reverse-shot and the 180-degree rule. The aural dimension predominantly relies on diegetic sound but, at different moments, a disembodied female voice-over with an informative tone reads the articles of the Criminal Code that refer to the legal implications of seeking or procuring an abortion. Other sound effects also disturb this seemingly naturalist form. For instance, the sound of bells interrupts the diegesis and is symbolically used as a reminder of the omnipresence of the Catholic church

⁶⁸ Other examples of Latin American hybrid documentaries made by women are Sara Gómez’s *De cierta manera* (Cuba, 1974) and Clara Riascos’ *La mirada de Myriam* [*Myriam’s Gaze*] (Colombia, 1986).

and its ideological power. Thus, despite mostly relying on realist aesthetics, the film also includes different devices that exceed conventional realist codes, pointing at its own construction and breaking the cinematic illusion.

In particular, two images create powerful feminist interventions. In the first one, the protagonist of the film appears in a gynaecologist's room where she is examined before a clandestine abortion procedure takes place. The *mise-en-scène* of this shot highlights the complicity of both the medical institution and the church with patriarchal ideas that continue to blame women for being biologically capable of getting pregnant. Framed from a still low-wide angle, Pat lies on the examination table with her legs open and knees bent. In between her legs, the figure of the male doctor is framed. The juxtaposition of a semi-naked young woman lying on this table and a male doctor treating her condescendingly is a visual representation of extremely uneven power relations. He represents an institution that ignores women's issues, denies women the control of their own bodies, and is complicit with preventable deaths. Behind him, on the wall, a crucifix hangs. This is obviously not a trivial element since the Catholic church was one of the main obstacles in the struggle for decriminalizing abortion and fiercely opposed the passing of the law in 1979. Moreover, this image points at the fact that also middle-class women, like Pat, who can afford to pay for an abortion in better but still not safe conditions, are subjected to pervasive patriarchal attitudes towards women's bodies. In the second image, Pat appears in the bathroom of her friend's house at night, after her visit to the doctor. Also framed from a still low-wide angle with dark *chiaroscuro* lighting, she is sat on the toilet having violent spasms provoked by a catheter that not only leads to a painful abortion, but also to a life-threatening infection. Her screams in this dark environment confront the audience about this needless suffering. The scene finishes with Pat's friend hugging and comforting her. Although a performance, the representation of suffering and the subsequent caring response appeals to the sensorial and animates the spectators to establish an emotional bond. In this domestic space, pain and care become political devices.



Figure 10. Pat is examined by a gynaecologist in *Cosas de mujeres* (1978).



Figure 11. Pat has violent spasms provoked by a catheter in *Cosas de mujeres* (1978).

The short film is interrupted at different moments with the distressing testimony of a woman from the lower classes who shares the traumatic experience she suffered due to the precarity of clandestine abortions. The woman is centred in the frame and looks directly at the camera. The shot is lit with a chiaroscuro effect that emphasizes the dramatism of her story. By including her testimony, the film deepens the understanding of the experiences suffered by marginalized women and demonstrates how they are prone to graver abuse. In this case, women's bodies are not only ignored or denied, they are also violated. As seen in the previous chapter, filmic testimonies are often used by women filmmakers in Latin America to 'denounce situations of exploitation and oppression in order to transform the audiences and to push them to act to change the status quo' (Seguí 2018b: 45). Moreover, within the context of the USA, Shilyh Warren notes that 'the audiovisual campaign from abortion rights advocates has been dominated by personal testimony' (2015: 771) and feminist documentaries constitute 'an archive of irrefutable evidence against political, medical, and religious ideology, which defines knowledge exclusively as that which is disarticulated from the personal' (p. 758). In this regard, the filming of this testimonial interview was possible due to the feminist aim of creating safe spaces where women could share traumatic experiences, which attributes political value to those personal issues hitherto excluded from public spheres. By doing so, it fosters the need for other experiences of this kind to be shared and denounced.

Excess, Abjection, and the Female Body

The second part of the film includes documentary footage that also relies on realist devices, namely interviews, observational footage, archive images, press clippings, and diegetic sound. The hospital is used as a transitional location where the fictional story of Pat becomes the real story of dozens of other women. Here we learn more about the *real* consequences of clandestine abortions. This part of the film does not seem to follow a linear structure. Instead, different scenes are intercut. These scenes include interviews with doctors about the need for safe practices and contraceptive methods; observational footage of medical staff treating women with infections; and titles and press clippings that emphasize the film's expository claim: the illegality of abortion is also a class issue as women from lower classes are the worst affected. In another scene, the camera enters the house of a poor woman, panning from a painting of Virgen Mary that hangs from the wall to several children sat around a table waiting for food. The movement stops when it reaches the mother, at the end of the room, cooking for them. This scene contributes to the politicization of domestic spaces and

emphasizes the daily hardship of mothers from the lower classes who bear and raise several children with very few resources.

Another documentary scene shows a curettage performed on a woman at the General Hospital of Mexico City. While it is important to highlight the political significance of representing a real abortion procedure, what interests me is how this image exceeds the aesthetic canon of women's bodies. Throughout the history of art, the female body and its excessiveness –namely blood, mass, and fluids– have been contained and concealed.⁶⁹ In *The Female Nude*, Lynda Nead argues that 'the forms, conventions and poses of art have worked metaphorically to shore up the female body—to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside' (1992: 6). In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva extensively explores the subject of abjection to describe 'what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (1982: 4). It is what provokes disgust, horror, and causes rejection. One of these borders is found in what separates the limits of the body from the objects that are discharged from its inside. Thus, Kristeva argues, corporeal waste represents a threat to our understanding. This happens because there is a breakdown of meaning that creates confusion and has an unsettling effect. Yet, it also cements our existence, values, and identity.

One of the shots in this scene shares a similar composition to the painting *L'Origine du monde* [*The Origin of the World*] (1866) by Gustave Courbet. It is a close-up shot of a woman's genitals. She is lying on a hospital bed with legs spread while medical devices (speculum and curette) and fluids (pregnancy tissue) traverse the threshold of the female body. The vagina is framed even closer than in Courbet's painting. The edges of the frame dissolve in black, blurring its own boundaries. This image is intercut with shots of doctors, nurses, and the woman's sleeping face while we hear non-diegetic sound of an interview with a doctor about how safe abortions can reduce maternal mortality. Far from the general view of the 1970s Mexican society which considered abortion to be taboo, illegal, and morally reprehensible, in this scene, it becomes a strictly medical issue. Whereas the image might provoke feelings of repulsion by the constant transgression between the inside and outside of the female body as well as by the discharge of tissue, the sound attempts to produce different effects. It confronts us with our feelings of disgust or, even horror, about seeing a woman having a curettage but

⁶⁹ An important exception is the work of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo in paintings such as *My Birth* (1932), which represents a semi-naked woman, lying on bed over blood-stained sheets giving birth to the artist herself; and *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932), a similar painting of Kahlo crying on a blood-stained hospital bed in Detroit after having a miscarriage.

not about women dying from a preventable cause. This idea is reinforced by the following image of a press clipping that states: ‘abortion continues to be the main reason for maternal mortality and, even, women’s mortality.’ Thus, the object here serves the purpose of, as Kristeva argues, threatening our understanding of reality and our morality.



Figure 12. Still from *Cosas de mujeres* (1978) showing a real abortion procedure.



Figure 13. *L'Origine du monde* (1866) by Gustave Courbet.

Looking at these images from *Cosas de mujeres* and *L'Origine du monde* invites me to think about the distinction between obscenity and art, the female body and its artistic representation. Referring to Kenneth Clark's study of the nude, Nead explains how celebrated representations of the female body intentionally express sexual desire in contained manners, as something 'seductive but not obscene' (1992: 20). She expands, 'art is being defined in terms of the containing of form within limits; obscenity, on the other hand, is defined in terms of excess, as form beyond limits, beyond the frame and representation' (ibid). Despite Courbet's painting shocking its contemporaneous society, today it is defined as an 'almost anatomical description of female sex organs [which] thanks to Courbet's great virtuosity and the refinement of his amber colour scheme, [...] escapes pornographic status' by the Musée d'Orsay.⁷⁰ The frame in *Cosas de mujeres*, however, refuses to discipline women's bodies by privileging matter over form and by transgressing inner and outer boundaries. It aimed to shock its audiences and continues to do so. This subversive approach has the potential of separating its audience from the moral values of the society they are part of. Even today, more than 40 years after it was made, *Cosas de mujeres* continues to exceed both the conventions of realist aesthetics associated with documentary and the aesthetic canon of women's bodies.

Cosas de mujeres ends with a series of photographs that show various groups of women demonstrating in favour of the decriminalization of abortion in Italy, the USA, Japan, and Mexico during the 1970s, highlighting the transnational nature of this particular struggle. Although the film's political goal was not achieved and abortion remained illegal, several other actions continued to happen in Mexico and the rest of Latin America. In the Fifth Feminist *Encuentro* in Argentina in 1990, September 28 was named as the Day for the Struggle for the Decriminalization of Abortion. In 1997, abortion was legalized only in specific cases in most Mexican states. In 2005, several demonstrations across the region continued with these demands. Since 2021 abortion is no longer a crime. Yet, in most of the country, it is permitted only under specific circumstances, such as rape, risk for the mother, or nonviable fetus. Given the ongoing battle for the control of women's bodies and the existing limitations in the legislation, *Cosas de mujeres* remains a strikingly relevant feminist documentary.

⁷⁰ 'L'Origine du monde.' Musée d'Orsay, <https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/node/53476#artwork-indexation>. (Accessed 20 January 2020).

2.2. Grupo Feminista Miércoles and *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*

A few years ago, the Centre of Women's Studies (CEM) at the Venezuelan Central University (UCV) tried to give the Josefa Camejo Order to Franca Donda as a recognition for her participation in the struggle for women's rights in Venezuela. Born in Italy, in 1933, Donda was an activist, filmmaker, and photographer involved in film and feminist collectives in Venezuela from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. She refused the award coherently with her conviction that individuals should not be rewarded for work and effort that is done collectively.⁷¹ Understanding the politics behind this decision can shed light on the reasons why the historiography of Latin American cinema has overlooked the existence of feminist film collectives such as the Venezuelan Grupo Feminista Miércoles. Between 1979 and 1988, this collective produced the documentary *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* (1981) and the videos *Argelia Laya, por ejemplo* [*Argelia Laya, for Example*] (1987), *Eumelia Hernández, calle arriba, calle abajo* [*Eumelia Hernández, Up and Down the Street*] (1988), and *Una del montón* [*One of the Bunch*] (1988), and participated in several activities organized by the Venezuelan women's movement. Broadly, its filmography addresses issues related to motherhood, the relations between production and reproduction, and women's role in labour, feminist, and other political movements. Although long overdue, the following section contextualizes this collective, its history and filmography, and provides a formal analysis of *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*, arguing that this film does not only construct the story of Ismaelina and her community, but also raises important feminist issues.

Within the Venezuela's cinematic context, three important contributions created a space for the emergence of Grupo Feminista Miércoles. Firstly, Margot Benacerraf was one of the leading figures in Venezuelan cinema, the country's first woman filmmaker, and also one of the first directors of documentaries in Latin America.⁷² Her pioneering work opened the possibility for other women to make films. However, the reluctance to recognize her filmography as part of Venezuelan cinema (Burton 2000; Azuaga 2003) serves as an example of the broader exclusion of women's cinema from Latin American film history. Secondly, in September 1968, Mérida hosted the Primera Muestra de Cine Documental in Latin America, which is considered one of the three events –along with the Viña del Mar film festivals in 1967

⁷¹ The Josefa Camejo Order was established by CEM in 1995 to recognize the contribution of individuals and institutions to women and human rights and their efforts to build a fairer and more equal society.

⁷² Margot Benacerraf studied film at IDHEC in Paris in the early 1950s. During her short career as a filmmaker, she directed *Reverón* (1952) and *Araya* (1959). As mentioned in the introduction, this second film won the prestigious FIPRESCI prize, shared with Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, at the Cannes Film Festival in 1959. However, *Araya* did not premiere in Venezuela until 1977. She also worked in film institutions such as the National Cinemateca, which opened its doors in 1966 with her as its first director.

and 1969– that consolidated the NLAC (Pick 1993). This event also boosted the national film industry, particularly in relation to the making of political cinemas and documentary films. However, the literature about this film movement rarely acknowledges the contributions of Venezuelan filmmakers, let alone those of Venezuelan women filmmakers. Thirdly, the film collective Cine Urgente (1968-1973), led by the couple formed by Jacobo Borges and Josefina Jordán, and Franca Donda, amongst others, was the first attempt to make a socially and politically committed cinema in Venezuela.⁷³ Although John King asserts that this collective was ‘an isolated initiative without any wider resonance’ (1990: 215), it led to the constitution of the first feminist film collective in the country, Grupo Feminista Miércoles.

Militancy, Feminism, and Cinema

If the 1960s were associated with struggles of liberation that inspired radical filmmakers to make a revolutionary political cinema, the 1970s witnessed how autonomous women’s movements questioned and contested the role of women in society and inspired the making of feminist films. In Venezuela, women’s autonomous movements gained strength in the late 1970s around the discussions to reform the Civil Code, which aimed at giving equal rights and opportunities to women (Espina and Rakowski 2002: 32).⁷⁴ Members of these movements created or joined women’s collectives, including Persona, La Conjura, and Grupo Feminista Miércoles, ‘to focus on women’s consciousness-raising through group discussion, journal publication, and video production’ (Friedman 2000: 164). The collective with which I am concerned in this chapter, Grupo Feminista Miércoles, was launched publicly in March 1979 at the Venezuelan Square in Caracas during the reform of the Civil Code. Founded by Venezuelan Josefina Acevedo and Italians Franca Donda and Ambretta Marrosu, among others, this collective utilized cinema as a tool to document the struggles of Venezuelan

⁷³ Prior to Cine Urgente, Jacobo Borges, Josefina Jordán, and Franca Donda had participated in *Imagen de Caracas* [*Caracas’ Image*] (1968), a vast multi-screen and multi-media exhibition that commemorated the 400th anniversary of the foundation of Caracas. Amongst Cine Urgente’s productions are the films *22 de Mayo* [*22nd of May*] (1969), directed by Jacobo Borges, and *¡Sí Podemos!* (1972) and *María de la Cruz* (1974), directed by Franca Donda and Josefina Jordán.

⁷⁴ Some of these women’s movements were Movement for Women’s Liberation, formed in 1969, Socialist Women (which was part of the political party Movement for Socialism), and Women’s League. The last two were formed in 1972.

women, to raise awareness about women's issues, and to intervene in legal and political contexts.⁷⁵

Although it is not possible to trace a linear history of it, from 1979 to 1988, Grupo Feminista Miércoles produced the medium-length documentary *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* and three videos, *Argelia Laya, por ejemplo*, *Eumelia Hernández, calle arriba, calle abajo*, and *Una del montón*. The first two videos contain testimonial interviews with women who were participants of contemporary women's struggles, whereas *Una del montón* is formally more complex as it reuses footage from different television programs to deconstruct the media discourse around the case of Inés María Marcano in order to provide a feminist perspective.⁷⁶ In the book *Unfinished Transitions*, Elizabeth Friedman includes a statement of principles written in 1979 by the group, which defines the collective as autonomous and feminist, emphasizing that 'the organization of women's struggle does not divide the struggle of workers, peasants, and the proletariat in general, it strengthens it' (2000: 165). The statement also said:

The movement for women's liberation... should be an AUTONOMOUS movement [...] and the women's groups are tools of this struggle because they are a favorable environment where women can affirm themselves, understand themselves, speak freely, and build self-confidence; they allow the search for a new identity, leaving behind the constructed image in which women are imprisoned and oppressed; they facilitate the break with the traditional relations of subordination-domination, seduction, etc. which privileges *machismo* to the detriment of women; and the group allows the move from personal to collective consciousness, the same as the class consciousness of any oppressed group (p. 165).

⁷⁵ Grupo Feminista Miércoles was originally formed by Josefina Acevedo, Cristina Aragona, Mauxi Banchs, Carmen Luisa Cisneros, Franca Donda, Katina Fantini, María Pilar García, Miriam González Blanco, Ambretta Marrosu, Tamara Marrosu, Cathy Rakowsky, Christa Sponsel, Ana Mundarain, and Vicky Estévez. Later, new women, including Margalida Castro, Gioconda Espina, and Henriqueta Estrada, among others, joined. These women were not filmmakers, but feminist activists who worked on proposing policies with political parties, unions, and municipal groups.

⁷⁶ Argelia Laya (1926-1997) was a working-class woman of Afro-Venezuelan heritage who, throughout her life, campaigned for several women's causes, from women's suffrage to the decriminalization of abortion, and was a member of the Communist Party, a *guerrillera* known as Comandante Jacinta, and co-founder of the Movement for Socialism. Eumelia Hernández (1913-1990) was also a working-class woman who became both a women's rights and union activist. She was a long-standing member of the Communist Party, vice-president of the Unitary Central of Workers, and a founder of the Feminine Cultural Association. Inés María Marcano was a textile worker who lived in a zinc-roofed shack with her two young children in the shantytown of Nueva Tacagua, located on the hills surrounding Caracas. One night, two men broke into the house, kidnapped her two-year-old daughter, raped, and killed her. Even though these two men were convicted and imprisoned, Marcano was also detained on the charge of child abandonment because she was not in the house when the events happened. A public campaign eventually succeeded in releasing her from prison.

The bridging of gender and class issues was reflected in the choice of subjects. Its filmography always represented working-class women, not only as workers, but also as mothers. Moreover, Grupo Feminista Miércoles prioritized the political over the cinematic and apart from *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*, its productions responded to the urgency of documenting the feminist movement in Venezuela. Moreover, all its films were credited as directed by the collective. Despite its pioneering work, its alignment towards feminist politics rather than cinematic aesthetics might explain why Grupo Feminista Miércoles' contributions to both Latin American political cinema and transnational feminist cinema have been mostly briefly summarized or relegated to a footnote, with some exceptions (Kuhn & Radstone 1990; Schwartzman 1992; Torres San Martín 1996; Azuaga 2003; Raydán 2010; Monsalve Peña 2012; Cervera 2022a). This collective has also been acknowledged within the field of Latin American gender studies (García Guadilla, 1993; Friedman 2000; Espina and Rakowsky 2002). The absence of formal innovation and technical quality needs to be read in political terms, that is to say, the lack of funding or support for women's cinema obstructed the development of a feminist cinematic language in Venezuela. However, as I demonstrate in the following paragraphs, films such as *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* include sophisticated formal devices that construct a complex discourse. Drawing on Kaja Silverman's understanding of the disembodied voice and the relationship between photographs and death as theorized by Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and Laura Mulvey, I contend that *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* makes use of devices that point at the dissonance between second-wave feminist ideas and the lives of rural women.

Production, Reproduction, and Motherhood

The first film of Grupo Feminista Miércoles, *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*, was shot in 16 mm and is 35 minutes long.⁷⁷ The initial idea developed from the paper 'La maternidad como instrumento ideológico' ['Maternity as an Ideological Tool'] presented by the collective at the First Feminist *Encuentro* in Bogotá in 1981.⁷⁸ Written and directed collectively by an all-

⁷⁷ The existent digital copy is included in a DVD produced by CEM that pays tribute to the work of Franca Donda in both Cine Urgente and Grupo Feminista Miércoles.

⁷⁸ This paper argued that maternity is a central cause of women's oppression because of society's expectation that every woman must become a mother, but also because as mothers, women raise their children repeating the same gendered socialization and oppressive patterns that they suffered. It says: 'motherhood, for us, is the center around which all the problems of women's history revolve until today, because still, whether we are specifically mothers or potential mothers or, if you like, non-mothers, as women we are destined to accept motherhood as a fundamental role of our existence. This acceptance, furthermore, is what leads us to the two culminating moments of our alienation as individuals: the moment in which, being the maternal function the one that gives us the greatest prestige, we use it as an instrument of manipulation and power; and especially the moment in which, by educating our offspring, we become supporters and perpetrators of the same patriarchal, sexist and repressive

female crew, *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* explores issues surrounding womanhood, motherhood, and the relations between production, reproduction, and oppression through the story of a woman potter who died shortly after giving birth to her 24th child.⁷⁹ One of the main ideas explored throughout the film is the role of women as reproducers of labour and ideology in what Silvia Federici refers to as the subjugation of ‘women’s reproductive function to the reproduction of the work-force’ (2004: 12). Its brochure describes the women’s stories in the documentary as an example of the ‘problems around family responsibility, domestic and productive work, love and the transmission of ideology’ that affects women across classes. Other issues raised include maternal mortality, women’s lack of control and understanding of their own bodies, and how motherhood reproduces patriarchal ideology through gendered forms of education and socialization. The film was funded by the Federal District’s Municipal Council, and received the Best Short Film and Best Photography awards from the Municipal Awards of National Short Films in Caracas in 1981.

Historically, women’s capacity to reproduce has determined their role in society and their bodies became an asset that was controlled and regulated by outsiders, namely fathers, husbands, the church or the state. The prohibition of abortion is one of the most effective means of controlling women’s reproduction but, as *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* proves, women’s bodies are controlled in other ways too. Specifically, maternal mortality –the death of women during pregnancy, childbirth, or after delivery– is exposed as a systemic problem related to a deficient health care system, poverty, and the patriarchal family. From a medical perspective, one of the factors that affects maternal mortality is the number of prior births. By the time of her death, Ismaelina had been married for 27 years and had given birth to 24 children, 19 of whom were alive. Interviewed in the documentary, her husband says that she died of what seems to be postpartum bleeding (*‘derrame’*), which is one of the main causes of maternal death. As a matter of fact, still today, maternal mortality remains a major challenge in Venezuela, where progress has been slow or non-existent in the last decades, and maternal mortality has even increased in recent years.⁸⁰

Similarly to the scarce research done to date on Grupo Feminista Miércoles, *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* has been briefly analysed in only a few publications (Kunh & Radstone 1990;

ideology that dominates us: that is, we become the main instrument of our own oppression. For us, motherhood is still today what reduces women to a womb, through which they are dominated’ (1981).

⁷⁹ According to the credits, Josefina Acevedo and Franca Donda were the directors of photography and camera operators. The sound was done by Carmen Luisa Cisneros, and the editing was done by Josefina Acevedo, Franca Donda, Carmen Luisa Cisneros, and Ambretta Marrosu.

⁸⁰ Roser, Max and Hannah Ritchie. ‘Maternal Mortality.’ *Our World In Data*, 2019, retrieved from <https://ourworldindata.org/maternal-mortality> (Accessed: 15 June 2020).

