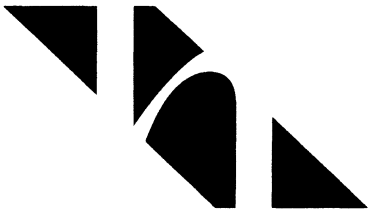
Cinematographic and Political Transitions in *La redada* and *La frontera*



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Abstract: This paper reveals and analyzes the cinematographic, political, and aesthetic transitions intersecting two Southern Cone films that premiered concurrently in 1991: the award-winning Chilean movie *La frontera* by Ricardo Larraín and the forgotten Argentine independent production *La redada* directed by Rolando Pardo. Despite bridging similar historical circumstances and tackling sensitive issues that rose to the forefront during the transition to democracy, *La frontera*'s and *La redada*'s editing techniques, treatment of characters, mise-en-scènes, and conclusions reveal divergent aesthetics that affected the films' reception at the time of their release and that deserve a close critical analysis. Not only can these artistic differences be interpreted in relation to the political moment of transition of the late 1980s and early 1990s in Argentina and Chile, but they also resonate with current discussions about inequality and discrimination in postauthoritarian society and the actual state of democracy in the Southern Cone.

Keywords: Argentina, Chile, film/cine, *La frontera*, politics/política, *La redada*, Ricardo Larraín, Rolando Pardo, transition/transición

The most basic definition of the word "transition" is the movement or development from one state, stage, form, style, or place to another; however, used in the context of film studies and Southern Cone politics, this term conveys more specific meanings. Cinematographic transitions comprise the basic architecture of the editing process in which the filmmaker must decide not only how to structure the overarching storyline, but also how to move from one shot to another, within and between scenes. Film theorists have long recognized that different kinds of transitions (such as fades, flashbacks, match cuts, dissolves, cross-cuts, and jump cuts) function as tools that influence the viewer's experience of time and space as projected on the screen. Smooth, seamless transitions are part of a continuity editing strategy and tend to produce a linear, realistic effect that is associated with classical Hollywood cinema. Montage or collision editing, on the other hand, uses jump cuts and unmatched shots to call attention to the artifice of filmmaking. The latter abrupt cinematographic transitions invite spectators to create their own interpretation of the images rather than supplying a single, closed reading.[1] From a political perspective in the Latin American context, the term "transición" refers to the shift that took place during the mid-to-late 1980s and early 1990s in the Southern Cone from authoritarian rule and state-sponsored violence to democratic administrations that were strongly influenced by neoliberal economic policies. This period in Argentina and Chile was also a time when individuals and political institutions had to grapple with sensitive issues such as the documentation of traumatic human rights abuses, justice for the tens of thousands of citizens who were tortured and disappeared during the military dictatorships, and the expression of collective memory in postdictatorship society.[2] The transition period to democracy created an opportunity for Southern Cone artists, politicians, and human rights activists to craft their version(s) of history through particular and, at times, opposing memory lenses of the recent past.

As producers of moving images that would be viewed by national and international audiences, Argentine and Chilean filmmakers in the late 1980s and early 1990s were in a unique position to impact the ways in which recent authoritarian history would be remembered and to envision alternative political paths for the future. Cinematic production in these countries, however, was also closely linked to the state through censorship bodies, governmental production subsidies, and mandated screen quotas for domestic movies. Bearing in mind this tension between aesthetic autonomy and the material reality of filmmaking in the Southern Cone, I examine two movies (one canonical, one obscure; one Chilean, one Argentine) from the post-dictatorship period. Both plots deal with forced internal exile during the military dictatorships in Argentina and Chile. Both films feature characters who engage with polemical transition issues, including the role of memory in the face of political amnesia, the lack of comprehensive justice for human rights violations, the (im)possibility of reconciliation, and the effects of surviving the traumatic years of military dictatorship. Despite bridging similar historical circumstances and tackling sensitive issues that rose to the forefront during the transition to democracy, the directors' editing techniques, treatment of characters, mise-en-scènes, and concluding sequences reveal divergent aesthetics that affected the films' reception during the transition years.[3] Not only can these artistic differences be interpreted in relation to the historical period of the late 1980s and early 1990s in the Southern Cone, but they also resonate with contemporary critical discussions about inequality and discrimination in these postauthoritarian democratic countries, marking the continued relevance of these films more than twenty years after their premiere.[4]

The year 1991 was one of political transition in both Argentina and Chile. It was also the year in which *La frontera* (Dir. Ricardo Larraín) and *La redada* (Dir. Rolando Pardo) premiered in Chile and Argentina, respectively. Considered one of the key films of the Chilean transition, *La frontera* was a domestic and international box office success, winning awards at the Berlin and Havana Film Festivals, as well as Spain's Goya for Best Spanish Language Foreign Film. Larraín's film is regularly taught in Latin American film classes and has received accolades for its high-quality cinematography, a realistic style coupled with the use of metaphoric and poetic allusions to the sensitive political context, and the use of a reflexive ending. *La redada*, on the other hand, boasts a single catalogued VHS copy in the WorldCat database and has largely been ignored by academics and movie critics.[5] Rolando Pardo's first feature-length film set itself apart from the didactic and melodramatic style of a series of Argentine films that addressed the repression and censorship of the dictatorship in the early years of the transition to democracy.[6] *La redada*'s parodic rather than melodramatic tone, humoristic portrayal of the characters, and refusal to cater to a conventional aesthetic sensibility make it difficult to place within the paradigmatic categories of Argentine cinema that tackles the subject of the dictatorship. In this sense, both *La frontera* and *La redada* stood out from the cinematographic milieu at the time of their release.

