

Bodies in Motion:
María Luisa Bemberg's Filmic Approach
to Women and their Journeys

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ABSTRACT

Argentina's film industry and feminist movement both emerged at the turn of the twentieth century and evolved side by side. However, from the 1900s to the 1970s, the number of women in front of the camera in Argentina far exceeded the mere three directing behind it: two female directors during the silent era (1901-1928), none throughout the Golden Age of Argentine cinema (1930-1950) and one in the 1960s. Not until the 1970s do feminism and film finally intersect in the figure of Argentine film director María Luisa Bemberg. A unique female perspective grounded in her feminist ideals distinguishes Bemberg from her predecessors. In her short, impressive career, Bemberg subverts stereotypical images of women in Argentine cinema to leave a legacy of female protagonists that embody a new model of 'woman' in film.

This dissertation studies Bemberg's framing of women and their spatial movement in her historical biographies: *Camila* (1984), *Miss Mary* (1986) and *Yo, la peor de todas* (1990). Bemberg correlates her female protagonists' transgressive movements with their desire for independence. The director's female perspective exposes the political, social and cultural problems that continue to repress women and which each of her nonconforming protagonists, in her own way, is meant to reveal. This study makes an important contribution to existing scholarship on Argentine cinema in particular and to film studies in general since few studies exist that specifically explore women's movement framed through the cinematographic gaze of a female director.

First, I delineate the histories of Argentine film and of the feminist movement before exploring women's roles in the film industry. Through a selection of Argentine 'Golden Age' films, I examine the female stereotypes and conventions of spatial movement to assess whether Bemberg breaks away aesthetically. Finally, I apply aspects of Giuliana Bruno's feminist film theory to analyze Bemberg's spatial framing of women in her biographical films.

SOMMAIRE

L'industrie cinématographique et le mouvement féministe en Argentine ont tous deux émergés au début du XX^e siècle et ont évolué côte à côte. Toutefois, entre les années 1900 et les années 1970, il y avait beaucoup plus d'actrices que de réalisatrices dans le cinéma argentin: deux réalisatrices à l'époque du film muet (1901-1928), aucune pendant l'âge d'or du cinéma argentin (1930-1950) et une dans les années 1960. Ce n'est que dans les années 1970 que féminisme et cinéma se croisent finalement dans l'œuvre de la réalisatrice María Luisa Bemberg. Bemberg se distingue de ses prédécesseurs par sa perspective féminine unique soutenue par ses idéaux féministes. Au cours de sa courte et impressionnante carrière, Bemberg a renversé les images stéréotypées de la femme dans le cinéma argentin pour faire place à une lignée de protagonistes féminines qui incarnent un nouveau modèle de femmes dans le cinéma.

Cette thèse étudie la représentation des femmes et leur mouvement spatial dans les biographies historiques de Bemberg: *Camila* (1984), *Miss Mary* (1986) et *Yo, la peor de todas* (1990). Dans ces films, Bemberg montre la relation entre les mouvements transgressifs de ses protagonistes féminins et leur désir d'indépendance. La perspective féminine et féministe de la réalisatrice révèle les enjeux et institutions politiques, sociaux et culturels qui ont opprimé les femmes et que ses protagonistes tentent de combattre afin de s'affirmer en tant qu'êtres pensants libres. La cartographie de la trajectoire spatiale des personnages féminins dans les films de Bemberg qui est élaborée dans cette thèse représente une contribution importante à la recherche sur le cinéma argentin ainsi qu'aux études cinématographiques féministes.

La présente étude commence avec un survol de l'histoire du cinéma et du mouvement féministe argentin. Elle explore par la suite le rôle des femmes et les stéréotypes féminins dans le cinéma argentin. Cette analyse me permettra de mieux dégager les caractéristiques de l'esthétique féministe de Bemberg. La théorie cinématographique féministe de Giuliana Bruno servira de cadre conceptuel à une analyse détaillée du cadrage spatial utilisé par Bemberg dans ses films biographiques.

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Women and their nomadic journeys both imagined and real, not only Camila's, Miss Mary's, Sor Juana's, and María Luisa Bemberg's, but also my own. The best journeys are often shared and this one is no exception, one that I could not have made alone.

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*The true journey of discovery lies not in seeing
new landscapes but in having new eyes*
Marcel Proust

Introduction

Nowhere has the ideology of male ascendancy been more evident in society than in the film industry's historical predominance of male directors. Argentine cinema shares this same reality throughout the twentieth century as the number of women in front of the camera far exceeded those directing behind it. In fact, only two Argentine female directors, Emily Saleny and María V. Celestini are acknowledged to have released films during the silent era (1901-1928). Female directors were absent throughout the Golden Age of Argentine cinema (1930-1950) until the 1960s when Vlasta Lah directed *Las furias* (1960) and *Las modelos* (1962). In the 1970s María Herminia Avellaneda directed *Juguemos en el mundo* (1971) and Eva Landeck *Gente de Buenos Aires* (1974) and *Este loco amor* (1979) (Vilaboa). Perhaps because of their experience working with male directors or because they did not consider it, none of these films offers a feminist perspective.

Directing films from a female and feminist perspective is what distinguishes María Luisa Bemberg from her predecessors.¹ In the early 1970s, Bemberg, by

¹ In this dissertation, I use the terms "female perspective," "female gaze," and "female aesthetic" in my analysis of Bemberg films. Although the current scholarly position contends that one cannot at present claim that filmic/cinematic gaze is gendered, existing scholarship on Bemberg's films has focused her "female gaze" on political, cultural and gender issues and my dissertation aims to complement and enrich these studies. Moreover, since the films under discussion were released between 1980 and 1990, I believe that the use of these terms is valid. In her essay, "On Female Identity and Writing by Women" (1980), Judith Kegan Gardiner states, "women's experiences

then a grandmother, an activist in the Argentine feminist movement and co-founding member of the *Unión Feminista Argentina* (UFA), was involved in consciousness-raising campaigns that challenged the traditional restrictive roles of women in society. In support of feminist ideals, she directed two short films, *El mundo de la mujer* (1972) and *Juguetes* (1978), pioneering works whose message is still relevant (Calvera, “Biography”).

As a feminist,² Bemberg complains that the image of women in film and television “es tan lamentable que quiero demostrar que hay mujeres pensantes, activas, que no padecen un destino sino que lo asumen” (Núñez).³ As a filmmaker, Bemberg vows to promote women’s rights by portraying images of women that are different from what she considers the traditional “sweet, corrupt, and complacent” female stereotypes (Bemberg qtd. in Pauls 112 and King 221). As she states of her films: “Decidí que todas mis historias fueran narradas de modo que el hilo conductor fuera una mujer transgresora a las leyes que nos reprimen, porque la transgresión es la esencia de la libertad” (Burton-Carvajal, “Firmar” 77).⁴ By representing female characters as victims of a system that relegates women to an

differ from men’s in profound and regular ways” (178). She explains further, “In a male dominated society, being a man means not being like a woman. As a result, the behavior considered appropriate to each gender becomes severely restricted and polarized” (189). Gardiner believes that these differences in experience will be apparent in the writing. Finally, she states, “female identity is a process” (179). From these statements, it is possible to conclude that gender influences development of the personality, which in turn, influences a male and female perspective.

² Although feminism defines Bemberg’s ideological position, she states that she does not wish to be pigeonholed as a “feminist” alone as this would impoverish her by ignoring her other personal and professional accomplishments (F. López, *Crónica* 6).

³ Bemberg seizes the opportunity to change this image in film: “Uno de los compromisos éticos y morales que asumí cuando decidí hacer cine era tratar de romper el cliché tradicional que tiene el cine sobre la mujer, estereotipo con el cual es difícil que las mujeres pensantes puedan identificarse” (Burton-Carvajal, “Firmar” 78).

⁴ In this dissertation, all of Bemberg’s direct quotes are kept in the language in which they appear in the original interview or text cited; therefore these quotes will alternate between Spanish or English.

unjust and oppressive order (Fontana 18) Bemberg criticizes Argentina's patriarchal society and denounces gender roles for what they are: designed to repress women and enforce their inferior status, although she also blames women for their passive acceptance and submissiveness to their prescribed dependent role.

Based on these ideas, Bemberg brings her filmic direction into focus. She would show "mujeres de carne y hueso, con todas las contradicciones y los conflictos que tiene un ser humano, mujeres que no padecen pasivamente su destino, sino que se juegan, que son audaces, valientes, honestas consigo mismas, que se atreven" (Burton-Carvajal, "Firmar" 77). In another interview she states, "Me gusta toda mujer que viva según sus pautas internas, que sea lo bastante libre y corajuda como para salirse del 'molde'" (Soares 88). With a desire to create a new model of "woman" for future generations to emulate, Bemberg's protagonists are normally atypical because they express female reactions and desires, question convention, dare to be different and have the courage to rebel against the patriarchal system. Bemberg's message to Argentine women of her generation and women everywhere is clear. First, women must recognize the institutions that traditionally mould them into complacent reproductions of the patriarchal order. Then, women must listen to their own internal voices and question, challenge and rebel against established conventions that channel them into stereotypical roles. Listening to her own voice, Bemberg commits to delivering her feminist message through film, with nonconforming female protagonists and from a woman's point of view. In so doing, Bemberg's filmmaking renovates the conventional framing of women in Argentine cinema.

This dissertation explores Bemberg's approach to women and their journeys by analyzing the framing of spatial movement in her historical film biographies: *Camila*, *Miss Mary* and *Yo, la peor de todas*. The theoretical orientation of my dissertation is based on film and visual cultures scholar Giuliana Bruno's film theory and perspective on spatio-visual arts. In *Atlas of Emotion* (2007), Bruno proposes a feminist strategy for reading space by expanding traditional travel discourse and the definition of journey to include women's subjectivity⁵ and emotion. Bruno's feminist film theory describes 'emotion' as an interior landscape of "sensational movements" (219)⁶ and argues for an understanding of perception that incorporates both the optic and the haptic or tactile (251). Bruno develops a theory that connects spatial circulation and the emotive terrain of her female traveler (*the voyageuse*). The *voyageuse* is defined as a nomadic subject, based in part on Rosi Braidotti's theory that "to move away from hegemonic and dominant practices is itself a form of nomadism: it is *the subversion of set conventions* that defines the nomadic state, *not the literal act of traveling*" (Bruno 114-115; Braidotti 5; emphasis added).

By applying Bruno's film theory on spatial circulation to the female protagonists in these historical biographies, I argue that Bemberg adopts a feminist

⁵ In this dissertation, I shall use Mansfield's definition of "subjectivity" as an "abstract or general principle that defies our separation into distinct selves and that encourages us to [. . .] understand why, our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, either as objects of need, desire and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience. In this way, the subject is always linked to something outside of it [. . .] The word subject, therefore, proposes that the self is not a separate and isolated entity, but one that operates at the intersection of general truths and shared principles" (Mansfield 3).

