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TITLE: Family Ties and Affective Landscapes in 21st Century Argentinean and Mexican Cinema: *El premio* (2012) and *Mai morire* (2013)

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ABSTRACT: This article considers the intersection of cinematic work and landscape by analysing the gazes and discourses that affectively frame the rural landscape of Argentina and Mexico as portrayed in the films *El premio* (2012) and *Mai Morire* (2013). Landscape evokes emotion and affect, and by focusing on the resignification of iconic rural landscapes in the films, we question alternative meanings of rural landscape as portrayed in these two regions. We argue that the films articulate a moment of rupture in the lives of the protagonists by using the landscape to depict the importance of change in their individual lives. Both films imbue the landscape with meanings that represent intensities to provoke a more nuanced understanding of the political or social context of the protagonists' problematic situations. We focus on the formal and the aesthetic devices used to trigger an affective response and reshape the cinematic meaning of Patagonia and Xochimilco.

KEYWORDS: Film, Aesthetics, Rural Landscape, Argentina, Mexico, Affect, Emotion

RESUMEN: Este artículo considera el cruce entre el trabajo cinematográfico y el paisaje analizando las miradas y discursos que encuadran afectivamente el paisaje rural de Argentina y México representado en las películas *El premio* (2012) y *Mai Morire* (2013). El paisaje evoca emoción y afecto, y al enfocarse en la resignificación de paisajes icónicos, este artículo analiza los significados alternativos del paisaje rural representado en esas dos regiones. Argumentamos que las películas articulan un momento de ruptura en la vida de las protagonistas utilizando el paisaje para representar la importancia de ese cambio en sus vidas. Ambas películas dotan al paisaje con significados que representan reacciones intensas para provocar una comprensión más matizada de la complicada situación política o social de las protagonistas. En nuestro análisis nos enfocamos en los elementos estéticos y formales utilizados para provocar una reacción afectiva y construir nuevos significados cinematográficos de Patagonia y Xochimilco.

PALABRAS CLAVE: cinema, estética, paisaje rural, Argentina, México, afecto, emoción

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Family Ties and Affective Landscapes in Twenty-First-Century Argentinean and Mexican Cinema: *El premio* (2012) and *Mai morire* (2013)

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In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, films from Argentina and Mexico have given landscape a central role within the narrative. Landscape evokes emotion and affect, and filmmakers have accordingly considered transformations within their societies by highlighting the landscape as a cinematic element and as a catalyst of meaning. Landscape acts as a vehicle to understand new ways to read through emotion and affect; it presents a different epistemological approach to address discourses of the construction of new subjectivities. As Martin Lefebvre explains in the introduction of his edited collection *Landscape and Film*, “in investigating landscape in film one is considering an object that amounts to much more than the mere spatial background that necessarily accompanies the depiction of actions and events” (xii). Our analysis thus integrates the enduring concept of landscape in the visual arts in order to understand its functions in the context of the Argentine film *El premio* (2012), directed by Paula Markovitch, and the Mexican film *Mai morire* (2013), directed by Enrique Rivero.

This article focuses on an alternative way of understanding political and familial relationships by considering how they are etched in the rural landscapes in *El premio* and *Mai morire*. We argue that the films articulate a moment of rupture in the lives of the protagonists by using the landscape to

depict the importance of the change in their lives. Both films represent, through landscape intensities, reactions that provoke a more nuanced understanding of the political or social context of the protagonists' problematic situations. We focus on the formal and aesthetic devices used by the filmmakers that trigger an affective response and reshape the cinematic meaning of Patagonia, Argentina and Xochimilco, Mexico. In addition, by paying attention to the transitional period in the life of the protagonists, we examine the significance of the changes that invert their lives through those iconic landscapes.

The film *El premio* portrays the hardships faced by seven year-old Cecilia (Ceci) and her mother Lucia, as they hide in a secluded, small beach house south of Buenos Aires, in the Patagonia region. The family is forced to move to this isolated beach in the cold winter months to escape the dangers of the brutal repression of the last dictatorship. The story is set in 1977, where mother and daughter are hiding while waiting to hear from the father who has disappeared. Surrounded by impressive marine landscapes, the protagonists try to survive their tenuous conditions. Cecilia starts attending the local school but must hide her identity to protect her family. Lucia is consumed by pain and worry, and is an absent-minded parent. The mother-daughter relationship deteriorates as the story progresses, in particular because of a prize won by Cecilia

at the school. The child's questions are also met with long silences that deepen the emotional gap between the mother and the daughter.

Mai morire addresses, with a minimalist and intimate style, the return of Rosario (called Chayo) to her native Xochimilco to care for her dying 99-year-old mother.¹ On her return home, Chayo is reunited not only with her husband and children (whom she previously abandoned to work as a cook), but also with her home landscape of Xochimilco. The rhythm of rural life in the lacustrine area of Xochimilco persists despite being in the middle of large, crowded, and chaotic Mexico City, which becomes a central point of the film. As soon as Chayo arrives, she is wrapped up in the slow pace of rural life and by the dreamy, spectral landscape of Xochimilco. The landscape invites the protagonist (and the viewer) to reflect on life, death, self-determination, and crucial decisions that affect family structure and relationships.

Despite their many differences, *El premio* and *Mai morire* both narrate a moment of crisis faced by female protagonists—a rupture of daily life, a transition to a new positioning of their reality where they must seek to establish a new normality. Both films take place within a recognizable landscape in their respective national imaginaries. These films incorporate, through an affective landscape, the intensity of feelings caused by the life-changing situation that the protagonists are living and the particular familial ties represented. At the center of both films is the portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship and its struggles in two particular and different stages of life: the formative years in *El premio* and the twilight years in *Mai morire*. In *El premio*, we see the enraged sea trying to enter the cabin of a woman and her daughter who are looking to find a place of refuge, while in *Mai morire* we see the constant presence of the lake as the protagonist awaits the slow death of her mother.

Both the tempestuous and uncontrollable Atlantic Ocean edging Patagonia and the lethargic and enigmatic lake of Xochimilco

suggest how the landscape can express the tensions surrounding the protagonists' personal lives. Furthermore, the films depict socio-political changes through the weakening of the family structure in combination with the use of affective landscapes. *El premio* tackles the subjective turn in the discourse of the memories surrounding the horrors of the last dictatorship, while *Mai morire* brings to light the gradual change of ideas about "la gran familia Mexicana" and the role of women within it. These films thus offer an affective re-reading of two historical and cinematically iconic places in the Argentine and Mexican imaginaries through personal stories. Patagonia and Xochimilco are anchored to certain emotions that have been codified through time. As we explain later, these two places, through different cinematographic periods, have been encoded with certain emotional attributes: hope and hostility in the case of Patagonia, and national pride and nostalgia in the case of Xochimilco. We argue that these films channel the affect (a non-codified feeling) of the female protagonist through the landscape. In the context of this paper, we consider the landscape as one important narrative and symbolic element that engages the audience emotionally and affectively.