From the outset of the dictatorships in Argentina (1976–83) and Chile (1973–89), artists and intellectuals were among the groups targeted as subversive by the repressive military juntas. Filmmakers were subject to censorship, persecution, torture, disappearance, execution, and exile. After the Argentine military junta relinquished power, Raúl Alfonsín's administration actively encouraged filmmakers through cultural policy initiatives such as the revitalization of the *Instituto Nacional de Cine* under the directorship of Manuel Antín, the dissolution of the Rating Board, the ratification of a new cinema law (Ley 23.052), and the sponsorship of films about political issues through cultural programs run by the Ministry of Culture and Education (Stites Mor 86, 189).[7] The transition government supported the production of movies that probed the events of the recent past in so far as they projected the cathartic message that Argentina was now moving forward towards democracy. Critics have pointed out how films from this period (such as *La historia oficial* that went on to win the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1986) commodified the traumatic experience of dictatorship and were destined for consumption by international audiences rather than local moviegoers. If, as Tamara Falicov notes, "the 'boom' in Argentine cinema during the 1980s helped to shape and sanitize Argentina's image

internationally" ("Film Production" 133), *La redada* stands out as a movie from the transition that speaks against the dictatorship without appealing to an international cinematographic palate. Filmed in 1987 but not released until 1991, *La redada* also straddles the bridge between the highly productive years immediately following the collapse of the Argentine dictatorship and the subsequent period of the early 1990s when national film production was on the decline due to several factors, including the Menem administration's cancellation of state funds for the Institute of Argentine Cinema, the rising costs of movie tickets, the widespread availability of the VCR, and an increasing interest in international films by domestic audiences (Rocha 841). Gonzalo Aguilar notes that in the mid/late nineties, Argentine film production entered a new phase characterized by a shift from state funding to the support of foreign foundations, changes in artistic production, and aesthetic choices that clearly distance these "new" filmmakers from their immediate predecessors. As Aguilar argues, "Argentine cinema of the 1990s is the most genuinely political—that is, as cinema. It opens up the space of indeterminacy; it considers meaning not as a message transmitted but as that which is constructed with shots and with mise-en-scènes; it makes us see and hear imperceptible or less grandiose forms of domination" (123). This aesthetic of contemplating and challenging hegemonic discourse through cinematographic form (rather than overt denunciation) that emerged in the latter part of the nineties is precisely what Pardo was already experimenting with in *La redada*.[8]

Chilean cinema during the Pinochet years suffered a fate similar to its Argentine neighbor as film schools were closed and directors and film technicians were forced into exile or turned to politically neutral jobs in advertising and tourism. In addition, previously vibrant artistic enterprises such as Chile Films lost their state-supported financing and a 1974 decree established a censorship system that allowed the National Film Ratings Board to ban movies for political or ideological reasons (Pick 124). As Ana M. López notes, the "wave of repressive regimes, military *coups d'ëtat*, failed socialist experiments and revolutionary efforts, ballooning foreign debts, and worsening economic conditions" severely diminished cinematic production across the region in the late 1970s and 80s (151). During the dictatorship, however, Chileans in exile made over 150 films in sixteen countries from 1973 to 1983, condemning the military regime's repressive tactics and human rights abuses, as well as exploring the marginalized condition of exile (Campo and Olivarria 148). With the transition to neoliberal democracy, previously shuttered multiplex theatres re-opened and, between 1990 and 1998, thirty-five Chilean feature-length films were released. Compared to the Alfonsín administration's enthusiastic support of national cinema during the Argentine transition, Patricio Aylwin's government and Chilean society in general were much less receptive to national film initiatives, especially those that were critical of the Pinochet regime. It was not until the Chilean Congress's 2001 constitutional reform that film censorship laws were eradicated; and state support for national film initiatives did not return until legislation mandating support for audiovisual productions was passed in 2004.[9] In the decade following Chile's return to democracy, the majority of domestic film productions distanced themselves from narrative content directly associated with the traumas of dictatorship and the experience of exile.[10]

Against this backdrop, Larraín's *La frontera* marks an important contribution to Chilean transitional cinema for several reasons. As a domestic fictional feature film, *La frontera* occupies a cinematographic genre that diverges from the well-established Chilean documentary tradition that took shape largely in exile. In addition, the tone of the film is much less politically explicit than other domestic productions, such as Pablo Perelman's censored film *Imagen latente* (1987) or Miguel Littín's clandestine testimonial *Acta general de Chile* (1985). Set in the latter years of Pinochet's dictatorship, *La frontera* tells the story of Ramiro Orellana (played by Patricio Contreras), a mathematics professor who signs a letter publically denouncing the kidnapping of a colleague. For this act of protest, Ramiro is banished to a desolate coastal region in Southern Chile where the threat of destructive tidal waves is part of everyday life. Here, in a place far removed from the national political capital of Santiago, the director Ricardo Larraín brings to life

a peripheral community of social castaways, forgotten members of the Chilean national family who resist the official message of "consensus and reconciliation" that was touted as the political narrative of the transition. In his interactions with these ec/ex-centric townspeople (in the dual sense of unconventional and outside the geographic center), Ramiro learns how to listen to the voices and the stories of citizens who must survive periodic catastrophic destruction, a clear allusion to the violence of the Chilean dictatorship. Despite their geopolitical isolation, several of these characters evoke what Steve J. Stern has identified as the four memory frameworks that influenced Chileans' recollection of the 1973 coup d'état: the past as unresolved rupture, as persecution and awakening, as a closed box, and as salvation (see *Reckoning*). *La frontera*'s artistic rendition of these frameworks captures a crucial piece of the Chilean collective memory puzzle on the silver screen, providing cinematographic space to voices that were excluded from the official narrative of the transition.

La frontera's spectacular long shots of the rugged southern Chilean coast visually underline the importance of the ocean, a metaphor for the continuity of time that is periodically interrupted by moments of violence or crisis (catastrophic tidal waves). Depending on their particular memory framework, each survivor remembers and reacts differently when the waters have settled once more into a peaceful rhythm of ebb and flow and the time has come for rebuilding. Maite (played by Gloria Laso), whose mother and son were washed out to sea when the last tidal wave destroyed the family home, has been waiting years for an answer about her loved ones. As she puts fresh flowers on a makeshift altar in the remains of her home, Maite tells Ramiro: "Sus cuerpos no aparecieron nunca"—an allusion that places her in the memory camp associated with the "relatives of those who vanished [and who] remembered military rule as an astonishingly cruel and unending rupture of life—an open wound that cannot heal" (Stern, *Reckoning* 5). Ultimately, Maite will not survive the next wave of destruction as she refuses to abandon her past in exchange for a future life with Ramiro. In a flooded basement with the tidal waters slowly rising around her, Maite enters a trance-like state as she rocks her father's lifeless body and sings him a lullaby.[11] At this crucial moment, Ramiro chooses to abandon Maite in her so-called mad devotion to memory in order to survive.