⁶ Unless stated otherwise, all references to Bruno are from *Atlas of Emotion Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film*. I interpret Bruno's use of "sensational" to mean "sensory," i.e. related to the senses, in this context.

strategy for reading space by framing their movements using both haptic⁷ and architectural elements. These elements normally signal a protagonist's passage to spaces of transgression or to emotional places of feminine subjectivity. Bemberg's filmic framing of women's journeys through both external and internal sites not only affects the traditional representation of home, landscape and geography in these films, but also reveals new ways of presenting larger political, social or cultural problems that continue to repress women: problems that each of Bemberg's transgressive women, in her own way, is meant to reveal.

María Luisa Bemberg: Biography

As both a feminist and a female director, Bemberg represented the essence of a nomadic *voyageuse* in her own life, not only because she travelled extensively but because, despite the difficulties and pressures from her aristocratic family and social class, she questioned norms and broke set conventions. Bemberg perceived feminists as transgressors who were breaking the thousand-year-old mould of the traditional male-dominated family (González 10). Feminism,⁸ for Bemberg, was not only a battle of the sexes, but also a struggle against the dominant *machismo* historically imposed by men and complacently accepted by most women (F. López, "María Luisa Bemberg" 66). Bemberg's feminist approach to her films was in

⁷ Bruno's definition of haptic not only includes "the ability to come into contact with" but also kinesthesia, or "the ability of our bodies to *sense* their own movement in space," and thus includes the other senses and their relation to space in her shift from an optic to a haptic reading (Bruno 6).

⁸ Leonor Calvera defined Argentine feminism in the 1970s as follows: "Habíamos sostenido que nuestro adversario era el sexismo, esto es la distribución de roles en función del sexo, que le dificulta a la mujer las posibilidades para ejercer cualquier tarea independiente, desde el logro de la subsistencia económica hasta el derecho a pensar como ser auto-determinado (Calvera, *Mujeres* 48). As a co-founder of the UFA (Unión Feminista Argentina), Bemberg subscribes to this definition of feminism.

itself an act of transgression intent on critiquing Argentina's patriarchal society, which enforced an inferior status on women and stifled their attempts at creativity (King, *An Argentine Passion* 26). In an interview with Nissa Torrents, Bemberg describes her female protagonists:

In my films, women always rebel. Against their husbands and families in *Momentos* and *Señora de nadie*, and in a larger field in *Camila*, against the Family, the State and the Church. In *Miss Mary*, the governess [. . .] intends to rebel but, like the other women in the film, she is defeated. Nobody makes it. The atmosphere is too oppressive, too rigid. The class pressures are too strong [. . .]. (Torrents 171)

Bemberg's words perhaps echo her own experience as a woman raised in Argentina's upper class; like her female protagonists, Bemberg herself was a rebel. As Jorge Ruffinelli explains, women of her generation and social class were expected to marry and confine their public activities to their class. Not only did Bemberg defy these limitations by embracing the predominantly masculine activity of filmmaking, but moreover her films were acts of transgression, because they criticized the relationship between her own upper class and the patriarchal powers of Argentina which, she claims, were responsible for many of the country's social and political problems (Ruffinelli 16-17; King, *An Argentine Passion* 221). If Bemberg's career choice and film topics marginalized her within her social group, paradoxically her social class and economic power facilitated her entry into the film industry; she had the financial resources to fund her first film and to secure the technical and professional cinematographic expertise that she may have otherwise lacked (Bueno 93).

Born on April 14, 1922, the third of five children, into one of the wealthiest and influential Argentine families, Bemberg lived in Argentina during three important historical eras: the Infamous Decade (1930-1943)⁹; all but two years of the first Peronist Era (1945-1955); and the military dictatorship of the Proceso (1976-1983). Although Bemberg had a privileged upbringing in her formative years during the 1930s, it was also a potentially oppressive one (King, *An Argentine Passion* 1). As King explains, elite Argentine parents had firm ideas about their children's education. As part of the elite Argentine education process, Bemberg's two eldest brothers went to school abroad, first to Switzerland and then to the United States where they obtained doctorates at Harvard (8). On the other hand, she and her two sisters were home-schooled by private teachers and governesses who stressed language learning, reading, music and dance — the refinements required by the female offspring to secure a successful match in society. The sisters did however accompany their parents on long business and cultural trips abroad, and King argues that these trips helped shape Bemberg's strong visual and aesthetic insight through first-hand contacts with works of art in galleries and museums (*An Argentine Passion* 6-9). Bemberg reflected this upbringing in her most autobiographical film, *Miss Mary*; like the girls in the film, María Luisa and her sisters remained at home under the tutelage of twenty-two governesses (*An Argentine Passion* 10) with little hope of an independent career.

Bemberg admits that her interest in film must have been present, at an unconscious level, during her childhood and adolescence. She recalls that as a child

⁹ Also known as Conservative Restoration, it defined a time during which a small group of conservatives maintained power by falsifying elections and banning other political parties (King, *An Argentine Passion* 11).

she drew scenes with dialogue boxes reminiscent of a *storyboard*, which she then staged as a puppet theatre for her sisters and cousins. With a couch serving as a stage and lamps positioned as spotlights, she played all the roles (Trelles 108). Although she had always aspired to be an actress, her conservative family prevented her from pursuing this career; as she confesses, “Me faltó la libertad interior para salirme del carril que me habían delineado” (qtd. in Trelles 108). Bemberg’s personality was shaped by resistance. Bemberg has stated that as a young girl she disliked her authoritarian and prejudicial father who was so concerned with her beauty and virtue and showed little interest in her intelligence and education; later in life she understood that the Bemberg fortune had imprisoned him in a life that he had not chosen (Fontana 15; King, *An Argentine Passion* 7). As an adult, she now realized that the factors that conditioned her youth were being born a woman in a patriarchal system in which the feminine was and probably still is strongly subordinate to the needs and interests of the *varón*: procreation, the home and a life of service to the family (Fontana 16). A move from the family home was possible only through marriage and on October 17, 1945, María Luisa Bemberg married Carlos Miguens. This date is an important one in Argentine history because it was the same day that mass demonstrations of workers demanded Perón’s release from prison (King, *An Argentine Passion* 10-11).¹⁰

¹⁰ When General E. J. Farrell became president in 1944, Perón took over the Ministry of War, and later that same year rose to the vice-presidency. However, his labor policies provoked strong resistance and continued opposition, and by October 1945 all political parties were against him. On October 9, he agreed to resign but not without first delivering a speech in front of the Secretariat of Labor that further angered his opponents and eventually led to his arrest and confinement on the island of Martín García. Although his opponents celebrated Perón’s political demise, his supporters saw his jailing as a threat to the benefits they had obtained since 1943 and began to organize demonstrations and strikes. On October 17 in Buenos Aires, men and women marched from the outskirts of town to the Plaza de Mayo, and remained there all day long to demand Perón’s release;

Perón's election campaign gathered momentum and his presidency in 1946 inaugurated the first Peronist era (1945-1955).¹¹ Bemberg remained in Argentina through all but the last two years of Perón's first rule. In 1949, she renewed her childhood attraction for the theatre by entering in a business partnership with her husband in the former *Teatro Smart*¹² but the theatre production company was unsuccessful (Guerriero 191). Bemberg and her young family traveled to Europe in 1953 and lived in Spain and France for two years. After returning to Argentina in 1955 with their four children, Bemberg divorced her husband of ten years (King, *An Argentine Passion* 12).¹³ If she lacked the courage to take charge of her destiny in her youth, she found the inner strength to do so at age 33; considering its rare occurrence in 1955, Bemberg's divorce broke with set conventions. However, based on her reply in a 1971 survey question in *Sur* —“Primero que [la mujer] sea autónoma, vertical. Recién entonces el divorcio —debidamente legislado — hará de ella, si lo desea, una mujer libre y no una víctima” (Aguirre 199) — divorce for Bemberg must have represented a liberating act.

Almost ten years after her divorce Bemberg finally felt that her children were established and she was free to pursue her own interests in the arts. While the

they did not leave until he spoke to them from the balcony of the Casa Rosada close to midnight (Navarro 232). Bemberg incorporates the street demonstrations associated with this event in *Miss Mary* in the scene in which the youngest daughter is married on the eve of the demonstrations (Oct.16) and on Oct.17 the governess returns home to England.

¹¹ In the 10-year period following his rise to power, Perón targeted the Argentine oligarchy and as a result, Bemberg's parents spent most of the Peronist years in France (King, *An Argentine Passion* 12; Guerriero 186).

¹² There is little information on *Teatro Smart* other than that it was founded in 1914 as *Cine Smart* and changed to a theatre venue in 1922. In 1980 it became known as *Teatro Blanca Podestá* and is now called *Multiteatro* (Fontana 14). The building has changed ownership over time and has been converted to three theatre auditoriums.

¹³ Perón had implemented divorce laws in 1954 which were repealed with his overthrow in 1956.

1960s in Argentina were volatile years politically threatened by military interventions, culturally they were “boom” years as the country embraced the waves of cultural change, innovation and intellectual movements from France, and local artists tested their own versions of pop art and experimental theatre (King, *An Argentine Passion* 15). At this time Bemberg reaffirmed her passion for the entertainment world through her continued interest in theatre. In association with director Marcelo Ridder, she designed the costumes for the theatre production of *La visita de la anciana dama*, Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s tragic-comedy at the Astral. On a tedious afternoon Bemberg started sketching the costumes for the play and Ridder was enchanted by them. Under the guidance of the renowned costume designer, Bergara Leumann, Bemberg created the sketches that were used to develop the costumes, and she received unanimous critical acclaim in the reviews (Fontana 14). Motivated by her accomplishment, she established the *Teatro del Globo* with theatre agent Catalina Wolff in 1959, which she managed for five years. In addition to her theatrical successes, Bemberg claimed that the experience served to underline her lack of aptitude for business administration (Trelles 113). As she explains in an interview “Instead of staying in the small room upstairs, where we had to talk about numbers, the size we were going to make the posters, [. . .] I was down below, alongside the director, seeing how the work was staged, how the lights were arranged, watching the set designer at work” (King, *An Argentine Passion* 15). Through these forays in theatre, Bemberg acquired invaluable experience and skills not only in the administrative part of the business but also in costume design and in the technical aspects of production which served

her well in her meticulous *mises-en-scène* and in the entrepreneurial planning of her films (Bueno 93).