As a response to many recent socio-political and economic changes, Argentinian and Mexican filmmakers are portraying change in an emotional and affective way through the incorporation of narrative and cinematographic devices such as graphic violence, unconventional narratives, the re-emergence of genre films, and the innovative use of cinematography in order to reach audiences through sensation (Podalsky 8). In this sense, contemporary films can be characterized as devices to evoke and provoke certain intensities or visceral reactions through form or aesthetics that encourage reading and understanding the film on a more affective and emotional level (Podalsky 20). These sensory dynamics allow us to interrogate the socio-political contexts and discourses through anchoring ourselves affectively to the profilmic event.

According to Verónica Gariboto, in the early 2000s a number of social science and humanities scholars turned to affect-based approaches in order to engage with cultural artifacts since “feelings are cultural, socially and historically variable as opposed to universal, private, and static” (19). In this sense, feelings can give another perspective of how specific historical, political, and social events can provoke an emotional or intense reaction and how these feelings influence not only the thinking process but also the way of behaving or reacting to the affective stimulus. As Garibotto points out, films not only translate experience in which the audience emotionally relates but also create new affective configurations that “serve as a catalyst for critical inquiry.” In doing this, “cinema becomes both a historical register and a historical agent” (21).²

In our reading of *El premio* and *Mai morire*, we understand emotion and affect according to Brian Massumi’s definition wherein emotion “is a subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal” (28). In other words, emotion is an intensity that has been qualified, recognized, owned, and named. On the contrary, affect is a sensation or intensity that has not been qualified or recognized, and because of this, has not been verbalized (28). This distinction will help us to understand how, through aural and visual representations of landscape, the abrupt and constant socio-political and historical changes of the region are explored in these two films in the individual and intimate stories of the protagonists. These cinematic landscapes translate feelings towards the context that the protagonists, in many occasions, cannot articulate with a qualified intensity because of the situation they are immersed in. Both films represent a transitional and redefining phase that will shape the protagonist’s life through an “affective turn” of iconic landscapes.

Revisiting the Rural through Affective Landscape

Landscape has been an object of study for artists for many centuries. More recently, landscape in film has gained critical attention in a predominantly narrative cinema. Specifically, the gaze that frames the cinematic landscape embeds many specific meanings (Lefebvre). Scholars have paid special attention to landscape in film in a wide sense, including not only the spatial but also sound landscape, movement landscape, and image landscape. Martin Lefebvre emphasizes the importance of landscape in film, arguing that landscape becomes the centerpiece of films because it is anchored in human life. In his view, landscape is a multifaceted and multidisciplinary spatial object whose meanings and representations extend from real-life environments to art. In *Cinema and Landscape*, Harper and Rayner understand that landscape in film is produced by human interpretation because it “involves isolation of a certain spatial extent, and a certain temporal length” (16). In their opinion, landscapes are never neutral in regards to their intention or reception, adding that “depicted landscapes are often symbolic, and frequently contribute to social formation” (16). Thus, the centrality of landscape as meaningful space in film creates a need to decode its symbolism and the feeling it evokes.

Despite the emergence of landscape studies in film, scholars focusing on Latin American cinema have centered their studies on urban spaces, paying little attention to the rural or natural landscape in fiction and documentary films (with the exception of Jens Andermann, Irene Depetris Chauvin, and Cynthia Tompkins).³ Andermann suggests that landscape has been one of the most important and long-standing modes of critical counter-politics in Latin American cinema of the twentieth and early twenty-first century. He argues that landscape reopened world cinema towards the singularity and strangeness of places, resisting and counteracting

their neocolonial and subalternizing geopolitical inscription (134-35).⁴ In his article “Exhausted Landscapes: Framing the Rural in Argentine and Brazilian Films,” Andermann focuses on the analysis of Argentinean and Brazilian films, arguing that the presentational qualities are “contested by an archival self-consciousness, that is, by the way in which they both call on and dismiss the repertoire of rurality proper to a previous, national cinematic modernity” (53).⁵ In his work, he analyzes the compositional modes and signifying functions of landscape in recent films.⁶ This key point in Andermann’s theories of landscape and film is central to our analysis since both films we examine are appropriating rural scenery to re-write a more personal and reflective view of society and history. By turning the gaze to the rural, the films revisit iconic landscapes deeply connected to the representation of hegemonic notions such as nation, politics, family, and identity in each country, opening them to new or alternative versions. Our analysis therefore builds upon Andermann’s preliminary studies, expanding research to the analysis of new meanings of the rural in connection to Patagonia and Xochimilco and how both landscapes are entangled with discourses of politics and family.

Filmmakers interested in the representation of landscape as a meaningful catalyzer extend across both Argentinian and Mexican cinemas. For example, in Argentina Lisandro Alonso’s films *La libertad* (2001) and *Los muertos* (2004) center attention on the landscape of the north of Argentina, while *Liverpool* (2008) and *Jauja* (2014) focus on Patagonia. Martín Traperó’s *Nacido y criado* (2006) is also set in Patagonia. Lucía Puenzo’s *Wakolda* (2013) represents extreme landscapes of the south, while *XXY* (2007) places attention on the northeast of Argentina. Other Argentine films such as Juan Solana’s *Noreste* (2005), *Esteros* (2016) by PaPu Curotto, or *El limonero real* (2017) by Gustavo Fontan also showcase the unique landscape of the northeast section of Argentina. Likewise in Mexico, many filmmakers choose to highlight rural

areas. For example, Carlos Reygadas in *Japón* (2002), *Luz silenciosa* (2007), *Post tenebras lux* (2012), and *Nuestro tiempo* (2019) focuses on rural landscapes to depict the unrecognizable and abstract side of the Mexican landscape. Diego Quemada-Díez’s *La jaula de oro* (2013) traces an affective geopolitical journey throughout the crossing of different borders. Israel Cárdenas and Laura Amelia Guzmán represent northern Mexico in a naturalistic and documentary style by locating history in the isolated landscape of the Sierra Tarahumara in *Cochochi* (2009). *Alamar* (2009), directed by Pedro González Rubio, presents the Mexican Caribbean as a metaphor for fatherhood and alternatives to modern life, while *La tempestad* (2017), directed by Tatiana Huezo, shows an emotional journey of the protagonist that depicts the violence generated by the corruption of the government and drug cartels upon the rural landscape.⁷