One of the other social castaways in *La frontera* is a nameless scuba diver (played by Aldo Bernales) who invites Ramiro along on his excursions to discover a hole at the bottom of the sea that he believes is causing the tidal waves. The diver's description of the last tidal wave is indicative of his memory framework: "Me acuerdo perfectamente . . . en la noche una ola gigante dejó todo el pueblo bajo el agua. Y lo más importante el agua se fue de un golpe, como si lo hubiera sacado el tapón de la bañera y arrasó con todo lo que tenía por delante." In contrast to Maite's highly charged emotional response to the loss of her family members and inability to move forward, the diver is on a crusade to literally get to the bottom of the cause of the *golpe*—a reference to the political *golpe de estado* led by Pinochet that overthrew Allende's democratically-elected government and violently washed away its supporters. Adhering to the persecution memory framework, the diver looks to Ramiro for help in his quest for the truth, insisting that he cannot complete the task on his own. His constant maritime exploration and use of the word "compañero" (a word that was censored during the dictatorship) further cements *El buzo*'s alignment with a memory framework that evokes the military regime's violent persecution of dissident political agendas and that demands action and change through solidarity.[12] At the end of the film, as the villagers run to the hills in search of higher ground to escape the imminent tidal wave, the diver, dressed in his antiquated scuba gear complete with a copper diving helmet (another vestige of the past that evokes the 1960–70s), is seen descending the embankment toward the ocean, heading to his likely death.

The deaths of both Maite and *El buzo* in *La frontera* represent the demise of two possible ways of confronting the impending violent disaster: on the one hand, Maite's unwillingness to forget and let go of the past in exchange for a better future and, on the other hand, *El buzo*'s idealistic activism that ultimately leads to self-destruction. Through these characters, the film

posits that their associated memory frameworks cannot be counted on to construct the official narrative of the transition. *La frontera* clearly delegates this role of the model survivor and memory craftsman to Ramiro.

La frontera aligns the viewer's perspective with Ramiro from the opening scene as we travel with him in a car to the remote southern Chilean town where he has been banished. The director uses point-of-view shots of the changing landscape and indigenous population to position the viewer *with* Ramiro and to emphasize the "otherness" of this place. As Ramiro comes into contact with the villagers, their difference is stressed through unusual behavior, nonsensical dialogue, and humorous caricature, which clearly contrast with the conventional normality of the middle-class math professor from the capital. Ramiro does have some breakthrough moments when he engages with the marginalized "others," yet, even in these scenes, the filmmaker maintains Ramiro's privileged position through scripted dialogue and his choice of camera angles. For example, before their excursion, the scuba diver claims that Ramiro will somehow be able to see things that he cannot ("un par de ojos nuevos pueden ver lo que los ojos viejos ya no ven de puro acostumbrados"). Then, in a low-angle, back-to-camera shot, his friend crowns Ramiro with his copper helmet. The protagonist's non-frontal position suggests a certain alienation from the surrounding environment, which is then compounded by the low-angle shot that magnifies his importance and cinematographically imbues Ramiro with power and respect.

La frontera suggests that a new national hero must arise from the turbulent political waters.[13] These so-called heroes will be conventional citizens, like Ramiro, who have acquired political consciousness and who will be the public voice of those who cannot speak. In this sense, Ramiro adopts the memory framework associated with the moral awakening of conscience that opposes the amnesiac discourse of mindful forgetting.[14] A closer look at Larraín's construction of the mise-en-scènes, however, reveals that while *La frontera* highlights some of the problematic issues surrounding the discourse of consensus that dominated the transition period in Chile, the film also visually adopts and reflects a hegemonic structural tendency towards concealment, exclusion, and the rejection of heterogeneity, in a more general sense.

In one of the final scenes, as the tidal wave pours through the town, we see a series of faceless silhouettes fleeing to the hills. The cinematographic techniques employed in this scene (slow motion, back lighting, empathetic Andean flute music) create suspense and allude to the mysterious circumstances behind the thousands of forced disappearances that took place during the dictatorship. This absence of specificity with regard to the detained and disappeared was precisely one of the critiques of the discourse of memory during the transition. In *The Insubordination of Signs: Political Change, Cultural Transformation, and Poetics of the Crisis*, Nelly Richard criticized the way in which the Chilean disappeared were left without faces or bodies, without the possibility of being recognized as subjects of history or as subjects with a history. *La frontera*'s allusion to the anonymity of the disappeared in this scene stands in contrast to other artistic visual projects that challenge or transgress, rather than reenact, the official transition narrative.[15]

After this retreat scene, the camera fades to a slow traveling shot that moves through the crowd huddled in the cemetery and ends in a close-up of Ramiro's face, which is illuminated by key lighting, stressing his central role in the next phase of postcatastrophic/postdictatorship Chile. The image of Ramiro's face then dissolves into a series of shots of the tranquil ocean and a flock of white seagulls flying upward, as uplifting orchestral music signals to the viewer that a new day has arrived. Next, Larraín shows the flooded town from the aerial perspective of a rescue helicopter, producing a privileged, dominant view of the scene. Alighting from the *carabinero* helicopter with cameras, representatives from the press are present to document the event. As soldiers unload supplies and descend into the chaotic scene to help the survivors, any indication of past police or military violence is completely absent. The reporter's camera lens frames Ramiro with the calm waters of the sea and a large cross in the background (suggestive of a rebirth or resurrection) and he asks about Ramiro's experience as a victim of the tidal wave and as a *relegado*. After a long weighty pause, Ramiro states his name and the reason for his

internal exile, as well as the name of his disappeared colleague Oscar Aguirre. Although Ramiro verbally repeats the name of his disappeared colleague, the camera shot, through a black and white close-up of the protagonist's face, visually limits what we experience in the final scene of the movie. The aesthetic image is neat, clean, colorless, direct, and simple.