Although she was an activist in the feminist movement, Bemberg's attraction to theatre remained strong. Bored with the tedious administrative tasks of managing the *Teatro del Globo*, she reverted to writing to express her feminist ideas. She believed that a short play that she produced, *La margarita es una flor*, could be the basis for a script (Trelles 111). Bemberg submitted the piece in a contest for *La Nación* but it was ignored. A friend of her daughter's fiancé showed the work to Raúl de la Torre, an up-and-coming director, who asked Bemberg to jointly develop the script (Trelles 111). This, her first feature-length script, was used for de la Torre's film, *Crónica de una Señora* (1971) (Bach 20), in which the main character examines her life after a friend's suicide and discovers its existential emptiness (*Crónica de una Señora*). Bemberg attended the shooting session and was enthralled by the magic of filming (Trelles 111). While de la Torre directed the film, it is evident that the issues presented parallel Bemberg's own discomfort with her rich and mundane life.¹⁴ Although de la Torre expresses Bemberg's critical point of view with restraint and good taste, what prevails on the spectator is that this somewhat common conflict is presented with a fresh approach,

¹⁴ The film was semi-autobiographical and its huge success was due in part to the controversy that it provoked. In an interview with Caleb Bach, Bemberg recalls Victoria Ocampo's reaction to her first film and how her own experience at the Film Festival affected her: "I remember having tea with Victoria Ocampo not long before she died and she liked very much my first script. She saw it four times. Earlier she had said, 'I want you to have tea with me at San Isidro because Graham Greene is coming. He's seen your film. He wants to meet you. So I went. Those were pregnant days. I was just beginning as a professional writer. Later, at the Film Festival in San Sebastián in Spain, when Graciela Borges won the prize for the best actress, we [Raúl de la Torre and Leopoldo Torre Nilsson and others] were sitting on the bed awaiting news, [. . .] and I remember saying to myself, 'these are the people I'd like to be with: people interested in creation'" (Bach 21).

new to Argentine cinema (Fontana 17). Bemberg, however, remained dissatisfied with de la Torre's direction of her script's affluent female protagonist, Fina,¹⁵ and particularly with de la Torre's framing of her anguish upon realizing her existential emptiness; Bemberg believed that a special framing was required to give it conviction but she could not convince de la Torre (18).

The inability to influence de la Torre stems perhaps from Argentina's cultural ambiance in the early 1970s. Contrary to the feminist debates that were occurring in the United States and elsewhere at that time, Argentina's political culture was very different: men in uniform controlled the government, a militant union movement divided older conservative and younger, more militant men and a youth movement relied on street and guerrilla warfare (King, *An Argentine Passion* 18). The socio-political climate was not receptive to feminist interventions. By extension, neither was the film industry that continued to be male-dominated. Although women found a niche as scriptwriters, the number of female directors was negligible (King, *An Argentine Passion* 16), perhaps because of the expense, technology and sophistication. Still, Bemberg must have perceived the medium's potential for communicating her feminist ideas and she must have felt ready to undertake larger commitments, because she soon ventured tentatively into the world of directing with two short films *El mundo de la mujer* (1972) and *Juguetes* (1978).¹⁶ She discovered the power of filmmaking and concluded that while

¹⁵ In the film, the protagonist Fina holds two key texts of the 1970s feminist movement, Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, through which Bemberg wanted to underline the philosophical debate of this second wave of feminism; contrary to the first which focused on women's rights (Fontana 12).

¹⁶ These and all of Bemberg's films can be viewed online at www.marialuisabemberg.com.

filming is painful and exhausting, “montar una película” is a passionate and exciting activity (Trelles 113).

El mundo de la mujer, a 17-minute short, was filmed on location at the 1972 *Exposición Femimundo* — a marketing fair replete with beauty items and consumer goods promoting the ideal woman (King, *An Argentine Passion* 18).¹⁷ In this documentary, Bemberg criticizes *Femimundo*’s marketing strategy for manipulating women towards consumerism with no consideration given to intellectual pursuits. Through a collage of images and sounds, the camera contrasts *Femimundo*’s use of pencil-thin, long-limbed models with mid to close-up shots of plain, middle-aged corpulent women. In the short feature, Bemberg shows that *Femimundo*’s exhibits communicate a patriarchal image of what a woman “ought to be” in order to keep her man content — an image that she can attain through the purchase of “must-have” feminine products and household accoutrements. The short ends with a voiceover of Cinderella’s happy ending countered with a perfectly coiffed and cosmetically enhanced woman framed behind bars, imprisoned in her new life as a spouse.

Juguetes, a 12-minute short filmed at the 1978 children’s toy exhibition, denounces children’s toys and fairy tales for being in fact designed to reinforce stereotypical gender roles. Toys and fairy tales designed for boys promote competition, creativity, strategic thinking and problem solving skills while girls’ dolls, miniature appliances and fairy tales teach that the “happy-ever-after” can be found in marriage, a home and domestic aptitudes.

¹⁷ The fair’s official title was *Exposición Internacional de “La mujer y su mundo”-Femimundo 72*.

In between these two short films, Bemberg wrote another script that Fernando Ayala purchased and then transposed to film in *Triángulo de cuatro* (1975); a dramatic comedy, it critiques the frivolous and fragile marital relations of the high bourgeoisie that lead the female protagonist to seek refuge in infidelity (Fontana 20). Again dissatisfied with Ayala's direction of her script, Bemberg realized that a film is ultimately the director's product. Both directors had taken her script and made *their* movie, not *hers* and she concludes:

Yo creo que la primera película se hace en la máquina de escribir. Cuando uno escribe, por ejemplo, "amanece, aparece, en el fondo la silueta de una figura que avanza hacia la cámara" yo ya lo estoy filmando, estoy encuadrando. Concluí entonces que si yo quería que la película reflejase fielmente lo que yo había visualizado no tenía más remedio que ponerme a dirigir. (Trelles 111)

Frustrated by the gap between her intentions and the final outcome, Bemberg realized, in her mid 50s and during one of the blackest moments in Argentine history, that if she wanted to project her own vision and ideals through film, she would have to direct the production herself (King, *An Argentine Passion* 17-19).

As a committed feminist, Bemberg entered film for ideological motives: a childhood frustration with the double standard between her brothers and herself, and an adult rebellion against men and women's gendered roles which exploded with the reading of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe* (Bach 20). As with many of her contemporaries in Latin America, Silvina Ocampo, Marta Brunet, and Rosario Castellanos to name but a few, Bemberg's feminist awakening was influenced by Simone de Beauvoir's unprecedented perspective on women's rights

and their ability to challenge the patriarchal *status quo* (André, “Simone de Beauvoir”). According to Beauvoir, these goals are achievable only if women are allowed to think, take action, work and create on the same terms as men, and declare themselves their equal (Mussett). To ensure women’s equality, Beauvoir advocates changes to laws, social structures, customs, education and most importantly, women’s participation in the labor force to gain economic freedom and independence from men. The need for women to have access to the same activities and projects as men and to be treated as equal to them places Beauvoir in the tradition of liberal or second-wave feminism (Mussett). Bemberg’s feminism subscribes to Beauvoir’s philosophy for modern woman’s emancipation and reclaiming of selfhood, and her films propose different ways in which women can direct their energies into political struggles to challenge and ultimately change the *status quo*.

However, Bemberg was also influenced by Andre Malraux’s visit to her aunt Victoria Ocampo’s villa in 1959 and, motivated by his long-espoused idea, “Les idées ne sont pas faites pour être pensées mais vécues,” Bemberg asked herself:

¿Qué hago yo con respecto a un feminismo, que ya era mucho más militante, aparte de acabarle con los nervios, protestando, a mis amigos y a mi familia? ¿Hice una introspección acerca de la manera que podía, de alguna manera, intentar modificar la consciencia de mi país? (qtd. in Trelles 111)

Recalling that she had been a very imaginative girl, she decided that she was going to tell — quoting one of her heroes, cinematographer Robert Bresson, — “that which to me hasn’t been told,” but that she would do so from the point of view of a

woman, with female protagonists, as a promise to her own gender (qtd. in Bach 20). With this statement, she crossed another barrier and subverted conventional filmmaking when Argentine, American, and even European audiences reacted positively to her early efforts. Based on this positive reception, she told herself: “My dear friend, you’re on the right track” (qtd. in Bach 20).

Perón returned to Argentina in 1973 and assumed the presidency with his wife as vice-president, but he died a year later leaving Isabel to succeed him. Lacking political experience, she could not prevent the economic downfall of the country. The 1976 military coup ousted her from office and initiated a systematic purging through censorship and generalized state terror that resulted in the exile of numerous film directors and actors. Argentine cinema rapidly declined as all prospective films had to pass through the censors. Bemberg’s third script, *Señora de nadie*, which she wanted to direct herself, was refused by the censors for three reasons: it was a bad example to housewives since it dealt with adultery, it included a gay character, and it was directed by a woman (Trelles 113).

Undaunted, Bemberg moved in a new direction to expand her skills. On many occasions she had admitted that she aspired to be an actress and, following Malraux’s mantra that one must live what one believes, she left Argentina to study acting in New York City with Lee Strasberg. According to Bemberg, she wanted to experience and better understand the actors’ needs and fears in order to gain their trust as a director (Bach 21). This experience gave her a sense of confidence that served her well in managing her actors with both a firm and protective hand; as she points out, all the actresses in her films have won international awards (Trelles 113). However, upon returning to Argentina in 1981, Bemberg found it difficult to

enter the film industry, partly because she belonged to the mistrusted oligarchy and partly because she was a woman and a feminist perceived as trying to carve herself a space in a man's world (Bach 21; King, *An Argentine Passion* 20).

Lita Stantic, film producer and director, was instrumental in facilitating Bemberg's entry into the film world (King, *An Argentine Passion* 20). Stantic produced five of Bemberg's films¹⁸ and together they formed a partnership in a production company, GEA Cinematográfica in 1981. Bemberg's early films are openly feminist; all show a consistent interest in creative women and the ways in which their creativity can be stifled (King, *An Argentine Passion* 26). Bemberg wrote, directed, produced and financed her first full feature film, *Momentos* (1981), which like the two previous films entrusted to other directors, shows the tedious and empty lives of middle and upper-class women (Calvera, "Biography"). In this film Bemberg breaks with male film directors' traditional portrayal of the adulteress as a transgressor of established norms¹⁹ by presenting a female perspective on a woman's adultery (Grant 86). The protagonist Lucía, a widowed landscape gardener marries her psychoanalyst, Mauricio, an older man who is unable to fulfill her needs. She meets the young, successful but unhappily married Nicolás and Lucía leaves her husband to begin an affair. During the lovers' trip to Mar de la Plata, boredom sets and when differences between the pair become evident, the tenuous relationship disintegrates and Lucía returns to her husband. As Fontana explains, Bemberg brings a feminine perspective on the subject of

¹⁸ *Momentos* (1981), *Señora de nadie* (1982), *Camila* (1984), *Miss Mary* (1986), *Yo, la peor de todas* (1990).

¹⁹ Traditional filmic representations of transgressive women in Argentine Golden Age cinema will be discussed in Chapter 1.

adultery; focused on feelings rather than morality and guilt, Bemberg's adulteress is rendered blameless (Fontana 23). In order to avoid censorship, Bemberg explored marriage and adultery in a moderate way in this film but it still caused offence. However, it was a box office success with a nine-week run and 500,000 spectators, and also won the *Opera Prima* prize at the Cartagena film festival, thus establishing her career and reputation (King, *An Argentine Passion* 21). As Bemberg quips, "It was the beginning of a long-lasting complicity between the female audience of Argentina and the first successful grandmother filmmaker in the country" (qtd. in Bach 21).