Paz Escobar has studied the representation of Patagonia in Argentine cinema in the period from 1986 to 2006—considered the “neoliberal hegemony” (119). She suggests that at the turn of the twentieth century, Patagonia is identified with the rural in a broad sense because films are mostly set in small towns and rural spaces. She adds that while there are some films set in cities, they are in fact visually removed from the story.⁸ Furthermore, for Escobar, the Patagonian space in the films from this period resorts to a stereotypical construction, one repeated many times before. She argues that most films present a utopian (a place of hope and new beginnings) or dystopian (a place of purgatory or hostility) vision of Patagonia (14). Escobar adds that the idea of Patagonia as an empty place is strong in the films, in particular “One idea of the rural associated to the predominance of the natural vs the urban-human in relation to big cities [. . .] that is independent from the economic activities of these places” (122).⁹ As noted by Escobar, there are different representations of Patagonia; many films present it as a rural retreat where everything is nature—sea, deserts, and mountains. The

film *El premio* moves away from such utopian conceptions of Patagonia by introducing a new meaning connected to the marine landscapes by appealing to the intensity of the relationship between mother and daughter.

Although there are few films that take place in Xochimilco either totally or partially, this landscape was immortalized cinematographically during the Golden Age of Mexican cinema (1930-1950) in the film *María Candelaria* (1943), directed by Emilio Fernández. The original title of the film was *Xochimilco*.¹⁰ According to Carl J. Mora, this film remains a classic that prompted a style that subsequent filmmakers perpetuated, despite creating a touristic vision of Mexico and establishing an idealistic and stereotypical representation of Indigenous people “patiently paddling their flower-laden dugouts along the scenic canals of Xochimilco” (65). Part of the success of *María Candelaria* is due to the cinematographic style of Gabriel Figueroa, who is recognized as the most important Mexican cinematographer for having created an iconic Mexican landscape.¹¹ As described by Alberto Elena and Marina Díaz, in *María Candelaria* Figueroa highlighted the beauty of Xochimilco by portraying successfully its flora and fauna and by the use of several techniques: filters to accentuate, and make more dramatic, the clouds; a deep focus and dramatic low and high angle shots; the use of diagonal axis (47). All these elements created a mesmerizing image of Xochimilco that continues in the Mexican imaginary. Fernández’s *María Candelaria* placed Mexican cinema in the international scope by winning the 1946 Grand Prix for best feature film in Cannes, and best photography at the Locarno Film Festival. These triumphs not only helped to establish a European market for the Mexican cinema but also to position a touristic vision of Mexico. At the national level, *María Candelaria*—like many of the films of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema—obsessed with the construction of national identity and in particular with an *indigenist* ideology as a gesture of reaffirming a national heritage. Like its precursor *María*

Candelaria, *Mai morire* also presents a mesmerizing Xochimilco but instead of reinforcing nationalist or tourist tropes, it depicts a landscape reflective of the inner struggles of the protagonist.

Contextualizing *El premio* and *Mai morire*

Since the return of democracy in 1983, Argentina’s conflictive relationship with its political past has been a central theme in cultural production—in particular, literature, cinema, and theatre, which often depict the violence and human rights violations of the last dictatorship (1976-1983). The representation and reinterpretation of the crimes committed during the last dictatorship show a clear evolution of the artistic discourse surrounding the tragedy of the *desaparecidos* and the lasting consequences suffered by their families. This evolution is a direct product of both social and political circumstances, and the temporal distance and emotional perspective of their author.¹² The presence of an authorial voice belonging to the child of *desaparecidos* (Cecilia) in *El premio* points not only to the generational change but also to the evolution of the strategies used to address the political violence. The choice of a child’s perspective is one of those typically used in literature and films after the turn-of-the-century.¹³ Director Paula Marcovitch lived through the violent years of the dictatorship, hiding with her mother in the south of Buenos Aires while her father was taken by the military forces; later she lived in exile in Mexico. Thus in her semi-autobiographical film *El Premio*, Marcovitch embraces this narrative pattern by constructing her story from a child’s perspective.¹⁴ However, what sets her film apart from others using the same format is the original and central usage of the marine landscape as a catalyzer of meaning, representing the stress suffered by the mother-daughter relationship in their forced enclosure during the violent years.

Garibotto suggests that films by second-generation filmmakers that return to a child's or a teenager's perspective go backwards in history by using an "archaic" 1980s format, typical of the first years after the return to democracy in Argentina (142).¹⁵ She argues that "these fictions join Kirchnerist discourse in making the dictatorship an empty signifier, a nodal point articulating hegemony" (152). Nevertheless, in our opinion, Marcovitch's choice of the child's perspective is not intended to empty or crystallize the dictatorship following the tendency highlighted by Garibotto. On the contrary, Marcovitch gives centrality to the extreme situation that the protagonists are forced to live in because of the political violence, turning the focus to the private relationship struggles of the protagonist with her mother. This allows Marcovitch to represent the disconnection between them by centering the story around the territorial displacement and focusing on the violent politicization of the country. The safe place found by the mother to hide and survive brings the family to a hard confrontation because of the prize won by Cecilia at school, and deepens the emotional gap between them. This highlights the impossibility of escaping the violence of the dictatorship, which is represented in the use of the affective landscape.

Unlike *El premio*, *Mai morire* is not plot-driven but rather provides glimpses of the transitional period in the protagonist's life. However, like *El premio*, Rivero's film captures through the landscape textures of affective states of both the characters and the story. *Mai morire* is Rivero's second feature film and like his first film, *Parque vía* (2008), the filmmaker presents an intimate story in a minimalist form and slow pace, through non-professional actors. In contrast to *Parque vía*, where the actions happen in an interior space, *Mai morire* unfolds its story in a well-known open space. With these two films, Enrique Rivero has been placed by critics and academics in the group of "radically independent" Mexican filmmakers who differ from recognized authors, such as the "three amigos,"¹⁶ because

he shows a "certain tendency" to make films in Mexico (López 42). Although these independent filmmakers do not represent a homogeneous group, they have distinguished themselves by accessing different routes towards global markets such as the art film festival circuits, making relatively low-budget productions, and adopting styles often associated with "slow cinema," European auteurs, new forms of realism, or experimental cinema. Thematically, they tend to move away from national clichés or mainstream stories like romantic comedies and urban violence films¹⁷ (López, Podalsky). In fact, *Mai morire* was released internationally in 2012 at the Rome International Film Festival.¹⁸