Schwartzman 1992; Azuaga 2003; Cervera 2022a). In one of these texts, Ricardo Azuaga describes its narrative as a transition from the reconstruction ‘of events that happened around the death of Ismaelina’ (2003: 370) towards a ‘reflection about the social and labour situation of dispossessed and exploited women’ (p. 371). Through a ‘correspondence between reality and theory, reflection and practice,’ as stated in the film’s brochure, the dissonance between women’s lives and feminist ideas is also exposed. This dissonance is mirrored aesthetically through different audio-visual devices, such as the use of non-synchronous voices and by mixing footage and photographs.

Yo, tú, Ismaelina begins with the opening credits rolling over a variety of shots of the mountainous landscape of Lomas Bajas, in the Venezuelan state of Táchira. The images are accompanied by a classical soundtrack that resembles those of the 1950s Hollywood films, thus creating an idealized atmosphere that is rapidly dismantled. The rural landscape, located near the border with Colombia, is also significant because it distances women’s issues from urban areas and situates them in the rural and marginal. This shift also mirrors the changes that were happening within the Latin American women’s movements. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, essentialist ideas of womanhood were displaced by intersectional feminist approaches that recognize race and class as factors that also affect women’s oppression. Thus, *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* joins this effort by looking at and creating knowledge about the life of popular illiterate women living at the margins, in poor rural areas.

Formally, the film deploys realist aesthetics, including observational footage, interviews, and diegetic sound, but it neither follows a linear or chronological structure, nor relies on continuity techniques. Instead, it mixes media, photographs and footage, and uses other devices that draw attention to its own artificiality. After the opening scene, we see a sequence of photographs of Ismaelina while she works making pottery. Then, five women are filmed one by one in a similar style to that of a photographic portrait, namely framed in a mid/close-up shot, while they look at the camera and simulate stillness. The last of these women appears behind a clapperboard, then the camera zooms out showing numerous children surrounding her. The observational footage unobtrusively captures the daily life of these women – harvesting clay, processing it into pottery, and selling that pottery in a local market. Interviews are conducted with these women potters, Ismaelina’s husband, medical staff, and teachers. Following the feminist documentary aim of educating on women’s health, and similarly to *Cosas de mujeres*, *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* includes interviews with medical staff about family planning and contraceptive methods. These interviews also raise concerns about the lack of women’s sexual education and the restrictions that women face to obtain contraceptives. Here,

the patriarchal family and the State are presented as institutions that control women's bodies and affect women's health. In the case of Venezuela in the 1980s, as the film unveils, women could only get a tubal ligation if they had at least six children and were authorised by their husbands. The film also reveals that women often visit women's clinics to get contraceptive pills without the knowledge of their husbands for fear of their response. Whereas the interviews with teachers point at the gendered segregation of children and expose that the education of girls is regarded as less important by their mothers and families.

Disembodied Voices and Haunting Photographs

The primary narrative device is the interview but, in most cases, these are disembodied or unsynchronized. We often see the image of the person who is talking but the sound that accompanies the image does not come from the diegesis. In conventional documentaries, voices and bodies are synchronized to provide a sense of coherence and authenticity, but this is not the case in *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*. For Azuaga, 'the almost absolute absence of synchronicity between image and sound' is likely due to its 'austere' mode of production (2003: 371), but it can also suggest other things. In *The Acoustic Mirror*, Kaja Silverman argues that the disembodied voice has a valuable function for feminist filmmaking because it liberates women from their bodies, which historically have been objectified by Hollywood cinema and the male gaze. Thus, the disembodied voice can be a site for dissonance and dislocation which blurs the 'distinction between diegetic interiority and exteriority and [...] between spectator and spectacle' (1988: 142).⁸¹

Drawing on Silverman, I read the disembodied voice in *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* as both a formal disruption and an alternative representation of women's subjectivities. On the one hand, by representing disembodied voices and unsynchronized bodies, the film echoes the collective approach of its mode of production. On the other hand, the dissonance between image and sound complicates the positioning of women on screen. They appear in their roles as artisans and mothers, as producers and reproducers. However, what we hear differs from what we see. We listen to women's voices blaming Ismaelina for working too much and for refusing to use

⁸¹ Kaja Silverman uses a selection of films made during the advent of sound in the 1940s to argue that classical cinematic conventions represented women as lack not only by turning the female body into a fetishized object of the male gaze but also by how the female voice was constructed. Silverman argues that these films reduced the female voice to embodied emotionally-driven sounds and unauthoritative speeches. By enclosing the synchronized female voice within her female body, women's subjectivities are degraded to the presence of their bodies. In order to overcome the reach of the male gaze, Silverman proposes to break the rules of synchronization and diegetic sound, thus freeing the female voice from the body confinement by seeking dissonance and dislocation through the female voiceover, voice-off, and silence (1988: 164).

contraceptives, but we see images of poverty and absence. Through this dissonance, the film unveils how women internalize and uncritically reproduce the same patriarchal discourses that oppress them, and points at the need for consciousness-raising.

Visually, the film is also unsettling thanks to the use of photographs. The still images are almost exclusively dedicated to Ismaelina. We see a series of images of her making pottery, in apparent motion yet frozen in time. These photographs were taken by Franca Donda before the death of Ismaelina. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag writes that ‘ever since cameras were invented in 1839, photography has kept company with death. Because an image produced with a camera is, literally, a trace of something brought before the lens, photographs were superior to any painting as a memento of the vanished past and the dear departed’ (2004: 21). Thus, photographs become traces of someone who existed and passed away. The relationship between photographs and death was also addressed by Roland Barthes in *La Chambre Claire [Camera Lucida]* (1980), pointing that there is a ‘terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead’ (p. 60) and emphasizing how photography’s unique relation to its referent authenticates an existent moment which cannot be repeated. For Laura Mulvey, the temporality attached to still photographs differs from that of cinema inasmuch as ‘the reality recorded by the photograph relates exclusively to its moment of registration; that is, it represents a moment extracted from the continuity of historical time. However historical the moving image might be, it is bound into an order of continuity and pattern’ (2004: 13).

Mulvey expands these ideas in *Death 24x a Second. Stillness and the Moving Image* (2006). Here she refers to the semiotic system elaborated by C. S. Peirce to describe how the aesthetic specificity of the photographic image is grounded on the index. Photography also relates to the two other types of signs as it can retain similarity with the real object, like icons, or can be decipherable through a code, like symbols. But, it has a trace that anchors it to a specific moment and place in a similar way to the mark that trauma leaves on the unconscious (p. 65). However, Mulvey points out, ‘a return to the index and to the real of the photographic medium is not a return to realism’s aspiration to certainty. Rather, the trace of the past in the present is a document, or a fact, that is preserved in but also bears witness to the elusive nature of reality and its representations’ (p. 10). Thus, ‘the photographic index reaches out towards the uncanny as an effect of confusion between living and dead’ (p. 31). Mulvey draws on Freud’s essay ‘The Uncanny’ (1919) to refer to how ‘the threshold between life and death becomes a space of uncertainty in which boundaries blur between the rational and the supernatural, the animate and the inanimate’ (p. 37). The confusion of that distinction, she explains, becomes ‘objects of human fear and fascination’ (p. 38).



Figure 14. A photograph of Ismaelina in *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* (1981).



Figure 15. A photograph of Ismaelina and some of her children in *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* (1981).

Throughout this documentary, still images of Ismaelina appear in haunting moments. At times, Ismaelina wears a blue-checked dress and a white turban that covers her hair and highlights her dark skin. At times, the photographs are in black and white. In most of these still images, she is working with her hands, shaping clay into pottery. Although photographs, the blurring effect obtained by the gyratory movement of the wheel offers a sense of motion, thus of life, which unsettles ‘the boundary between life and death’ (Mulvey 2006: 11) and gives a sense of animating the inanimate. The photographs of Ismaelina are recordings of both ‘absence and presence simultaneously’ (Barthes 1980: 57). She is no longer part of the historical world in which the film was made. Her voice is never heard. Only her returning image, frozen in time, is seen. Nevertheless, her trace persists into the present, she looks at us, becoming the subject matter of the film’s narrative. Thus, Ismaelina’s haunting presence fractures traditional conceptions of temporality and serves as a reminder of the terrible consequences of women’s oppression.

Besides the numerous photographs of Ismaelina, other photographs also appear in the film, framed and hanging on walls. In *They Must Be Represented*, Paula Rabinowitz refers to Walter Benjamin to claim that ‘like the commodity itself, and the woman within commodity culture, photography’s contribution to fabricating a society of the spectacle is dual – photographs are themselves objects of the gaze as well as purveyors of images’ (1994: 37). In various scenes, portraits appear to be spectators, looking at the diegesis from within. The portrait of Ismaelina and her husband during what seems to be their wedding appears when her husband talks about her. Other portraits of people hang while a woman speaks about Ismaelina. By blurring the boundary between spectator and spectacle, these photographs witness the process through which women not only talk about their experiences but, by publicly sharing their own stories, also build grounds for reflection and change. Like the title indicates, Ismaelina stands for all women who suffer and even die because of the subjugation of their bodies to the reproduction of the workforce and patriarchy.

As seen throughout this section, Grupo Feminista Miércoles consistently showed a radical commitment to collective cinematic practices in an attempt to avoid repeating the same modes of authorship and production that kept women out of filmmaking. By doing so, it depatriarchalized the ways of making films and opened up a possibility for the making of a feminist cinema. When Donda rejected an award for her contribution to women’s rights in Venezuela, she was acting coherently with the fundamental idea that achievements should not be attributed to individuals, but need to be acknowledged as collective efforts. This conviction also explains why the collective refused to credit individual directors. However, in a field

where the history of film continues to be constructed on the basis of individual success, the efforts of Grupo Feminista Miércoles were dismissed and rapidly forgotten. This is to say, by rejecting to adjust to the modes of authorship that praise the figure of an individual auteur/director and that continue to be pervasive in both the film industry and film studies, the collective was also, yet unwittingly, erasing its participation in Venezuelan film history.

As demonstrated, and despite the difficulties and limitations –technical, financial, and otherwise–, the filmography of Grupo Feminista Miércoles made important interventions and contributions to the context in which it was produced and many of the issues raised continue to be relevant today. By giving epistemic advantage to those women who were located at the margins and exploring the dissonances between modernity and poverty, feminist ideas and women’s lives, the collective demonstrated its commitment to intersecting gender and class struggles in order to bring about social awareness, justice, and change. Privileging non-fiction forms and realist aesthetics, these films are not formally experimental or technically perfect. Instead, the primary aim was disrupting the status quo. This does not mean that they were unsophisticated, but that overall, their production primarily responded to the urgent need for intervening in social and political contexts and documenting the feminist movement in Venezuela during the 1980s. Throughout its history, Grupo Feminista Miércoles created an audio-visual archive of women’s struggles that has great value for Latin American political cinema, women’s history, and transnational feminist cinema. However, as addressed in Chapter 4 and *Processing Images from Caracas*, this archive does not exist as such and the materials that could be part of it continue to be scattered in different places and countries.

2.3. Cine Mujer in Colombia and *Carmen Carrascal*

Bogotá, August 2018. In a candid interview that intersects the professional, personal, and political, Patricia Restrepo revisits her career as a filmmaker, which began at Grupo de Cali. This film collective was founded by Luis Ospina, Andrés Caicedo, and Carlos Mayolo, amongst others, circa 1972 in Colombia.⁸² Although over the years several women joined, their participation, she poignantly notes, was erased in Ospina's last film *Todo comenzó por el fin* (2015). 'It's complex, it's paradoxical,' she says, recognizing that it was Ospina who gave her copies of the short-lived journal *Women & Film* (1972-1975), through which she learnt about women's cinema. During her years in Grupo de Cali, Restrepo worked as sound recordist, script supervisor, and wrote 'the reviews that were left unsigned' in the collective's magazine *Ojo al cine*. Soon she realized that to further her career, she would have to find a different platform.⁸³ As seen throughout this chapter, this was the case for many women in both film production and political organizations during the 1970s in Latin America. To overcome exclusion, women began creating their own platforms, joining forces to lift each other up. After leaving Grupo de Cali, Patricia Restrepo moved to Bogotá and became involved in the Colombian feminist film collective Cine Mujer. From 1978 to the late 1990s, Cine Mujer produced several short films, documentaries, series, and videos, and acted as a distribution company of Latin American women's cinema. Its twenty years of activity make it one of the world's most enduring feminist film collectives. Yet, its history is largely unknown in Colombia and abroad.

That being said, the Colombian Cine Mujer has been addressed in few but important works (Lesage 1990; Goldman 2002; Arboleda Ríos and Osorio 2003; Martin 2012; Suárez 2012; Cervera 2020a, 2022b). Providing varied analysis, these scholars seem to agree on the fact that some aspects of its filmography, such as 'its modernist belief in agency, its preoccupation with oppressed groups, and strong belief in women's power to effect change and to mobilize' (Martin 2012: 162), were inspired by both the NLAC and second-wave feminism. These scholars also make a case for looking at Cine Mujer's films by paying attention to textual and extratextual elements as a way of 'demonstrating the inextricability of aesthetic, formal, and social issues within the group's history' (Goldman 2002: 247). Nuancing what has already been written, I contend that Cine Mujer was primarily influenced by and worked in alliance

⁸² Informed by the counterculture movements of the USA, from which Ospina had learned during his studies at UCLA, Grupo Cali, also known as Caliwood, experimented with different art disciplines, made films, practiced cine-clubismo, and published the film magazine *Ojo al Cine*.

⁸³ Author interview with Patricia Restrepo, Bogotá, August 24, 2018.

with the Latin American women's movements, local women's organisations, and its own film subjects. These alliances allowed the further development of collaborative modes of authorship and production that echoed a communitarian way of operating. In the following paragraphs, I firstly briefly address the history and production of this collective and, secondly, I analyse one of its films, *Carmen Carrascal*. Drawing on Laura Marks' work on haptic visuality, I focus on how its collaborative mode of production foregrounded a process of rapport-building with the film subject that was then reflected on the screen through images that evoke a dialectical relation between haptic and optical visuality.

Nearly 20 Years Making Feminist Media

Women began entering the film industry as directors in Colombia from the late 1950s, mainly as documentary filmmakers, through figures such as Gabriela Samper, Marta Rodríguez, Camila Loboguerrero, and Gloria Triana, amongst others. During these years, Colombia's public discourse was largely dominated by what is known as the Colombian conflict, which refers to the unofficial war between drug trafficking organisations, guerrillas, the paramilitary, and the Colombian government.⁸⁴ However, during these decades, a very different type of history was also being written. From the 1970s, the political party Socialist Bloc and other organisations such as Broad Women's Front opened up spaces for women to meet regularly and discuss women's issues. In 1978, the First Women's National Meeting took place in Medellín, where the slide show *La realidad del aborto* (1975), made by Eulalia Carrizosa and Sara Bright, was screened as part of several activities that pushed for a public debate about the importance of decriminalising abortion. This slide show was also shown at the Colombian congress in 1979 by Liberal congresswoman Consuelo Lleras in an attempt to pass a legal proposal to decriminalise abortion. Like in Mexico, the law was not passed. Yet, Carrizosa and Bright decided to create a feminist film collective to serve 'the women's movement with audiovisual media' (Goldman 2002: 242).

The Cine Mujer foundation was legally constituted in 1978 by Bright and Carrizosa. Later, Rita Escobar, Patricia Restrepo, Dora Cecilia Ramírez, Clara Riascos, and Fanny Tobón

⁸⁴ Following the assassination of the liberal candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in April 1948, a period of upheaval known as *La Violencia* (1948-1965) in which more than 200,000 people were killed began. This surge in violence led to an agreement by the two main political parties (Liberal and Conservative) to rotate power in what is known as the Popular Front. However, also during these years, the four Colombian guerrillas were founded –FARC, ELN, EPL, M19– and warfare, repression, persecutions, and drug trafficking became part of everyday life. The so-called Colombian conflict lasted until the ratification of the peace agreement in 2016, yet its consequences remain very vivid in many parts of the country.

also joined.⁸⁵ From the late 1970s to the early-1980s, this collective made fictional short films that mirrored the daily struggles of women from similar backgrounds as the filmmakers. Some of the issues explored in these films are the representation of women in the media, the invisible work of the housewife, and the gendered socialisation of children, in film such as *A primera vista* [*At First Sight*] (1979), *Paraíso artificial* [*Artificial Paradise*] (1980), *¿Y su mamá qué hace?* [*What Does Your Mum Do?*] (1981), and *Momentos de un domingo* [*Sunday Moments*] (1985). From the 1980s, they made medium-length documentaries that represented women from lower-class backgrounds and implemented collaborative modes of production, such as in *Carmen Carrascal* (1982) and *La mirada de Myriam* (1987). During these years, Cine Mujer's most creative and experimental productions took place and were primarily funded by FOCINE.⁸⁶ From the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, Cine Mujer became a production company that made educational videos and series commissioned by governmental and global institutions, such as the UN. Some examples are *Realidades y políticas para la mujer campesina* [*Realities and Policies for Peasant Women*] (Sara Bright, 1985), *La trabajadora invisible* (Clara Riascos, 1987), and *A la salud de una mujer* [*To the Health of a Woman*] (Clara Riascos and Eulalia Carrizosa, 1990). In addition, Cine Mujer documented the first two Latin American and Caribbean Feminist *Encuentros*, in *Llegaron las feministas* [*The Feminists Arrived*] (1981) and *En qué estamos* [*What Are We On*] (1983). Also, it became a distributor of Latin American

⁸⁵ With the exception of Sara Bright, who had studied film in England, none of them had received formal education in film. Instead, most of the Cine Mujer members learned about cinema by discussing films at cine-clubs and about filmmaking by working in other film collectives. For instance, Eulalia Carrizosa helped film critic and scholar Margarita De La Vega with the Cine Club at the University Jorge Tadeo Lozano and worked with filmmaker Erwin Goggel and the independent film collective Mugre al Ojo. In this private university, Clara Riascos studied communication and Patricia Restrepo studied advertising. Riascos had also worked with Erwin Goggel and was taught by militant filmmaker Marta Rodríguez. Whereas Patricia Restrepo, as mentioned before, had been part of the film collective Grupo de Cali and learnt about women's cinema through the magazine *Women & Film*.

⁸⁶ FOCINE was a state-funded film entity active between 1978 and 1993 that funded short films through a surcharge law. This law established that each film released in Colombian theatres should be accompanied by a Colombian short film or documentary, which was partly funded by a tax payable on the film ticket. Yet, Colombian filmmakers Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo claimed that the combination of the international interest in *critical realism* foregrounded by the NLAC and the resources provided by this new law encouraged emergent filmmakers to make films that trivialised social issues for the voyeuristic gaze of international audiences, through what they called *pornomiseria* [*misery-porn*]. To expose the trend of commodifying poverty and misery in Colombian documentary cinema, they made the mockumentary *Agarrando pueblo* [*The Vampires of Poverty*] (1977) and wrote the essay '¿Qué es la pornomiseria?' ['What is misery-porn?'] (1978). However, as David Wood has argued, 'given the inevitable compromises that those hoping to gain FOCINE funding and distribution contracts had to make with hegemonic political, formal and industrial models, filmmakers on the radical left tended to reject the state funding structure, since they felt it amounted to ideological submission that could lead only to self-censorship' (2009: 47).

women's cinema and, therefore, has played a crucial role in the preservation of films made by women in the region.⁸⁷

Since Cine Mujer increasingly received support from not-for-profit organisations outside the film industry, its production was freed from the pressures of commercial success and formal excellence, which allowed them to focus on social and political issues and production practices. However, the bounding to this type of institutions imposed different economic, technological, and ideological constraints, which aesthetically and politically conditioned its projects in other ways. Nevertheless, escaping the logic of mainstream cinema allowed them to make films distinctively, showing a radical commitment to horizontality and collaboration and rejecting building up the career of a single director. Although individual directorial roles were credited in most of its films, throughout its production, all members rotated above- and below-the-line roles, acting as directors, camera operators, sound recordists, script supervisors, editors, and so on. In an interview conducted with Bright and Carrizosa in 1983, Bright stated that 'the idea was to work collectively, without hierarchies. I think we have never voted on anything, all agreements are reached by consensus' (1983: 5). Patricia Restrepo also stated that the collective's approach remained non-auteurist, horizontal, collaborative, and feminist. She said:

We were convinced that what we wanted was horizontality. We were not interested in vertical relationships, all that seemed terribly patriarchal, and we always worked that way [...]. We all were at the same level and the idea was to support each other. I think this was the basis of our feminism, in the way we established our work relations.⁸⁸

Collaborative Practices and Popular Feminism

Carmen Carrascal is a 27-minute ethnographic documentary about the life of a rural artisan who weaves baskets made out of *iraca* leaf through a craft that she invented. According to the synopsis included in the catalogue *Con ojos de mujer*, 'Carmen, the craftswoman, is the expression of human capacity for self-assertion [...] *Carmen*, the film, is an intimate documentary, close to its character, and respectful of her. It is the portrait of an admirable

⁸⁷ The Colombian Cine Mujer became a distributor of Latin American women's cinema and published three catalogues that include all the films in their collection – 'Catálogo Distribuidora Cine-Mujer' (1989), 'Con ojos de mujer' (2000), and 'Con ojos de mujer 2' (2006). According to the most recent catalogue, the last production by Cine Mujer was *Ciudadanía plena* (1998). Nonetheless, its end is marked by a letter signed by Patricia Alvear donating the Cine Mujer's archive to the Colombian Film Heritage Foundation on November 17, 1999.

⁸⁸ Author interview with Patricia Restrepo, Bogotá, August 24, 2018.

woman, made from real knowledge, not only about what she does but also about what she feels' (Dueñas-Vargas 2000: 4). In this analysis, I contend that *Carmen Carrascal* is an example of what Israel Rodríguez, although referring to the Mexican Cine Mujer, describes as a 'displacement from historical feminism towards popular feminism in film productions' (2019: 202). In particular, I focus on how its collaborative mode of production foregrounded a process of rapport-building with the film subject that forged affective alliances that were then reflected on the screen through images that evoke haptic visuality. Moreover, by establishing a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image, the film attributes political value to the sensorial and emotional.

Director Eulalia Carrizosa learnt about Carmen Carrascal's story in the newspaper. Carrascal had received an award from Artesanías de Colombia for her handcrafted baskets, which she made because she could not afford to buy school backpacks for her children. After pitching the idea to the rest of the collective, Cine Mujer decided to visit Carrascal in order to take photographs and record interviews. Later, they secured funding from the Inter-American Foundation through an application that emphasized the need to tell stories of *different* women. Indeed, as Julia Lesage notes, this is 'a biographical film in which a woman whose voice is otherwise culturally underrepresented tells about her life' (1990: 329). Carrizosa returned to Colosó on her own to carry out the pre-production and to work on the script with Carrascal. During this time, they began forging a relationship of trust and collaboration and visited the nearest cinema, in Sincelejo, to watch films and discuss about filmic representations. A few weeks later, a small crew formed by Sara Bright as the sound recordist, Rita Escobar as the script supervisor, and Luis Crump as the cinematographer joined Carrizosa to make a film that would interweave her life-story and the creative process of craft-making.