Her next film, *Señora de nadie*, which had not passed the censors in 1979, was approved in 1982 when the military control had started to relax. The film sparked much debate in the press. At a time when the military version of the nation as family was reaching a final crisis with the Falklands War, Bemberg was presenting a different perspective about honesty and openness in marriage (King, *An Argentine Passion* 22). Bemberg made her film when Argentina was still under the *Proceso*'s military dictatorship; in fact it premiered on the evening before the announcement of the invasion of the Malvinas by Argentine forces (Foster, "Queer Couples"). The Falklands War along with the growing disenchantment in Argentine society sealed the transition from dictatorship to democracy. Not only was the government overthrown but so were a number of laws that appeared unchangeable: for example, in 1986 changes were made to divorce and child custody laws which committed, at least, to the legal equality of women (Fontana 26). While *Señora de nadie* was released before all these changes occurred, it captures the imbalance, marginalization and loneliness that a woman suffers when

she assumes her status as a citizen (Fontana 29). As Foster explains, when the protagonist, Leonor, uses the term *divorciada* in the film, it cannot refer to the post-1987 legal changes made in Argentina, nor does it refer to the legal process known as the *separación de bienes* prior to 1987²⁰. Leonor's decision to leave her husband has left her abandoned by the legal code; without access to her husband's assets and no personal finances her situation is fragile (Foster, "Queer Couples"). Eventually she finds friendship and solidarity with a homosexual, Pablo, and the film ends with them in bed.²¹ As transgressors of patriarchal norms, both Leonor and Pablo are socially isolated in Argentine society and must find ways to survive on their own (Foster, "Queer Couples"). If *Momentos* presented the adulteress as blameless, Leonor and Pablo's relationship in *Señora de nadie* again subverts the traditional theme of infidelity (Fontana 29).

After the return to democracy in 1983, Stantic suggested the making of *Camila* after Bemberg received criticism by the reviewers that she would not be able to film a love story. Due to the uncertain post-dictatorship political environment and the sensitive nature of the subject — the 1847 love affair between Camila O'Gorman, a young aristocrat and her confessor, the Catholic priest Father Ladislao Gutiérrez during Rosas' regime — Bemberg was concerned that the treatment of the subject matter would irritate the Catholic Church in Argentina (King, *An Argentine Passion* 23). GEA Cinematográfica co-produced the film with Spain, not only to secure the human resources required for the historical

²⁰ The courts could recognize the separation of the married partners and the distribution of common property between them. Neither partner would be able to legally remarry, although the husband might provide alimony for the wife and children (Foster, "Queer Couples").

²¹ The final scene replicates the film's beginning in which Leonor is in bed with her husband, Fernando.

reconstruction, but more importantly to guarantee the film's release at least in Spain. Not only did *Camila* become a box-office success in Argentina, but the quality and the intelligence of the work warranted its nomination for an Oscar as the best foreign film, giving Bemberg international recognition in her sixties (King, *An Argentine Passion* 23-24).

Camila was followed by *Miss Mary* (1986). Set against a backdrop of the military dictatorship of General Uriburu in the 1930s and the eventual rise of Juan Perón in the 1940s, an English governess travels to an upper class Argentine home to provide the children of the aristocracy with a British education, as is typical of the time (King, *An Argentine Passion* 25). As King explains, using the famous British actress Julie Christie in the starring role was a bold move by both actress and director considering that Britain and Argentina were officially still at war (26). In *Miss Mary*, Bemberg projects the frustrations of her individual childhood experience onto the social scene (Fontana 38). As Fontana elucidates, Bemberg's unique perspective resides in presenting the problematic, controversial content of her films without falling into feminist ideology. In *Camila* and then in *Miss Mary*, Bemberg gradually reveals the global context under which gender oppression is concealed. Gender inequality is always proportional to the type of social system: the stronger the latter's authoritarianism, the more severe the repression of women in the state and family. Bemberg's need to exploit this idea leads to her third historical biography (Fontana 38).

In *Yo, la peor de todas* (1990), Bemberg returns to the life of a historical figure, the prolific seventeenth-century Mexican poet and scholar, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. The story is based on Octavio Paz's biography, *Sor Juana Inés de la*

Cruz, o las trampas de la fe (1982); Sor Juana became a nun so that she could avoid marriage and have access to education, only to be silenced by the Church. To avoid the details and expense of another historical reconstruction, Bemberg filmed *Yo, la peor de todas* in the studios of Pampa films in Argentina (Burton-Carvajal, “Firmar” 83). Bemberg was faced with two challenges: the first, to tell the story of a cloistered nun whose life was dedicated to poetry and knowledge is already a conceptual challenge because the film medium is based on images and movement to keep the spectator entertained (King, *An Argentine Passion* 40). Sor Juana’s story needed dialogue in order to communicate ideas. The other challenge resided in how to define the visual space for a conflict that had many intellectual elements (*An Argentine Passion* 40). Sor Juana was a figure larger than life and a realistic portrayal would not do. The result is an atemporal and universal recasting that makes Sor Juana a symbol of feminine resistance to patriarchal repression (*An Argentine Passion* 42).

Bemberg universalizes her protagonists’ desire for independence, forcing them to come face to face with the established powers of Family, State, and Church. These protagonists are ultimately isolated, marginalized and silenced, in much the same way as Argentine feminists, by these same oppressive and rigid institutions and by class pressures. In a way Bemberg’s protagonists, much like the Argentine feminists, are also betrayed by the lack of solidarity from within their own gender²² — by the passive majority of women who accept the *status quo* and

²² Women’s lack of solidarity and their passive acceptance of the *status quo* are conveyed in Bemberg’s *Camila*, *Miss Mary* and *Yo, la peor de todas*. Calvera explains the issue: “El androcentrismo ha sido altamente efectivo en mantener con vida los preconceptos que lavan el cerebro. De este modo, se consigue que la fidelidad de la mujer a su propio género quede abortada

refuse to recognize the economic, social and political dependence of their female condition (Bemberg qtd. in Bence 199).

In her last film, *De eso no se habla* (1993), Bemberg explores a different genre, a fable, through comedy. Based on surrealist Julio Llinás' short story about an aging man who falls in love with a dwarf from a provincial Argentine town, this film was a risky undertaking since it could incite unflattering comparisons to Buñuel or Fellini. Although the film maintained the simplicity of a fable, politically, "not talking about" and suppressing difference could also be read as Argentine society's denial of the tragic events of its recent history under the Process dictatorship (King, *An Argentine Passion* 27). While working on a filmic adaptation of *El impostor*, a short story by Silvina Ocampo, Bemberg was diagnosed with cancer and she died in 1995.

Many scholars have studied different approaches and expressed various views on María Luisa Bemberg's films. Since this dissertation aims to present a set of readings that seek to enrich existing studies of these specific films by applying Giuliana Bruno's theoretical concepts of spatial movement, it seems fitting to refer to the most relevant and influential material in order to situate this work. Of the three books published entirely on the life and films of María Luisa Bemberg, Clara Fontana offers a comprehensive biography and commentary on all her films in the series "Los directores del cine argentino" (1993); and John King's co-edited *An*

antes de nacer. La vigia del prejuicio que el sistema sexista ha internalizado en cada mujer colabora para convertirlas en extranjeras de su propio género. Las des-solidariza de las otras mujeres y las confina al aislamiento, por dorado que sea. El prejuicio obra para que las mujeres no quieran mezclarse en el descubrimiento de esa mujer autónoma que quiere el feminismo y odia el patriarcado. El prejuicio obra para que acepten sin escándalo que le sean cortadas las alas de su independencia y las de la libertad ajena. Las feministas, que no ignoran estas trampas, están siempre atentas para descubrirlas y hacerlas conocer públicamente" (Calvera, *Mujeres* 138).

Argentine Passion, María Luisa Bemberg and her Films (2000) contains a collection of scholarly articles as well as personal testimonies and perspectives about her life and work from individuals who worked with Bemberg. Lastly, the *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* recognized Bemberg's contribution to Argentine cinema and to the study of feminist theory with a series of essays edited by Rita de Grandis in the Otoño 2002 dedicated issue. Moreover, several dissertations study Bemberg's films in relation to Argentine myths, gender and class issues, and social, cultural and historical themes.

Bemberg not only leaves an impressive legacy of six films in her short career as a female director but more importantly she leaves in her characters, Camila, Miss Mary and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, a new model of "woman" in Argentine film. Bemberg hailed feminists as transgressors for questioning traditional gender roles and attempting to subvert patriarchal conventions (González 10). Bemberg's transgressions as a feminist are embodied in the creation of daring female protagonists who not only challenge patriarchal norms but break from the mould to pursue their own destinies.

Theoretical Framework

Bemberg's view of feminists as transgressors intersects with Bruno's conceptualization of the female subject as a *voyageuse* and contemporary philosopher and feminist Rosi Braidotti's theory on nomadism. Bruno's nomadic *voyageuse* is based on Braidotti's theory that it is not the literal act of traveling that defines nomadism, but rather it describes a critical consciousness of resistance that moves away from hegemonic and dominant practices by subverting set conventions

and coded modes of thought and behavior (Braidotti 5). Braidotti explains that the nomadic subject is a conceptual figuration, a way of understanding movement through established categories and levels of experience: as she so eloquently describes it, a way of “blurring boundaries without burning bridges” (4). The figuration of a nomad expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity (Braidotti 22). As transgressive female characters that defy patriarchal authority and subvert set conventions, Bemberg’s Camila, Miss Mary and Sor Juana adopt a nomadic way of being that contrasts with the rigid and static boundaries of a repressive state.

Bruno’s *Atlas of Emotion* provides the theoretical and conceptual basis that underpins my study of Bemberg’s framing of spatial movement and emotion in her historical biographies. The theorist claims that a typographical error — a misspelling of sightseeing as “site-seeing” — led her to identify a *paradigm* shift in film theory and to challenge the traditional focus on the visual perspective inherited from the Renaissance and the shortcomings she perceived in the Lacanian gaze. Bruno explains that many aspects of the moving image — for example, the acts of inhabiting and traversing space — could not be explained or understood within the Lacanian-derived ocular framework. Locked within a fixed optical framework that did not allow for the exploration of spatial impact, the film spectator became a *voyeur* (16-17). Moving away from the existing scholarly perspective on the filmic gaze, Bruno’s film theory seeks to construct “a moving theory of *site*” with a multidisciplinary approach that links architecture, travel, geography, mapping and home (house) (15). A shift to seeing “sites” instead of “sights” transports film

theory into the realm of architecture (6) and correlates the experience of motion and movement associated with the act of wandering through an architectural site to the experience of film space. In an attempt to reposition film in the field of spatial arts and practices, Bruno sees similarities between architecture and film, specifically in its tactile connections to architecture and spatial movement (Bruno 15-17).²³ As a director, it appears that Bemberg would support Bruno's theory on film and architecture, for on the subject of the film script she states: "Es como la *planta arquitectónica* de una casa: ¿de qué sirve poner mármoles de Carrara si la planta es mala? Lo importante, y eso solo puede hacerlo el director, *es tener toda la película en la cabeza. Como un mapa*" (qtd. in Pauls, "Rojo" 6; emphasis added).