In *Mai Morire*, Rivero revisits frequent themes in the national cinematographic discourse such as the mother, the family, and poverty. Particularly in classical Mexican cinema, topics about motherhood and women have established, through repetition, not only stereotypes such as the devoted mother, the liberated woman, or the "bad" woman, but also an archive of emotions identified by the audience, such as admiration, inspiration, or disapproval. Tracing the depictions of motherhood in Mexican cinema, Isabel Arrendondo identifies that women filmmakers of the 1990s—what she calls the third-wave—shift the images of motherhood to a political dimension by providing a social, economic, and judicial context in which the mothers live (187).¹⁹ Rivero moves away from these representations of motherhood prevalent in both classic and third-wave cinema. First, Rivero depicts Chayo, the main character, as a mother who is not self-sacrificing, submissive, or bad. Second, he does not endow Chayo with a political dimension because of the lack of context of her situation, leaving voids of information. This forces the spectator to question why Chayo initially left Xochimilco. What is her relationship with her husband and children? How bad is the economic situation of the family? Why is Chayo not expressing any emotion or feeling about her current situation? The viewer is invited to

fill these gaps by speculating about possible scenarios since the narrative does not provide enough information. In this way, the film focuses on the subjectivity of an inexpressive Chayo during a transitional period of her life, where the landscape works as a mirror of her still uncoded feelings. With this Xochimilco turns into an affective landscape of the protagonist's internal state.

Framing the affective landscape

We consider two important elements involved in the depiction of the rural landscape in the films analyzed: 1) framing, and 2) soundtrack and sound effects. The combination of these elements helps in the construction of the affective landscape which provides new insights relating to familial ties and subjectivities. We will explore how the tension of the protagonists' situations is marked by the framing of the marine and lacustrine landscape in conjunction with the sound landscape. We argue that *El premio* and *Mai morire* center their story around the paradox between the open space in Patagonia and Xochimilco and the confinement suffered by the protagonists in their forced displacement. Both Marcovitch and Rivero deal with this contradiction by externalizing in the landscapes the internal affective state of the characters Ceci and Chayo, turning those iconic places into spaces of physical isolation.

In the opening scene of *El Premio* we observe framed in a long shot the young protagonist Ceci (Paula Galinelli Hertzog) walking from a distance on the beach with the imposing and tumultuous Atlantic Ocean behind her. The camera stays still, showing Ceci move with difficulty, and as she approaches we observe that she is trying to use her roller skates on the sand (Figure 1). Then, the camera moves to the left to accompany her strenuous journey to finally jump in front of Ceci, focusing briefly on her facial expressions of discontent as she continues struggling to move forward on the beach. This long scene of over a minute finishes with a close up to the roller skates covered in water and sand. Then, Ceci continues walking slowly on the skates towards the small beach cabin where she meets her mother, Lucia, (Laura Agorreca) who is trying to keep the windows closed against the strong wind. Here, we hear the first exchange between mother and daughter when Ceci complains: "Ma, no se puede patinar, mira" (Ma, one cannot rollerblade here, look); but her mother does not look at the rollerblades or pay much attention to her. Instead, she is concerned with keeping them warm and safe in the small cabin space.²⁰ With this opening, Marcovitch sets the tone of the film by showing the two very different worlds the mother and daughter will inhabit in this new place, and amplifying the centrality of the landscape that will shape their relationship and feelings.



Figure 1: Ceci struggles to use her rollerblades in the sand.²⁹

The coastal landscape of Patagonia depicts the transcendental changes in the lives of the protagonist. For Ceci, this overwhelming situation is shown with her need to quickly return to the regular activities in her life, like playing, having fun, and going to school. For the mother, it is the complete opposite as she retreats physically and emotionally into the small place that provides shelter and protection for them; she is consumed with worry, waiting to hear news from the city.²¹ In their interaction with the landscape, we observe the different emotions of the mother such as fear and anxiety, and we understand affect mostly from Ceci: her playtime outdoors reveals nonverbal expressions of her feelings. The mother resists the landscape while the daughter tries to adapt to it. Thus, the framing using long shots of the marine landscape completes the opening scene and extends through the film. The choice of washed, non-saturated colors in the landscape and the clothing worn by the young protagonist adds meaning. The selected color palette presents the memory of the events as remembered by the director, inviting the viewers into her reminiscence of 1977. Furthermore, the beach is foggy in the opening scene, highlighting that those memories are not undisturbed but are simply her particular recollection of the past. The director's intention is to tell the very private story of the many struggles the seven-year-old protagonist faces as she is trying to make sense of their confinement in the new, isolated place while assuming a new identity and background to protect the family. In this sense, we agree with Geoffrey Maguirre when he states that the film intends to diversify the perceptions of the child of the disappeared in Argentina, "signalling the persistent tensions between recounting these individual, personal narrations of the past and the reluctance to

allow such narratives to be subsumed and institutionalized within contemporary Argentina's collective public sphere" (5).²²

Moreover, Marcovitch uses strong audible elements in the landscape scenes to convey the unstructured and nonverbal feelings of Ceci and socially codified emotions of her mother. In particular, the wind and haunting music appear first with the title, before the beginning of the film. In the opening scene, and throughout the film, the invasive sound effect of the waves as the young protagonist walks on the sand is a clear example. The waves breaking on the wind-swept shore, while Ceci tries unsuccessfully to rollerblade, accentuate the uncodified sensation of the protagonist and at the same time mark the overwhelming qualities of the landscape. Thus, the affective landscape amplifies the unstructured feelings as the young protagonist channels them. Another important aural element is the dissonant music used in most of the scenes where the young protagonist is at the beach playing alone (Figure 2) with the street dog, or with her new friend Silvia (Sharon Herrera). Undoubtedly, the sound clashes with the opening scene, adding to her attempt to play; nevertheless, the haunting piano chords instil a boding, unshakable affect which cannot be identified easily. Marcovitch focuses on the unique story of the mother-daughter relationship with a particular minimalistic style. As Paul Julian Smith explains, the film has a minimal story line matched with bare technique, consisting of "extended, unbroken takes of the wind-swept infant heroine facing the unforgiven ocean" (220). We argue that the marine landscape, along with the aural landscape, becomes a central point to the story as it acts as a catalyzer of meaning, highlighting the internal struggles of the protagonist's confinement due to forced political displacement.