Initially, Cine Mujer wanted to direct this film collectively, implementing a collective mode of authorship. Each member was supposed to act as director for a day and the film would 'reflect the agreements and disagreements in the search for a feminist cinema.' However, as Carrizosa recognizes, 'this approach proved to be unviable.'⁸⁹ Eventually, she became the sole director, but the script and the most important decisions were discussed collectively amongst the Cine Mujer members and in collaboration with the film subject. Clara Riascos described this close relationship with the subjects as 'a sisterhood. It was not an intellectual or cinematic relation. That was the attitude of male filmmakers [...]. We really got to know them and joined

⁸⁹ Author interview with Eulalia Carrizosa, Bogotá, August 20, 2018.

forces with them. We respected their lives, portraying them with great dignity.’⁹⁰ Insisting on this special relationship and their dedication, Carrizosa emphasizes that Cine Mujer made films ‘metiéndole todo el alma’ [putting their whole soul into it]. Unlike the other films in this chapter, *Carmen Carrascal* was well received in Colombian film festivals and won several awards, including at the Film Festival in Cartagena and the International Short-Film Festival in Bucaramanga, amongst others.

In relation to both Third Cinema and feminist cinema, Priya Jaikumar notes that collaboration exposes ‘the problematic identification of authors with directors, which diminishes the contributions of craft and below-the-line workers who tend to be more diverse in terms of race, class, gender, and nationality’ (2017: 210). As seen in Chapter 1, the combination of collaborative production practices and feminist politics allows building relationships of trust that cross the boundary between the public and the private and create intimate spaces in which women can feel empowered to share their personal stories. This mode of production attempts to displace the centrality of the filmmaker’s subjectivity and poses questions about enunciation. However, this approach ‘still disguises an unequal power relation that remains between the people on each side of the camera’ (Marks 2002: 41). In this regard, Cine Mujer’s mode of production did not completely break with the hierarchies of film production or entirely displace the centrality of the filmmaker, primarily because class barriers guaranteed that power still rested with the director and the collective to a large extent. For instance, as Julia Lesage notes, the documentary subjects ‘could not participate in the editing’ (1990: 332), proving that Cine Mujer did not completely involve Carrascal in all stages or relinquish its agency. Moreover, and despite its attempts to break with class barriers during the production of its documentaries, the collective never involved subaltern women in the core group.

As seen before, rural women were initially othered by bourgeois feminists and their struggles and demands were excluded from second-wave feminism. This situation began to change from the 1980s and *Carmen Carrascal* is the first film by Cine Mujer that exemplifies a shift towards popular feminism. The protagonist is an illiterate artisan and mother of nine children from Colosó, in the remote region of Sucre. The film addresses not only her craft through the representation of her labouring body and by pointing at the precariousness of artisan work, but also a number of private and personal issues, such as the troubled relationship with her husband, the efforts to give an education to her children, the suffering caused by not

⁹⁰ Author interview with Clara Riascos, Bogotá, August 24, 2018.

having them around, but also her wish of not having any more, and her struggles with mental health episodes. At one point, her quivering voice stresses the burden of motherhood. She says: ‘I don’t want to have any more. I have nine children; I don’t want to have more. But if God gives me another, I can do nothing. I have to give birth whether I want to or not.’

Furthermore, this film also shifts both the Colombian public discourse and the grand stories of Latin American political cinema. By the 1980s, the Colombian conflict mainly affected rural areas through the killing of community leaders and local populations, sexual violence, and forced migration. However, the hardship of women’s everyday rural life was barely acknowledged and rarely represented in Latin American cinema. Within this context, B. Ruby Rich notes:

If the period of the early New Latin American Cinema movement was strongly identified with the reclaiming of the dispossessed and with the portrayal of the sweep of history, in both ideological and folkloric terms [...] then it is fitting that the current phase of the New Latin American Cinema should follow the lead of these films, turning away from the epic toward the chronicle, a record of a time in which no spectacular events occur but in which the extraordinary nature of the everyday is allowed to surface. Its films mark a shift from “exteriority” to “interiority.” In place of explicitly and predictable political, at the level of labor or agrarian struggles or mass mobilization, we often find an attention to the implicitly political, at the level of banality, fantasy, and desire, and a corresponding shift in aesthetic strategies. Such a shift has also, not coincidentally, opened up the field to women (1991: 281).

She adds that these films ‘share a refusal to attribute “otherness” to subjects formerly marked as such, accompanied by a commitment to the narrative inscription of an “other” selfhood, identity, and subjectivity’ (1997: 280). As an ethnographic portrait of a subaltern woman made through a collective and collaborative mode of production, *Carmen Carrascal* casts light on rural women not with an intention of victimizing or othering, but to challenge and expand ideas about national identity and womanhood.

Haptic Visuality, Bodily Experiences, and Respect for Otherness

Formally, *Carmen Carrascal* follows a conventional realist approach and, unlike *Cosas de mujeres* and *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*, maintains a coherent style throughout. The film combines a

talking-head interview with Carrascal with observational footage of her daily life. The closeness of the interview shot often reveals Carrascal's moments of doubt, her timid laugh, and the silent thoughts, emphasizing that this film is not only about seeing or listening but also about feeling. The observational footage shows the rural environment in which Carrascal's life takes place with detailed attention to the process of making the baskets, from collecting and cutting the *iraca* leaf, the braiding and weaving, to its transport to the nearest town. Other daily activities that show the hardship of rural life are also included, such as the lack of water supply and electricity, and the subsequent need to collect water from natural sources or to cook in a fire stove. The sound track consists of a combination of music, diegetic sound, and Carrascal's voice, which articulates the narrative. The film opens and ends with a touching song sung by the protagonist about a mental health episode. Carrascal had requested not to include this song in the film, but the fact that it made it to the final cut points at some of the flaws involved in collaborative processes and, as mentioned previously, proves that the filmmakers did not completely relinquish their agency.

In line with the broader interests of this chapter, in the paragraphs that follow, I explore how Cine Mujer's particular mode of production was mirrored on screen through its formal approach. One of the strategies used to reflect the intimacy established with the film subject is through the numerous close up shots of hands and face. Even though the use of close-ups has been associated with mainstream cinema, particularly with the ocularcentrism of Hollywood classical cinema, it can also be re-appropriated as a manifestation of proximity to establish a bond of affect that produces different types of effects. Moreover, the combination of close-ups of face and hands underlines that relation between haptic and optical visibility.

In *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Laura Marks describes haptic visibility as a multisensorial experience that 'occurs in dialectical relationship with the optical' (2002: 12), which is often present in intercultural cinema. Haptic images do not rely on the viewer's identification with the image through distance, distinction, and disembodiment but through a bodily experience that 'invite[s] the viewer to dissolve his or her subjectivity in the close and bodily contact with the image' (p. 13). In documentary cinema, as Marks notes, 'haptic visceral intimacy engenders an ethical relationship between viewer and viewed, by inviting the viewer to mimetically embody the experience of the people viewed' (p. 8). Marks argues that the haptic is not a feminine form of perception, but 'a feminist visual *strategy*, an underground visual tradition in general rather than a feminine quality in particular' (p. 7). She adds that 'what is erotic about haptic visibility, then, may be described as respect for otherness, and concomitant loss of self in the presence of the other' (p. 20).



Figure 16. A close-up shot of Carrascal's face in *Carmen Carrascal* (1982).



Figure 17. A close-up shot of Carrascal's handcraft technique in *Carmen Carrascal* (1982).

The cinematic language of *Carmen Carrascal* privileges details that evoke sensorial and bodily experiences by meticulously following her craft-making process, especially through the relation between distance and closeness, through textures such as graininess or under- or overexposure, and by addressing the dialectical relation between haptic and optical visibility. Throughout the documentary, there are several wide-shots of the space intercut with numerous close-ups of precise hand movements, subtle facial expressions, and skin and material textures that poetically represent the labouring body and the process of handcrafting. The fragmentation of the body and the juxtaposition of close-ups of hands and face through adroit editing, camera movements, and sensitive zooming emphasize the dialectical relation between haptic and optical visibility and between distance and closeness, which enables us, as viewers, to establish a bodily relationship with the image and to embody her experience. Moreover, the graininess and materiality of both the materials used by Carrascal in her handcraft as well as the 16mm film contribute to the stimulation of a tactile consciousness. All these elements are blended with an ochre hue. In this rural environment, Carrascal, her husband, and children are shown living harmoniously with cows, cats, pigs, chickens, and a mule. Most of what they need is taken from the natural world around them and there is almost no waste. However, despite this seemingly idyllic description, *Carmen Carrascal* is not a contemplative film that exoticizes the environment or its inhabitants. As Julia Lesage contends, ‘*Carmen Carrascal* presents both the strength of its protagonist and of her bonds to her children and fellow basket makers, but it does not romanticize or sentimentalize rural life’ (1990: 330). The poetry of the images and the delicate and intimate manner in which the film constructs Carrascal’s everyday life demonstrate a refusal to other her.

In the final sequence, the film follows Carrascal’s journey to Colosó, where she sees and embraces her children and delivers the baskets. Here we see that her handcraft technique has also been learned by members of this community. Despite being a character-led film, this final scene emphasizes that Carrascal represents a broader community, and positions their labouring bodies as sites of alternative epistemologies. Similarly, the representation of her handcraft on screen and the ethical relationship engendered through haptic visibility have the potential of producing embodied experiences, respect for otherness, and politicized bodies in the audience. The film proposes new ways of seeing, sensing, and experiencing that disrupt conventional narratives on the Colombian conflict, mainstream cinema, and even the canon of Latin American political films. These mechanisms create perceptive fractures. Instead of engaging with the rational, it privileges emotional and sensorial attachments and invites the audience to challenge hegemonic ideas about both national identity and womanhood. By doing so, the film

itself becomes a site of visual resistance concerned with providing alternative forms of representation that escape the dominant visual regime and political landscape.

To sum up, the Colombian Cine Mujer emerged as an independent cinematic collective interested in formal experimentation through the making of short films that explored topics that mirrored the daily struggles of its members. From the early 1980s, the collective showed greater interest in making documentaries concerned with representing the personal and communitarian achievements of subaltern women through collaborative practices that relied on the slow process of building relationships of trust. Eventually, Cine Mujer mutated into a media organisation that was commissioned by governmental and global institutions to make educational documentaries and videos. Amongst its ways of operating, the rotation of above- and below-the-line roles radically contested conventional modes of authorship and production and showed a fundamental commitment to horizontality and collaboration. Its films remained feminist inasmuch as they were all concerned with providing different representations of women, using the subjects' voice as the main narrative device, politicising the domestic space, and promoting processes of consciousness-raising. However, and despite its long and diverse trajectory and its dedication to improving the status of women, Cine Mujer's history continues to be excluded from the historiography of Latin American cinema. Acknowledging its contributions allows not only for the inscription of women's cinema within film history but also for learning about different understandings of political cinema. In particular, films such as *Carmen Carrascal* demonstrate a complex aesthetic approach that was closely related to the ethical underpinnings of its production practices.

Chapter 3. Diasporic Women Making First-Person Films

In the 1980s, an important shift within documentary occurred. An art-form that had been mostly concerned with telling the stories of others turned the cameras around to point the lenses at its makers. Influenced by the postmodernist rejection of universal truth and also by the greater appreciation of subjective interpretations of the world, documentary filmmakers became the protagonists of their own films. This shift was also informed by the 1960s and 1970s social movements that sought to politicize personal experiences, as seen in black, feminist, and queer cinemas. Since then, the inclusion of the filmmaker in the diegesis has received increasing scholarly attention and has animated theoretical debates on issues about performance and performativity that hitherto had been largely overlooked in documentary studies. Drawing on the work by scholars Alisa Lebow and Pablo Piedras, I borrow the term ‘first-person documentary’ as an elastic label that allows me to include an array of documentary films in which the extent of the filmmaker’s presence varies. More specifically, this chapter explores three films directed by diasporic Latin American women filmmakers during the 1980s and early 1990s: *Susana* (1980) by Argentinian Susana Blaustein Muñoz, *Journal inachevé* [*Unfinished Diary*] (1982) by Chilean Marilú Mallet, and *El diablo nunca duerme* [*The Devil Never Sleeps*] (1994) by Mexican Lourdes Portillo. Through the analysis of these films, I argue that diasporic experiences foregrounded subjective, personal, and self-reflexive approaches through the making of first-person documentaries that deal with traumatic events which are both personal and historical. Although the diasporic experience has already been theorized as a trigger for the subjective turn in documentary, this chapter takes this debate further and considers whether gender and sexuality also played a role in the emergence of Latin American first-person documentaries.

During the second half of the 20th century, Latin America witnessed extreme violence in the form of *coup d’états* and brutal dictatorships, such as those in Chile (1970-1991) and Argentina (1976-1983); civil wars and genocides, such as the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996); and civil unrest, guerrillas, and crime related to drug trafficking, corruption, and violence against women. These events caused, directly or indirectly, mass migration and, as a result, Latinx communities have given rise to new hybrid cultures and identities. Antonio Traverso and Kristi Wilson note that post-dictatorial periods in countries such as Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay promoted the rise of ‘subjective, personal, self-reflexive memory documentaries [informed by] the literary genres of the confession, the auto-biography and the testimony’ (2013: 277). However, as Pablo Piedras contends, dictatorial periods also fostered subjective interpretations of ongoing events, often by those filmmakers who were able to settle

abroad (2014: 64). Echoing these ideas, although specifically referring to ‘Chilean Cinema in Exile,’ Zuzana Pick points out that it is the experience of exile that ‘validated autobiography as a reflective site’ (1993: 195). This experience ‘ foreground[ed] reflexivity and the use of the first-person narrator’ (Ramírez-Soto 2014: 441) to address not only the exile, but also the return.⁹¹ In relation to documentary practices in the Middle East, Alisa Lebow states that ‘those most inclined to take up first person filmmaking are precisely those who have experienced [...] an excess of violent conflict’ (2012: 9). Stemming from the research conducted by these scholars, this chapter contends that the corpus of first-person films directed by women filmmakers who had to emigrate from their countries, often but not solely as a result of political repression or violence, constitutes a new category of political documentary within Latin American cinema. Although with crucial differences, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico were heavily affected by extreme forms of violence. For women filmmakers, escaping these contexts opened up possibilities for re-invention, self-assertion, and transformation, even while they were still battling with the loss of identity resulting from migration and displacement.

First-Person (Women’s) Documentary

The term first-person documentary has been used by several scholars (Lebow 2012; Piedras 2014; Warren 2019) to refer to those films that are articulated around the filmmaker’s subjectivity, which is represented through their body and/or voice. It serves as an umbrella term that includes a wide range of films that have also been described by others as autobiographical, subjective, personal, performative, auto-ethnographic, self-referential, and self-reflexive (Nichols 2001; Renov 2004; Bruzzi 2006; Ruffinelli 2010; Piedras 2014; Warren 2019). Lebow states that ‘the designation “first person film” is foremost about a mode of address: these films “speak” from the articulated point of view of the filmmaker who readily acknowledges her subjective position’ (2012: 1). However, she argues, ‘the filmmaker’s subjectivity is not only brought back into frame, it permanently ruptures the illusion of objectivity so long maintained in documentary practice and reception’ (p. 5). Besides, she emphasizes the dualism that this term provides, as it can refer to either first person singular or plural, I or we, individuals or collectives. Expanding on the possibility of representing a collective through first-person narration, Michael Renov and Shilyh Warren contend that first-

⁹¹ Elizabeth Ramírez-Soto highlights films such as Raúl Ruiz’s *Lettre d’un Cinéaste ou le Retour d’un Amateur de Bibliothèques* [*Letter from a Filmmaker, or The Return of a Library Lover*] (1983), Angelina Vázquez’s *Fragmentos de un diario inacabado* (1983), Miguel Littín’s *Acta general de Chile* [*Chile’s General Act*] (1986), and Claudio Sapiain’s *Eran unos que venían de Chile* [*They Were Some Who Came from Chile*] (1987) (2014: 441-442).

person documentaries reveal more extensive cultural practices that are inscribed within historical processes and socio-cultural contexts. For Renov, ‘self-inscription enacts identities – fluid, multiple, even contradictory – while remaining fully embroiled with public discourses [...]. Through their explorations of the (social) self, they are speaking the lives and desires of the many who have lived outside “the boundaries of cultural knowledge”’ (2004: 178-181). Warren describes auto-ethnographies as ‘a distinct group of first-person films in that they present the filmmaker-self within a matrix of cultural practices, beliefs, and expectations that allow viewers to gain insight about a particular group of people at a particular time and in a particular place’ (2019: 80).

If the Anglophone literature establishes that first-person documentary emerged in the 1980s, Latin Americanist scholars claim that this new approach developed a decade later in the region (Ruffinelli 2010; Piedras 2014). Jorge Ruffinelli argues that this delay can be explained by the fact that Latin American documentary prioritized the ‘collective interest rather than the individual, [...] linked to the notion that history is made by the masses and not by individuals’ (2010: 61).⁹² However, as this chapter demonstrates, the films produced by diasporic (women) filmmakers since 1980 need to be included in the historiography of Latin American documentary and recognized as pioneers of its subjective turn. As a shift, the transition from objective to subjective documentary approaches occurred gradually and, I contend, was often led by women filmmakers. Here, I am intrigued by the drive that seems to exist behind women’s greater interest in inscribing the self within documentary discourse. Thus, this chapter focuses on how feminist and queer cinemas might have played a role in the emergence of first-person documentaries.⁹³

⁹² Drawing from Bill Nichol’s documentary modes, Pablo Piedras argues that the history of documentary has evolved towards an increasing subjectivization. For him, first-person documentary’s origin can be found in the participatory modes of the 1960s which, partly due to new technological developments, allowed closer relations between filmmaker and film subject, such as in Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin’s *Chronique d’un été* [*Chronicle of a Summer*] (1961). Michael Renov also positions this film as well as Wendy Clarke’s *The Love Tapes* (1982) as precursors of the subjective documentaries of the 1980s and 1990s (2004). Paula Rabinowitz echoes this idea by arguing that Cinéma Vérité shifted the documentary discourse from ‘the private exposure of public events and figures [...] into the public display of private, even secret, lives’ (1994: 131).

⁹³ The selection of films throughout this thesis demonstrates that women filmmakers’ subjectivities were formally represented in their films. For instance, *Amor, mujeres y flores* incorporates the poetic and personal narration of Marta Rodríguez and *The Double Day* inscribes the bodies of its director and crew within the diegesis of the film. However, in these films, the filmmakers are not the vectors of enunciation and/or the narrative is not articulated around their personal story. Feminist documentaries of the 1970s also used subjective devices, inscribed the body of the filmmaker and, at times, used first-person narration. As a matter of fact, Michael Renov argues that first-person documentary emerges from identity politics promoted, amongst others, by feminist movements and the politicization of issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, amongst others (2004: 177). Similarly, Michael Chanan connects this shift to the ‘passage from the politics of class to the identity politics and social movements which followed the feminist turn of the 70s, in which the conventional boundaries of social identity were dissolved and subjective selfhood was asserted in forms which challenged old certainties’ (2007: 242).

The films included in this chapter represent the complexities of this shift in a number of ways. The process of filmmaking is utilized as a tool for self-knowledge, where identities can be re-negotiated and families are sites for self-construction. In the process of making these films, the camera becomes a tool for introspection and experimentation with which to explore still forming or newly acquired identities, traumatic events, and repressed memories. Although the subjective turn in documentary practices has been associated with a narcissistic form of expression, as Erika Teichert contends, telling intimate and personal stories can also be a political act (2020). I subscribe to the work of those scholars who have highlighted the relations between psychoanalysis and documentary filmmaking, particularly as regards how the camera can trigger the revealing of what has been repressed, becoming a tool for self-analysis that can, nevertheless, produce both restorative and political effects.⁹⁴

Moreover, as Mara Polgovsky Ezcurra argues, artistic strategies of the 1970s and 1980s in countries like Argentina, Chile, and Mexico emerged as a response to authoritarian regimes and re-signified political art by putting an emphasis on the vulnerability of the body and the subject through the exploration of pain and desire (2019). These contexts, she notes, shifted ‘the politics of art [which] began to adopt new forms, new meaning, and new strategies. In them, the live body and the body’s vulnerability to injury, illness, and death took center stage’ (p. 5). By incorporating devices that problematize and expand the conventions that have defined documentary, these films complicate strict categorizations and create hybrid forms in which issues of performance and performativity are explicitly recognized. In some instances, they also ‘break open and render visible the conventional forms of construction of documentary discourse, exposing the codes which normally determine the reading of the representation’ (Chanan 2007: 239) and, by so doing, emphasize contradiction, fragmentation, and instability. Thus, these films are informed by and contribute to contemporary debates on the status of documentary and pose questions about its factual and realistic convention. They offer situated

Referring to experimental documentaries such as Yvonne Rainer’s *Journeys From Berlin/1971* (USA, 1980), Jill Godmilow’s *Far From Poland* (USA, 1984), Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (USA / Vietnam, 1989), Paula Rabinowitz notes that feminist cinema increasingly blurred the boundary between documentary and fiction through reflexive practices articulated around the filmmaker’s subjectivity (1994). In *Subject to Reality. Women and Documentary Film*, Shilyh Warren looks at three first-person feminist documentaries produced in the USA during the 1970s – *Joyce at 34* (Joyce Chopra and Claudia Weill, 1972), *Nana, Mom and Me* (Amalie Rothschild, 1974), and *Old Fashioned Woman* (Martha Coolidge, 1974) – as auto-ethnographies that, despite addressing individual stories, are embedded within cultural practices related to whiteness. As these examples show, the inscription of the self within documentary was an experimental ground for women filmmakers and feminist cinema from the early 1970s in the USA.

⁹⁴ Several scholars have written about the relation between documentary filmmaking and psychoanalysis, including Waldman and Walker 1999; Renov 2004; Lebow 2012; Piotrowska 2013; and Teichert 2020.

knowledge and corporal experiences by positioning the protagonists/filmmakers as historical subjects who speak not for or about but as part of or within a collective.