While both film and architecture are considered visual media, Bruno posits that they are bound spatially along a path that is tactile and she also incorporates the other senses and their relation to space in her theoretical shift from the optic to the haptic. From this premise, Bruno concludes that the haptic is an agent in the formation of both geographical and cultural space, and by extension, should be considered an agent in the expression of the spatial arts, which includes motion pictures. With this shift in focus to the haptic, the film spectator moves from a passive *voyeur* to a *voyageur/voyageuse* traveling through space (Bruno 6). Using Sergei Eisenstein's essay *Montage and Architecture*, Bruno sees a commonality between the person who connects visual spaces as s/he wanders through an architectural site and a film spectator who co-assembles a montage of views, shot

²³ This dissertation does not focus on Bruno's theory of cinema and female spectatorship but rather applies Bruno's theories to the film narrative and its space.

by shot (55-56).²⁴ By examining the relationship between film and architecture through the common element of traveling through space through the shifts in viewing position and in crossing spatio-temporal dimensions, film offers a practice of space that is “lived in” (62), and as such architectural. Bruno sees this practice as similar to the itinerary of a visitor or resident who travels the city’s configurations from its highest points, to its streets, to its subterranean level and compares this multiplicity of perspectives derived from traveling the city to cinema’s way of “site-seeing” in its use of filmic shots: camera angles, view scaling, speed, and camera movements (62). In *Camila*, *Miss Mary* and *Yo, la peor de todas*, Bemberg uses a similar approach in framing movement through architectural spaces, as I shall demonstrate.

Having thus linked architecture and travel to film through the concept of motion, Bruno then expands on the idea of motion in emotion. On the premise that “emotion” contains a movement because it stems from the Latin verb *emovere*, which is composed of *movere* (to move) and *e* (out), Bruno concludes that the meaning of “emotion” is historically associated with a “moving out, a migration, transference from one place to another” (6). Emotion reveals itself to be a matter of voyage or travel: “a moving form of epistemological passion and historic force” (Bruno 262). The theorist correlates this migratory, nomadic sense of the term “emotion” with the idea of “transport” associated with cultural travel, explaining

²⁴ She explains: “There is a mobile dynamics involved in the act of viewing films, even if the spectator is seemingly static. The (im)mobile spectator moves across an imaginary path, traversing multiple sites and times” in a fictional navigation that connects distant moments and faraway places (55–56).

that since the cultural movement of emotion is historically inscribed as traveling space, cinema's moving image is inextricably linked to travel (7).

Bruno further supports her argument by relating that the origin of "cinema" derives from the Greek *kinema* which connotes both motion and emotion. The desire to make a private "album" of moving views for public consumption created *kinema*, an intimate traveling room. Cinema — "a nomadic archive of images"— becomes a home of "moving" exploration. Having linked film with travel, she proceeds to link film with "transport" in the full extent of its meaning: to include the sort of carrying which is the carrying away of emotion, as in transports of joy, or in "*trasporto*, which in Italian encompasses the attraction of human beings to one another" (Bruno 7). For Bruno this implies more than the movement of bodies and objects as imprinted in the change of film frames and shots, the flow of camera movement, or any other shift of viewpoint. Not only does cinematic space move through time and space or narrative development but also through inner space because as Bruno explains, it "moves" the spectator with its ability to affect him/her (Bruno 7). Bruno describes Munsterberg's vision of "emotion" in cinema to support her argument: film makes an impression that first comes into our visual field in the form of a sensation — a bodily defined emotional response. By stimulating the physiological transformation of sensations and emotions, the moving image becomes a form of "transport" that acts as a passage (Bruno 261).

Bruno's aim is to reclaim *emotion* and to argue, from the position of a *voyageuse*, for the haptic as a feminist strategy of reading space (16). While the shift to "site-seeing" includes the feminine gender (87), the shift to the haptic as a feminist strategy of a *voyageuse* posits film as a form of "transport" and travel

which must also incorporate “psychogeographic”²⁵ journeys in order to chart the intimate space of movement and emotion” (6). Bruno’s redefined concept of journey/travel for the *voyageuse* includes emotion (“e-motion”) as a “landscape to be experienced as a series of sensational movements” (219); in this way the female traveler’s journey links spatial circulation and the emotive territory. In a “moving” way, emotion makes “sense” of the place of affects, as it traces their movement in space (Bruno, “Presentation” 4). By considering film from an architectural point of view, and seeing its traversing of space as travel, and by reclaiming it as an “emotional space” of feminine subjectivity, Bruno connects sight and site, seeing and traveling, motion and emotion, and forces not only a rethinking of the relationships among architecture, travel, gender and subjectivity but also a redefinition and expansion of current terms and concepts, like home, geography and landscape. By applying Bruno’s film theory on spatial movement and the *voyageuse* to Bemberg’s protagonists, I argue that Bemberg’s cinematographic framing of her female protagonist’s movements affects the representation of home, landscape and geography to reveal new ways of presenting political, social or cultural problems. In the following section, I shall explain the theoretical revisions of these concepts of home, geography and landscape that I shall apply to Bemberg’s protagonists.

Bruno questions the binarism that identifies “home” with the female subject and “voyage” with the male and challenges the traditional view that travel alone

²⁵ In 1955, Guy Debord defined psychogeography as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals” (Debord). Much later Michel de Certeau includes this concept in describing the practices associated with “the unpurposeful walking in the city as ‘a symbolic order of the unconscious’” (De Certeau 270).

implies mobility while *domus* is the static site of (female) domesticity and domestication (103). Historically, travel discourse focuses on travel as a male practice, constructed by and for a predominantly white male voyageur and catering to a recurring male fantasy of circularity, of home as the *oikos*, the origin and destination of voyage. Home is a place/concept from which the male can travel, leave behind or become lost in search of the self and identity with the possibility of a return to sameness (or a nostalgia for the loss of that sameness) to the same home, to the same woman (Bruno 85). The notion of “home” conceived as the opposite of “voyage,” as something that can be repossessed or returned to by the male because it remains fixed and immobile, correlate home/*domus* as a space/identity that continues to be gendered female (Bruno 85-86), and establishes the site that produces sexual difference. Bruno has determined that women’s travel writing does not reflect the need to repossess an origin or seek the possibility of a return (84). According to feminist activist and scholar, Paola Melchiori,²⁶ “Women who leave are not nostalgic. They desire what they have not had, and they look for it in the future. The desire does not take the shape of a ‘return’ but rather as a ‘voyage.’ Nostalgia is substituted for dislocation” (qtd. in Bruno 86).²⁷ As evidenced in women’s travel writing, women’s travel is an errant, nomadic, wandering with no desire to return or to possess a place or location, but rather is

²⁶ In 1978, Paola Melchiori founded the Free University of Women, in Milan, Italy, and is currently president of its International Branch, a research and training-oriented feminist association of women from various intellectual backgrounds, social classes and cultures. Mainly interested in theory, she has authored and co-authored numerous essays and books on women and culture, on young women in women’s studies and pedagogical contexts, and on feminist theory within the Italian movement (Demos 249).

²⁷ Bruno’s translation of “le donne che partono non hanno nostalgia se non per ciò che non hanno avuto, e lo cercano nel futuro. Il desiderio prende forma non nel ritorno ma nel viaggio. Sarà lo spaesamento a sostituire la nostalgia” (Melchiori 22).

characterized by the forward movement of an ongoing voyage. To think as a *voyageuse* requires a redefinition and remapping of dwelling that transcends the fixity and possession of the *oikos* as seen from the male perspective.

For Bruno's *voyageuse* to exist as a nomadic subject, the concepts of voyage as conquest, and home as domination, need to be rethought. The nostalgia associated with the male's journey home which genders the female with stasis must be replaced by a forward, ongoing and errant concept of movement — a concept that Bruno defines as *transito* (86). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain that

‘Nomadism’ is a way of life that exists outside of the organizational ‘State’ [. . .] A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo. (380)

The nomad is thus a way of being “in-between” points, typified by movement and change. Not limited to a physical motion, Bruno defines *transito* as circulation through “in-between” spaces that includes passages, transitory states, desire, eroticism and emotion; the construction of a space that is “in between” serves to erode the opposition between immobility and mobility, inside and outside, dwelling and travel and to deconstruct the gender boxing that these oppositions entail (Bruno 71). This movement within an “in-between” space that characterizes nomadism and is included in Bruno's theory of *transito* is evidenced on several occasions in Bemberg's framing of her protagonists.

While Bruno agrees that a voyage involves and deeply questions one's sense of home, of belonging and of cultural identity, she argues that home itself is a site

of voyage; at home one may indeed travel, for the home is made up of layers of passages that are voyages of habitation. As a site of voyage the home allows the *voyageuse* to travel domestically by exploring its haptic architectural space: this idea of movement through the house/home subverts its static aspect. If the house no longer represents the antithesis of travel, then Bruno proposes that “dwelling” must be redefined and the “house” as the static dwelling place of home must be theoretically reconstructed (87). Her theory of “traveling-in-dwelling” implies a series of interactions. As she explains, the house is a site of emotion and generates stories of dwelling, of comings and goings and of journeys within its lived spaces. The act of moving through a room and viewing the assemblage of objects creates a “moving landscape” through which one can travel indoors in a “voyage around a room,” transforming the home into a location of travel (Bruno 103,167-169). Rather than a site of departure and return, the home exemplifies another notion of travel — as a site of continual transformation by being a “montage of living signs” that incorporate memory, subjectivity, and affect (103). As such, it is a form of travel indoors, a site of *transito* (103) or “in-between” space, through which woman’s correlation with stasis and home can be reconstructed as a site of mobility and voyage. Hallways, staircases, thresholds, and doorways are not “lived-in” rooms but “in-between” spaces through which one moves, passes, traverses or travels (88). Using a series of filmic and visual works, Bruno theoretically reconstructs the house as a feminine space of mobility through which the female ‘traveler’ or *voyageuse* can travel at home by exploring the architectural out-of-focus spaces of its interiors, deconstructing the house/home’s correlation with stasis and female domesticity (Bruno 87-88).

Bruno proposes a feminist strategy for reading space that links architecture, haptic elements, spatial movement and the emotion of women's subjectivity in her definition of the *voyageuse* (219). Bruno's revised perspective of "home" as a feminine space of mobility from the point of view of traveling through its "out-of-focus" spaces can be applied to Bemberg's films. In her definitions of *transito* and *trasporto*, Bruno describes how travel in relation to the home can be described in the form of a passage by using architectural terms and interior design: for example how the "in-between" spaces mentioned above can be used to describe apertures for women's horizons and for women's own passages (Bruno 82). Elements of Bruno's feminist film theory are evident in Bemberg's protagonists: for example, the use of haptic elements and their relation to spatial movement, of architectural space in relation to acts of transgression. Bemberg cinematographically frames architecture and landscape to contrast the environment of repression and confinement with that of promised limited freedom. In addition to architecture and landscape, Bruno's theory of *transito* is evidenced in Bemberg's use of transport and out-of-focus spaces to signal a protagonist's passage to an "in-between" space of transgression, a site of self-fashioning or an emotional place of feminine subjectivity, at times circulating towards the marginalized and socially or politically taboo, at others gravitating to sites of self-expression that embrace emotional journeys. As I shall demonstrate in the body of the thesis, elements of Bruno's theoretical reconstruction of "dwelling as voyage" and as "a montage of living signs" can be applied to the Bemberg's framing of her protagonists' movements, undermining the traditional representation of "home."