The final scene wraps up Ramiro's personal story (and Chile's political history) by relying on what Nelly Richard describes as the Chilean traditional left's idea of "the deep and true identity of humanistic morality, one that still maintained the integrity of the subject as a full and coherent foundation for representing the world" (*The Insubordination of Signs* 46).[16] Facing the camera, which frames his face like an official portrait taken in black and white tones, Ramiro steps into the role of the "new national hero" who must now reconstruct his life in the wake of disaster. However, in order to rebuild his life, the hero must leave behind a marginalized community of social misfits; abandon the woman who incarnates the unapologetic, insistent memory of the disappeared; and return to the neoliberal Chilean capital. The concluding scene encapsulates the political tension of the transition years: on the one hand, there is a recognition of the violation of human rights and a superficial, empathetic alignment with the victims, but at the same time the protagonist must accept the limitations of the fragile postdictatorship democracy in order to move forward with his own life. The neutral presence of the *carabinero*; the inclusion of uncensored journalists; the bright, natural lighting; Ramiro's reiterated but empty *denuncia*—all of these elements in *La frontera*'s final scene echo the tension that was evident in President Aylwin's televised inaugural speech at the National Stadium on March 12, 1990. Aylwin acknowledged the violence and repression of the Pinochet regime, declaring "Never again!" and yet the new president also implored Chileans to establish a climate of coexistence among civilians and soldiers: "Chile is one only! The guilt of individual persons cannot apply to everyone! We have to be capable of rebuilding *the unity of the Chilean family*!" (Stern, *Reckoning* 31; emphasis mine).

Larraín's film highlights some of the exclusions inherent in this unifying discourse by creating cinematographic space for members of the Chilean family who would not be granted equal voice or representation in the political arena of the postdictatorship era. In addition to Maite and the scuba diver, another character that embodies *La frontera*'s noteworthy attempt to include marginalized members of the Chilean population, while at the same time undermining their presence through cinematographic techniques that mirror dominant hegemonic structures, is the *machi* Hilda (Griselda Núñez): an indigenous Mapuche shaman healer who helps Ramiro survive a life-threatening illness upon his arrival to the village.[17] While conducting research for their project on the representation of native populations in Chilean film, Francisco Gallardo and his colleagues identified only twenty-nine films produced between 1964 and 2003 that focus in a significant way on indigenous issues (Mapuche, Aymara, Atacameños).[18] With less than one film per year highlighting indigenous populations in Chile, *La frontera*'s depiction of a female shaman is worthy of special attention.

In *La frontera*, Hilda appears suddenly, without explanation, at key moments of crisis and always at the service of others. Recognizable elements of Mapuche culture accompany Hilda's interventions (the use of leaves from the sacred *foye* tree and the invocation of male and female spirits to balance the chaotic energy in the universe); yet her magical, arguably miraculous, cure of Ramiro's life-threatening illness in the film differs from the more holistic and practical medical approach that is prevalent in Mapuche culture.[19] This mysterious aura is underscored by certain cinematographic details when Ramiro visits Hilda's home after he recovers to say thank-you. First, Ramiro receives permission to enter her thatched-roof abode; next a dolly-in, hand-held shot through a darkened tunnel-like entryway appears to reflect Ramiro's perspective, but once inside, we realize that he has just come through another doorway opposite the camera lens. This is one of the few occasions that Larraín breaks with his smooth continuity editing, and the unexpected jolting effect contributes to the mysteriousness of the smoky, low-lit interior. Hilda's face is only partially revealed by lateral lighting that mimics the flickering flames from

her fireplace. She moves slowly through the small, shadowy space, which evokes a sense of enclosure in contrast to the sweeping long shots and natural bright lighting of the Chilean sky and coastline that dominate the rest of the film.

In the cemetery scene towards the end of *La frontera*, Hilda implores the male and female energies to *balance* the positive and negative forces in nature by accepting that "now we both [indigenous and foreigners] pay for this wrong."[20] Read in the context of the Chilean transition, the *machi*'s invocation parallels the conciliatory political discourse of the Concertación government, the center-left political coalition that campaigned against Pinochet's continued rule and that dominated the Presidency from 1990 until 2010.[21] While the chant highlights the importance of balance, the Mapuche emphasis on wholeness through interdependence of opposing forces is omitted.[22] This subtle exclusion in the film's representation of the indigenous prayer mirrors the exclusion of polemical and dissenting points of view from the official agenda of the transition and subsequent democratic governments as a means of achieving political consensus.[23] The *machi*'s final words in *La frontera* stress balance (which can be interpreted as consensus or reconciliation) over the Mapuche appreciation and acceptance of difference. During the last scene of the film, Hilda disappears altogether from view as the camera lens focuses exclusively on the middle-class, male, non-indigenous protagonist who will rebuild Chile. Her absence visually echoes the exclusionary politics of the Concertación throughout the 1990s that gave political primacy to neoliberal and capitalist values despite the transitional government's official message of inclusion and diversity.[24]

La frontera captures an important moment in Chilean political and cinematographic history, creatively depicting the memory frameworks that have only recently been articulated by critical theorists like Stern. Produced at the cusp of the transition period, the film includes characters who experience the present through conflicting memory lenses that helped construct collective social memory during democracy (the past as open wound, persecution, moral awakening, and closed box). However, as a cultural artifact of its time, *La frontera* also favors cinematographic techniques that mirror the dominant political discourse of the 1990s: the rejection or exclusion of polemical or differing perspectives in favor of achieving a smooth, consensus-based transition to democracy. In this sense, the film affirms Joanna Page's observation that "[c]inema does not occupy a space external to the events that it registers but is very much part of the economic system, the social relations, and the cultural milieu it might be supposed to depict" (4). Furthermore, by exemplifying how the political can manifest itself through film technique, *La frontera* also prompts us to ask: in the context of transition from authoritarian state rule to democracy, how can aesthetic styles and choices transgress or challenge hegemonic political discourses and narratives? This question will guide our examination of the Argentine film, *La redada*.