Throughout these analyses, I look at how diasporic experiences, as well as femininity and queerness, facilitated the making of Latin American first-person documentaries. Alongside these issues I also explore how the surrounding historical contexts informed the making of these films, not only in relation to the countries in which they were produced, but also to the national cultures from where the filmmakers came. Taking the form of an unconventional audio-visual self-portrait, *Susana* mixes formats and experiments with the documentary form to address both feminist and queer issues. Here I draw on the work on queer cinemas that scholars such as B. Ruby Rich, Richard Dyer, and Thomas Waugh have produced to look at *Susana*'s transgressive representation of lesbian pleasure and desire. I also use Laura Marks' concept of haptic visuality and Luce Irigaray's idea of a feminine language to address issues such as the self-other distinction, the primal homosexual mother-daughter bonds, and the extension of nurturing loving relationships from mother-daughter to women-sisters.

Journal inachevé is narrated in the form of an intimate diary and explores Mallet's complex identity as an exiled woman, wife, mother, and filmmaker in Montreal. Here I draw on the work of British psychoanalyst Joan Rivière in her focus on the masquerade, as well as the responses and developments produced by Efrat Tseëlon and Judith Butler. This analysis also borrows Stella Bruzzi's idea of documentary as performative acts. Bruzzi makes an important distinction between performance in documentary and performative documentaries. As seen in Chapter 2, the former refers to a series of strategies deployed to draw 'the audience into the reality of the situations being dramatized, to authenticate the fictionalisation' (2000: 153). Whereas the latter refers to those films that 'draw attention to the impossibilities of authentic documentary representation' (ibid). Besides, *Journal inachevé* evokes feelings of ambiguity and disorientation and invokes the transformative opportunities that liminality opens by pointing at the existence of boundaries and conceptualising the possibility of crossing them.

Lourdes Portillo's *El diablo nunca duerme* mixes different genres to satirize the documentary form by searching for an unattainable truth. Even though this documentary has been explored at length by scholars such as Rosa Lisa Fregoso, Sylvie Thouard, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, and Maria Luisa Ortega, amongst others, its complexities still allow for further analysis. Drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa's idea of the in-between and Ed Morales' conceptualization of Latinx identities and its potential to unsettle rigid categorizations, I look at issues of performance and performativity as expressed by Portillo's character. I also argue

that *El diablo nunca duerme* incorporates, but also disrupts, storytelling techniques associated with the hero's quest.

3.1. Susana Blaustein Muñoz's *Susana*

If the previous chapter was concerned with how the women's movements inspired the making of a feminist cinema in the 1970s, this section looks at how further debates on gender and sexuality challenged binary essentialisms and how these ideas were then translated into documentary discourses and aesthetics. *Susana* is a ground-breaking documentary in many respects. It is a precursor of first-person documentary as well as of lesbian cinema or, more broadly, queer cinema. However, and unlike the other two documentaries included in this chapter, it has received very little scholarly attention. Directed by Argentinian Susana Blaustein Muñoz, the film is articulated through her body and voice and takes the form of an audio-visual self-portrait. In the process of making this film, repressed memories are revealed and confronted, allowing the emergence of a new subjectivity in which sexuality takes a central role. *Susana* addresses not only queer issues related to complex sexualities, lesbianism, and the performativity of gender, but also feminist issues on the relationship between mother and daughter, the patriarchal family, and the nurturing value of friendship. Here I focus on how *Susana* defies conventions of women's self-portrait. Through the use of different formal devices and strategies, such as photographs, haptic visuality, and the experimentation with language, the director constructs her subjectivity and attempts to open a new channel of communication with her family in order to rebuild a bond and promote understanding as the basis for respecting difference.

Prior to the 1990s there were very few documentaries directed by Argentinian women. This is particularly surprising considering the importance that documentary gained in this country with the opening of the first documentary school in Latin America, the Documentary School of Santa Fé, founded by Fernando Birri in 1956. Moreover, Argentina witnessed the emergence of Third Cinema and produced some of the most canonical documentaries of the NLAC, such as *Tire Dié* [*Toss Me a Dime*] (1960) and *La hora de los hornos* (1968). As demonstrated throughout this thesis, the number of women directing documentaries in different Latin American countries increased from the 1970s. In Argentina, however, a brutal dictatorship known as the Dirty War (1976-1983) forced the closure of the documentary school and the exile of filmmakers, imposing a long silence in the history of Argentinian cinema and undermining the development of women's cinema.⁹⁵ As mentioned above, the post-dictatorial

⁹⁵ During the Dirty War, a military junta backed by the Operation Condor tortured, imprisoned, and killed between 9,000 and 30,000 people in an attempt to erase socialist, left-wing, and Peronist ideas. By the 1980s, ongoing public unrest produced by the economic crisis, the Falkland War, and growing discontent ended the Dirty War and restored democracy.

period fostered a subjective turn that drifted away from the call to action of 1960s militant cinema. Within this context, there was a *boom* in documentary productions, labelled by film criticism as the New Argentine Documentary Cinema and described as a ‘strategy that manages to put into discussion some of the most conservative precepts of the classic documentary. In these films, the search for objectivity is energetically put aside to propose, instead, a world of hybridizations, questions and uncertainties’ (Margulis 2014: 108-109). Moreover, when democracy was restored, women’s cinema flourished, as demonstrated by the inauguration of the Women and Cinema International Film Festival in 1988; and filmmakers such as María Luisa Bemberg and Lucrecia Martel received international recognition, becoming some of the most important Argentinian directors of all time.

Filmmaking and the Exploration of Traumatic Memories

Despite some valuable efforts, women’s cinema in Argentina remains a largely unexplored field of research and there is a long-overdue responsibility to revisit and acknowledge the filmography of female filmmakers, particularly within documentary.⁹⁶ In line with the broader aim of this thesis, the following analysis explores the documentary *Susana* and its contribution to proposing new understandings of political cinema. *Susana* is a 16mm 25-minute black-and-white first-person experimental documentary in which its director reveals and asserts her non-normative sexual identity. In the form of an audio-visual self-portrait, the protagonist/director shares the difficulties she faced growing up in a conservative environment, the pain caused by her family’s lack of understanding about her sexuality, and the constant pressure to imitate the girls around her and to masquerade. This is to say, Blaustein exposes the burden of having to perform a gender role with which she did not identify. This trauma turned into what seems to be a difficulty to balance emotions, which as the film implies has had a long-lasting impact on the director’s mental health. In spite of the brutal honesty and rebellious tone with which *Susana* addresses such a delicate topic, she attempts to open up a communication channel with her family that can set the ground for building a new relationship based on respecting difference.

With some notable exceptions, *Susana* has received little scholarly attention. Its absence from the historiography of Latin American documentary might be explained by reasons that go

⁹⁶ The ground-breaking book *Tránsitos de la mirada. Mujeres que hacen cine* (Bettendorff & Pérez Rial 2014) is possibly the most complete anthology on Argentinian women’s cinema to date. Here, Paola Margulis’ chapter revisits the documentaries directed by women since the 1960s, including the pioneering work of Dolly Pussi, Clara Zappetlini, María Luisa Bemberg, Mabel Prelorán, as well as the mixed-gender collective Grupo Cine Testimonio and the women-only collective Cine Testimonio Mujer.

beyond the disregard of women's cinema by Latin Americanist film historians. First, this is a student film produced by the San Francisco Art Institute, in the USA, and has not been officially distributed in Argentina or Latin America. As a matter of fact, in a recent interview, Blaustein Muñoz said that the film was censored during the Dirty War and has never been publicly screened in Argentina (Holgersson and Linder 2021). Moreover, the film is only available in English without Spanish subtitles. Currently, it is distributed by Women Make Movies, from where it can be digitally rented or bought. It is also important to mention that most of Susana's career has taken place abroad and her participation in Argentinian or other Latin American film circuits has been very limited.⁹⁷

The first scholars to give value to and write about *Susana* were Richard Dyer and Thomas Waugh. Both of them acknowledged its importance within the context of the 1980s gay and lesbian cinema in the USA. Dyer refers to *Susana* as an example of a 'Coming Out' film. For him, the film is 'celebratory' and 'challenging' (2003: 235), as the director asserts her sexuality but, at the same time, confronts past traumas rooted in her family upbringing. Inspired by the 1970s instrumentalization of documentary by the women's movement, Thomas Waugh argues that 'documentary film has been a primary means by which lesbians and gay men have carried out their liberation struggle' (2011: 194), particularly through the interview but also through the 'artificial and hyperbolic "performance"' (p. 225). In relation to *Susana*, Waugh highlights that "'performance" opens wounds' as 'the film lines up frontal declarations "performed" by the author-protagonist's sister, ex-lover, and parents' (p. 231-232). In the book *El cine documental en primera persona*, Piedras connects this film to both the 1960s experimental cinema and the 1970s feminist documentary tradition in the USA, and places it 'in between the autobiography and the self-portrait' (2014: 49). He highlights the choice of English and the editing techniques as strategies that allow the director to impose her authority, 'restore her condition of subalternity and discuss the legitimacy of her sexual choice in the field of cultural representations' (p. 50).

The following paragraphs are informed by and expand the existing literature on this film by placing it not only within the different radical cinematic traditions that emerged in the USA

⁹⁷ In 1972, at the age of 18, Susana Blaustein Muñoz moved first to Israel, where she obtained an Art degree and worked in television production, and later to the USA, where she studied at the San Francisco Art Institute. After making *Susana*, she co-directed two documentaries with Lourdes Portillo, *Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* (1985), which addresses the social movement formed by the mothers of the disappeared during the Argentinian Dirty War and was nominated for the Academy Awards, and *The Days of the Dead* (1989), which explores Mexican and Chicana cultural practices in the USA. She has also directed *Mi casa, mi prisión* (1993), based on the autobiography of Palestinian journalist and activist Raymonda Hawa Tawil, the short-film *Ave Phoenix* (1995), and the short follow-up of *Susana, Old Love Dies Hard* (2013).

from the 1960s, but also by inscribing it within Argentinian culture. *Susana* reacts against the dictatorship and the patriarchal values imposed by Catholicism in a country that negated and condemned the director's sexual identity. It is also informed by the great influence that psychoanalytic practice has had –and still has to this day– in Argentine society.⁹⁸ This influence might have helped its director to validate the self-portrait as a site for self-reflexion. In the formal analysis of this film, I apply psychoanalytic theory in relation to the use of the camera as a 'technology of confession' (Lebow 2012: 124) that facilitates the emergence of what has been repressed. Thus, the making of a first-person film becomes a vehicle for a self-reflexive journey that can produce both restorative and political effects.

A Queer Self-Portrait

Formally, *Susana* mixes interviews –often in the form of confessions or video-diaries– voice-overs, home movies, photographs, a scene from the Disney film *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), and experimental scenes where lesbian sexuality is performed. These devices compose a complex self-portrait of the protagonist/director. Throughout the history of art, artists painted self-portraits to reaffirm their identity as such by depicting themselves with the tools of the craft, performing the act of painting, often wearing fine clothes, and posing solemnly to demonstrate their status. Francesca Borzello notes that, for a long time, women artists have represented themselves as 'charming', 'comely', 'feminine', 'refined', 'respectful', 'professional', and 'unthreatening' (1998).⁹⁹ However, as Borzello demonstrates, women artists also defied convention and depicted themselves with traits that transgressed idealized or stereotypical representations, increasingly so as they managed to get their way through in art history. Although in the form of a film, *Susana* is also a self-portrait, yet unconventional and experimental, provocative and irreverent. The female artist behind it, Susana Blaustein Muñoz, does not reduce herself to an appearance, an object of vision, or a sight. Instead, she depicts

⁹⁸ Argentina has had the world's highest number of practising psychoanalysts since the 1960s.

⁹⁹ 'As a minority member of the profession, a recipient of impoverished training and unhelpful attitudes, aware that her image would be scrutinized in a way self-portraits by male artists were not, a woman artist had to think hard about her presentation of herself [...]. They wanted to show they were as good as painters past and present, but dared not risk looking boastful. They wanted to show themselves at work but they could not look peculiar – no dirty work clothes or untidiness, no overly dramatic self-representation – because they could not risk comment on their appearance or their morality [...]. Female artists could not afford to ignore the rules of acceptable gestures and dress. The depiction of women in portraits is governed by convention and codified in art theory, and is never a simple matter. Throughout the centuries, artistic rules have dictated that women could not show their teeth, could not show their hair inbound, could not gesticulate and certainly could not cross their legs' (Borzello 2016 [1998]: 35).

herself as a filmmaker, a young queer woman, a daughter, a sister, a lover, and a friend. Foremost, she is both *the* woman with the leading role in the film and the vector of enunciation.

In *Susana*, one of the self-reflexive devices used is the photograph. In the opening scene, we see some portraits of a younger Susana framed in a medium-close up shot. These images are accompanied by an infantile melody played with a flute that evokes childhood memories. In the first photograph, Susana poses over a plain background wearing a beret, thus presenting herself as an artist. Her perfectly combed long dark hair sits on an elegant shirt. A chiaroscuro effect lights up half of her face and darkens the other half. Her facial expression adds dramatism to this recorded instant. She looks at us with a serious expression, perhaps defiant or saddened. Then, a sequence of three side portraits follows. In these images, Susana looks less formal, her hair is dishevelled by the wind, and she wears a more mundane stripy top. Her expression is, again, revelatory. In the first image of the sequence, she looks joyful or playful; in the second, she looks tired or annoyed; in the third and final image, she looks upset or angry. By focusing on emotions, on the changeable emotional response that Susana as a young woman was having at those precise instances, the film presents itself as an intimate portrait towards inwardness, an emotional journey that attempts to reveal what has been repressed, anticipating the reemerging of a past conflict. Other photographs show the family album: the wedding of her parents, Susana as a child and teenager, and so on. The conventionality of these images contrasts with Susana's own current album, comprised of photographs of her lovers taken by her and by moving images where lesbian sexuality is openly performed. These images defy patriarchal and reproductive sexuality and foreground pleasure and desire, provocatively transgressing the conventions underpinning the representation of women's bodies and self-portraits.¹⁰⁰

Although visual devices, touch is highlighted in these photographs, signalling at haptic visuality. In a number of old photographs in which Susana appears with her parents, the edit cuts or moves to details of their hands. She is held or embraced by her parents in gestures that seem protective and possessive. Later, we see other photographs of Susana with her friends and lovers, embracing each other in powerful gestures of love. In the last scene, Susana holds a photograph of herself with her arms around her lover and erotically slides her index finger over the image. Here, touch does not evoke protection or possessiveness but desire and pleasure. For Claudia Gorbman, these 'photographic self-portraits serve as doppelgangers' and

¹⁰⁰ The decriminalization of same-sex sexual intercourse in the state of California was passed in 1976. In most of the United States, same-sex relations were still illegal at the time *Susana* was made.

this particular scene ‘impl[ies] that she and her double-image will continue to engage in mutual pursuit’ (1983: 43-44). As seen in the previous chapter, Laura Marks coined the term ‘haptic visuality’ and argues that haptic images invite the viewer’s identification through bodily experiences. She writes:

In psychoanalytic terms [...] haptics draw on an erotic relation that is organized less by a phallic economy than by the relationship between mother and infant. In this relationship, the subject (the infant) comes into being through the dynamic play between the appearance of wholeness with the other (the mother) and the awareness of being distinct (2000: 188).

In the film, the appearance of wholeness with the other is expressed quite literally through photographs. In a sequence of three photographs, we see Susana embracing and being embraced by her lovers as an adult and by her mother as an infant. The closeness of the bodies is such that they seem to be part of a whole, dissolving the self-other distinctions, and underlining primal homosexual mother-daughter bonds. These photographs extend the affective bonds from mother to lovers/friends, unfolding as counter-images that allow the director to become part of another family, in which her sexuality is not only respected, but also celebrated. These new bonds make possible for her to subvert against what Freud called the negative Oedipus Complex, which refers to the girl’s refusal to shift the love-object from mother to father. Kaja Silverman insists on the value of this subversion, since it enables women to escape the passive role imposed upon femininity by actively manifesting desire either in the form of female sexuality or simply as female bonding (1988: 125). Although this position has been criticized by Teresa de Lauretis as she contends that it sweeps lesbian desire and sexuality ‘under the rug of sisterhood, female friendship, and... the mother-daughter bond’ (cited in Chaudhuri 2006: 81), in *Susana*, lesbianism makes an important feminist intervention because it ‘reclaim[s] for women a specifically female desire, autonomous from men’ (ibid).



Figure 19. A photograph of Susana as a baby being embraced by her mother in *Susana* (1980).



Figure 18. Susana slides her finger over a photograph of herself and her lover in *Susana* (1980).

Formulating a Feminine Language

Another important aspect of this film is the choice of language. *Susana* was made in English at the San Francisco Art Institute, in the USA. However, its director's mother tongue, as well as that of her relatives, is Spanish.¹⁰¹ This choice of language can be read in different ways. As raised before, Piedras contends that Susana's better command of English allows her to gain authority over her family. This is to say the facility and eloquence with which Susana and her friends can speak English contrasts with the strong accents and broken English of Susana's relatives, particularly her younger sister. However, the preference of English over Spanish has other implications. The use of English allows Susana to construct a new identity, physically and linguistically far away from Mendoza, the Argentinian city where she grew up. By speaking in English, she refuses to accept those norms imposed upon her during her formative years: to fit in, to imitate her sisters, to attract the male gaze, and to conform to patriarchal values. Thus, the preference of English over Spanish implies a refusal of the language of the Catholic church and the mother tongue. However, Susana's parents and sister also accept to speak in English. In fact, they refer to her as 'Susan', the anglicized version of her name, yet the title of the film maintains its original Spanish version. The political discourse around the use of English in Argentina is rooted in colonialism and capitalism. Argentina's independence from Spain in 1816 led to a strengthening of commercial relations with English-speaking countries and learning English acquired social value amongst the Argentinian elites. As a middle-class family, Susana's family and Susana herself seem to also attribute social significance and a higher status to the ability of speaking English. Furthermore, the use of English allows the Blaustein Muñoz family to build a new channel of communication. It becomes a linguistic tool to talk about those intimate and painful details that were not able to be discussed in Spanish. Therefore, the choice of English in this film is complex and contradictory as it refers not only to the possibility of re-invention and communication, but also shows the importance that the director attributes to the hegemonic world language.

In voice-over, Susana's mother slowly reads in English a description of her daughter. She says that Susana was as a 'beautiful and cute girl' whose 'only problem was to be stubborn.' The mother reflects back on Susana's childhood and adolescence to try to spot a 'problem about her', but she cannot find anything else. On the contrary, her father –who also introduces himself as a 'paediatrician doctor'– attempts to expose the faults or problems he

¹⁰¹ It is important to note that the Blaustein Muñoz family is part of the Jewish diaspora. His father travelled to Argentina as a child from Poland in the context of World War II whereas her mother's grandparents originally came from Ukraine.

saw in Susana as a child. When he tries to give an example, a glitch –intentionally provoked by the director in the editing– happens. As noted by Piedras, Susana instrumentalizes the editing to punctuate and interrupt the narrative flow, particularly when her parents speak, ‘intercepting them in their cracks and impostures’ (2014: 50). By using different montage techniques, such as glitches and cuts, she reveals her status as the subject of the speech and asserts herself as the vector of the narrative. These techniques explicitly show that the story is told from her perspective and, thus, that this film is not an objective representation of reality where every contribution is evenly balanced, but a subjective exploration of her own trauma on her own terms.

Referring to a piece of writing by Edgar Morin on *Chronique d’un été*, Michael Chanan notes that ‘the “truth” in the idea of cinema vérité was akin to “psychoanalytic truth”, because of the way the camera brings to the surface what is normally hidden or repressed in the subject’s social personality’ (2007: 215). This reflexion is particularly relevant for the analysis of this film as it recognizes the unforeseen capacity of the camera to act as a trigger of the unconscious and the repressed. The relations between documentary and psychoanalysis have also been addressed by Erika Teichert. Writing about the production of neoliberal subjects in contemporary first-person documentaries, Teichert links the exploration of identity and the family with the existence of Freudian defensive mechanisms that reveal a foundational trauma ‘in which the family is always, knowingly or unknowingly, complicit’ (2020: 277). The editing of *Susana* points at the existence of these defence mechanisms, such as denial and repression, and the complicity, or even great responsibility, of her family in the formation of her trauma. Framed in a close-up shot and looking straight at the camera, Susana responds to her parents and reveals that the only way she found to communicate with them was through pretending to be sick. Here bodily symptoms become autobiographical statements that bring into consciousness what had been repressed. Eventually, vulnerability takes centre stage as she confesses that, during these years, she discovered her ‘vocation for art and women’ although she was unaware of ‘what the words lesbian or homosexual meant’.

As Piedras notes, first-person documentary can have a ‘restoring dynamic [that] inherently involves a certain conflict’ (2014: 115), which happens against an ‘other.’ In this case, the other is represented by Susana’s family and its value system. Through this conflict, the film fosters the need for respecting difference. In the final scene, Susana appears sitting around a table with her sister Graciela, in a studio. The clapper board is placed on the table and the microphone is also in shot. These elements point at the performative nature of filmmaking but also imply that this is a staged scene. Unlike Susana, Graciela’s appearance in the film

represents the patriarchal idealized and essentialized woman. Her goals in life are to get married and to have children, 'like every woman dreams', she says. In the film, she confesses that their parents think that even though Susana is intelligent and wise, she has become 'socially depraved' and 'dangerous' for her sisters. Sitting around this table, Susana and Graciela talk about the importance of communication and dialogue, of not trying to persuade but to learn about how to respect each other. Dyer describes this 'climatic final scene' as 'bristling combative' which might 'turn the viewer against Blaustein' (2003: 35). He also points at the fact that it 'does reverse the position lesbians usually occupy, in two ways: Blaustein is in control of the situation, not controlled by it; and she turns anti-lesbianism into the thing that has to be come out about, to be confessed, as Graciela embarrassedly admits that she still disapproves of Susana's identity' (ibid). On the contrary, I read this final scene as an encounter that, though difficult and painful, can set the ground for the cultivation of understanding and respect.



Figure 20. Susana and her sister in *Susana* (1980).

For Luce Irigaray, what Freud described as woman's lack and penis-envy leads to the loss of female subjectivity and the bond between mother and daughter (1979). This bond can be restored, she contends, by asserting women's subjectivities and formulating a new feminine language, which ultimately can disrupt the patriarchal phallographic order and, through nurturing loving relationships, can be extended from mother-daughter to women-sisters (Whitford 1991). Here Blaustein Muñoz, in her own way, as a rebellious young woman who is dealing with trauma and taking a great risk, demonstrates her willingness to open a channel of communication. In a reverse manner, she appeals to the caring and loving relationships established with her friends in her attempt to restore the bond with her mother and sisters and to reconcile with her family. She does so by experimenting with a new language, both linguistically and cinematically.