Figure 2: Ceci plays by herself outside the beach cabin (47:09).²⁹

Like Marcovitch's film, Rivero highlights from the first sequence how Xochimilco not only is an open space where the story takes place, but also the emotional and affective canvas of the main character. *Mai morire* begins with Chayo (Margarita Saldaña) returning to Xochimilco.²³ The film opens with a long shot and low angle of a hazy canal of Xochimilco. The camera captures the reflection of the trees in the water and a duck swimming, then flying, as the camera moves forward in the misty scenario. Then, the camera tilts up, revealing a horizon flanked by rows of trees left and right. In the same shot, without cutting, the movement follows and reveals the immutable face of the protagonist, Chayo, sitting in a boat while a rower standing in the aft rows slowly. The composition places Chayo in

the center and the landscape of the canal behind her. After a few moments, Chayo turns her gaze to her right and the camera rotates, showing gradually the landscape of the other shore. The shot ends the movement where it started, looking towards what is in front of the boat that is moving forward in the canal, with the water and the mist opening before its advance. In this rotational movement, the camera reveals both the space around it—which is moving before the viewer's eyes—and the protagonist, who is the one who really moves when moving forward in the boat. The long opening shot not only sets the general style of the film (contemplative, slow, and minimalistic), but also establishes a relationship between the main elements of the story: Xochimilco and Chayo.²⁴



Figure 3: Initial sequence, Chayo arriving in Xochimilco.³⁰



Figure 4: At the end of the initial sequence, Chayo is standing in front of the family house upon her arrival.³⁰

As the story moves, the spectator will learn that Chayo is only returning to a place once abandoned to fulfil her duty as the youngest daughter by taking care of her elderly, dying mother. On this return, she also reunites with her husband and children, who live in the same house as the mother. As a consequence, she must resume some obligations, such as the mother's role. As we pointed out, the plot structure leaves out important story information (e.g. the reason behind Chayo's first departure; her relationship with her children and husband) or barely provides some details (e.g. the existence of the husband's mistress and Chayo's acceptance of the situation). This does not help to build an attachment to the characters but rather to focus on the sensations that the main character is experiencing towards her mother's imminent death via the landscape and the *mise-en-scène*. In this way, the first scene shows that place can be read as a register of the psychological and affective state of an inexpressive Chayo who is forced, in a way, to come back to a life she had left. The sense of confinement is further accentuated by the style of framing in this sequence. The camera never looks up to reveal the open sky but only the landscape that flanks it. The sky becomes a background element that does not confer the feeling of liberation commonly related to it in open spaces. These elements are set as the limits of the environment in which

Chayo must stay to fulfil her duties, mostly inside her mother's small house.²⁵ As a result, Xochimilco paradoxically becomes an open space of personal confinement which triggers in the protagonist both identified emotions such as sadness and guilt, and non-identified sensations expressed through dreams and the landscape.

The inner, emotional and affective state of the protagonist's confinement is symbolized by the sensation of reverie and subjective time linked to the place, as well as by the chaotic sequences of Chayo's dreams. The sensation of reverie and subjective time linked to place is achieved by the mood created by the haze, the faint light of dawn, and the slow pace with which the small boat advances. These aspects work together to provide a feeling of being in a musing state with its own rhythm of time. An alternative frame of time is pointed out by Chayo later in two scenes: when she affirms in a telephone call to her former employer: "Aquí el tiempo pasa diferente" (Here time passes differently); and when she states while talking with her mother that: "El tiempo sí que pasa muy diferente aquí" (Time does pass very strange here). The film reinforces the sensations of lethargy and reverie with ambient and incidental sounds such as the morning murmur formed mainly by the distant echo of birds, and in the foreground the sound of the parsimonious paddling of the rower. During her stay, Chayo has three dreams that reveal

premonitions as well as her sorrows, desires, and guilts and unencoded sensations represented by the chaos in her dreams. The critic Jorge Ayala Blanco points out that Xochimilco is so ubiquitous in the story that its water and specific places like the *Isla de las Muñecas* (the Island of the Dolls) are present even in Chayo's dreams (2017:177). Rivero breaks the general style of the film (long shots, fixed camera, and diegetic sound) in the dreams' scenes by favor of fast movements, close-ups, and extra-diegetic music that make "the film look like a great dream scene," of which Xochimilco is the ideal scenario (Ayala Blanco, 177).

Since Marcovitch and Rivero center their stories on decisive transitional periods in the life of their main characters, liminality is featured at several layers in the narrative, from stages of life (Chayo's mother senectitude), to performative roles (Ceci as a student, Chayo as a daughter), to the betwixt and between quality of places (Patagonia and Xochimilco). In *El premio*, the windy coastal landscape of Patagonia is the place in-between the family's happy past and unknown future, and it hosts the mother and daughter in a transitional period where they need to hide their identities in order to survive. Ceci's performative role begins when she starts attending

the local school. Her mother teaches her the new cover story that will protect them, asking Ceci to repeat it until she memorizes it: "my dad sells curtains and my mother is a housewife" (10:30). For the protagonist, going to class could compromise their hiding place, creating a life and death situation because her father is now a desaparecido. Marcovitch builds the landscape of Patagonia as a liminal space by setting the story in the middle of the winter, naturally imposing harsh conditions on their survival. She presents a dystopian Patagonia by framing the empty beach through diverse long shots, stressing the paradox of the open space and the family's impossibility to feel free within this space of forced confinement and alienation. One example of this situation is the scene where the ocean takes over the small beach cabin, washing away the furniture, so that Lucia must retrieve the pieces (Figure 5). Furthermore, Ceci is in a particularly liminal situation. She is between the private world of forced confinement, with ample knowledge of the consequences of her parents' political situation, and the public space of the school, where she eventually comes in contact with the military forces endangering their hiding place because she writes an essay about the disappearance and torture of her cousin.



Figure 5: Lucia walks to the beach to salvage some of the furniture from the water (52:58).²⁹

Mai morire depicts Chayo and her mother both in liminal periods of their lives. While Chayo's mother is between life and death,

Chayo faces the dilemma of whether to stay in Xochimilco with her husband and children after her mother's death, or return to the city

and to her job as a full-time cook. Death as a topic is at the core of the film as the title, in Italian, means “never die.” Chayo’s return has to do with the imminent death of the mother who is close to 100 years old. Thus, death sets up Chayo’s journey toward self-reaffirmation. Chayo’s stay also coincides with the celebration of the Day of the Dead, in which her mother still manages to participate. The film shows the preparations of both Chayo’s family and the townspeople for the celebration. The theme is treated in an anecdotal and reflective way, where death is seen by the characters as part of a natural cycle and daily life. For example, in a scene in which Chayo’s son Julio and the grandmother are setting up the family altar, the grandmother explains to the grandson the order of each candle, and to which of the deceased they are dedicated: “Mira Julito, pon primero la de mi hermano Joaquín, fue el primero que se fue, tenía 5 años [. . .]. Esa vela es de tu tío Pepe, se mueve mucho porque le gustaba tomar mucho” (Look, Julito, place my brother’s Joaquín first. He was the first to leave, he was 5 years old [. . .]. That candle belongs to your uncle Pepe, it moves a lot because he liked to drink too much). Candidly, the grandson asks the grandmother: “where is the candle for me?” As expected, the first candle that will be part of the altar will be that of the grandmother, who is on the threshold of death, and not that of the child.²⁶