Bemberg's cinematographic framing of her protagonists' spatial movement also affects the traditional representations of geography and landscape. While the theoretical orientation of my dissertation is based on Bruno's film theory and perspective on spatio-visual arts, I synthesize her cultural theories of perception, space and motion with social and cultural geographer Tim Cresswell redefined concepts of geography, mobility and landscape to enrich my arguments. Geographers have recently broadened their external and primarily visual definition of landscape as "that portion of the earth's surface that can be comprehended at a glance," to encompass the "emotional, performative, relational and multi-sensory nature of 'being-in-the-world'²⁸ as well as the automatic practices of everyday life" (Oakes 151, 195). This "non-representational" approach draws attention away from characterizing bodies and landscapes as static, fixed, demarcated and primarily visual, and towards an understanding of body and landscape as fluid constructs that are in a constant process of being reshaped as one moves through space (MacPherson 3). When moving through space, body and landscape interact in a performance in which they involve and complement each other (3).

One of Bruno's definitions of geography as a "terrain of 'vessels' that holds and moves inhabitants and their passages through spaces, including the spaces of life" (207) can be considered "non-representational." As an inhabited vessel, Bruno proposes that this view of geography can be subject to charting the inhabitants' emotions on a map. However, as she observes, mapping remains negatively

²⁸ "'Being-in-the-world' is defined as "the experience that encompasses the unity of a person and environment, since both are subjectively defined. Being-in-the-world has three components: 1. Umwelt ("world around") - the natural world of biological urge and drive. 2. Mitwelt ("with-world") - the social, interactive, interpersonal aspects of existence. 3. Eigenwelt ("own world") - the subjective, phenomenological world of the self (Existential Psychology).

perceived as a restrictive, hegemonic instrument of colonization and domination; moreover, as Gillian Rose elucidates, it reflects a geographic discourse that has historically been dominated by men (209). Based in part on Mademoiselle de Scudery's *Carte de Tendre* and Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, Bruno proposes cartography as a "tender" or emotional mapping of intimate spaces.²⁹ Scudéry published a map of her own design to accompany her novel *Clélie*; produced by her female character, it embodies a narrative voyage that visualizes in the form of a pictorial landscape an itinerary of emotions (Bruno 2). In Stein's text, geography connotes a new writerly space — one that is inhabited; by mapping objects, food and rooms Stein charted a lived space. Both Scudery's and Stein's texts represent what Bruno calls a "tender" geography that included women and their spaces — and mapped as a "room of one's own" (209). As Bruno explains, the construction of this particular "room" involves creating a space for the dominant geographical discourse's traditional exclusion of women and proposes that the desire for "a room of one's own" marks the female experience (209). By reclaiming the realm of mapping as that "room of one's own," Bruno shows that cartography intersects with the shaping of female subjectivity and that a voyage of this interior functions as a tour (210). Bruno's theory of "tender" geography can be applied to Bemberg's cinematographic framing of her protagonists' rooms as a voyage in which the objects captured not only chart a lived space but also reveal intimate female subjectivities.

²⁹ Bruno paraphrases the director Sergei Eisenstein's ideas on the relationships between space and filmic sequencing to suggest that imaginary journeys connect distant moments and faraway places through an architectural — and therefore a spatial — itinerary that operates in its own right beyond the narrative (Bruno 18).

Geography is also linked with subversion and transgression. Bruno's nomadic *voyageuse* is based on Braidotti's definition of nomadism as a conscious resistance against hegemonic practices and conventions (Braidotti 5).³⁰ Braidotti's position is similar to geographer Tim Cresswell's definition of transgression as a form of politics which questions symbolic boundaries (Cresswell, *In Place/Out* 48). Cresswell posits that although space and place are used to structure a normative world, they are also used to question it through marginality, resistance and difference. By explaining that in a spatially sensitive analysis of transgression the margins reveal something about "normality" (48), he underlines transgression's importance as an example of possible tactics for resistance to established norms. Since no hegemonic structure is ever complete, studying the ways in which hegemonies are contested in everyday life is critical. As he makes clear, transgression, (literally, "crossing a boundary"), is often defined in geographical terms. Geography, then, informs us on transgression, and transgression, conversely, provides valuable insights into the way places affect behavior and ideology (30).

Furthermore, Cresswell posits that society's geographical ordering is founded on numerous acts that create ambiguous boundaries and simultaneously introduce possibilities for transgression. While places have associated characteristics that influence our description of the people in them or from them, ideologies on the other hand are "action-oriented" beliefs or ideas that promote some actions while discouraging others. As an example, Cresswell explains that patriarchal ideology not only involves ideas about male superiority but, more importantly, also supports

³⁰ Braidotti defines a nomadic consciousness as a "form of political resistance to hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity" (23).

and legitimates actions that contribute to actual domination (164). Thus transgression represents a questioning of symbolic boundaries that are constituted by place (48). When an expression such as “out of place” is used it is impossible to clearly demarcate whether a social or geographical place is denoted — “place” always means both (20). As I shall demonstrate, Cresswell’s geographical approach can be applied to Bemberg’s protagonists to augment Bruno’s film theory. As transgressive female characters that subvert set conventions, Bemberg’s Camila, Miss Mary and Sor Juana adopt a nomadic way of being that defies patriarchal authority. Their transgressions are critical political interventions that offer insights about a lived space.

Moreover, in *Gendered Mobilities*, Tim Cresswell reasons that ways in which gender and mobility intersect are infused with meaning, power and contested understandings. He underlines that the “concept of gender does not operate in a binary form but rather is constructed through performative iteration,” with the result that “interpretations of gender are also historically, geographically, culturally and politically different, enabling a certain slippage between realms in terms of how genders are read” (1). Understanding mobility not only means understanding observable physical movement, but more importantly, understanding the meanings that such movements are encoded with the experience of practicing these movements and the potential for undertaking them (*motility*) (2). Acquiring mobility is often analogous with a struggle for acquiring new subjectivity. Masculinity is often coded as mobile and femininity as relatively stationary and passive (2). Braidotti adds to these views by considering mobility as one of the essential aspects of freedom, as she clarifies:

Being free to move around, to go where one wants [. . .]. The physical dimension is only one aspect; mobility also refers to the intellectual space of creativity in the freedom to invent new ways of conducting our lives, new schemes of representation of ourselves. (256)

In her films, Bemberg subverts traditional encodings of mobility by usually framing male and passive female characters as seated or immobile, while the female protagonists are usually captured in some manifestation of mobility, performing a transgressive act that sprouts up from “in-between” spaces, mapping a nomadic consciousness meant to reveal political, social and cultural tensions.

The expanded view of geography and mobility extends to a revised definition of landscape. Bruno claims that landscape can be perceived as “viewing as motion” because it evokes an emotional response that is shaped by the movement of traveling through it (219), intrinsically connecting seeing/sight and traveling/site with “motion” and “emotion” (Bruno 16). By describing emotion as a landscape of sensational movements, Bruno links spatial movement and the emotion in the *voyageuse* (219). As Bruno explains, the history and geography of women’s travel reveals itself as a voyage of self-discovery. The movement of female travelers along a terrain correlates to a simultaneous “interior” movement associated with the emotional impact produced by the landscape. The panorama serves as a vehicle for women’s subjective, psychic voyages that express emotions or memories that may not surface otherwise (Bruno 376- 377). As I shall show, Bemberg’s framing of her female characters correlates the landscape with internal emotional journeys.

This dissertation aims to explore Bemberg’s approach to women and their journeys by analyzing the framing of their spatial movement in her historical

biographies to show that the director's unique female perspective grounded in her feminist ideals sets her apart from her predecessors. To accomplish this, I shall first delineate in Chapter 2 the histories of Argentine film and of the feminist movement before studying women's small roles in the film industry. In the second part of the chapter I shall examine the female stereotypes and conventions of spatial movement through a selection of Argentine Golden Age films (1930s-1950s) to assess whether Bemberg breaks away aesthetically.

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I shall apply aspects of Bruno's feminist film theory as well as non-representational considerations of geography and landscape to *Camila*, *Miss Mary* and *Yo, la peor de todas*. Bemberg's female protagonists represent different approaches to Bruno's nomadic *voyageuse*. By analyzing Bemberg's use of architecture, haptic elements, and *transito* in the framing of her protagonists' circulation through internal and external sites, I argue that these theorists' expanded definitions of home, geography and landscape applied to the films reveal new ways of presenting political, social or cultural problems that continue to repress women.

Chapter 2

Women, Feminism and Film in Argentina's Golden Age of Cinema (1930s-1950s)

2.1 Feminism and Film in Argentina

The history of Argentina's film industry and its feminist movement are two parallel developments that finally intersect in the 1970s when Bemberg commits to use film to advance the feminist cause. The first section of this chapter delineates the histories of Argentine cinema and of the feminist movement and explores women's roles in the film industry. Based on Bemberg's avowal to break with the images of "sweet, corrupt, complacent" women traditionally represented in Argentine film, the second section briefly identifies stereotypical examples of female characters that prevailed in its Golden Age of cinema (1930s-1950s) and then focuses on the spatial framing of these characters to determine whether Bemberg's female perspective deviates in some way from aesthetic conventions.

With Argentina's origins rooted in the predominantly male activities of the *conquista* and its colonization grounded in sixteenth-century Spanish patriarchal culture, its women were mostly excluded from its history. Considered the property of the men in the family, single women remained under the authority of their fathers and married women of their husbands,³¹ and were not allowed to hold any political or administrative positions in the colony. With the influence of French and other foreign cultures in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, attitudes

³¹ Until the mid-nineteenth century, single women remained under their father's rule until the age of twenty-five, after which they gained some civil rights and could marry without their father's approval; when they did so, they lost their rights again (Carlson 7).

began to change, especially with respect to the education of aristocratic women (Carlson 32). While the Argentine upper class did not consider public education or literacy necessary for other segments of the female population, they did want their daughters to be literate, educated and to behave in a proper and virtuous manner (36). Motivated by the Enlightenment, numerous voices, among them Juana Manuela Gorriti (1818-1892), Mariquita Sánchez de Thompson (1786-1868) and Juana Manso (1819-1875), insisted on the mandatory education of women and access to universities (Calvera 18). Prior to and during his presidency, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888) also played a key role in the advancement of women's education, advocating that girls should be educated not only for motherhood, but also for the ultimate purpose of contributing to politics and public life (Carlson 66).³²

The Argentine women's movement began toward the end of the nineteenth century following similar movements in Europe and the United States in which women began to organize themselves to enhance their lives and improve society (Carlson 42). It is important to distinguish between the women's movement and the feminist one. The mostly wealthy upper and middle-class Argentine women who formed the *Sociedad de Beneficencia* were philanthropists focused on improving

³² Sarmiento believed that women were as capable as men and he was a steadfast supporter of women's education. His progressive ideas were outlined in a *folleto* entitled *Programa de una coleja de las señoritas de San Juan* (in *Recuerdos de provincial Folletos* 1850) in which he maintained that women would benefit if they received the same education as men. After traveling extensively in Europe, Africa and the United States in the 1840s, he returned to Chile and wrote approvingly about the education of women. After Rosas' defeat in 1852 Sarmiento returned to Argentina and as Director of Education for the state of Buenos Aires accomplished major educational reforms. He believed that public education was the means to civilize society and a right of every citizen, especially women (Monti 93-94). He viewed women's education as opening doors to their independence (94) and his innovative idea was to post women in top positions in education so that they could be powerful instruments in spreading this message across the country (Monti 92).

the technical and home schooling of women with limited means by hosting literary and artistic events (Lavrin 258). Conversely, feminists came from all walks of life and organized to promote equal legal, social and political rights for women (Guy 1). Many women philanthropists were strongly opposed to feminism and did not necessarily share its political demands for suffrage and women's rights (Carlson 42). As Lavrin explains, subversion of gender roles within family and society was an intimidating thought. Even female advocates of women's emancipation were more interested in equality in education and legal equality for married women than in suffrage (Lavrin 257).