In line with the broader aim of this thesis, this analysis rescues and restores the value that *Susana* has for Latin American political documentary cinema. This value refers to the courageous effort of making lesbianism visible at a time when it was repressed and heavily condemned, particularly within the context of a Catholic country like Argentina. But it also refers to its attempt of using the camera as a tool that stimulates the surfacing of past traumas and conflicts, underlining the value that first-person film practices have for analysis and self-knowledge. By accepting to, on the one hand, permanently print the confession in the film medium and, on the other, to expose this film publicly, the filmmaker transgresses the understanding of therapy as a technology of the self that seeks self-betterment. Instead, it opens the possibility of creating a tool that can be of use not only for oneself, but for the family, the community it refers to, and for cinema-goers at large. Moreover, although centred around the individual trauma of the director/protagonist, the film addresses a number of important issues that are closely related to queerness and feminism, such as complex sexualities, the performativity of gender, the relationship between mother and daughter, the patriarchal family, and the nurturing value of friendship.

Taking the form of an experimental and provocative self-portrait, its innovative formal approach expands the borders that have defined what, conventionally, a documentary was. First and foremost, by inscribing the director's body and voice within the diegesis, the film poses questions about the factual and realistic convention of documentary and, instead, offers situated knowledge and corporeal experiences. This disruption of conventional codes is achieved through various experimental techniques that point to the constructedness of the film discourse, such as through glitches and other editing techniques. The film also employs photographs to point at changeable emotional responses that are connected with the unconscious and

repressed. In these images, touch is highlighted to foreground pleasure and desire, defying patriarchal and reproductive sexuality and transgressing conventional representations of women's bodies. Moreover, these techniques assert Blaustein Muñoz's authorial voice, despite her condition of subalternity as a young queer woman, and propose a new language that refuses to fit in, to imitate, to reproduce, and to perpetuate the status quo, opening up the possibility of re-invention.

3.2. Marilú Mallet's *Journal inachevé*

Journal inachevé has been praised by both documentary and feminist scholars because of its sophisticated and innovative reformulation of the documentary genre (Nichols 1994; Renov 2004; Chanan 2007) and its transgressive representation of feminine subjectivity (Pick 1987; Longfellow 2016; Margulis 2016). Directed in 1982 by Chilean Marilú Mallet while living in exile in Canada, *Journal inachevé* broke apart from documentary conventions by articulating its story from the point of view of the (female) filmmaker through first-person narration and the inscription of her body within the film. This feature-length documentary is narrated in the form of an intimate diary and explores Mallet's complex identity in Montreal. Through interactions with her then husband, the Australian filmmaker Michael Rubbo, with her mother and brother, and with her fellow Chilean exiles, *Journal inachevé* captures a paradoxical –since it is both privileged and unfortunate– family environment. In this analysis, I explore issues of performance and performativity by, on the one hand, drawing from the work of British psychoanalyst Joan Rivière in her focus on the masquerade and, on the other hand, Stella Bruzzi's idea of documentary as performative acts. I also look at the different strategies deployed to point at the existence of boundaries and the possibility of crossing them. These boundaries are metaphorically conceptualized in terms of identity –as gender, language, culture, and nationality– and also in cinematic terms –as form, location, and type of images. Ultimately, I contend that the protagonists of *Journal inachevé* perform the epistemological debates in documentary to evoke feelings of ambiguity and disorientation and invoke the transformative possibilities that liminality opens.

Chile's national film industry began consolidating from the 1950s through film collectives such as Grupo Cine Experimental and the film movement known as the New Chilean Cinema. In addition, the Viña del Mar Film Festival was of crucial importance not only for the national film culture, but also for the development of the NLAC and helped establish a network of filmmakers, film theorists, and critics across the region (Pick 1993). The Chilean film industry received increasing support during the Unidad Popular years (1970-1973), when public funding of production companies such as Chile Films animated the making of socially and politically committed films. It was also during these years when women were able to access directorial roles. This was the case of Marilú Mallet.¹⁰² However, her career in

¹⁰² After completing studies in Architecture, Marilú Mallet became interested in filmmaking during the late 1960s. She learnt about cinema watching the ICAIC's film collection while living in Cuba. Daughter of a member of Salvador Allende's Socialist Party, she directed three short films for the Ministry of Education during the Unidad Popular period, *Amuhuelai-mi*, *A, E, I*, and *¿Dónde voy a encontrar otra Violeta?* [*Where Will I Find Another Violet?*]. After the *coup d'état*, Mallet went into exile, emigrating as a political refugee to Montreal in 1973. In

Chile was cut short by Pinochet's *coup d'état* in 1973, which forced a large number of established and emergent filmmakers into exile, including Carmen Castillo, Patricio Guzmán, Miguel Littín, Raúl Ruiz, Valeria Sarmiento, and Angelina Vázquez, amongst others. As mentioned before, the filmography of these exiled Chilean filmmakers constitutes a corpus of work described by Zuzana Pick as 'Chilean Cinema in Exile' (1987), which 'retain[ed] the basic traits of their national identity and past cinematic tradition' (p. 66-70), yet also began incorporating the filmmakers' personal story into the films. Thus, Chilean cinema in exile can be regarded as a precursor of the subjective turn in Latin American documentary cinema.

The Status of Documentary, Postmodernism, and Feminism

As mentioned above, *Journal inachevé* has received wide recognition by scholars of both documentary and gender studies. Its importance to the history and theory of documentary is proven by the fact that this film has its own entry at the *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*, where it is described as 'an intensely personal and poetic evocation of the relationships between cultural and personal identity, the politics of gender, and the displacements and disjunctions of exile, through the "inachevé" ("unfinished" or "open-ended") cinematic diary' (2006: 687). Several documentary theorists have highlighted the ways in which this film represents a 'radically distinct model' (Nichols 1994: 86) or 'a crucial shift' (Chanan 2007: 241), and examines 'the very status of the documentary, questioning its constitutive identity bases, the horizon of predictability that makes it identifiable as a genre and as a language' (Margulis 2016: 157). Yet, this documentary also belongs to a 'growing prominence of work [...] in which the representation of the historical world is inextricably bound up with self-inscription' (Renov 2004: 176). Other scholars have focused on its 'feminist appropriation of language' (Pick 1987: 66-70). Brenda Longfellow draws on the work of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Michele Montrelay on the specificity of feminine language to contend that *Journal inachevé* employs devices such as the diary, the inscription of the female body, the articulation of a public discourse from a personal experience, and the blurring between the real and the symbolic to formulate a new language that foregrounds 'the rupture between voice and image [...] between

Canada, she continued her career as a filmmaker, being funded at times by the National Film Board and the Canadian government. Her filmography as director includes films such as *Il n'y a pas d'oubli* [*There Is No Forgetting*] (1975), *Je ne sais pas* [*I Do Not Know*] (1975), *Les Borges* [*The Borges*] (1978), *À force de points* [*By Dint of Points*] (1979), *Tertulia y Connexions* [*Gathering and Connections*] (1980), *Journal inachevé* (1982), *Mémoires d'une enfant des Andes* [*Memoirs of a Child of the Andes*] (1985), *Child of the Andes* (1988), *Chère Amérique* [*Dear America*] (1990), *2 rue de la mémoire* [*2 Memory Street*] (1995), *Double Portrait* (2000), *La cueca sola* [*The Cueca Alone*] (2003), *Chers Nonagénaires* [*Dear Nonagenarians*] (2009), *Sur les Traces de Marguerite Yourcenar* [*In the Footsteps of Marguerite Yourcenar*] (2011), and *Au pays de la muraille enneigée* [*In the Land of the Snowy Wall*] (2016).

the reconstruction of memory and the historical reportage, between poetry and the everyday' (2016: 66). Through 'the desire to return to a "zero degree of writing"', Longfellow argues that this film can be positioned in the conjunction between postmodernism and feminism. For her, 'what is real, finally, is the process of the film itself, its awareness of itself as a process through time and space' (p. 77).¹⁰³

My contribution to the current literature on this film expands what these scholars have written on how its formal strategies transgress the conventions of documentary. I focus on an aspect of documentary that has been largely overlooked for a long time, this is the performance of its subjects. I contend that both Mallet and Rubbo appear as authors-performers (Bruzzi, 2006: 198) who do not only talk about something –marriage and documentary– but also perform it, embodying the epistemological debates around this art form. I draw from the work of Stella Bruzzi to explore how, on the one hand, documentary offers a negotiation between reality and image, interpretation and bias, demonstrating that 'documentaries are performative acts, inherently fluid and unstable and informed by problems of performance and performativity' (p. 1). On the other hand, I pay attention to how 'the intrusive presence of the filmmaker[s]' (p. 187) exposes the ways in which the display of femininity can unsettle and disrupt dualistic differences and subvert the notion of woman-as-sign. Specifically, in the following paragraphs, I pay attention to how ideas on documentary and gender are negotiated through the liminality of space, time, and identity. I link liminality to the concept of masquerade in relation to Mallet's character and its attempt to create confusion between feminine submissiveness and the assertion of women as subjects of speech.

Liminality of Space, Time, and Identity

Journal inachevé is a 51-minute film produced and funded by a number of Canadian media and film institutions, including Radio-Québec and l'Institut Québécois du Cinéma. The film is an exploration of Mallet's life in Montreal. Although nearly ten years had passed since her exile from Chile, the film unveils her efforts and ongoing difficulties to overcome the sense of displacement, yet not only because of her status as a political refugee but also as a woman trying to establish her career as a documentary director. *Journal inachevé* constantly points at the notion of boundaries and uses several metaphors for conceptualising the possibility of

¹⁰³ The book *Nomadías. El cine de Marilú Mallet, Valeria Sarmiento y Angelina Vázquez* (2016), edited by Elizabeth Ramírez-Soto and Catalina Donoso Pinto, offers the most complete analysis on Mallet's filmmaking career to date with insightful contributions by José Miguel Palacios, Brenda Longfellow, and Paola Margulis.

crossing them. The crossing of boundaries evokes feelings of ambiguity and disorientation and invokes the transformative possibilities that liminality opens. Formally, the film crosses the boundaries of its own form. In other words, under the appearance of a realist documentary, *Journal inachevé* disguises a more complex film that transcends commonly accepted conventions. The film appears to be a video-diary as we hear Mallet's first-person intimate narration, a collage as it juxtaposes disparate elements, or even a more conventional observational documentary as the camera follows unobtrusively her daily life. However, none of these labels entirely describes it. As a hybrid film concerned with the complexities that disrupt coherence and stability, the film navigates between inner and outer worlds pointing at the existence of boundaries and the possibility of transgressing them. In this regard, Paola Margulis underlines the political significance of representing everyday practices through spaces (private and public) and temporalities (past and present), and the capacity to construct both individual and collective subjectivities (2016).

One of the audio-visual strategies that reflects this crossing is the transit between locations –the street, the home, the workplace– and from the outdoors to the indoors. The film begins with a sequence of freeze-images of buildings in the white Canadian winter, edited as diapositives. The final image shows the façade of Mallet's building, on which the title appears. As the music starts, the frame de-freezes, and the camera zooms in towards the door while we hear Mallet's voice-over. The next scene shows the interior of her house. With a very different aesthetic approach, a handheld camera wanders through the different rooms, introducing Mallet's family: her brother playing guitar, her mother painting, and her son reading. The crossing from outside to inside unfolds as a metaphorical passage towards introspection. Throughout the film, there are a number of intercut shots of outdoor places of passage –roads, paths, marshes– that point at liminality. In these transitioning moments, Mallet's identity crosses the threshold from wife and mother to refugee and filmmaker. Another device that explores the concept of crossing is the archive footage, either in the form of photographs or moving images. The archive appears in haunting moments that disrupt the narrative with a distancing effect. Although it represents a historical moment, that of the *coup d'état* in Chile on September 11, 1973, its images can either correspond to the real event or an artistic representation, blurring the distinction between realness and performance, past and present. For instance, the performed historical archive shows Mallet and others from the back, with their bodies against a wall and their arms up, performing what could not be represented. That is the persecution, detention, and even execution faced by many Chileans during and in the

aftermath of the *coup*. Whilst other images show real footage of people running away from the Chilean Air Force in the streets of Santiago and the bombing of Palacio de la Moneda.

Performances and the Masquerade

Liminality also creates the basis for gender transgressions in Mallet's character through the unsettling and disruptive potential of the masquerade. The concept of masquerade was coined by British psychoanalyst Joan Rivière in her essay, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' (1929), to describe how women –particularly, intellectual women– use femininity as a mask to hide masculine traits. By masquerading, a woman hides her status as the subject of speech and performs femininity in order to attract the male gaze, reassure men that she is not a threat, and fit in a society ruled by patriarchal institutions.¹⁰⁴ Citing Kathleen Woodward, Catherine Craft-Fairchild writes that the 'controversial aspect of Rivière's pioneering study has spawned at least "two currently circulating notions of masquerade"– one that views the inevitable female disguise "as submission to the dominant social code," and another that sees masquerade as disruptive and as resistance to patriarchal norms' (1993: 51-52). As Efrat Tseëlon notes, these two seemingly opposite notions are not mutually exclusive:

Masquerade unsettles and disrupts the fantasy of coherent, unitary, stable, mutually exclusive divisions. Masquerade replaces clarity with ambiguity, certainty with reflexivity, and phantasmic construction of containment and closure with constructions that in reality are more messy, diverse, impure, and imperfect. The masquerade, in short, provides a paradigmatic challenge not only to dualistic differences between essence and appearance. It also challenges the whole discourse of difference that emerges with modernity (2001: 3).

The scenes that employ the masquerade as a strategy to pose more effective questions about the performativity of gender and its relation with desire are those that take place between Mallet and her husband, Michael Rubbo. Even though neither of them are performative subjects in the strict sense, they perform the role of documentarists, embodying the epistemological debates around this art form. At the time of making the film, Rubbo was an already established documentary filmmaker working for the National Film Board (NFB),

¹⁰⁴ This concept was then developed by Jacques Lacan and has been appropriated by feminist scholars to theorize about issues of gender and femininity as a performance.

whereas Mallet was trying to consolidate her career as documentary director. Their characters are both performing a ‘disintegrating marriage’ (Chanan 2007: 239) and embodying the ruptures between objective and subjective approaches to documentary. The first scene where Mallet appears in the film is next to Rubbo. We see a de-centred medium-close up shot of them giggling while Mallet whispers in his ear. In the background, several masks hang on a wall indicating at masquerades and performativity. Their participation in the documentary as performers is corroborated in the final credits, where Mallet is described as ‘la cinéaste [the filmmaker]’ and Rubbo as ‘le mari [the husband].’ These final credits satirically subvert the gender roles associated with the creative couple, where he would be the director and she would be the wife –but whose contribution to the making of the film would almost never be acknowledged or credited. In addition, Mallet’s name also appears under the roles of ‘montage’, ‘rédaction voix off’, ‘production’, and ‘réalisation’.



Figure 21. Mallet whispers in Rubbo’s ear in *Journal inachevé* (1982).



Figure 22. Mallet curls her eyelashes in *Journal inachevé* (1982).



Figure 23. Rubbo introduces himself with the masks in the background in *Journal inachevé* (1982).

Later in the film, Rubbo introduces himself –with the masks in the background– as an Australian filmmaker who did not move to Canada but to the NFB. Here, his identity is defined as tied to and fixed by an institution, a practice, and a discourse of the type of documentary associated with objectivity, authenticity, and truth that the film aims to deconstruct. The character of Rubbo is described in essentialist terms by Mallet as ‘rational’, ‘pragmatic’, and ‘purist’. Furthermore, he always speaks in English, not in French or Spanish, refusing to participate in the linguistic milieu in which his everyday life unfolds and indicating their inability to communicate. At the end of this scene, he asks: ‘and, well, what else do you want me to say about that?’ This question is left unanswered, but it implies that, despite being a filmmaker himself, he accepts that power rests with Mallet as the author of the film. The absence of an answer points at the different filmmaking approaches maintained by them. For Mallet, there are no definitive answers. At this moment, the film becomes ‘performative, expressing the notion that the documentary [...] is ephemeral, fluid and in an unstable state of redefinition and change’ (Bruzzi 2006: 189).

On the contrary, Mallet’s character seems to be defined according to essentialist feminine traits. She is depicted as empathetic, kind, and attentive. She visits and supports friends who have been threatened with deportation. She is nurturing and the main carer for their son Nicolas. She is emotional, passionate, imaginative, and intuitive. And, when talking about the artist, she uses the generic masculine third-person singular form, ‘*un* artiste ne peut s’enraciner où *il* vit et ne peut habiter que le lieu de son travail [an artist cannot take root where *he* lives and can only live in the place of *his* work]’ (my emphasis). In a disembodied voice at the beginning of the film, Rubbo tells her: ‘I don’t think you are so exotic. Not as exotic as you were.’ While we see Mallet with her long hair, curling her eyelashes and putting her make-up on in front of a mirror. She replies in French ‘pourquoi exotique? [why exotic?].’ He explains: ‘You know, when I met you, you were this Chilean refugee being in the Canadian Embassy with people shouting at you. And now, you are a housewife with a child.’ Rubbo’s attempt to undermine Mallet’s identity is immediately contested. She responds: ‘Mais ce n’est pas vrai [but this is not true].’ They laugh, subversively, denoting the parody of the performance. Then, a punctuating silence follows. By challenging his statement, Mallet presents herself not as a woman that hides her status as the subject of speech by performing femininity to please the male gaze but as a woman with agency who employs the masquerade in a disruptive and resistant manner. According to Rivière, one of the reasons why women masquerade is related to the fantasy of taking the place of men. Judith Butler expands, the rivalry with men reveals the desire to take over their place ‘in public discourse as speaker, lecturer, writer –that is, as a

user of signs rather than a sign-object, an item of exchange. This castrating desire might be understood as the desire to relinquish the status of woman-as-sign in order to appear as a subject within language' (1990: 70). The masquerade is then disruptively employed by Mallet to parody cinematic representations of women as signs, express her desire to occupy her husband's directorial role, and assert her authorial voice.

Both Nichols and Chanan select the same two scenes in order to explore how the film deconstructs its documentary status. These two scenes –the Chilean soiree and the discussion in the kitchen– are linked via meta-cinematic elements. This is to say, what happens in the first scene, and how it was and should have been filmed, is discussed in the second scene. Here the film explicitly becomes its own subject. For Chanan, the first scene points at displacement in two different ways: the displacement experienced by the Chilean exiles and, unintendedly, the linguistic displacement experienced by Rubbo and Nicolas who cannot understand the improvised Spanish lyrics (2007). For Nichols, this scene stresses 'affective texture' and 'situated knowledge', highlighting that Mallet's approach is about feelings rather than understanding and illustrating the genre's transition from 'fullness and completion, knowledge and fact' to 'incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression' (1994: 1).

In the second scene, through a seemingly spontaneous argument between Mallet and Rubbo about the previous scene, witnessed and recorded by the film crew, a parallelism is drawn between their different approaches to documentary filmmaking and their different ways of understanding life. Chanan notices the irony of the moment. Rubbo, who in his own films had shown interest in experimenting with first-person documentary 'espouses here the kind of well-behaved documentary that depends on keeping certain things out of frame, out of the range of the camera' (2007: 240).¹⁰⁵ I contend that in this film, Rubbo performs the role of the antagonist who challenges Mallet's filmmaking choices and her overall approach. By embodying what Jean Rouch described as the 'provocateur', Rubbo's performance acts as a catalyst of truth for the main documentary subject. After being insistently pushed by him, Mallet breaks into tears. This moment can be read as what Rivière refers to as the fear of

¹⁰⁵ This is demonstrated in Rubbo's documentary *Waiting for Fidel* (1974) –in which the film producers and himself as the director become the subjects of a film intended to be an interview with Fidel Castro– and in both Raúl Ruiz's *De grands événements et des gens ordinaires* [*Of Great Events and Ordinary People*] (1979) and Mallet's *Journal inachevé* –where he personifies the documentarist. Moreover, Rubbo's entry in the Canadian Film Encyclopedia states: 'Michael Rubbo did not invent the subjective, personal documentary, which has since been popularized by Michael Moore and Nick Broomfield, but he was one of its first and bravest advocates. This was particularly unusual for a director carefully schooled by the National Film Board's English studio, which encouraged an objective approach to reality, including the use of a voice-of-God narrator, and frowned upon any kind of self-consciousness' (Canadian Film Encyclopaedia, Michael Rubbo entry).

retribution. Mallet expresses the fear to fulfil her fantasy of taking the place of her husband as a renowned documentary director, while also realizing that their marriage is no longer sustainable.

Throughout the film, Mallet does not deny that she is a housewife and a mother, but she asserts herself as a more complex subject who both fits within and transgresses the boundaries of what is expected from a middle-class white woman. She reveals that her ‘individuality has been wiped out,’ but throughout the film she constructs her identity as adaptable, changeable, and fluid. Her performance points at the liminality of identity as she recognizes: ‘J’ai l’impression que ma vie est comme un long trajet en voiture [I feel my life is like a long drive].’ Furthermore, as a speaking subject who articulates the narrative through the use of the first person singular, she is re-appropriating a language and re-signifying a practice. However, Mallet is not using the ‘privilege to speak “I”’ as a way to establish ‘a sovereign self, a center of absolute plenitude and power’ (Butler 1990: 159). Instead, as Butler suggests, she ‘pursue[s] the decentering of the subject and its universalizing epistemic strategies’ (p. 160). By doing that, she is not renouncing to her agency but, by reconceptualizing her ‘identity as an effect,’ she is ‘open[ing] up the possibilities of “agency”’ (p. 187). Faced with a series of crises –in her marriage and within herself– Mallet’s circumstances allow her to question social conventions and to be inventive and imaginative. She embraces the major transformations at hand in liminal periods, in which fluidity and malleability open a possibility for reversing or dissolving hierarchies and other social norms.

As Margulis has noted, ‘the confrontation between two ways of understanding life, work and the environment, sustained by the marriage of filmmakers Michael Rubbo and Marilú Mallet, has its counterpart in the divergence of ways of conceiving the documentary’ (2016: 158). However, as I have argued, the discrepancies and, at times, opposite traits that construct Mallet and Rubbo as documentary subjects/filmmakers are performed to create a tangible parallelism that mirrors the epistemological debates in documentary, unsettling the hitherto well-established conventions of this art-form. *Journal inachevé* emphasizes the negotiation at place between the historical world in which the film takes place and its representation, signalling at the fluidity and instability of artistic practices that rely on performative real subjects. By linking documentary epistemology to gender essentialism, the film unveils the linguistic and political structures that constitute both reality and women as objects of discursive formations and effects. The display of femininity has, nevertheless, a disruptive potential as it subverts the notion of woman-as-sign. Instead, the film explores the liminality of Mallet’s identity –as wife, mother, refugee, and filmmaker. Liminality allows for gender transgressions

to occur through the masquerade. Here the masquerade refers not only to the mask that enhances femininity to seemingly attract the male gaze and reassure patriarchy of the unthreatening condition of women, but also to its resistance to patriarchal norms by asserting women as subjects of speech. Within this ambiguous, reflexive, and messy space opened up by liminality and the masquerade, an opportunity to transform the status quo arises.