Inspired by events that took place in the northwestern city of San Miguel de Tucumán during the 1976–83 military dictatorship, and based on an eponymous short story written by exiled writer Leopoldo Castilla in 1977, *La redada* tells the story of the political persecution of a group of social misfits living on the margins of Argentine society. Employing terminology used by the *junta* to justify state terrorism, the military governor Antonio Domingo Bussi (played by the late Ulises Dumont) decides to "clean the city" of these vagrants, beggars, and prostitutes in anticipation of a visit by General Jorge Rafael Videla. More than two dozen victims, whose only "crime" was not fitting in to the conventional social structure, are loaded into military trucks and abandoned to die in the desert region of the neighboring province of Catamarca. *La redada*'s protagonist, Clemente (Miro Barraza), survives the raid and continually retells the story to those who will listen, more than a decade later, from a present contemporaneous with the film's release in 1991.

Given the broader historical context of this film (filmed in 1987, immediately following the passing of Alfonsín's amnesty laws)[25] and the specific local circumstances in Tucumán,[26] *La redada* highlights the ability of film to recover and remember the unofficial stories of abuse

and violence from the dictatorship while also signaling the difficulty of bringing the responsible parties to justice during democracy. *La redada* showcases an alternative position with respect to the official political discourse of impunity that took hold towards the end of Alfonsín's presidency. Furthermore, by centering the camera lens on characters who challenge conventional norms and inhabit the margins of society, *La redada* also anticipates the critique of widespread economic inequality in the postdictatorship democratic period that would become a common theme in many of the films classified as "new" Argentine cinema of the mid/late 1990s.[27]

La redada tells the story of a group of marginalized individuals referred to by their nicknames, each of whom represents a distinct polemical social reality: madness, prostitution, homosexuality, poverty, corporal mutilation or physical disability, religious cults, and gender discrimination.[28] Pardo refuses to shelter the audience from any uncomfortable moments, portraying the characters in an uncensored, irreverent, and raw style. The filmmaker depicts scenes of La Francesa (Clotilde Pites), a haggard prostitute who parades through the plaza as a caricature of the town's middle-class women; the transgendered Queso i'chancho (played by Baby Acosta) having anal intercourse with a dwarf in a public restroom; a deaf woman who lives in a run-down shack and who shouts garbled nonsense at her four so-called adopted adult sons; a one-legged homeless woman who screams profanities at anyone who crosses her path; and a devil worshipper who raids the town cemetery at night. By structuring the film around these characters and focusing on their perspective, Pardo calls attention to the ways in which society determines who is "normal" and questions to what extent abnormality can be used as an excuse or a justification for human rights abuse. *La redada* does not posit these marginalized characters as an idealized celebration of the "other" but rather constructs a unique cinematographic space where their story can be seen and heard.

At first glance, the characters in *La redada* who are condemned to die at the hands of the military leadership in Tucumán, despite having committed no crime or transgression, can be compared to the villagers in *La frontera* who live an isolated existence and who are united by tragic violence. Yet the cinematographic treatment of these characters and the particular way the filmmakers chose to structure the final scenes point to several significant differences. Unlike Ramiro's clearly articulated distance from the village's inhabitants, Pardo selects his protagonist from among the characters who live in the borderlands of Tucumán. Clemente dwells with his companions under a bridge near a wide river and is subject to the same political persecution and social discrimination. Positioned as a survivor (like Ramiro), Clemente does not escape the raid unscathed. He is left blinded and years later still lives along the riverbank. While *La frontera* focuses its ending on the new Chilean "hero" who will be the face of transitional democracy, *La redada*'s final scene underscores the loss of the victims who are noticeably absent and resists the impulse to monumentalize the lone survivor.

Throughout the film, *La redada* confronts us directly with the "other," unmediated through a conventional character. The soundtrack of the opening flashback mixes the screeching notes of an off-key violin with the grunts of a prostitute's clients, as we see raggedly clothed men milling along a rocky river bank. This scene captures La Francesa having sex, and yet her body is never exposed for the viewer's consumption. The camera lens focuses on her face, covered in poorly applied makeup, but there is no intent to pity, sexualize, or victimize the character. In contrast to this scene, *La frontera* employs a series of stylized cinematographic techniques during Ramiro and Maite's first intimate encounter. Filmed against a choppy ocean with the wind blowing through their hair, Ramiro leans Maite against the exposed roots of a palm tree. As they kiss and embrace, the camera cuts to the town officials running through the woods towards the lovers as loud thunder from an impending storm rumbles in the background. The parallel action suggested by the cross-cut creates an urgency and heightened excitement that is absent from La Francesa's transactional encounter with her anonymous client. While *La frontera* employs dramatic and romantic Hollywoodesque strategies to draw the viewer into the pleasure of the scene, *La redada*

refuses to sexualize the town prostitute and leaves the viewer in a position from which s/he must confront otherness and difference, rather than identify with the character.

Throughout the opening flashback, Pardo mixes high and low angles and relies on abrupt cuts, rather than dissolves or fades, that jump from close-ups to long and medium shots. The editing sequence also violates the 30-degree rule requiring that the camera position be at least thirty degrees from the previous one, when there is a cut to another shot of the same subject, to avoid jolting the spectator (Hayward 475–76). These cinematographic techniques (which are employed throughout the film) resist the smooth visual effects of continuity editing that dominate *La frontera*. By calling attention to the artifice of film through rough montage and the violation of classical continuity techniques, *La redada* provides an opportunity for the viewer to break away from the role of passive consumer and to question the causal narrative logic of traditional film plots. However, given the sociopolitical context of the dictatorship and transition to democracy, Pardo's filmic techniques should not be interpreted as an attempt to evade or escape the reality of the moment. Rather, by highlighting the imperfections of cinematographic production, *La redada* reminds the viewer that this story does not have a neat ending.[29]

In this sense, the film's approach to telling the story of the raid reflects a certain critical approach to the politics of memory: "Es evitar que la historia se agote en la lógica del *documento* . . . o del *monumento*. . . . Es mantener la relación entre presente y pasado abierto a la fuerza del recuerdo como desencaje y expectación. Es impedir que la historia se convierta en la figura estática de un tiempo clausurado" (Richard, *Políticas* 11–12). This sentiment is clearly expressed in a humorous scene where the city's artists scramble to create a series of sculptures that will be used to inaugurate the grand Avenue of National Heroes. As General Bussi walks through the center of the *Avenida de Próceres*, admiring the statues of Tucumán's military and political dignitaries, the camera zooms in on the unfinished wet clay sliding off the figures. We see that some of the statues are actually the artists themselves covered in white plaster, trying to stand motionless as Bussi passes by. This scene captures the futility of Bussi's attempt to consecrate his place in the official history of the nation, and points out the importance of appreciating aesthetic imperfection as a strategy for transgressing the tendency towards consensus and political amnesia that arose during the postdictatorship era.