Rivero represents the cycle of life and death through Xochimilco’s beautiful sunrises and crepuscules. The soft light of dawn with which the film begins transforms little by little as the story progresses in intense flushes of sunset and deep darkness in the night scenes (Figure 6). In this sense, Rivero connects the wheel of life and death with the landscape, and invites the viewer to reflect on this matter through the contemplation of the different light changes during the days. Naturally, it is to be hoped that the subject of death will connect affectively and emotionally with the viewer when confronted with his own mortality, and that depending on various aspects (e.g. culture, stage of life), it will always provoke a unique reaction to the viewer. As we have argued, the liminality or in-betweenness is not only present in the character’s life, but also the place itself. Although we place Xochimilco as a rural area, a better description of this place is of the liminal site it occupies, wherein it conserves strong rural features, yet at the same time it is part of the most important urban nucleus of Mexico.²⁷ In the film, the rural aspect of the site is acknowledged by Chayo’s husband when he tells her that they need to go to the city to buy her new shoes. With this declaration, the husband is separating Xochimilco from Mexico City even when it is practically part of the metropolitan area. For the protagonist, Xochimilco on an emotional level represents a paradox since it is a place of both belonging and non-belonging for her.²⁸



Figure 6: Chayo pondering her decision whether or not to stay, at dawn in Xochimilco (01:10:35).³⁰

Even though the liminal place of coastal Patagonia provides refuge to Ceci and Lucia, it will become, at the same time, the place where the rapid deterioration of the mother and daughter relationship happens. The only scene where they walk together on the beach (after burying books that could compromise their safety) is relevant because it illustrates their opposite reactions and emotions towards the place. We observe the two protagonists fully displaying their emotions regarding the interior exile: the mother resists, but Ceci tries to adapt. In this sense, Lucia has become cold towards her daughter, consumed by worry and sadness, and her long silences are very difficult for Ceci, who constantly attempts—unsuccessfully—to engage her mother in conversation

and games. Their emotions towards each other are easy to recognize in figure 7, where the mother's sorrowful sight is lost in the sea, as she walks in silence without answering the many questions coming from Ceci. In contrast, her young daughter is happily sharing her personal thoughts, comparing them to the ideas she read in books. Here we observe and sense the emotional distance that separates them despite being physically so close. On the one hand, Ceci cannot fully grasp the dangerous situation they are in, and she struggles to negotiate her position between the two worlds: the private at home and the public at school. On the other hand, her mother is incapable of articulating her thoughts and feelings other than by long silences.



Figure 7: Lucia and Ceci walk back to the beach cabin after burying books in the sand (26:23).²⁹

The situation escalates when Ceci finally tells her mother what she wrote in the essay for the school contest. Lucia rushes them to the teacher's home to ask for another chance to write a different essay, thus saving their hiding place and their lives. The teacher allows Ceci to write a new essay, and following her mother's advice, she writes the opposite of the original essay. Ceci is crowned the winner days after at school, and wants to go to receive the prize. Lucia does not allow her to

attend the ceremony, but Ceci decides to go anyway, encouraged by her teacher. Because of her young age, she does not fully understand why her mother does not want her to accept the prize given by the military forces, but she can sense her mother's disappointment. Marcovitch's choice of the child perspective attempts to show the emotional and affective struggles of the relationship between the protagonists, focusing on the individual pain experienced by mother and daughter. At the

end of *El premio*, the story illuminates the frustration Lucia feels because her daughter does not understand why accepting the prize constitutes a betrayal, but at the same time, it highlights her incapacity to communicate and explain this to Ceci. As we mentioned, the mother retreats physically and emotionally,

while the daughter goes out in public. This is perfectly put in the final scene where we see the young protagonist alone and surrounded by the windy landscape of Patagonia, and in the voice over we hear her mother crying inconsolably.



Figure 8: In the final scene, Ceci sits in the dunes. She has become one with the landscape (1:42:04).²⁹

Although Chayo has been physically absent from her family, *Mai morire* does not explain or “melodramatize” this absence. Chayo knows that she must fulfil her duty as the youngest daughter by leaving her job in the city, without any complaints, to care for her mother. Chayo’s children ask her if this time she will stay with them, but they do it out of curiosity rather than a desire to force her to stay (figure 9). Similarly, the husband has found a substitute for his sexual urges without any complaints from Chayo, knowing that she might never stay. What is clear during Chayo’s visit to the family home is the certainty that her place is not there; she does not feel that she belongs in Xochimilco. The only tie that binds her to this place is her duty as the youngest daughter. Thus, Chayo’s strongest emotional connection is with her mother. Between the two women there seems to exist a love beyond a mother and

daughter relationship. There is a metaphysical understanding between their souls. This is observed in the one scene where the dawn of Xochimilco works as a frame for their conversation. In a long shot we observe in a still dark morning Chayo patting her cow, Petra. Then the camera follows her to the other end where she meets her mother who, sitting in a wheelchair, watches the shining dawn. The women begin an exchange about the sunrise and Chayo’s dreams and premonitions (figure 10). Finally, the mother says, “Tú no te hallas aquí, ¿verdad? Es un mal que te pasé ya que no enterré tu ombligo aquí. El de Juanito lo enterramos en la chinampa, el de Yani en el fogón y el tuyo lo enterramos en el camino.” (You feel out of place here, right? It’s a curse that I passed to you since I didn’t bury your umbilical cord here. We buried Juanito’s in the chinampa, Yani’s in the stove and we buried yours in the road.) Though the tradition

of burying the umbilical cord may vary from region to region, the general idea is that after giving birth Mexican women, mostly of rural areas, bury the umbilical cord underneath a tree on their land. As Korn points out, “this ritual symbolizes the planting of roots for their child in the land and in the community,

thus reaffirming the child’s cultural connections. It is this people/land connection that passes from one generation to the next, demonstrating the essence of human culture” (5). With her explanation, the mother takes on Chayo’s feelings of guilt for not being tuned-in with the land and her family.