3.3. Lourdes Portillo's *El diablo nunca duerme*

El diablo nunca duerme is one of the very few documentaries made by a Latin American woman during the 1990s that has received wide recognition. Possibly, one of the reasons for this is that it was made by Lourdes Portillo, a Mexican woman living in the USA who by the time of making this film had already an established career as documentary filmmaker.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, this documentary was supported by the US media industry and has recently been inducted into the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress. This 'melodocumystery,' as described by Portillo (Fregoso 2001: 43), mixes different genres –the thriller, the road movie, the investigative documentary, and the Mexican melodrama– and embraces the postmodernist rejection of objective reality, universal truth, and scientific knowledge. Although *El diablo nunca duerme* has been explored at length by several scholars –particularly in relation to the status of documentary, the tensions between individual and collective identities, and the undermining of cultural frameworks– its complexity can stimulate further discussions. This analysis contributes to existent debates by, on the one hand, positioning this film as a first-person documentary that far from getting closer to reality exposes the flaws of this claim. On the other hand, I argue that *El diablo nunca duerme* belongs to a new tradition of documentary that incorporated storytelling techniques based on the hero's quest and widely used in fictional scriptwriting. It also draws from some of the conventions of Mexican melodrama. However, I contend that the archetypal narrative of the hero's journey and melodrama's attention to mythological constructions of femininity are not only incorporated, but also disrupted through the use of queer strategies. Unlike the other two documentaries included in this chapter, *El diablo nunca duerme* is not an explicit exploration of Portillo's own subjectivity and identity. Instead, the inscription of her body and voice is satirically utilized to lay bare the idiosyncrasies of a particular middle-class Mexican family, taking as a starting point the unexpected death of her uncle Oscar.

¹⁰⁶ Originally from Chihuahua, Lourdes Portillo moved to the USA as a teenager and graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1978. Most of her documentaries have received wide recognition, including *Después del terremoto [After the Earthquake]* (1979, co-directed with Nina Serrano), *Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* (1986) and *La Ofrenda: Days of the Dead* (1988), both co-directed with Susana Blaustein Muñoz, and *Corpus: A Home Movie for Selena* (1999). She also directed the experimental video *Columbus on Trial* (1992). *El diablo nunca duerme* was funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Latino Communications Center, and the REX Foundation. It was produced by Portillo's own production company Xochitl Films, which along with Women Make Movies are the film's distributors. A shorter version of the film was acquired by the Independent Television Service and broadcasted at PBS in 1997.

Latinx and Borders

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, the different types of conflict that arose in Latin American countries during the twentieth-century –from brutal dictatorships to drug trafficking– forced many people to migrate, mainly but not only, to the USA. As a result, new hybrid cultures developed in the country. These new cultures unsettle the very rigid identities defined within nation-states and open up the possibility for change. Ed Morales explains that, in the Americas, Latinx identities emerge from the unresolved trauma of European colonization and the profound changes that have unfolded since then –from the transatlantic slave trade to mass migration– but also from the need to decentre whiteness (2018). However, he argues, the understanding of race has developed very differently. Whereas in Anglo-America race has been strictly defined in binary terms by opposing whites and blacks, in Latin America the entanglement of different races has permeated strict classifications and allowed for several categories of mixed-race people to exist (p. 11). Here, *mestizaje* –a Spanish term referring to the process of race-mixing– has also been encouraged from the top-down by politicians such as the post-revolution Mexican minister José Vasconcelos in his nevertheless controversial book *La Raza Cósmica* [*The Cosmic Race*] (1925).

Acknowledging the inherent racism and pervasive racial hierarchies still prevalent in Latin American countries, Morales makes a pragmatic argument stating that the incorporation of Latin American ideas of race in the USA has the potential to destabilize, challenge, and resist the Anglo-American binary contradictions. Unlike the denomination Hispanic, which foregrounds the idea of a European origin, the term Latinx serves as a counter-narrative of whiteness through the acknowledgment and celebration of mixed-race heritage. In this regard, as Morales puts it, ‘Latinx intends to describe the in-between space in which Latinx live, which allows us to cross racial boundaries more easily and construct identities, or self-images, that include a wide variety of racial, national, and even gender-based identifications’ (2018: 16). This in-betweenness and the idea of ‘border thinking’ is rooted in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and developed through Chicana Studies and Border Art. Informed by her own experiences as a chicana, feminist, and queer person of Mexican mixed-race descent and raised in the USA near the Mexican border, Anzaldúa developed the concept of the ‘New Mestiza’ to address the in-between as a form of higher consciousness capable of breaking down the barriers that separate dualistic oppositions. Mixing Spanish and English, prose and poetry, her best-known book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) looks at the invisible borders that exist between genders, identities, and races and reflects on the susceptibility to the hybridity of

the borderlands. Amid the flourishing of these ideas, Lourdes Portillo, a self-identified Chicana and lesbian, began working on *El diablo nunca duerme*.

The existent literature highlights the multiple ways in which this film and, more broadly, Portillo's filmography exemplify the crossing of boundaries. In the introduction of the book *The Devil Never Sleeps and Other Films*, Rosa Linda Fregoso notes that, throughout her career, Portillo has shown a consistent and defiant interest in crossing cinematic boundaries, inasmuch as 'her work refuses to be pigeonholed into one category of filmic style' (2001: 2). More specifically, Fregoso addresses how *El diablo nunca duerme*'s formal structure 'simultaneously acknowledges and critiques the conventions of documentary film' (p. 92) and disrupts its claims of authenticity and truth. It does so, 'by drawing from other culturally specific forms of knowledge more properly associated with the space of the popular [...] at odds with the modernist project of certainty, uniformity, absolute truth, associated with official documentary discourse' (p. 93). Reiterating the idea of in-betweenness, Maria Luisa Ortega notes that Portillo's filmography transits between committed narratives, political and social documentaries, experimental videos, and performances (2011: 95). However, Ortega inscribes *El diablo nunca duerme* not within those cultural artefacts informed by migration and the crossing of borders in a literal sense, but within the 1980s and 1990s tradition of first-person documentary in the USA by connecting it to films such as Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March* (1986) (2011: 99). Even though these two films are very different, in both cases the boundary between fiction and documentary becomes increasingly blurred.¹⁰⁷ They combine a first-person narrative/performance and raw material that comes from the historical world and incorporate storytelling devices hitherto only employed in fiction cinema. The structure is built through a journey undertaken by the filmmaker in order to fulfil a quest, which broadly reproduces the basic elements found in Greek mythology or what has been named as the hero's quest or journey.

Informed by the cultural debates around the complexities of Latinx identities that emerged in the USA during the 1980s, *El diablo nunca duerme* becomes an artefact that unsettles rigid definitions and embraces fluidity. Portillo incorporates cinematic strategies that belong to different film traditions and genres, including the Mexican melodrama, as well as

¹⁰⁷ In *Sherman's March*, the filmmaker unexpectedly turns into the protagonist of a failed film about General William Tecumseh Sherman's March to the sea during the Civil War. But it is precisely this failure, his vulnerability as filmmaker, and the focus on the process which made this film a compelling one. Although with a different tone and formal approach, its contemporary film *Roger and Me* (1989) by Michael Moore also relies on the director's mediation as filmmaker-protagonist to narrate the failed attempt to confront General Motor's then CEO Roger Smith after the closure of the Michigan's plant and the subsequent loss of thousands of jobs in Moore's hometown.

relying on storytelling techniques developed in Greek mythology and adapted to novels and films. Here, the categories that have traditionally constructed identities in a hierarchical order on the basis of race, class, gender, or sexuality, and even the distinctions between private and public are dismantled. The mixing of these strategies becomes an effort in the decentring of dominant ideologies and frameworks. Thus, the film embraces the in-between as a form that ruptures dualistic oppositions. Formally, *El diablo nunca duerme* mixes different elements to construct its story: interviews, observational footage, historical archive, family photographs and home movies, and other images related to Mexican culture, borders, economic development, and technological mediation. It also includes different aural devices, such as voice-overs, both Mexican and European music, and sound effects that set the mood throughout. Its 88 minutes heavily rely on experimental framing, editing, and sound to create meaning. From the angles used to the juxtaposition of disparate elements, this documentary shows a complex understanding of film language and a transgressive approach to it. The camera movement and the framing are, at times, still and carefully composed and, at times, handheld with an amateur look. One of most unsettling framings is that of some interviews. The use of high and canted angles suggests mistrust or accusation, contributing to the overall intention of challenging appearances and opening questions about the truth.



Figure 24. Portillo's relative being interviewed in *El diablo nunca duerme* (1994).

Myths, Legends, and the Hero's Journey

In this analysis, I contend that *El diablo nunca duerme* incorporates some of the common stages found in the narrativization of stories as described by Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell. In *Morphology of The Folktale* (1928), Propp proposed thirty-one generic narratives in storytelling. The figure of a protagonist or hero, *his* quest, and the existence of an antagonist as well as its organization in three main stages –departure, initiation, and return– are the basic elements that articulate these narratives. These ideas were later developed by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Based on Freud and Jung's theories about universal human consciousness and internal conflicts, Campbell proposed five steps in the narrativization of stories that include 1) a call to adventure 2) a road of trials 3) the achieving of the goal 4) the return to the ordinary world and 5) the application of the boon. This structure has been reproduced in many films, most of which have a man as protagonist or hero. Feminist scholars have argued that this articulation of stories reworks the male Oedipal complex and positions women as absence or lack (De Lauretis 1984; Prinsloo 1992); or, in Proppian terminology, as donors, villains, or rewards.¹⁰⁸ In this type of films, women are characterized as either obstacles or providers whose primary function is to fulfil male desire (Creed 1987; Johnston 2000).

El diablo nunca duerme begins with the announcement of the sudden and unexpected death of Portillo's uncle. This event triggers a personal journey motivated by her desire to know what happened to him. Right from the start, Portillo presents herself as the subject of enunciation. Intrigued by the murky circumstances surrounding Oscar's death, which she describes as full of 'intriga, traición, venganza, ángeles y diablos [intrigue, betrayal, revenge, angels and devils],' she accepts to undertake what Campbell described as the *call to adventure* by stating: 'por supuesto, tuve que ir a México a descubrir lo que había ocurrido en realidad [of course, I had to go to Mexico to find out what had actually happened].' This sentence initiates a journey that begins in the USA –where Portillo lives– towards Chihuahua and Guaymas –where her family is. As mentioned before, several scholars have pointed at the crossings, in-betweenness, and hybridity of this film, which I understand as a celebration of mixing, whether of races or cultures, as well as the fluidity of gender identities. In particular,

¹⁰⁸ For Jeanne Prinsloo, the Proppian functions can be organized in groups that correspond to different stages of the Oedipal trajectory as theorized by Freud: 'The Oedipal scenarios hinge on the boy child becoming aware of himself as separate from his mother (preparation) and his need to prove himself as not a child (complication) and, in order to reach maturity, to separate from his mother (transference), and through struggle, to be able to return and gain recognition for his achievements, which are rewarded by marriage to the woman who is not his mother, but who makes good the lack of the mother' (1992: 70).

Maria Luisa Ortega draws on the trope of the border, understood as a category in postmodern theory that inhabits the margins and the in-betweens to disrupt ‘the traditionally homogenous spaces of identity (national, cultural, and of gender) whose edges are more and more uncertain’ (2011: 97). In the film, the physical crossing of borders is represented by moving images of maps, flags, signs, and the sky, and corresponds to what Campbell calls the *crossing of the first threshold*. Unlike in Campbell’s description, Portillo does not step into the unknown or penetrates the space of the other. On the contrary, she returns to the familial. Instead of discovering new land, Portillo is revisiting what is already known to her, her past, traditions, and roots.

Portillo’s desire to know is articulated through the mixing of both conventional and disruptive approaches to storytelling. This film also incorporates elements from the Mexican melodrama, a genre that is often articulated around the figure of the patriarch (Byars 1994). Representations of women in Mexican melodrama rework mythological constructions of femininity articulated through three key figures, the Virgin of Guadalupe, la Llorona, and la Malinche, primarily in their role as mothers (Melero 2015). As Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos notes, these foundational myths have enclosed women into different forms of captivity or identity cells, as mother-wives, nuns, prisoners, whores, and madwomen (2005). These roles ‘dominate the contemporary Mexican imaginary, locking women into the home and their reproductive roles [and by so doing, locking them out] of the discursive system’ (Melero 2015: 12). For Ana M. López, ‘family melodramas map the repressions and contradictions of interiority and interior spaces – the home and unconscious’ (1994: 256). This is clearly expressed by Portillo’s voice-over as it delves into her unconscious and shares recurrent dreams, where her family, its stories, and the image of Saint Rita are often present. Later in the film, Portillo also refers to La Pascualita, a young woman who died on her wedding day and whose embalmed corpse wearing a wedding dress is believed to be exposed as a mannequin in her mother’s shop. The fascination with La Pascualita and its significance for the ongoing importance ascribed to virginity in Mexican society is such that her story has become a legend. In the film, both the references to Saint Rita and La Pascualita unsettle and complicate women’s position within Mexican culture.

Melodrama has also been described as a complex film genre, full of contradictions as it ‘simultaneously champion[s] and criticize[s] the institution of the family and the gender roles it entails’ (Byars 1994: 94). As a matter of fact, melodramas can be ‘organized around a woman’s point of view, her problems, and her desires, [...] call[ing] attention to gendered identity construction’ (ibid). Moreover, in recent years, feminist reinterpretations of women’s

significance to the formation of Mexican nationhood have challenged the patriarchal imaginary that presents women as either virgins or traitors, often through '(re)imagining motherhood and turning it into a point of departure on their struggle for equality' (Melero 2015: 19). Thus, I position *El diablo nunca duerme* as a cultural text that contributes to the reinterpretation of women's roles in Mexican mythology and melodrama by presenting the institution of the family as the centre of patriarchal heteronormative ideology.

Mobilizing Queerness

The film is disruptive in its attempt to satirize the patriarchal ideology underpinning both the hero's journey and classical melodrama. Although the protagonist of the film is the family patriarch, the point of view is articulated and enunciated through a lesbian filmmaker. Moreover, Portillo does not embody feminine traits and, instead, performs roles traditionally associated with male characters: the detective and the film director. Portillo's character is visually represented through fragmentation. Most of her appearances take the form of point-of-view shots of her hands entering the frame either to express performativity through, for instance, the writing of her uncle's name on his grave; or to hold pieces of evidence and family photographs; or to manipulate technological devices, thus drawing attention to the cinematic apparatus. The first time that we see the actual filmmaker is in front of the cinema Azteca, while we hear her saying that this is where she watched her first film. This shot leads us to the cinema's interior, currently turned into a car park, in what can be interpreted as another nod to the distrust of appearances or the changeability of spaces. Portillo parks her car, winds the window down and, performing the detective, looks at camera while she reveals that, in those years, melodrama triggered her interest in film. A third shot of her head from behind shows her watching a Mexican melodrama on a small television. She turns to camera and raises her eyebrow, creating a moment of complicity with the audience about the familial drama we have just witnessed and also anticipating the kind of film we are about to watch. Throughout the film, several close-up shots of half of her face wearing polaroid sunglasses where film clips and interviews are reflected are intercut, emphasizing the idea that it is through her perspective that we, as the audience, make sense of the story. In all of these shots, she breaks the fourth wall and addresses the spectator. Thus, Portillo's privileged position guides and, at times, even misguides the audience. More importantly, these performances continue to unsettle, complicate, and subvert the role traditionally associated with women on the screen.



Figure 25. Portillo points at the Cinema Azteca in *El diablo nunca duerme* (1994).



Figure 26. Portillo looks at the camera after watching a scene from a Mexican melodrama in *El diablo nunca duerme* (1994).

Besides her central role, two other characters stand out, the deceased uncle Oscar and his widow, Ofelia. The distinction between Portillo's role as detective and as filmmaker, between fiction and reality, blurs when we see her in a motel room, surrounded by her crew, recording a phone conversation with the alleged Ofelia. The final credits reveal that the voice of Ofelia has been performed by an actress. Yet, the discussions that Portillo holds with crew members after the phone conversations maintain the illusion of reality, confusing what is supposed to be real with what it is performed. Oscar's last wife, Ofelia is characterized as the antagonist and, for part of the film, Portillo insinuates that she might be the murderer. Through the inclusion of different accounts, Portillo exploits the stigma of Ofelia's working-class background, as a woman from a poor family who gained class mobility through marriage. The family members blame her for marrying Oscar only a few weeks after his first wife died. This gossip can be seen as deeply embedded in the patriarchal and classist culture that Portillo exposes –and satirizes– but not always explicitly challenges. Although Ofelia's responsibility for the death of Oscar becomes the most pursued trail in the film, other (often ridiculous) possibilities are also raised. Through the seemingly serious consideration of these other possibilities, the film becomes a parody of itself. Exploiting the idea of absurdity, unexpected juxtapositions are made in the representation of the deceased Oscar. His identity is reconstructed by Portillo as located somewhere in between the family patriarch and a secret homosexual. Yet, the ambiguous sexuality of Oscar is presented as a family taboo, exposing and agitating the value system of its members. Similarly, Portillo's sexual identity is also taboo as it is never addressed in conversations with her relatives, missing this opportunity to come out and defy cultural and social normalcy.

Unlike the conventional hero's narrative, here, the story is articulated through the female protagonist, Portillo herself. Thus, the binaries associated with male/female and the association of male as hero and female as a reward are disrupted. Portillo's reward at the end of the film does not come in the form of glory, marriage, or gold but in the guise of knowledge or, more specifically, the impossibility of knowing the truth. Eventually, Portillo returns to the point of origin with new knowledge that, although, does not answer her initial quest, proves the impossibility of completeness. She says: 'vine a México con la ingenua idea de que si seguía todas las pistas y descubriría todos los hechos, descubriría también la verdad, tal como en las películas [...]. Una vez más compruebo que no hay respuestas claras ni soluciones simples a los misterios de la vida. Hay solamente verdades a medias y tentadoras preguntas [I came to Mexico with the idea that if I followed all the clues and discovered all the facts, I would also discover the truth, just like in the movies [...]. Once again I verify that there are no clear answers

or simple solutions to the mysteries of life. There are only half-truths and tempting questions].’ This unexpected ending in which the mystery remains unresolved functions as a disruption of something deeper as it has the potential of challenging dominant ideologies that present stories as full, coherent, and complete. Portillo does not restore correctness in her family but leaves all the questions raised throughout it open. In her pursuit of laying bare the idiosyncrasies of her bourgeois Mexican family, she unleashes repressed tensions and provokes the surfacing of behaviours and desires that expose the rigid cultural norms of heteronormative patriarchal societies.

To sum up, *El diablo nunca duerme* is a first-person documentary that positions the family as a site for self-construction through a personal journey that relies on and disrupts the archetypical narrative of the hero’s journey and the classical Mexican melodrama. This journey is not towards the unknown, but the familial and it is not led by a masculinist trope but by a lesbian who embraces the fluidity of her identity by performing different roles that are traditionally associated with male characters. Oscar’s identity is also, somehow, constructed in fluid terms, as he is placed in between the family patriarch and the secret homosexual. The disclosure and discussion of these details expose the value system of this middle-class family, which is never fully challenged by the director within the diegesis. However, resistance is expressed by other means, especially through the film form, the mixing of disparate genres, and its emphasis on absurdity. By posing questions about the factual and realistic convention of documentary, *El diablo nunca duerme* exposes the flaws and contradictions in the genre’s quest to get closer to reality. Throughout her career, Portillo has consistently privileged the documentary. Yet also throughout her career, Portillo’s filmography has continuously contributed to problematizing and expanding the definition of documentary, despite being supported by film institutions that often impose strict constraints. In this particular film, her participation and performance gave her unprecedented power over the narrative. This is because the inscription and mediation of the filmmakers’ body within the diegesis of the film permits directing more effectively what happens. In other words, not only does the filmmaker have control over what to do or where to go, but also, their presence allows greater manoeuvring of the circumstances in which she gets involved and the conversations she holds. Since the main protagonist of the film is also the director, the limitations associated with the spontaneity and uncontrollability of documentary subjects no longer apply. It is precisely the first-person articulation of the documentary that allows the incorporation and disruption of storytelling techniques hitherto only used in fiction.

Chapter 4. *Processing Images from Caracas*

As part of my practice-based PhD, I have produced the short documentary *Processing Images from Caracas*, which traces the archive of activist, filmmaker, and photographer Franca Donda and the film collectives that she was part of, Cine Urgente and Grupo Feminista Miércoles. This film accompanies, is informed by, and has contributed to the written thesis. This is to say, the two components are interdependent modes of discourse that feed into each other and, at times, even overlap. In this chapter, I first address the conceptual development behind *Processing Images from Caracas* by looking at how the initial idea unfolded into the final film. Second, I trace a lineage and outline the influence of non-fiction researchers-filmmakers and other relevant scholarly research on Latin American archives to my practice-based approach. Third, I explain the process of making *Processing Images from Caracas*, from the pre- to the post-production. Finally, I offer an overview of the final film and a critical reflection of the overall process. The aim of this film is to *make sensorial* one of the main arguments presented throughout this thesis. It shows how Latin American women's documentaries and other relevant materials that could make up an archive of women's or feminist cinema are at the brink of disappearance. From the realization that women's cinema has been, predominantly, denied proper archival value, my initial research question was expanded as it was no longer only concerned with how to inscribe women's documentaries within film history, but it also foregrounded the urgent need to protect these materials and create such an archive.

Link to *Processing Images from Caracas*

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/tz0bp829yq89ics/Processing%20Images%20From%20Caracas.mp4?dl=0>

PROCESSING IMAGES FROM CARACAS

A SHORT DOCUMENTARY BY LORENA CERVERA



Figure 27. Poster from *Processing Images of Caracas*. Image courtesy of Claudia Roffé.

Conceptual Development

The original plan for the practical component of this thesis was to make a short documentary based on interviews with women documentary filmmakers from different Latin American countries and images from their films. Within the context of a renewed revitalization of feminist movements in the region, its making could have served different purposes.¹⁰⁹ First and foremost, it was envisioned as a recognition of and a tribute to the work of these overlooked filmmakers. Second, by using footage from their films, I wanted to stress the alarming contemporaneity of many of the issues raised in Latin American feminist cinema of the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. Besides, the resignification of their films within current debates on women's issues and feminist cinema could have sparked more effective planning of feminist actions for future campaigns and films. Thus, in line with the written component, this film would have provided a revision of Latin American documentary from a feminist perspective through a creative practice intended to pay attention to women's accounts and filmographies.