Finally, let us turn to *La redada*'s concluding scene where Pardo deliberately engages the concept of transition in several different ways, from the literal to the aesthetic to the political. Now blind, Clemente still visits the river and, when the waters swell, he swims across to the other side—an action that plays into the etymological roots of the word "transition" which comes from the Latin "transire" meaning "to go over or cross." Clemente's attempts to cross the river (a departure from the original short story) can be interpreted as his active decision to confront and navigate the muddy, contaminated political currents of the present. In terms of the cinematographic transitions in this scene, the camera shots are pieced together from different, non-logical angles and distances that alternate between Clemente and the two men who are observing from the shore. A low-angle, frontal medium shot of Clemente (impossible from the perspective of the two witnesses) cuts to a back-to-camera, long shot of the blind man as he walks into the water and leaps into the waves; a close-up shot of the muddy waves cuts to a lateral, long shot of the two other men walking under the bridge towards the water. Here, not only does the abrupt montage sequence resist the smooth transitions of continuity editing, it also denies us any point-of-view shots from Clemente's perspective, a reminder that we can never truly understand his experience. Just as the choice of camera angles in this final scene distances the viewer from a facile association with the surviving victim, the jumpy editing techniques (that produce a fragmented sense of space and time) and the inclusion of Clemente's actual leap into the cold river (rather than the commonly used match cut to suggest the immersion which would shield the actor from the physical discomfort of getting wet) align with a theoretical discourse that is critical of the consensus politics that emerged during the Argentine and Chilean transition

periods.[30] In *The Art of Transition*, Francine Masiello notes the use of the fragment as a means of resisting totalizing concepts and as an alternative to lineal memory: "the uneven fragment, and hybrid forms of representation give voice to unplanned messages; they open to a culture of the margin. In the process, they override any totalizing effects identified with official power and suggest an alternative to historical memory as a concept complete in itself" (190). Clemente's leap into the cold, contaminated river transmits, on the one hand, a feeling of senselessness, a rupture with conventional logic that moves away from nostalgia and suggests a relationship with the past that is critical and uncomfortable. Clemente's repeated attempts to cross over the polluted present represent the kind of memory that insists on unexpected jumps between the past and the present, resisting the smooth, forward-moving concept of time that structures official accounts of history.

Finally, *La redada*'s closing, static, long shot privileges the lone survivor, without recourse to an empathy-evoking close-up shot, like the one of Ramiro in the final scene of *La frontera*. In the last frame of this latter film, the close-up draws the viewer in emotionally and stresses the importance of a singular protagonist, the newly conscientious citizen who is poised to return to the capital but at the cost of leaving behind the individuals whose memory texts fall outside the dominant political narrative. At the conclusion of *La redada*, on the other hand, the camera is located on the riverbank, at a considerable distance from the protagonist who sits alone on a rocky island, a border zone, both territorial and ideological, on the fringes of society. The camera position both distances the viewer from an emotional connection with Clemente and makes visible the absence of his companions who no longer inhabit this space. Clemente sits next to a sign that reads: "PELIGRO: AGUAS CONTAMINADAS." This written message alludes to the murky politics of the dictatorship while also suggesting that the politics of the present flow from the past, dragging along with them structures of power and systems of thought that continue to discriminate, homogenize, and exclude subjects who do not fit within their borders. Clemente's act of swimming upstream is perhaps one of the only recourses he has to stem the political currents of forgetfulness that tried to wash away the crimes committed during the dictatorship. Whereas Ramiro ultimately survives and is ready to move past the destruction of the tidal wave by returning to the nation's center, Clemente's continual immersion into and subsequent emergence from the polluted political waters point to the possibility of intervening and dislocating, albeit temporarily, the hegemonic structures that produce a unifying discourse intended to ensure citizens that all is well in these democratic times.[31]

In 2013, Argentina commemorated thirty years since the country's return to democracy and Chile marked the fortieth anniversary of the coup d'état that overthrew the Allende government in 1973. This comparative study of the award-winning Chilean film *La frontera* and the neglected Argentine production *La redada* brings us back to the historical moment of transition, when dictatorship was giving way to democracy, and examines how cinematographic productions contributed to the ways in which collective memories of the traumatic dictatorship years would be constructed. While *La frontera* acutely represented the different memory lenses that were utilized during the transition to deal with the past, the film's treatment of secondary characters and concluding scenes also mirror the consensus-building, hegemonic narrative that dominated the political arena of the 1990s.[32] *La redada*, on the other hand, favors an aesthetic that relies on fragmentation, that provides a cinematic space for the socially marginalized, and that posits the work of memory as an ongoing activity that entails continual leaps and jumps between the past and the present—characteristics that point to the film's ability to anticipate a shift in Argentine cinematographic trends and to perceptively discern how collective memory might function in postdictatorial democracy. Precisely because of these differences, a comparative analysis of these films reminds us of the importance of this crucial moment in the Southern Cone, both historically and in the present day, and contributes to a layered understanding of "transition" as a complex aesthetic, cinematographic and political concept.

NOTES

[1] Cuts, or the splicing together of two shots, are the building blocks of the film-editing process and involve direct intervention on the part of the director and production team. In her definition of the term "cut," Hayward writes, "Between sequences the cut marks a rapid transition between one time and space and another, but depending on the nature of the cut it will have different meanings" (95). See also part one on "film language" in Braudy and Cohen for a historical analysis of the editing process, and Burch's discussion of different temporal and spatial articulations that are possible in the transitions between shots (Chapter 1, "Theory of Film Practice").