Figure 9: Chayo doing house chores (17:20).³⁰

Chayo’s sense of guilt can be seen in the dream sequences, specifically in relation to her shoes and feet, which symbolize her roots and destiny. After the funeral of the mother, Chayo spends the night in the cemetery where she has her third dream. In this dream, one of the most representative images of Chayo’s anxieties are her feet, seen in a close-up, nailed to a boat. Although the canals of the place represent fluidity and displacement, being nailed to the boat makes it impossible for Chayo to move freely. Upon awakening, she is not wearing shoes and returns barefoot to her house. Seeing herself without shoes also gives Chayo clarity about the economic shortages around her and she expresses to her husband: “No tengo ni para zapatos” (I don’t even have money for shoes). Upon this observation, her husband replies that he will buy them. However, Chayo replies: “Yo puedo trabajar para comprármelos” (I can work to buy them). Although in the

end the husband is the one who buys the shoes, Chayo realizes that she can continue contributing to the household economy with her work like before. It is at this point where Chayo has decided, without verbalizing it, that she will leave. Moments later, she hugs her children and says: “Los quiero mucho, mucho” (I love you very, very much). In this way, when Chayo gets rid of her old shoes, the feeling of being immobilized and tied—by obligation—to her home is symbolically released. With her new shoes, identical to the old ones, Chayo begins her journey again. The fact that her new shoes are identical to the old ones suggests that she has renewed her ties with the family and her hometown, but in a more emancipating way.

Throughout the film, the apparent calm and expressionless personality of Chayo is reflected in the stillness of the lake. Thus, through the images of water, Rivero establishes the tension between immobility and

mobility, both physical and emotional, faced by his protagonist. However, despite the stillness of Chayo and the lake, the possibility of change and mobility is always apparent. On a physical level, mobility occurs through water, specifically through the canals. The notion of mobility is expressed at different moments in the film when we observe Chayo moving from one place to another while

navigating the canals. In this sense, Chayo can move and even leave the place definitively whenever she decides it by traveling through the calm of Lake Xochimilco, as appreciated in the last scene. At the affective level, it is established that Chayo is capable of generating change by navigating toward a life beyond Xochimilco once she has fulfilled her duty as a daughter.



Figure 10: Chayo and her mother talking about Chayo's dream (29:59).³⁰

Through similar narrative and technical resources, *El premio* and *Mai morire* transform the cinematographic and cultural imaginary of two iconic Latin American landscapes into intimate and affective landscapes reflective of the protagonists. To achieve this, both films use a minimal storyline, a contemplative and non-intrusive camera, as well as the framing of both spaces with scarce camera movement and long shots. The films show the main characters, Lucia and Chayo, as incapable of expressing their fears or anxieties; other protagonists are overwhelmed by the circumstances they are living, like Ceci and Chayo's mother. Thus, the cinematographic landscape becomes an essential narrative and visual element to translate and express what cannot

be expressed by the characters' own words or actions. The films articulate moments of rupture in the lives of the protagonists by using the rural landscape to depict the importance of those changes in their lives. In this sense, by paying attention to the transitional period in the protagonists' lives, we can examine the significance of these changes. At the center of both films is a portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship and its struggles. The directors work to incorporate, through an affective natural landscape, the intensity of feelings caused by the life-changing situation in the particular moment of crisis.

El premio ends in the same way that it begins, with an image of the young protagonist alone on the beach, further showcasing the importance of the landscape. However,

unlike the initial scene where we see Ceci on the move, trying to adapt to her surroundings, in the last scene the girl is motionless. She is lying still despite the wild wind, becoming one with the marine landscape of Patagonia. There is no fight left in her, and she has surrendered herself to her unknown future. While she is huddled there, one can hear the mother's loud cry off-camera, symbolizing the generational gap between them. Marcovitch's choice of portraying the story through the child perspective points to the importance of the recovery of the individual and the significance of personal stories about the terror of the dictatorship. In *Mai morire*, Rivero only hints at some aspects of the life of his protagonist by focusing on a brief but decisive period of her life. The gaps in the story have to be filled by the viewer's imagination and cultural knowledge. This provokes a deactivation of any trace of melodrama in the narration, thereby leaving the weight of expressing the story to the landscape. This gives Xochimilco a lyrical dimension that not only conveys the existential conflict that the protagonist is going through but also opens routes of meditation about life, death, and the pathways that are built from a monotonous daily life.

Notes

¹ In an interview with Carlos Jordán of the Mexican newspaper *Milenio*, Rivero explains that the film emerged from an anecdote that a woman told him. The director, in addition to respecting the location where the story took place, decided to film in Xochimilco because this region is connected with elements from ancient legends (11).

² We are aware that the "affective-turn," as called by Patricia Ticineto Clough, is not a unified approach but an umbrella term that encompasses a diversity of approaches for the study of emotions and affect from a diversity of disciplines, such as sociology (Illouz), psychology, biology, and neuroscience (Brennan, Damasio), philosophy (Massumi, Hansen), gender studies

(Ahmed, Sedgwick), and anthropology and ethnography (Stewart). Within the context of Latin America, Garibotto, Macón and Solana, Moraña and Sánchez Prado, and Podalsky have been developing studies of affect and emotion in cultural artifacts.

³ Studies of landscape in film have been common among Latin American scholars, but the focus has tended to be on urban spaces. In particular, Amanda Holmes' recent book, *Politics of Architecture in Contemporary Argentine Cinema*, looks at how city landscapes take part in the production of meaning in Argentine cinema. In the Mexican context, David William Foster's *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema* explores how the politics of the city, human geographies, and gender are depicted in this particular megalopolis in Mexican contemporary national cinema. Another central book in this area is the edition prepared by Amanda Holmes and Richard Young titled *Cultures of the City: Mediating Identities in Urban Latin/o America*, where many of the chapters focus on the representation of capitals, such as Lima and Mexico City, to point out their importance as centers of the nation. Recent publications address the concept of affective landscapes in Latin America in visual arts. *Más allá de la naturaleza. Prácticas y configuraciones espaciales en la cultura latinoamericana contemporánea*, edited by Irene Depetris Chauvin and Macarena Urzúa Orpazo, is one example. Also, the special issue in *Imagofagia* edited by Irene Depetris Chauvin and Natalia Taccetta titled "Giro afectivo y artes visuales. Una aproximación interdisciplinaria sobre América Latina," is another important compilation of works from academics highlighting the current relevance of this "affective turn" in the analysis of visual arts in Latin America.

⁴ In this chapter, Andermann delineates resistant approaches to space (setting) and place (landscape) in their relation to the dominant "cartographic cinema" in four moments in Latin American cinematic modernity: the silent era, the "Golden Age" of classic studio cinema, and the nuevo cine latinoamericano.