During my first research trip to Colombia and Peru in 2018 I filmed interviews with Marta Rodríguez, Eulalia Carrizosa, Patricia Restrepo, Clara Riascos, María Barea, and Nora de Izcue. I also conducted research at film archives from which I was able to gather many of the films included in this thesis. According to my original plan, I was supposed to conduct a second research trip to Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina in order to interview Rosa Martha Fernández, Gioconda Espina, Helena Solberg, Marilú Mallet, and Susana Blaustein Muñoz, amongst others. However, this trip never took place. The outbreak of Covid-19 and the travel restrictions imposed worldwide meant that I was unable to complete my fieldwork over the summer of 2020, as I had planned. At this point, I began imagining other ways of making this film. For some time I considered the possibility of making an essay film, re-using existing films made by Latin American women to explore themes such as women's role in production and reproduction. However, concerns about copyright and the quality of the copies that I could acquire became impediments to the further development of this idea. Moreover, although closely related to my work and of great interest to me, making an essay film would have also required extensive research beyond that already conducted for my thesis.

¹⁰⁹ As seen by the global resonance of the performance of 'Un violador en tu camino [A Rapist in Your Path]' by the Chilean collective LASTESIS on 25 November 2019 and the ongoing public debates on the decriminalization of abortion.



Figure 28. Still from the interview with Nora de Izcue. Lima, 2018.



Figure 29. Still from the interview with Clara Riascos. Bogotá, 2018.



Figure 30. Still from the interview with Marta Rodríguez. Bogotá, 2018.

As international borders began to open up in 2021, the possibility of conducting fieldwork became plausible again. However, my new circumstances did not allow for an extended research trip. I had begun working full-time at Arts University Bournemouth and I could not spend months travelling. Instead, I decided to visit just one country over the Easter break in 2022. I chose Caracas as the main location for shooting my film primarily due to two reasons: the lack of research conducted in this country and the consequent need for it and the relationships that I had already established with possible contributors via phone conversations. As I began thinking about this film, it became clear that the main purpose could be to trace the archive of activist, filmmaker, and photographer Franca Donda and the film collectives that she was part of, *Cine Urgente* (1968-1973) and *Grupo Feminista Miércoles* (1979-1988).¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Born in Italy in 1933, Franca Donda became involved in a photography club at the study of the brothers Aldo and Giuliano Mazzucco in Gorizia and in political circles close to the Italian Communist Party. She studied languages in London and Paris and learned about photography processing with Paul Strand. In 1957, she married Paolo Gasparini and, shortly after, they moved to Caracas. After the success of the Cuban revolution in 1959, they went to La Havana and stayed there for about four years. I contend that this period had great importance not only for her political formation, but also for the further development of her interest on photography and filmmaking. Over these years, she met Chris Marker while he was working on *La Jetée* (1962) and Agnès Varda while she was filming *Salut les Cubains* (1963), which includes photographs taken by Gasparini. Back in Caracas and after divorcing Gasparini in 1968, Donda co-funded a number of film collectives and women's organizations, including *Cine Urgente*, *Grupo Feminista Miércoles*, and *Mujeres Socialistas*. Her involvement in feminist and other left-

During this trip, Paolo Gasparini, a renowned photographer and Donda's ex-husband, gave me her remaining archive, which includes two albums with around 6,000 negatives, contact sheets, and personal items. The access to these images was decisive for the development of *Processing Images from Caracas*.¹¹¹

The Relations between Theory and Practice

As stated in the introduction, the making of *Processing Images from Caracas* draws from the research conducted, the methods applied, and the analyses of the selected films. The production stage took place after finishing a first draft of this thesis, enabling me to think about how I could apply the knowledge acquired. Thus, the film draws from the debates and ideas presented throughout it, including on documentary's capacity to ignite or fuel movements of resistance and its effectiveness for social and political action within the context of Venezuelan feminist activism. It also ascribes political value to the representation of affect and emotion by establishing a bond with the archive and emphasizing my own vulnerability. Besides, the making of this documentary stresses the performative nature of this art-form by mixing different formal approaches, rendering visible its discursive devices, and through my own performance as researcher-filmmaker. This is also a feminist documentary that re-uses the archive of the Venezuelan women's movement, sheds light on the work of an overlooked activist, filmmaker, and photographer, and is haunted by reality.

Stemming from this thesis' interest on exploring how events and ideas shape the making of films, this short documentary looks at a particular historical context, which is set through the topics addressed in the conversations, the film archive, and also Franca's photographic archive. The period represented in these photographs spans from the 1960s to the 1990s, this is to say from the aftermath of the Cuban revolution to the collapse of the communist bloc, which loosely coincides with the time frame of this thesis (1975-1994). More specifically, while looking at Gioconda Espina's photography album, we address issues such as the 1970s campaigns for the decriminalization of abortion and *Cosas de mujeres*, the Latin American Feminist *Encuentros*, and the emergence of the Venezuelan feminist movement. The

wing political movements was such that her biography is included in the book *20 mujeres del siglo XX: Venezolanas que cambiaron nuestra historia* (Dagnino 2019), where she is described as the author of 'the greatest visual testimony that exists about the women's movement in Venezuela since the 1970s' (p. 157). In the 1990s, she moved back to Italy, but she continued to visit Venezuela to work in the processing of photographs, including those by Gasparini. She died in Italy in 2017.

¹¹¹ When Franca Donda died in 2017 in Italy, her brother got rid of most of her possessions, according to Gasparini. Thus, most of her remaining archive was kept by Gasparini and it is now under my custody.

political context is also explored in the clips included from the films produced by Cine Urgente and Grupo Feminista Miércoles and while we talk about the influence of socialist ideas during the 1970s in Venezuela and the origin of the political slogan ‘Yes, We Can’ –that has been appropriated by well-known and very successful political campaigns elsewhere in recent years. The voiceover also mentions events that happened across the region in the second half of the twentieth century. Although not referring to specific countries, the words used –*coup d’états*, brutal dictatorships, and embargos– point at the pervasiveness of such episodes. However, these events are never seen. Instead, Donda’s images show women’s everyday life. Here, women’s bodies carry the spectres of the different forms of violence perpetrated in Latin America. These forms of violence are neither seen nor visible and also refer to domestic abuse and the states’ neglect of women, which can result in, as *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* demonstrates, high incidence of maternal mortality, amongst other terrible consequences.

The production practices applied in the making of this film also draw from the knowledge acquired throughout the writing of this thesis. This is a film that has been made thanks to the collaboration of the contributors, not only during the production, but also during the rest of the stages. Their involvement has been key because I have no personal relations with Venezuela and this was my first time visiting the country. Thus, although this is not a collective film as such, the establishment of collaborative relations between filmmaker and contributors has shaped the final film. These relations allowed the entering of personal spaces. For instance, I set the interviews and conversations with the contributors in their own houses since these are safe spaces where they can feel comfortable speaking out. Moreover, these locations help in the building of trust. Unlike conventional interviews, these encounters are not rigidly structured, but they are guided by the overarching aim of tracing Donda’s archive. They show a commitment to voicing others, but without falling into the trap of giving voice or speaking *by, for, or about* others. Instead, the intention was to create a space where I speak *nearby* the contributors. The framing and composition of these conversations represent this intention by inscribing our bodies next to each other in a medium shot.

Formally, *Processing Images from Caracas* is inspired by an event that took place in Caracas in 1968. Over two months, the vast multi-screen and multi-media exhibition *Imagen de Caracas* commemorated the 400th anniversary of the foundation of this city. Under the artistic direction of Jacobo Borges, artists, photographers, and filmmakers produced hours of films and photographs, filmed and taken all over the country to illustrate the history of Venezuela. These images were projected, often with distorted effects, on eight large screens and a number of cubes that went up and down. The exhibition was shut down early by the city

council due to its attention to aspects of Venezuelan history that the authorities of the time thought were not as celebratory as expected, such as the genocide of indigenous populations or the ongoing forms of violence. The multiscreen effect of this exhibition is mirrored in *Processing Images from Caracas* as a device employed for the archive footage. Split-screen effects appear in conventional and unconventional ways. Sometimes, the two or at times three screens show different but related content. Sometimes, they reproduce the exact same clips. This approach differs from what happened in *Imagen de Caracas*, but reinforces the idea of reproduction. The concept of reproduction is key and underpins the film throughout, referring to the technological reproducibility of film, the reproduction of political ideas, and the reproduction of life. Besides, the film also includes a clip showing interviews with Jacobo Borges and Josefina Jordán in which they explain the intention of this exhibition.

Conceptually, *Processing Images from Caracas* overlaps with some of the ideas discussed in Chapter 2, particularly in the section where I address Grupo Feminista Miércoles and the film *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*. Some of the theoretical tools employed in the analysis of this film are deployed in *Processing Images from Caracas*. Towards the end, the image of Ismaelina is followed by the image of Franca. Both of them are absent protagonists of feminist documentaries. In this final sequence, I read a quote from Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*, which is included in Chapter 2, that says 'ever since cameras were invented in 1839, photography has kept company with death. Because an image produced with a camera is, literally, a trace of something brought before the lens, photographs were superior to any painting as a memento of the vanished past and the dear departed' (2004: 21). Drawing from this quote, the film uses photography as a trace of both Ismaelina and Franca. Although not citing it directly, this sequence also draws from Laura Mulvey's work on still photographs, quoted in Chapter 2 too, particularly in relation to how 'the photographic index reaches out towards the uncanny as an effect of confusion between living and dead' (2006: 31).

Throughout the film, I appear in different moments performing the tasks associated with the role of the researcher-filmmaker, namely processing photographs, looking at files, and having conversations, etc. Thereby, I become a vehicular *character* and my voiceover is enunciated using the 'I'. In the process of making this film, I also embark on an introspective journey through which I learn something new about myself. Towards the end, my voice-over becomes much more personal as I disclose that, like Franca, I am a childless woman. At this point, the film turns into a subjective journey. As a woman in her late thirties, the loss of fertility and the ongoing societal pressures about motherhood have haunted me for a while. The revealing of these details puts an emphasis on emotion and vulnerability and places women's

experiences at the centre of political cinema (Pogolovsky Ezcurra 2019). Thus, although relying on some of the well-established conventions of documentary, such as the interview, my performance and voiceover unfold in a more experimental manner. Moreover, the mixing of photographs and moving images, filmed scenes and film archive, realist aesthetics and experimentation, and both English and Spanish aims at complicating strict categorizations and seeks to foreground hybridity. By drawing from as well as disrupting the conventions of documentary, this film seeks to be explorative, inventive, and imaginative, and to contribute to ongoing debates on the status of documentary.

Documentary Filmmaking as Practice-Based Research

In the conceptual development of my practice-based approach, I was inspired by the work produced by three contemporary non-fiction researchers-filmmakers: Iris Zaki, Sophy Romvari, and Onyeka Igwe. Overall, their works exemplify what Estelle Barrett describes as ‘the innovative and critical potential of practice-based research [which] lies in its capacity to generate personally situated knowledge and new ways of modelling and externalising such knowledge while at the same time, revealing philosophical, social and cultural contexts for the critical intervention and application of knowledge outcomes’ (Barrett 2010: 2). All these films underline the personal dimension intrinsic to any creative practice. This is to say, they all produce knowledge through personal explorations and embodied experiences that are shaped and presented in creative forms. Moreover, they demonstrate that practice-based research can engage wider communities and create multiple ways of knowing through, in these particular cases, screenings and discussions in film festivals, academic events, cinemas, and online platforms.

Iris Zaki produced *Women in Sink* (2015) as one of the short films that were part of her PhD thesis at Royal Holloway. It is a medium-length documentary set in a hairdresser in Haifa, Israel, where the filmmaker got a job washing hair. Zaki strategically rigged the camera above the washing basin and filmed close-up shots from a high angle of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian women while conversing with them and washing their hair. Despite the apparent simplicity of the idea and approach, the film unfolds as a complex observation of this melting pot in a region brutally affected by a long-lasting conflict. From Zaki’s approach, I borrowed the technique of the *abandoned* camera, as stated in the introduction. Having to make *Processing Images from Caracas* without funding and not being able to hire a crew, this technique enabled me to film my encounters with others. During my first research trip to

Colombia and Peru, I began practicing it. Despite requiring longer preparation time to establish the shot within locations that were new to me, natural lighting conditions, and sound considerations, this approach allowed me to engage with the contributors in a deeper manner. This is because it removes the distraction of having to operate the camera. Moreover, to some extent, it erases the awareness of being filmed, which should not be understood as a way of getting closer to reality or of achieving greater realness. However, it facilitates an encounter that is not so much defined by the technological mediation, but by the interaction in itself.

The problems that I found with this technique are that unexpected movements can disrupt the composition of the frame very easily and it is hard to keep the focus sharp, as demonstrated in two scenes of *Processing Images from Caracas*. In the first one, I appear framed in a medium shot looking at Donda's contact sheets. Sagrario Berti enters the room and comes next to me. However, she remains at the edge of the frame, part of her body can be seen but not her face. In the second one, Claudia Roffé and I are searching into her family archive, but none of us is in focus. Instead, the filing cabinets next to us are. For me, these mistakes reveal important details related to the production of the film. Moreover, as Julio García Espinosa's manifesto 'For an Imperfect Cinema' proposes, the making of an imperfect cinema creates an awareness of the discursive devices and shows the bold commitment to tell stories of those who work on the margins of the industry (1969). Nevertheless, the technical perfectionism of the mainstream film industry would most likely find them unacceptable.

Sophy Romvari's *Still Processing* (2020) is a short documentary produced as part of the MA in Fine Arts at York University, in Canada. It unfolds as a deeply moving film about grieving, melancholy, and vulnerability through the emotional journey of its director as she reacts to the opening of a box full of family photos and home videos where two of her now-deceased brothers appear. However, she undertakes photographic processing and filmmaking as a therapy for dealing with traumatic memories. From Romvari's film I was interested in her emphasis on the emotional attachments that occur during the making of a film. Like in Romvari's film, my film is also an exploration of loss, even though a different type of loss. *Processing Images from Caracas* is constructed around three losses: the loss of revolutionary dreams, the near loss of Donda's archive and legacy, and the loss of fertility. These losses stress a melancholic tone, which is reinforced by revealing my vulnerability as a woman filmmaker in her late thirties who has prioritized her studies and career over having a family, underlying the incompatibility of these two lifestyles for migrant women in many Western countries. However, the emotions that the film represents are not just related to sadness and pensiveness, but also to curiosity, tenderness, and empowerment. Besides, I built an emotional bond with

Donda and her archive. Even though we are not related, there are similitudes between Donda and me. We were/are migrant women from Southern European countries producing creative work. We haven't had children. And we also look a bit alike. Searching in her archive, I realized its enormous value, which led me to feel a sense of responsibility towards it and an urge to show it, whilst also strengthening the emotional bonding. Another reason why I look at the archive of others is because I do not have an archive of my own. As someone who comes from a working-class background, my family's visual archive is almost non-existent. Working class families like mine did not have access to photographic or film devices and, therefore, our memory is not captured in images, but is often transmitted through oral stories.

From Onyeka Igwe's practice-based PhD on colonial moving images at University of the Arts London, I was particularly inspired by her short non-fiction film *No Archive Can Restore You* (2020) and the trio of works titled *No Dance, No Palaver*, which includes the short films *Her Name in My Mouth* (2017), *Sitting on a Man* (2018), and *Specialised Technique* (2018). The first film was shot at the Nigerian Film Unit archive in Lagos and the last ones re-use existing archive materials to explore a major anti-colonial uprising in Nigeria known as the Aba Women's War. In these films, Igwe embraces a situated experience of the archive. This is to say, she develops a sensorial approach to researching the archive through the foregrounding of her own subjectivity and by practicing critical proximity. For her, critical proximity enables 'an all-bodied encounter with the archive that produces moving image works that are infused with ways of knowing that do not belong in Colonial systems of thought' (2021: 35). She expands:

Critical proximity emerged as a response to moving image practices that were made with the intention to challenge canonical historiography but that I deem to still be constructed using the epistemological framework of Colonial Thought. Further, the ambition of the methodology is to transfigure the contents of the colonial film archive so that the films do not continue to reproduce the racist ideologies that are embedded in both their form and content (2021: 39).

Igwe's films have inspired me to think about the use of archive, voice, embodiment, gesture, and text to explore sensorial, spatial, and non-canonical ways of knowing. From her work, I have borrowed the multiplicity of narratives through the incorporation of different subjects and stories that are threaded together through rhythmic editing and, at times, a dissonant relation between sound and image. Like Igwe, I also went to look for myself in the

archive and, through this process, I practiced a form of critical proximity. For instance, in my film, I appear in a dark room while processing portraits of Donda, embodying her primary job as photography processor and gaining knowledge from this situated experience. I also went to Caracas and visited the different archives that could have relevant materials. Even though my research foregrounds a de-patriarchal, rather than a decolonial, perspective through which to challenge the historiographic canon of Latin American cinema and restore the contributions of women documentary filmmakers, the question that underpins my thesis is related to Igwe's research. Here I am also concerned with how to explore women's cinema and make feminist films without (uncritically) reproducing those methodologies normalized by dominant ideologies.

On Latin American Film Archives

The making of *Processing Images from Caracas* has benefited from the work conducted by those scholars researching Latin American archives. These texts have provided insights into the wider circumstances that affect preservation and conservation practices in film archives, particularly in countries where public funding is lacking or inexistent or that are heavily affected by crises of different kind. During the few weeks that I spent in Caracas, I witnessed the precarious conditions in which Venezuelan public institutions operate due to different reasons, including the pandemic, the ongoing economic and political crises, and the international sanctions, amongst others. The situation in Venezuela is extremely complicated and it goes beyond the scope of my research to address it in its complexity. However, its effects are very noticeable in the state of the archives that I visited and there is a real risk of disappearance of many of its films. Moreover, these scholars reflect on ideas that are connected to one of the main arguments of this thesis, which relates to the role that Latin American cinematheques play in the building of national identity and collective memory.

The turn of the century 'witnessed a burgeoning moment for audiovisual centers and cinematheque projects, which translated into the construction of new buildings, the renovation of existent ones, or the transformation of old landmark buildings for this purpose' across Latin American countries (Suárez 2021: 27). The Latin American cinematheques had as a primary aim 'to promote, conserve, disseminate and develop to maximum capacity, the cinema of their country.'¹¹² Similar to the purposes of cinematheques elsewhere, the urge to preserve a

¹¹² 'Declaración del VI Congreso de la Unión de Cinematecas de América Latina,' *Cine Cubano*, November 1972, pp. 73–75.

country's film legacy not only responds to saving cultural heritage, but also to the need of building a national identity and a collective memory in the medium of film and other audio-visual formats. The construction of film archives is, then, inseparable from 'the concept of nationhood: archives, after all, help build national consciousness through the keeping of records that evidence shared identities, customs, and social mores, among other types of cultural representations' (Ceja Alcalá 2013: 78). This is particularly relevant within the context of my own research because, as I have argued, women's cinema was largely excluded from the historiography of Latin America cinema. As a result, many women's films are absent from Latin American archives and thereby have played no role in building ideas of nationhood, which contributes to the pervasive reproduction of patriarchal imaginaries in these countries' collective memory. Instead, women's film archives remain located in private houses, dusty rooms, or locked cupboards, as shown in *Processing Images from Caracas*.

The resources needed in the often public and ongoing endeavour of building and maintaining a nation's film archive have proven to be a great challenge for countries in which most of the population still struggle to get basic products, like food, a roof, or clean clothing (Ceja Alcalá 2013). The lack of proper funding has translated into an ongoing deterioration of the prints, year after year, affecting even those cinematheques that are affiliated with the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP) (Tadeo Fuica and Keldjian 2016: 75). In the last three decades, two major reports conducted by María Rita Galvão, head of the Cinemateca Brasileira, have assessed the conditions of the Latin American archives. The first one took place in 1988 and identified problems such as fungal damage and vinegar syndrome in most of the archives visited. Although less comprehensive and thorough, the second report was conducted in 2006 and insisted on the 'very critical' condition of Latin American film archives. Moreover, the high costs of technological and format updates represent an added obstacle to the task of these archives, as noted by Juana Suárez:

Institutions in the region face the pressure of saving and preserving analog materials that have been neglected over the years, while they simultaneously have to confront the pressure to transition to born-digital works, digitization, and mass storage technologies. For many archives, the basic expense for website hosting and design is a luxury that they cannot afford (2021: 30-31).

For those archivists who manage film archives in conditions of scarcity and precariousness, digitization is not always the preferred choice not only because of its high costs,

but also because of ‘the risk of quick obsolescence’ (Tadeo Fuica and Keldjian 2016: 73). Given these constraints, the digitization processes employed in many of these cinematheques have often used a technology called telecine, which can generate both magnetic and digital copies, ‘but that does not provide information suitable for restoration or long-term preservation’ (p. 74). Tadeo Fuica and Keldjian have also noted that the digital copies stored in these archives are not copies of the original film print but of its magnetic reproduction. They explain:

Most of the digital copies available today have not been made from the film print. Rather, it is more often that digital copies have been made from the transfers that had first recorded the film onto analog videotape. Thus the digital copy is a copy of the magnetic version, not of the film print itself. This sequence of transfers generates what we will call *palimpsestic digital copies*, because it is possible to see the different layers (palimpsests) of material conversion. [...] In a palimpsestic digital copy, as we define it, the vertical scratches caused by the film projector would be as visible as the horizontal marks originating from the interlaced video image. Likewise, digital copies with many visible pixels can testify to a series of compressions intended to decrease the file size to facilitate online uploading or saving on storage devices. These copies, which can be practical for research and provide a short-term solution to access, are not useful for preservation (2016: 74-75).

Several of these ideas underpin *Processing Images from Caracas*. The digital copies of the films in which Franca Donda worked and that I have been able to access can be described as *palimpsestic digital copies*. Most of these films were originally shot in 16mm, then transferred to a magnetic tape and, from there, digitized. The materiality of the film is then rendered visible through the multiple lines, vertical and horizontal, and now also through the pixelating. In the film, I point to the materiality of the archive and its palimpsestic effect by adding the same clip of a still image of Ismaelina in three different formats. The first image is from the 16mm copy, the second one from the magnetic copy, and the third one from the digital copy. These three images not only have different textures, but also different colour tones. Furthermore, the image carries not only the marks of these different processes, but also added sounds. The voices of those who conducted these processes can be heard in the background of

the digital copy, adding a completely different aural temporality, texture, and context to it. The films that we see, then, are then the result of multiple interventions.



Figure 31. Image extracted from the 16mm copy of *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*.



Figure 32. Image extracted from the magnetic copy of *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*.



Figure 33. Image extracted from the digital copy of *Yo, tú, Ismaelina*.