The beginning of the feminist movement in Argentina can be attributed to two factors: immigration and women's access to university. The waves of immigration encouraged by the government between the 1860s and the 1890s transformed the national population, and the flux of skilled, educated and professional Europeans played a pivotal role in the economic progress enjoyed by Argentina in the early twentieth century. Among them were liberals, anarchists and socialist exiles whose progressive ideas not only provided support for secular education but also a social and intellectual climate favorable to women's rights and feminist issues (Carlson 41).

Economic progress also brought the emergence and consolidation of the Argentine working class, influenced in part by the increased number of women working outside the home. Previously, women's tasks were confined to the care of the home and children; any other work assumed, as seamstresses or weavers for example, was done from their homes (Zaldivar 50). The introduction of large manufacturing establishments in the early twentieth century saw factories and

workshops filled with underpaid immigrant women and children working in deplorable conditions (Calvera 17). Their plight generated numerous strikes by women who worked as “costureras, cigarreras, chalequeras, pantalonerías, alpargateras, camiseras, fosforeras, tejedoras y empleadas domésticas”³³ in Buenos Aires, Rosario, Junín and Córdoba in the years between 1888 and 1910. In 1910 alone, 298 strikes were registered with a significant³⁴ number of women participating (Zaldivar 52; Carbajal). In the turbulent years that characterized nation building, Argentina’s first wave of feminism emerged as a struggle for women’s right to fair working conditions, one intertwined with anarchist and socialist labor movements (Calvera 18).

Immigration and economic progress also brought modernization. In addition to Buenos Aires’ cosmopolitan population, industrial activity, and reliable infrastructures for electricity and transportation (A.López, *Early Cinema* 51), Argentina was one of the countries to experiment with the recent invention of film. Immigrants again played a key role; in 1896, Belgian Enrique Lepage, motivated by two employees, the French Eugenio Py and Austrian Max Glücksmann, imported film equipment and projectors in order to further his photography business (A.López 49; Pérez Recalde 2). Mastering the new medium’s technology, Eugenio Py, considered the founding pioneer of Argentine cinema, produced two-minute documentary short films imitating the Lumière style. Aligned thematically with the nation’s growth and current events, Py’s *La bandera argentina* (1897), *La revista de la escuadra argentina* and *Llegada de un tramway* (both in 1901)

³³ As many of these occupations no longer exist, translation is problematic.

³⁴ All sources consulted repeat “significant” without specifying any specific number.

present national views in which government officials and members of the elite are shown in public, political and recreational events. The goal of these films was to impress upon the world the splendor of Buenos Aires as it embraced progress, modernism and the integration of its inhabitants; as a result, these views failed to show the growing labor unrest and numerous strikes against the system during that period (Guerstein 17).

At the end of the nineteenth century, an improved educational system also produced a core of well-educated professional women who, conscious of their abilities, felt hindered by existing limitations. Between 1898 and 1905, feminism began to be discussed and defined (Lavrin 15). Biagini posits that the first public use of the term “feminism” occurred at the *Exposición Nacional de 1898*, in which elite women referred to the feminine part of the exposition as “*feminista*” (Biagini 222). At the exposition, Argentine sociologist-historian Ernesto Quesada³⁵ praised the advancement of women under feminist guidelines in other parts of the world and expounded a fairly advanced version of “*feminismo*”³⁶ in his closing speech (Biagini 222; B. Smith 128; Barrancos, “Primera”). Quesada’s lecture, together with the successful 1898 National Women’s Exposition in Buenos Aires, launched

³⁵ Ernesto Quesada (1858-1934) was a lawyer, historian and sociologist of Buenos Aires whose controversial *La época de Rosas* (1898), represents his most important revisionist contribution to the study of Argentine history from a sociological perspective (Kroeber 102).

³⁶ According to Asunción Lavrin, the early twentieth-century concept of *feminismo* in Argentina was “the acknowledgement of women’s intellectual capacity, their right to work in an occupation for which they had the ability, and their right to participate in civic life and politics.” Some activists used the term while others preferred the less-stigmatized terms “feminine” and “female emancipation” (Lavrin 29).

the discussion of feminism in Argentina. Elvira López,³⁷ one of the first graduates from the University of Buenos Aires' Faculty of Philosophy and Literature in 1901, authored *El movimiento feminista, primeros trazos del feminismo en Argentina* (Palermo). This first doctoral thesis on feminism in Argentina, drawn largely from European sources, described the state of feminism in Europe and the United States, as a struggle to obtain the legal and economic equality of women without gender conflict (Lavrin 34). It was the first sociological study to examine in detail the female social condition in different historical eras and to analyze the evolution of the feminist movement at the international level (Denot). With respect to women's political rights in Argentina, Elvira López states in her thesis: "la mujer argentina no posee ninguno, y en la época actual es lo mejor" [since] "el sufragio es el término de la evolución feminista que aquí está en sus comienzos" (Leciñana). According to the Proceedings of the *Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional* in 1910, organized in part by Elvira López among others, the topics of suffrage and the divorce laws were heatedly discussed (Leciñana). Along with Elvira López, Cecilia Grierson and Elvira Rawson were the first professional female graduates from Argentine universities to endorse feminism (B. Smith 128). After participating in the International Congress of Women in London in 1899, Grierson was instrumental in creating Argentina's *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres* (1901),³⁸ which became affiliated with other international organizations of the same name (Retali, "El cambio").

³⁷ In 1896, the University of Buenos Aires created the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Among the nine students in the first group of graduates in 1901, four were women: M. A. Canetti, Ernestina López, Elvira López and Ana Mauthe (Palermo).

³⁸ The *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres* would function as an umbrella organization for women's clubs and philanthropic groups (Carlson 92).

While many of the early Argentine feminists were strong advocates of equal educational and career opportunities for women, many were also concerned with working conditions and job training of lower-class women. There was a deep philosophical division between upper-class women dedicated to philanthropic causes — whose views were more conservative and closely aligned with the traditionally assigned female roles — and the more highly educated ones interested in gaining political and economic rights for women (Carlson 95).

Women's organizations and centres began to form in two separate streams: one sought civic and political rights; the other sought women's recognition as members of the labor force and the improvement of their working conditions (Calvera 19). Activists in the struggle for women's political and civic rights began to emerge within the group of educated, mostly medical, professionals from the higher social classes. In 1901, for example, Cecilia Grierson, together with Alicia Moreau de Justo, Elvira Rawson and Julieta Lanteri, had instituted the *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*.³⁹ However, Alvina Van Praet de Sala, its first president and a member of Buenos Aires' highest social circles, began to disassociate the council from controversial issues including feminism, and disenchanted feminists began to form separate organizations: for example, Sara Justo's *Centro de Universitarias Argentinas* (1902),⁴⁰ Elvira Rawson's *El Centro Feminista* (1905), for women interested in political and social reform,⁴¹ and Julieta Lanteri's *Primer Centro del*

³⁹ The *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres* remained a conservative association with no interest in feminism and in 1919 joined the Patriotic League (Lavrin 259).

⁴⁰ The centre was renamed the *Association de Universitarias Argentinas* in 1904.

⁴¹ *El Centro Feminista* did not prosper because, as the *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres* had warned, the word *feminista* would keep people away (Carlson 103). To soften its radical image, Rawson

Libre pensamiento (Lavrin 258; Calvera 19). Yet these upper-class women never really reached out to women in other social classes in any major way nor did they join them as equal partners in their struggles for equality (Mercer; Retali, “El cambio”).

The influence of socialism among organized urban labor also broadened the meaning and discussion of feminism as women organized their own feminist groups. Notable socialist feminists include Fenia Chertkoff, Carolina Muzzilli, Raquel Messina, and Justa Burgos de Meyer (B. Smith 129). Fenia Chertkoff, a feminist columnist for the socialist newspaper *La Vanguardia*, formed the *Unión Gremial Feminista* in 1902. Mostly non-working-class militants of the Socialist Party, these women campaigned in favor of divorce, women’s civil rights and supported strikes in a first step to reach working-class women (129).⁴²

With the feminist movement thus split between the *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres’* conservative non-feminist philanthropists and progressive feminist intellectuals, the 1910 centennial of the May Revolution served as a pretext for two conferences: *El Congreso Patriótico y Exposition del Centenario* by the upper-class conservative “ladies,” and *El Primer Congreso Feminista Internacional de la República Argentina* by the *Asociación de Universitarias Argentinas* (Calvera 20). To counter the feminist conference, participants in the *Congreso Patriótico* spoke on welfare institutions, the technical education of women and the regulation of

renamed it *El Centro Manuela Gorriti* where, during thirteen years it provided essential services for women and a meeting place for feminists (103).

⁴² This centre would later join el *Center Socialista Femenino* (B.Smith 129). A report on the dangerous and unhealthy working conditions of women in factories by working-class immigrant, Carolina Muzzili, was used in the 1906 efforts to gain protective legislation (Mercer).

female industrial labor and child labor. Several of the speakers judged political rights for women as “inopportune” (Lavrin 258).⁴³ At the *Congreso Feminista*, participants presented essays on a wide range of themes that included proposed changes to divorce laws, equal salaries for equal work for both sexes, and women’s right to vote. Women’s suffrage did not appeal to the Buenos Aires aristocracy nor to conservative ladies of the patriarchy, who came to the conclusion in their conference that women’s lack of civil rights formed part of the natural order (Calvera 20).

If the feminist movement celebrated the centennial with a congress on women’s rights, the film industry did so by recreating key moments of Argentine history and mythifying events and persons that contributed to the formation of the country. The theatre, an art form with an extensive history, was a source of inspiration for filmmakers seeking to narrativize the medium (A.López 61). With a *mise-en-scene* reminiscent of the theatre and the style of film d’art in France, *literati* and film directors worked together to adapt literary works to film. Aligned with “a consciousness of a national identity and a narrative-nationalist impetus” (A.López 61), Argentine history and literature became the basic themes of silent films: among them *Nobleza gaucha* (1915), inspired by José Hernández’s *Martín Fierro*; and the first full-feature film, *Amalia* (1914), based on Jose Marmol’s novel. *Nobleza gaucha*, which exemplifies the nationalist sentiment and contradictions of the period, introduced the cultural city-country dialectic central to

⁴³Lavrin cites as examples leading Catholic conservative Celia Palma de Emery’s comment that “exaggerated or misunderstood feminism” was “pernicious” and Carolina Jaime de Freyes’ view that feminism was based on “an ideal of nobility and goodwill that embraces all good doctrines” although she did not accept all of its premises (Lavrin 259).