⁵ Andermann focuses on two Argentinian films: *Los muertos* (2004), directed by Lisandro Alonso, and *Opus* (2005), directed by Mariano Donoso; and two Brazilian films: *Serras da desordem* (2006), directed by Andrea Tonacci, and *Viajo porque preciso, volto porque te amo* (2009), directed by Karim Ainouz and Marcelo Gomes.

⁶In his opinion,

“landscape becomes the measure for the crisis of meaning that separates the present from the national-popular moment from which Cinema Novo and ‘new Latin American cinema’ took their cues” (52).

⁷ Among these filmmakers, academics have highlighted the role of the landscape particularly in the work of the Argentine Lisandro Alonso and the Mexican Carlos Reygadas. See, for example, Andermann, de Luca, Cunha, Hanley, Martins, and Shaw. Other scholars have identified, along with Alonso and Reygadas, more filmmakers that use the landscape in a central way in their works. See, for example, studies by Podalsky, and Lopez. They identify Mexican directors such as Gonzalez Rubio, Cárdenas and Guzmán, while Andermann has also identified Trapero and Paz Encina among others.

⁸ As examples of this trend, Escobar mentions *Mundo Grúa*, set in Comodoro Rivadavia (Pablo Trapero, 1999); *Todas las azafatas van al cielo*, set in Ushuaia (Daniel Burman, 2002), and *El perro*, set in Caleta Olivia and Trelew (Carlos Sorín, 2004).

⁹ Our translation.

¹⁰ Other notable films that take place in Xochimilco include: *El violetero* (1960) by Gilberto Martínez Solares, *Mi niño Tizoc* (1972) by Ismael Rodríguez, *Chicuarotes* (2019) by Gael García Bernal, and *Island of the Dolls* (2018) by Sebastián Mantilla.

¹¹ Ramirez Berg points out that Figueroa wanted to emulate the muralist Mexican school style in an effort to create Mexican cinematography and motivated by the desire “to succeed in gaining recognition for the Mexican landscape throughout the world” (101).

¹² In her latest book *Rethinking Testimonial Cinema in Postdictatorship Argentina: Beyond Memory Fatigue*, Veronica Garibotto addresses the reticence toward postdictatorship testimonial narrative that started in the early 2000s and continues today. Garibotto proposes to redefine the interpretative focus to explain this reticence and “redesign an intellectual ethics more in keeping with Argentina’s political juncture today” (8). She argues that the problem is how these testimonial narratives are read because it is “on the level of interpretation that the access to history has become a problem” (9).

¹³ As examples we can mention the novels *La casa de los conejos* (2008) by Laura Alcoba, and *Pequeños combatientes* (2013) by Raquel Robles. Both chose this narrative strategy, as well as the films *Salamandra* (2008), directed by Pablo Agüero, and *Infancia Clandestina* (2013), directed by Benjamin Avila.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Maguire’s analysis of the film pays particular attention to the implications of the child’s individual experience and agency, suggesting that the film reflects the director’s perspectives towards the position of the hijo/child in contemporary Argentina. For Maguire,

“the distressing familial tension between mother and daughter reveals a much broader intergenerational friction over the transmission of cultural memory in contemporary Argentine society” (5).

¹⁵ Garibotto contends that this exception has ideological consequences, because

“the use of fiction allows for the cinematic images’ iconic dimension to predominate over their indexical dimension. This predominance solidifies emotions, (and) precludes examination” (142).

She adds the film *El Premio* to the list of films used as an example of her idea of iconic fictions, along with *Cautiva* (2005), *Salamandra* (2008), *Andrés no quiere dormir la siesta* (2009), and *Infancia Clandestina* (2012).

¹⁶ Alfonso Cuarón, Guillermo del Toro, Alejandro González Iñárritu.

¹⁷ Some of the filmmakers placed in this group include Israel Cárdenas, Carlos Reygadas, Amat Escalante, Michel Franco, Laura Amelia Guzmán, Julián Hernández, Nicolás Pereda, and Francisco Vargas.

¹⁸ In the Rome International Film Festival, the film was awarded the Best Technical Contribution Award 2012 for its photography by Arnau Valls Colomer and Gerardo Barroso.

¹⁹ Arredondo particularly studied the works of Busi Cortés, María Novaro, Dana Rotberg, and Marisa Sistach.

²⁰ In Argentina, the unique term *insilio* is used to describe the dangerous politically-motivated situation represented in the film. The word represents

the experience of “interior exile” lived by many Argentinians on the long list of targets by the military dictatorship. Fernando Reati affirms that these individuals lived

“as pariahs [. . .] in a type of isolation and incomunicacion that protected their lives but alienated them from their environment” (Reati 185, our translation).

²¹ In several scenes we observe how the mother keeps trying unsuccessfully to listen for news on an old radio that does not work well.

²² Marcovitch’s film received the attention of academics inside of Argentina such as Leonor Arfuch in her article “Narrativas del país de la infancia,” and also in North America. The contributions by Veronica Garibotto, Inela Semilovich, and Geoffrey Maguire are very insightful and provide different interpretations of the film.

²³ In an interview with the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior*, Rivero explains that he selected Margarita Saldaña to interpret the role of Rosario due to her resemblance to the woman who told him the anecdote on which the film is based. Saldaña is not a professional actress but a vocalist for the Veracruz group Los Soneros del Tesechoacán. The filmmaker was impressed by the resemblance and the presence of Saldaña (Calderón 12).

²⁴ The initial shot lasts around 2:50 minutes.

²⁵ Unlike *Como agua para chocolate* (Alfonso Arau, 1992) the duty of the youngest daughter to take care of the mother is stripped of any melodramatic tone. This duty is a responsibility, and not a tradition that condemns Chayo, who before her mother became ill and her sister married, had been able to make her own life choices.

²⁶ According to Ayala Blanco, the woman who inspired the film died during filming and the director pays tribute to her by putting a shot of her at home sitting on a chair surrounded by candles. The critic also mentions that the woman’s relatives also participated in the filming (175).

²⁷ Xochimilco is particularly known to be the last remnant of the pre-Hispanic agricultural system, *chinampa*, developed in a complex lacustrine system of wetlands in the Basin of Mexico (Eakin et al.). For this characteristic it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987. It is also one of the 16 boroughs that form Mexico City.

²⁸ This can approach what Dominique Maingueneau has termed “paratopia,” which refers to a difficult

negotiation between a place and non-place, and expresses the idea of belonging and not-belonging at the same time, the impossible inclusion in a ‘topia’ (in Lie) (52–53).

²⁹ ©El premio 2012 | Paula Genoveva Markovitch

³⁰ ©Mai Morire 2013 | Enrique Rivero

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