[2] Masiello defines transition in Latin America as the "mov[e] from conditions of dictatorship to democracy under neoliberal rule" (xi). For a political and economic comparative study of the military dictatorships in Argentina and Chile, see Dávila's *Dictatorship in South America*. For information on the subsequent transition(s) to democracy, see Borzutzky and Oppenheim's *After Pinochet: The Chilean Road to Democracy and the Market* and McSherry's *Incomplete Transition: Military Power and Democracy in Argentina*.

[3] The classic film studies definition of "mise-en-scène" (as developed by Bordwell and Thompson in *Film Art: An Introduction*) refers to the theatrical elements staged in front of the camera (setting, props, lighting, costumes, makeup, acting) that the director then guides within the frame. Gibbs has contested this formulation of the term, noting that it makes no reference to camera movement or position, nor to shot composition (53–54). In this study, I follow Gibbs's expanded characterization of mise-en-scène which Aguilar has succinctly described as "the combination of what happens *with* the shot and what happens *in* the shot, or, in stricter terms, the complex combination of sequences of the shot and its components" (2).

[4] The Latin American Studies Association recent debate series on Democracy in 21st Century Latin America, published in *LASA Forum* (Fall 2013 and Winter 2014), includes a compilation of case studies that highlight examples of exclusion and inequality under the banner of democratic structures throughout Latin America. In the case of Argentina, Svampa notes that while the post-transition democratic Kirchner administrations began with a promising pro human rights, anti-neoliberal, heterodox economic platform (under the leadership of the late Néstor Kirchner), the government (led by his wife Cristina Fernández since 2007) has remained loyal to the progressive middle class and favors alliances with multinational corporations (agrobusiness, megamining, fracking, and tourism) that have been linked to public land dispossession and the suspicious deaths of rural workers. In the case of Chile, massive student-organized protests that began in 2011 have called attention to the spiraling costs of the public education system, crippling student loan debt, widespread economic inequality, and the legacy of Pinochet-era electoral laws that disproportionately favor conservative right-wing parties.

[5] According to WorldCat, there are 149 libraries with copies of *La frontera* worldwide (89 have the DVD and 60 house the VHS version). More recently, the film has also been made available for viewing through Chile's Cineteca Nacional Digital Archive: search for "La frontera" at http://cinetecadigital.ccplm.cl/ via the online catalogue. My research on *La redada* was made possible by support from the University of California, Irvine and Jorge Ruffinelli who graciously facilitated my access to the film at Stanford University (where the only catalogued library copy worldwide is housed). *La redada* has been recently uploaded to YouTube. However, given the clear copyright violation and the unpredictable nature of this user-generated video-sharing website, it is not clear how long the film will be available through this medium.

[6] Some well-known examples of this cinematic tendency during the Argentine transition period include *Camila*, *La historia oficial*, *La noche de los lápices*, and *Hombre mirando al sudeste*. See also Andermann (3–4) and Falicov's *The Cinematic Tango: Contemporary Argentine Film* for a discussion of this trend.

[7] For more information on how Alfonsín's cultural policy initiatives affected the Argentine postdictatorship film industry, see Stites Mor (75–96).

[8] The concept of hegemony here and throughout the paper refers to the complex, dynamic process in which political, cultural, and social forces interact to produce a dominant system of values and beliefs that leads to sedimented forms of political order, the repression of difference, and the dominance of established political power. See the chapter on "Hegemony" in Raymond Williams's *Marxism and Literature*. For more contemporary formulations of the concept, see Critchley and Marchart's *Laclau: A Critical Reader*.

[9] Passed in November of 2004, Law 19.981 (La Ley de Fomento Audiovisual) mandated funding for the promotion of national audiovisual initiatives (including development, creation, research, dissemination, protection, and preservation) through the government's Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes.

[10] These characteristics sharply contrast with the politically engaged Chilean cinematic productions from the 1960s and early 1970s and the handful of militant clandestine films created by resistance artists

during the dictatorship. See Mouesca and Orellana for a concise history of Chilean film production from 1902 through the first decade of the twenty-first century.

[11] *La frontera*'s depiction of Maite as a madwoman who chooses to die rather than to let go of the violent past and the memory of her lost relatives unwittingly reflects a similar discourse used by the military regime during the dictatorship in Argentina to brand the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo as *locas* for their weekly demonstrations demanding the return of their missing children.

[12] Stern describes the "memory as persecution" framework as a direct response by human rights victims and activists to counter the pro-junta vision of the coup d'état as "salvation" from chaos. The persecution framework instead emphasized the Pinochet's regime as a "turn from a historical tradition of constitutionalism and democracy to one-man rule backed by a secret police; the economic shock policy that destroyed social and labor rights, denationalized the economy, and condemned many to poverty; the wave of officially denied abductions, tortures, disappearances, and killings of dissenting citizens" (*Battling for Hearts and Minds* 144).

[13] The possible emergence of a national hero is evoked in an earlier diving scene where Ramiro finds a statue on the ocean floor that depicts the famous "Abrazo de Maipú," a symbolic embrace between the founding fathers of Chilean independence, José de San Martín and Bernardo O'Higgins.

[14] Stern uses this term to describe his fourth memory framework, "memory as mindful forgetting, a closing of the box on the times of 'dirty' war and excess. In this perspective, the early junta years had been times of dirty war that were now thankfully superseded. . . . It would do no good to society to revisit the wounds and excesses of those times" (*Battling for Hearts and Minds* 3).

[15] One such example is Pérez and Gómez's *Muro de la memoria* (2001), a ceramic tile mural composed of photographic portraits of 950 Chilean citizens who were disappeared during Pinochet's dictatorship. The mural was installed on one of the bridges that cross the Río Mapocho, in the center of Santiago. Instead of using the state-issued ID card photos, the artists painstakingly gathered images from the families and friends of the disappeared to "evoke an anterior life, a happy life, a life before the disaster that allows passers-by to see the victims not as subversives or revolutionaries, but as human beings, as Chileans like themselves" (Lazzara 116).

[16] Richard counters this idea of the whole subject with the Chilean *avanzada*'s concept of the nonsubject or "the subject in crisis, deconstructed, fragmented into multiple impulses, that expressed itself through personal biography in reaction to the failure of large ideological delineations of collective identity. Those diminished expressions of a fragile, trembling identity did not fit with the Subject of Resistance" (*The Insubordination of Signs* 46).