In her article, Janet Ceja Alcalá wrote about her experiences visiting Cuba's film archive. Nearly ten years later, my experiences visiting the Venezuelan Audiovisual Archive (AAV) were strikingly similar.¹¹³ The AAV is hosted within the National Library in a brutalist building designed by Tomás Sanabria and constructed in the 1980s. Located in the premises of Foro Libertador, the sturdiness of the materials with which it was built once served to protect the fragility of its contents. Today, the seeming robustness of its appearance is deceptive. Ceja Alcalá wrote about the broken air-conditioner and emulsions deteriorating. The state of the AAV is not far from the Cuban film archive. When I was there, its air-conditioning system had been broken down for months and the room where the film reels are stored reached a temperature of 29.9°C. The recommended temperature for this type of archive should not go higher than 15-16°C and, ideally, it should be below 0°C. Other instances also demonstrated the precarious conditions of this archive. According to the catalogue, there are various 16mm copies of the films made by both Cine Urgente and Grupo Feminista Miércoles, including *22 de mayo* (1969), *María de la Cruz* (1974), *¡Sí Podemos!* (1972), and *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* (1981). However, when I requested to watch them, only two of them were found. *22 de mayo* (1969) and *María de la Cruz* (1974) were not stored in their allocated place and the archivist was unable to find them. Besides, not all copies of the other ones were found. This shows that the catalogues are neither accurate nor up-to-date, which is a common situation in other Latin American cinematheques, as pointed out by Tadeo Fuica and Keldjian.¹¹⁴

As mentioned in Chapter 2, in 2006, CEM produced a DVD to pay tribute to Franca Donda. This DVD contained all the films and videos that she had worked on, including those produced by Cine Urgente and Grupo Feminista Miércoles, but the digitization process was conducted rapidly and not in proper conditions. Besides, CEM did not keep the original copies and, during my visit, I could not find any other materials related to these collectives in their premises. This is partly because I was unable to access most of the facilities of the UCV due to the ongoing closure of many of its buildings after the looting that took place in 2017.¹¹⁵ As

¹¹³ The collection of the AAV was initially comprised of materials from the National Audiovisual Archive and a number of donations by renowned Venezuelan filmmakers and photographers, including Amabilis Cordero and Luis Felipe Toro; as well as newsreels and documentaries from the Central Information Office and the Filmic Archive of the Venezuelan Television. In 1998, the National Cinemateca moved its filmic archive (80,000 reels) to the installations of the BN.

¹¹⁴ During this trip I also tried to visit the archive of Jacobo Borges, the only founder of Cine Urgente who is still alive, but eventually I was only able to access his digital archive. However, and aside from a copy in 16mm of the film *22 de Mayo*, Borges' archive has no other trace of Cine Urgente.

¹¹⁵ In addition to the extremely low salaries and, more generally, the lack of funding, the crisis of the UCV was exacerbated during the 2017 protests and the vandalising of its installations, when people from the nearby shantytown stole materials with which to build their shacks, including glass, doors, bathroom components, air conditioners, metals, wood, etc. Fortunately, most of the books and other educational material remained intact in

a matter of fact, one of the purposes of this trip was to locate a short documentary based on interviews with the members of Grupo Feminista Miércoles produced by Suribeth Monsalve Peña as part of her undergraduate dissertation titled ‘Grupo Feminista Miércoles: Una aproximación a su historia’ (2012). Unfortunately, I was not able to locate this material due to the university libraries’ closure.

This situation is not new though. In the 1980s, film critic and member of Grupo Feminista Miércoles, Ambretta Marrosu, already pointed at how difficult it is to watch Venezuelan films because copies often disappear or cannot be located (1988: 21). In the attempt to avoid the disappearance of Venezuelan cinema, Marrosu and her husband Alfredo Roffé bought a large storage space for their archive, which contained films in different formats, books, magazines, photographs, film devices, and other documents. However, when they died, most of it was lost.¹¹⁶ At the time of one of the worst crises in recent Venezuelan history, public institutions were unable to take it. Friends and relatives kept a few things but, most of it, their daughter Claudia Roffé says, was thrown away. Their remaining archive is kept at the family house and contains numerous books and magazines on cinema and other art disciplines, several types of film devices, and the family’s personal archive, comprised of correspondence, photographs, and other documents. These materials are valuable not only for an archive of women’s cinema, but also, more broadly, of Venezuelan cinema.¹¹⁷

The Process

The making of *Processing Images from Caracas* has benefited from the relationships established with the contributors, especially with feminist scholar and psychoanalyst Gioconda Espina, art curator Sagrario Berti, photographer Paolo Gasparini, and film scholar Ricardo

most cases, but deteriorated more rapidly. Currently, many of its buildings are still being rehabilitated, in some cases through very thorough processes to ensure they go back to its original state.

¹¹⁶ This couple devoted most of its years to promoting cinema, bringing international cinema to Venezuelan spaces and creating a solid Venezuelan film industry. Ambretta Marrosu (1931-2017) met her first husband, Venezuelan Juvenal Herrera, at the Communist Festival for Youth, celebrated in East Berlin in 1951. Soon after, she moved to Venezuela, where she co-founded the film magazines *Cine al día* (1967-1983) and *Cine-Oja* (1984–2001), worked in film institutions such as the National Cinemateca, and wrote texts that have articulated the history of Venezuelan cinema from 1897 to 1980, including *Exploraciones en la historiografía del cine en Venezuela* (1985). Alfredo Roffé (1929–2011) was a researcher, architect, film critic, and university lecturer. His family owned the bookstore Cruz del Sur, where he met Ambretta Marrosu. Located in the centre of Caracas, this library was a space of encounter for intellectuals and artists in the 1950s and 1960s. Roffé was also a co-founder of *Cine al Día* and taught cinema at the School of Art of the UCV.

¹¹⁷ During this trip I also visited the Margot Benacerraf Foundation, which is dedicated to the dissemination of audiovisual culture, besides keeping the personal archive of this cineaste. Although exclusively funded with Benacerraf’s funds –which follows a model that is not accessible to those without large sums of inherited wealth– the way in which it operates could set an example for the creation of an archive of Latin American women’s and feminist cinema.

Azuaga. These relationships go back to 2020, when we held several phone conversations on Grupo Feminista Miércoles and Franca Donda for the writing of Chapter 2. I also spoke to Claudia Roffé about her mother, Ambretta Marrosu. In preparation for the production of this film, I contacted them again to see if they would be willing to participate as well as to seek advice on finding accommodation and other practical matters. I also contacted the archives that I intended to visit. So, prior to the trip, I had a first draft of the shooting schedule, even though this changed significantly due to the re-valuation of ideas, the availability of the contributors, and financial difficulties. I travelled to Caracas at the end of March 2022 and stayed there for nearly four weeks. Over this time, I visited both public and private archives –CEM, AAV, and the family archive Marrosu and Roffé– and conducted interviews with Espina, Berti, Gasparini, and Azuaga. An important encounter happened at the AAV. For several days, I visited the archive and watched items from its collection to try to find relevant materials for the film. Most of this research took place at the audiovisual department, where I was able to watch and film images from the magnetic copy of *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* as well as television programmes where Franca Donda, Josefina Jordán, and Jacobo Borges are interviewed. However, the most important event that took place at this archive was the day that I spent filming the film archivist, Francisco Ramírez. On that day, Ramírez, a university student, and I searched the film archive looking for different 16mm reels. During this time, several situations illustrated the precarious conditions of the Venezuelan film archive, some of which can be seen in the final film and have already been addressed in this chapter.

Overall, the production of this documentary was particularly difficult for several reasons. First, there were safety concerns about me filming alone in one of the most dangerous cities in the world. I took all possible precautions and, luckily, the production went smoothly. For instance, I never used public transport, I did not film on the streets or at night, and I rented a room in someone else's flat so that I could inform my flatmate of my daily schedule. Another difficulty encountered was the high costs of this trip due to Venezuela's hyperinflation. Initially, I received funding from three organizations. The Society for Latin American Studies (SLAS) Travel Grant covered the costs of the flights, the LAHP Research Fund covered the costs of film equipment, and the UCL Turing Grant covered the costs of local transport and accommodation. However, I ended up spending three times the budget I was given for this last purpose. Eventually, I was able to claim funding from the Grenoble Alpes University that was initially allocated for a different trip, although this was not confirmed until I came back, which limited what I was able to do whilst I was in Caracas.

Once back in the United Kingdom, I began the editing process, which took place over May, June, and July 2022. I reviewed the footage and selected those encounters that could better serve the purpose of the story. I focused on four main contributors: Sagario Berti, Gioconda Espina, Claudia Roffé, and Francisco Ramírez. Besides, I also began the processing of Donda's negatives. I was able to access flatbed scans and the darkroom at my workplace. This was, nevertheless, a very laborious process since I had to learn how to process photographs. But the hardest and most time-consuming part was the selection of the negatives that would be processed. Amongst the thousands of images, there were many of family gatherings that I quickly dismissed. Instead, I focused on Donda's portraits of women and children in different Latin American countries: women marching in the aftermath of the Cuban revolution, indigenous women carrying their children in a crowded place somewhere in Ecuador, and women working in a cigar factory in rural Venezuela, amongst others. Eventually, I scanned 357 negatives, about a third of which are included in the final film. The last stage in the making of *Processing Images from Caracas* consisted of a round of feedback on the first cut and the editing of the final cut. I sent the first version to a dozen of people – filmmakers, film scholars, my supervisors, and the contributors– in order to have an external input. The feedback provided varied and mostly focused on technical details, such as the way I inserted the photographs, the structure of the film, or the tone of the voiceover. These comments were very illuminating and helped me gain distance, improving the final cut of my PhD film.

The Final Film

The film is structured in three acts. The first act introduces several important elements: photographic processing, me as a researcher-filmmaker, Franca Donda as the absent protagonist, and the setting of the film in Caracas. The sentence chosen to open this act, 'She took photographs but she never called herself a photographer' is related directly to Donda's experience but touches, more broadly, on the experiences of the women filmmakers that I interviewed for my thesis. Many of these women did not identify themselves as filmmakers or artists, often because of a lack of self-worth. The process of claiming one's self-worth is explored throughout the documentary by reclaiming Donda's photographic and film legacy. Possibly the most straightforward way of conveying this idea is through one of Argelia Laya's clips, which appears in the second act. Here she says 'Aquí no hay hombre que se me ponga a mí por encima [there is no man who puts himself above me].' This clip is an extract from the

documentary *Argelia Laya, por ejemplo*, produced by Grupo Feminista Miércoles, that refers to Laya's experiences as Comandante Jacinta while being involved in the guerrilla. Even though this information is not provided in the film, the sentence points at the pervasiveness of patriarchal ideas and attitudes that continue to diminish women's work.

The second act is conceived as the body of the film, where the main issues are raised, including the Venezuelan feminist movement and the broader political context shaped by the influence of socialism, the fragility of the film archives, and Franca's complex and multifaceted identity as photography processor, photographer, filmmaker, and activist. This act's heading, 'She took photographs of no wars but she lived surrounded by conflict,' refers quite literally to key events in her life, as a woman who was born during the interwar period, whose father was killed while fighting for Franco in Spain, who lived in Italy throughout World War II, in Cuba in the aftermath of the revolution, and in Caracas for most of the second half of the twentieth century. This sentence also points at the fact that documentary photographers often received recognition only if they had covered a war. Franca's photographs are not explicitly about the horrors of war. Instead her focus is on women and children from marginalized, working class, indigenous, black, and rural communities.

The third act offers closure. First, a copy of the film *Yo, tú, Ismaelina* is eventually found, but the projection reveals its poor condition. The clip of this film included in the documentary shows images of Ismaelina taken by Franca and establishes a parallelism between them, as absent protagonists of feminist documentaries. Then, another parallelism is established between Franca and me, as childless women. The heading of this final act, 'She took photographs of women at a time when women were rendered invisible,' stresses, on the one hand, the uniqueness of Donda's photographic archive because it gives attention to women at a time when most filmmakers and photographers did not give any importance to their everyday life. On the other hand, these photographs have been unseen for decades. By pointing at the *invisibilization* of women so insistently, I hope this film can help the audience understand the ideological underpinnings involved in what is given artistic value and why, shedding light on the biases that might still blind us to recognize certain types of art as art. By doing so, the film foregrounds the need for revisiting existent archives and creating new ones.

Critical Reflection

The final film encompasses many of the ideas explored throughout this thesis in compelling ways but without being excessively academic. This is to say, it offers the possibility

of different levels of engagement, intellectual, creative, and emotional, which could allow audiences outside universities to appreciate it. The film *makes sensorial* one of the main arguments presented throughout this research. It shows how Latin American women's documentaries and other relevant materials that could make up an archive of women's or feminist cinema are at the brink of disappearance. However, there are so many other threads that could be expanded. This is why I would like to explore the possibility of developing a feature-length film, so that I can elaborate some of its parts, add other materials that are not included in this cut, and also film other scenes that could help tie the story better together. For this, I would need to get a production company on board and apply for funding opportunities or grants to cover the costs of a second shooting in Caracas as well as of the postproduction and distribution processes.

As I have already mentioned, the process of making this film has been very difficult for different reasons. First, the outbreak of Covid-19 not only forced me to re-think my initial idea several times, but also caused uncertainty as I was not able to plan well ahead of the production stage. Second, the difficulties encountered while filming in Caracas and related to safety, hyperinflation, and the closure of institutions affected what I was able to film. Despite this, I was very fortunate to receive Donda's remaining archive. This was entirely unexpected and has become a central element of the final film. Third, the post-production stage was both exciting and tedious. It was exciting because I was able to recognize the value of Donda's archive and the materials gathered and shot in Caracas. It was tedious because I conducted this process on my own. Besides, this last stage was conducted at the end of my PhD journey, which is inevitably an exhausting period in itself.

Overall, I think that the film could have been improved if I had had access to more resources, particularly to more funding for the fieldwork/production and technical expertise during the postproduction, including a photography technician and an editor for sound and grading (skills that I do not have). Films are often collaborative projects as their making requires different types of expertise. However, practice-based programmes often don't offer this extra support, which makes it even harder to produce a creative artefact that can contribute to knowledge. Thus, in hindsight, the lack of the help (financial, technical, and otherwise) needed to produce a practical component is one of the main obstacles I have experienced. In my case, I have been able to overcome it successfully because I gained experience in documentary filmmaking, particularly in directing, cinematography, and editing, previously to starting my PhD. However, having to assume the roles of the researcher, producer, director, scriptwriter, cinematographer, camera operator, sound recordist, and editor has been

overwhelming. To sum up, both the filmmaking process and the resulting film contribute to the production of knowledge. Throughout its making, I deepened my understanding of Franca Donda, Cine Urgente, and Grupo Feminista Miércoles. I also gained knowledge on the history of women's cinema in Venezuela. Besides, I had to acquire several skills to be able to work with the materials gathered, from improving my filmmaking skills to learning about photographic processing. The film in itself also contributes to the production of knowledge since it sheds light on the work on an overlooked woman activist, filmmaker, and photographer and, more broadly, on Venezuelan feminist cinema. Moreover, it shows the process of research and the methodology applied, which could help others to think about how to conduct practice-based research.

Conclusion: From the Symbolic Value to the Material Preservation

Through the writing of this thesis I identified an important gap in the literature of Latin American cinema. Thus, this research is the first of its kind to rediscover, acknowledge, and re-signify Latin American women's documentaries and to restore their contributions to Latin American film history. To do so, it has built from and contributes to the corpus of work that is dedicated to the re-historicizing and theorization of Latin American cinema from a feminist perspective. I have contended that the proposed period was a formative moment in women's and feminist cinema and that the selected films provide new and complex understandings of political cinema. Informed by the contexts in which they were produced, women's documentaries explored issues that were hitherto overlooked in Latin American cinema. These issues are related to women's entry to the workforce, the double day, the status of domestic work, reproductive rights, motherhood and its role in the reproduction of patriarchal ideology, the experiences of subaltern women, non-normative sexual identities, femininity and the authorial voice, and the family as a site for self-construction. These documentaries implemented processes that often aimed at de-patriarchalizing the ways of making films. This was achieved through the building of relationships of trust and care between filmmakers and subjects, the foregrounding of collective and collaborative practices, and the instrumentalization of filmmaking as a tool for introspection and self-discovery. These analyses have paid attention to the relations between modes of production and representation by decoding the formal devices and aesthetic strategies employed. Using an array of theoretical tools, the analyses of the selected films demonstrate the complexity and sophistication of women's documentaries, particularly in relation to how these films appropriate and re-signify objects that have historically been exploited by patriarchal forms of signification and also how they disrupt the aesthetic canon of women's bodies. Despite its great importance, this corpus of work has received very little scholarly attention. Today, these films look if not old, outdated for contemporary audiences given the rapid technological changes of the last few decades. However, many of the issues raised continue to be alarmingly relevant, such as the ongoing struggles for reproductive and LGBTQ+ rights, sexual and domestic violence, and the feminization of poverty, amongst many others.

The films discussed in Chapter 1 were inspired by militant cinema and provide a women-centred analysis of the class struggle. Despite being overlooked by those who have written the history of Latin American political cinema, I have demonstrated how these films both rely and challenge Marxist ideas on the development of a class consciousness by offering an insight into the singular characteristics that defined women's entry to the workforce. I have argued that

these films broke with the culture of silence imposed upon women by patriarchal structures by letting women speak for themselves. In order for women to voice their stories, the filmmakers implemented methodologies that created safe spaces where oral history could be shared. Moreover, they acted as facilitators of the process of consciousness-raising, as educators in critical thinking, and as mediators in the construction of women workers' voices. Through these voices, issues such as the double shift, women's entry to industrial employment, and the precariousness in which domestic work operates began being discussed publicly. The processes implemented in the making of these films contributed to the politicization of women, not only in terms of the importance of developing a class consciousness or raising awareness on women-specific forms of oppression, but also in relation to the need for strengthening communal bonds and creating new forms of social cooperation.

The collectives addressed in Chapter 2 operated in distinctive ways and subverted the hierarchies associated with film production. Throughout their filmography, there were recurrent practices, such as the alliances between filmmakers and feminist activists, women's organisations, and subaltern women, that displaced the centrality of the filmmaker and complicated the place of enunciation. In some cases, there was a refusal to credit individual directors or a need to rotate above- and below-the-line roles so that all members of the collective could have the opportunity to lead specific projects. The films included in this chapter address issues related to second-wave feminism, such as abortion rights. In line with the shifts that happened within the Latin American women's movements, these films also give epistemic advantage to subaltern women by representing their everyday struggles as mothers, wives, and artisans. Formally, these films not only rely on realist aesthetics, but also show a greater interest in experimenting with cinematic forms that exceed conventional documentary boundaries by incorporating performative and reflexive elements as well as navigating between different formats. However, as feminist projects concerned with intervening in particular contexts and contributing to the wider aim of changing women's lives, the filmography of feminist film collectives often sacrificed the quest for artistic experimentation for the sake of greater community engagement.

As seen in Chapter 3, Latin American diasporic female filmmakers chose first-person documentary as a form that allowed them to be explorative, inventive, and imaginative in their attempts to deal with the inevitable questioning of identity that results from migration and displacement. In these films, the emphasis on personal stories and the disclosure of intimate details have political value. This value refers to the courageous effort of shedding light on issues that were repressed and condemned, such as the brave act of coming out, the disruptive

use of femininity to assert women as subjects of speech, or the mobilization of gender fluidity to unsettle conventions. Like testimonial and feminist films, first-person documentaries can validate and politicize the personal and private by inscribing individual experiences in historical contexts, representing bodies as places of resistance and knowledge production, and by drawing attention to performance and performativity. Furthermore, each film in its own way broke apart from documentary conventions that maintain the illusion of authenticity, transparency, and objectivity; and, by so doing, exposed the flaws and contradictions in the quest of getting closer to reality. In these films, the process of filmmaking is utilized by the filmmakers as a tool that can facilitate analysis and self-knowledge. This is to say, instead of presenting journeys of discovery towards what is unknown, they delve into the familial and personal. As films that are made to be shown publicly, what their protagonists learn about themselves and their families is not for their own personal record, but for public interpretation and use, transferring this private tool into a sort of public ownership.

The research conducted, the methods applied, and the analyses of the selected films have informed the making of the practical component, the short documentary *Processing Images from Caracas*. This film contributes to the production of knowledge by shedding light on the work of one of the filmmakers included in this thesis, Franca Donda, and the collectives that she was part of, Cine Urgente and Grupo Feminista Miércoles. In her photographs, she paid attention to women's everyday lives, offering a distinctive insight into a period of time when women were rendered invisible. Similarly, the films produced by the collectives focused on the struggles of those living in slums or poor rural areas, issues that were largely overlooked by Venezuelan cinema. Shot on location, *Processing Images from Caracas* also reveals the precarious conditions of the Venezuelan archives. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, the rapid deterioration of the film archives does not only affect this country, but more broadly the Latin American region.

By paying attention to contexts, processes, and forms, this research recovers and restores the symbolic value of women's documentaries and, by doing so, intends to animate further steps towards their material preservation. Thus, there are some lines of enquiry that could follow from this thesis. As stated in the introduction, one of these lines could be related to revisiting early documentary films made by women, including those by Mexican Carmen Toscano, Venezuelan Margot Benacerraf, and Colombian Gabriela Samper, to name a few. Another line of inquiry could explore the role that the women behind the NLAC –such as Nora de Izcue, Marta Rodríguez, Sara Gómez, Josefina Jordán, and Beatriz Palacios– played in setting up an institution that was key for the making of political films across the region. From

these collective endeavours to document Latin American women filmmakers and feminist film collectives, a women's and feminist film archive could be created. Given the precarious conditions of many Latin American film archives, this initiative might take the form of an online repository. As a collaborative research project that brings together filmmakers, researchers, archivists, librarians, technicians, and activists, one of the aims could be to locate, map, and systematize women's cinema in the region. Those who undertake this task need to consider the singularities of Latin America and its film history. These singularities have to do, on the one hand, with the elusiveness of women's cinema and its materials. This is to say, many women's films have been overlooked by film historians and are absent from the historiography of Latin American cinema. Moreover, many of these films were produced with scarce resources, have been kept in poor conditions, and/or are at the brink of disappearance. Therefore, expensive restoration processes might be required. On the other hand, since the second half of the twentieth century, this region has been heavily affected by mass migration, which means that these materials are scattered not only across Latin America, but also across the world. Thus, this thesis ends with an invitation to conduct more research on Latin American women's cinema and to undertake the creation of an archive as soon as possible. The urgency of this endeavour is not only related to the importance of preserving this legacy but, most importantly, of promoting the legitimization of marginal cinemas and alternative film practices as well as the circulation of ideas, the formulation of critical discourses, and the production of knowledge to engender new historical narratives that put an end to the pervasive reproduction of patriarchal imaginaries in these countries' collective memory.

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