[17] Female *machi* have a long history of marginalization in Chilean history, literature, and the arts. Bacigalupo notes that "Female *machi* also existed in the seventeenth century, but the chroniclers had limited access to them and little interest in documenting their practices" ("The Struggle" 498).

[18] Only four are feature-length non-documentaries, two of which are Perelman's *Archipiélago* and Littín's *Tierra del fuego*.

[19] See Bacigalupo's *Shamans of the Foye Tree: Gender, Power, and Healing among Chilean Mapuche* for a detailed and in-depth explanation of Mapuche *machi* medical and spiritual practices (33).

[20] Chanted in an indigenous language, the English subtitles read: "Why are you punishing us, Father and Mother, Male and Female energies that rule the universe? . . . Male energy, hear us out, give us more life, say your children. Do not misunderstand our actions, give a good life to your children. Remove the evil from their path. Give strength to the earth so that within the Universe it can balance positive and negative. Why do you punish us when we kneel to you, begging you to stop the punishment? . . . It was the foreigners whose evil ways poisoned your blood in this space, O Universe. Now we both pay for this wrong."

[21] The 2012 film *No*, directed by Pablo Larraín and starring Gael García Bernal, chronicles the creation of the Concertación coalition's 1998 ad campaign aimed at convincing Chilean viewers to vote "No" on the referendum determining if Pinochet would remain in power. The film posits that the upbeat, musical slogan ("La alegría ya viene") was an important factor in Pinochet's defeat and the return to democracy in 1990.

[22] The Mapuche map of reality (upon which they model relationships between the spiritual and human worlds) involves the interdependence of four cosmological realms—masculine, feminine, youth, old age—all of which are complementary and necessary for wholeness (Bacigalupo, *Shamans of the Foye Tree* 47).

[23] Richard criticizes the Concertación as "'la democracia de los acuerdos' [que] privilegió los pactos y las negociaciones a través de una política del consenso que dejaba fuera de la agenda oficial todos aquellos temas polémicos y disensuales en torno a los cuales que generaron enfrentamientos de puntos de vista: desde los temas de derechos humanos hasta los temas valóricos" ("Entrevistas").

[24] The marginalization of indigenous communities (both rural and urban) in Chile has been well documented, and in the context of the transition, the treatment of the Mapuche communities by the

government "exposed a state tilt toward powerful investor groups, and an ethnocentrism that marginalized Mapuche communities and leaders from the circle of effective dialogue" (Stern, *Reckoning* 345).

[25] Alfonsín began his presidency promisingly in 1983 by rescinding the junta's parting amnesty to military officers guilty of human rights violations and by creating CONADEP, the Argentine Commission on the Disappearance of Persons. However, shortly after, in 1986, Alfonsín's party led Congress to pass the Ley de Punto Final and Ley de Obediencia Debida, both of which severely limited the government's ability to prosecute military and police officers for crimes against humanity.

[26] When Pardo's film premiered in 1991, General Bussi was running for the gubernatorial position in Tucumán. His rival was the former actor/singer Palito Ortega whose movies during the dictatorship have been widely recognized as proregime propaganda. The appearance in the political arena of these two figures who were so closely aligned with the dictatorship is an example of the amnesia or "willful forgetting" that permeated the later transition period of the 1990s that coincides with the present of Pardo's film.

[27] See Aguilar's excellent analysis of this cinematic trend in *Other Worlds: New Argentine Film* and Page's *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema*. Considered the founding film of the not-so "New Argentine Cinema," *Pizza, birra, faso* explores the social realities deriving from mass unemployment, the changing role of the state, and the effects of global capitalism in Buenos Aires during the mid-to-late 1990s.

[28] All of the original characters from Castilla's short story appear in the film: Clemente, Machaquito, la Francesa, Lucifer, el "Nohaydequé," la Pata i' catre, el Queso i'Chancho, la Muda y sus cuatro mendigos adoptados, and el Kikiriki. Pardo adds a few new characters, including el Viborero, Huguito, Tarrocefálico, and el Poeta.

[29] As summarized in Braudy and Cohen's introduction to the section "Film and Reality" in *Film Theory and Criticism*, Deleuze argued that the conditions created in modern art cinema "disrupt the orderly narrative procedures of the commercial Hollywood film and inaugurate a more difficult cinema whose images are no longer linked by rational cuts, whose spaces are empty, fragmentary, and discontinuous, and whose characters are seers rather than doers, visionaries rather than agents" (139). In his essay "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice," Bordwell, referring to the art cinema of the 1960s, notes that "such films make you leave the theatre thinking . . . : the ambiguity, the play of thematic interpretation, must not be halted at the film's close. . . . [L]ife lacks the neatness of art and *this art knows it*" (61).

[30] Latin American cultural critics such as Richard and Perlongher, clearly influenced by Deleuze's conceptualization of "the minor," emphasize the creative potential of the fragment, in-between spaces, local struggle, and marginal subjects to challenge hegemonic political and historical discourses of the present. Richard "reaches for the power of disruption found in local resistance and social action. Translated to art and literature, a splintering of any totalizing vision stands as a form of rebellion against state power and its patterns of fixed representation. By extension, the local struggle shows the exclusions of postdictatorial democracy and neoliberal rule" (qtd. in Masiello 12).

[31] This strategy parallels one of the tenets of radical democracy developed by Laclau and Mouffe in which the subaltern "other" persistently emerges into the political field to destabilize the dominant discourses of systematic coherence and knowability. Gareth Williams asks how we might envision the negativity of the "other" articulated by Laclau as potentially constitutive of an "other" politics. "This negativity appears to ground itself not so much in the incorporation of subalternity as an inferior position within a hegemonic articulation, but rather as the opening up of the political field to an incommensurable dominant/subaltern relationality" (131).

[32] In 2011, this narrative began to publicly unravel as a growing Chilean youth movement took to the streets to protest the lack of federal support for education, excessive economic inequality, and rising student loan debt. A *New York Times* article noted: "Even as Chile appears to the outside world to be a model of economic consistency and prudent fiscal management, there is deep discontent here with the neoliberal model and its economic consequences for those who are not part of the economic elite" (Barrionuevo).

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