Latin American modernity debates (A.López 61). These films opened the way for the creation of a national film industry with producers that began to narrate city conflicts with a more critical point of view; for example, Camila and Héctor Quiroga's daring production *Juan sin ropa* (1919). Camila Quiroga, a theatre actress who had the starring role, was an example of how women incorporated themselves as actresses into the new invention of film. The film revolved around a rural worker who migrated to Buenos Aires to work in a refrigeration company; labor riots ensued and the workers' protest was repressed by massacres in what became known as *la semana trágica* of January 1919. The scenes of violence and urban working conditions introduced social criticism in national film ("El largometraje" *Historia del cine argentino*).

Argentine feminists in the first decades of the twentieth century promoted their cause mostly in newspaper articles and essays.⁴⁴ The nascent film industry, still in its silent stage, did not emerge as an alternative medium to forward their cause. During the silent film period (1896-1928), there are no examples of films that treat feminist issues and only two female directors were associated with national cinema, Emilia Saleny and María V. Celestini. Little is known about theatre actress Emilia Saleny. After a career developed almost completely in Italy, she returned to Argentina in 1917 and founded *La Primera Academia Cinematográfica Argentina* (Bianchi qtd in Scherer; Siles Ojeda). Together with her students, she is accredited with four films; she directed *La niña del bosque*

⁴⁴ In parallel, and thanks to the feminist movement, more and more women expressed their social criticism through writing: for example, in *La Voz de la Mujer* (1906), Carolina Muzzili's *La tribuna feminista* (1917) and Alicia Moreau de Justo's *Nuestra Causa* (1919). These publications offer documented testimonies that capture the small advances, the drawbacks, the projects, the frustrations and the joys of the feminist struggle (Calvera 24).

(1916) and *El pañuelo de Clarita* (1917) and acted in *El Evadido de Ushuaia* (1916) and *Problemas de Corazón* (1919) (Siles Ojeda). Unfortunately all were destroyed by fire. *La niña* would have had a cast of child actors that would have justified a female director, while *Clarita* was a melodrama (Siles Ojeda). Even less is known about María V. Celestini whose film *Mi derecho* (1920) suggests a feminist theme aligned with the fight for women's rights at the time. Given the social-cultural limitations imposed and the economic costs associated with filming, these women did not produce further works (Trelles 16).

Feminist issues were also absent in the films of the early 1920s, when a thematic change in national cinema brought the beginning of a new genre — the *tango* films. Motivated by a desire to investigate the marginalization and the misery that constituted daily life in Buenos Aires' suburbs, film director José Augustín Ferreyra moved the filmic focus from the urban centre to the periphery (Ostuni). In the 1920s, Argentine feminists could claim a few victories in Civil Code reform,⁴⁵ but the climate in the country was not receptive to their cause; one of the main reasons appears to have been their inability to build a mass base

⁴⁵ The Argentine legal system deemed women as minors in need of male protection and as such women were denied voting privileges (Lavrin 194). Accordingly, the Civil Code prohibited divorce and authorized men to supervise the labor, property, and finances of their wives and daughters (194-96, 228). In 1924, Mario Bravo and Juan B. Justo Socialist Senators submitted a draft entitled "Civil Rights of Unmarried, Divorced or Widowed Women." This project was approved by the Senate in 1925 and a year later it finally became law (11.357). The first article of that law, "Act of Civil Capacity of Women," recognized equal capacity to exercise all rights and civil duties between men and women, whether these were unmarried, divorced or widowed. For married women, many of the restrictions imposed by the code were lifted but they were not yet granted full equality. On April 22, 1968, then President Juan Carlos Onganía signed the Decree Law 17,711 which devoted full capacity for women of any age or marital status (Giordano).

The 1869 Civil Code also stipulated that a married woman was not legally authorized to administer or dispose of her assets; the spouse administered all the assets of the marriage. The law passed in 1926 changed the situation of the married woman, but did not grant full civil equality. She could now buy goods, manage and dispose of goods earned with the proceeds of her profession and belong to civil or commercial associations. However the law still left the married woman in an inferior position: for example, she was not allowed to leave her husband, unless the situation was life-threatening, or to exercise parental authority of their minor children (Giordano).

(Carlson 166). Halfway through the decade, the effervescence of the feminist movement waned as discouragement with its apparently unattainable goals spreads worldwide — a disenchantment that was also echoed in Argentina (Calvera 24).

Wall Street's financial collapse in 1929 reverberated in Argentina, raising Buenos Aires' unemployment and making survival in the rest of the country so difficult that it spurred a migration from the provinces to the metropolis in search of a better livelihood (Retali, "El cambio"). In 1930, Uriburu's military coup overthrew Yrigoyen's government and ushered in an era of restructuring in which conservative views took control and changed social sensibilities ("El cambio"). The flux of workers into Buenos Aires impacted women's participation in the meager labor market. The feminist cause all but disappeared leaving female workers and employees in the lower classes without any kind of union support (Calvera 24). Low-income women were defenceless against intolerable situations: for example, maids earned as much as their patrons decided to pay them, ate leftover food, slept anywhere they could and even risked the sexual abuse of the men of the house (Retali, "El cambio"). Many of these women reverted to prostitution, while their lower middle-class counterparts moved into positions such as salespersons, cashiers and, a few, as administrative employees. While these jobs provided a relative independence, these women suffered social prejudices and even contempt from the men in their families, because it was still considered demeaning for a woman to "work outside the home" (Retali, "El cambio").

The distance between upper-class and proletarian women was perhaps never wider than in this decade. Protected by their social standing, aristocratic women continued their existence with their backs turned on reality, alternating between

pleasant occupations such as hosting receptions or studying languages or the fine arts at classes given by the conservative *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*; occasionally they eased their consciences through the activities of this philanthropic society. However, in general, these ladies showed no discomfort for the social role which was meant for them and few were the voices that sought greater freedom of action and thought (Retali, “El cambio”). Middle-class women’s energies became channelled into personal achievements in theatre, literature and the arts. Even though the concern for political rights remained, historical circumstances in the 1930s did not appear appropriate for any long term actions (Calvera 24).

Given the depressing economic situation, feminists focused on the suffragist campaign. In 1930, two organizations were founded to promote it: the *Comité Socialista Pro-Sufragio Femenino*, and the *Comité Pro-Voto de la Mujer* (Lavrin 277). The *Comité Socialista* leaned strongly on committed feminists such as socialist physician Alicia Moreau de Justo (1885-1986), a staunch supporter of female workers’ rights, suffrage, and the reform of Civil Codes, such as divorce. In 1918 Moreau de Justo helped found Argentina’s *Unión Feminista Nacional* and its journal, *Nuestra Causa*, in which she published many of her articles on women’s political rights (B. Smith 129). In the 1930s she was broadcasting her message in *Vida Femenina*, a feminist socialist journal that became a solid source of suffrage support. In contrast, the *Comité Pro-Voto de la Mujer*,⁴⁶ founded on the same goal of suffrage by Carmela Horne de Burmeister from the association of *Damas*

⁴⁶ Renamed the *Asociación Argentina del Sufragio Femenino* in 1932.

Patricias, was aligned with the traditionalist forces that opposed divorce (Barrancos, “Problematic” 133; Calvera 24). The committee claimed to be inclusive of all women, but its leadership was obviously middle class and conservative (Lavrin 278). Although the Chamber of Deputies approved women’s suffrage in 1932, the Senate shelved the project. As Lavrin explains, disappointed feminists felt that twenty years of effort had been wasted in the country where women’s political awareness had first developed.⁴⁷

The discussion on feminism and suffrage continued through the late 1930s. Throughout the decade, Moreau de Justo patiently outlined again and again the many reasons for women’s suffrage, stating in a 1937 issue of *Vida Feminina* that gender condemned women even though they worked, paid taxes, and obeyed the same laws. Suffrage would bring a new healthy element into the political process (Lavrin 283).⁴⁸ When a proposal to modify the Civil Code and abolish women’s economic independence surfaced in 1936, Victoria Ocampo, one of Argentina’s leading women writers and founder of the Argentine literary magazine *Sur* (1931), joined the feminists for a short time to denounce this and other bills designed to demean women (Lavrin 278). That same year Ocampo formed the *Unión de Mujeres Argentinas* and, with her refined literary style, restated the principles that feminists had previously established (278). Her intellectual reputation served to

⁴⁷ Lavrin explains that although ten of those years were spent on understanding the full meaning of feminism and strengthening its foundations, the rejection of suffrage in the 1930s was the result of increased antifeminism and a backlash of militarism and fascism in a country facing a serious economic crisis (Lavrin 282).

⁴⁸ Moreau de Justo’s efforts are evidenced in her article “Diez Razones” in *Vida Femenina*: two of these ten are, “1. A igualdad de obligaciones, igualdad de derechos. — Las mujeres viven sometidas a las mismas leyes que los hombres; trabajan como ellos, como ellos pagan impuestos, pero no puede intervenir directa ni indirectamente en la sanción de las leyes. [. . .] 10. La mujer será un elemento saneador de la política” (Moreau de Justo 4-5).

underline the gulf between conservatives and reformers (Lavrin 283). However, she discovered no sense of solidarity or real friendship among women, but only competition for the attention of men: their only real interests were courtship, marriage and motherhood (Carlson 179). Disagreement with the Communists caused Ocampo to resign from the *Unión de Mujeres* in 1938 because she believed that politics must be at the service of the feminist struggle, and not vice versa. Despite her efforts, Ocampo never renounced her own aristocratic class and found herself confined by its limits; she did not perceive the egalitarian principles of democratic socialism to be either possible or desirable (Retali, “El cambio”; Carlson 179).

The decade of the 1930s also brought cultural opponents to feminism in the guise of those who, first through radio theatre and then in film, collaborated in the “sentimental and traditional” education of women and in the preservation of existing moral and public values (Retali, “El cambio”). With the introduction of sound film, the Argentine film industry capitalized on its popular musical legacy — the *tango* (Falicov 11). New production companies began importing film equipment and technicians from Hollywood to work with their staff and Lumilton, for example, based its studio on the Hollywood model (12). This initiated the Argentine film industry’s “*época de oro*”⁴⁹ that lasted until the 1950s; an era dominated by genres such as the *tango* films, the detective and gangster films, comedies and melodramas (Falicov 12). In a society that was essentially *machista* and in which the roles of each sex were clearly defined, the popular male directors

⁴⁹ Argentine Golden Age will be discussed in detail in the second section of this chapter.

(José Agustín Ferreyra, Francisco Mugica, and Manuel Romero) were behind a product targeted at and consumed by women, especially in genres like melodrama. These directors constructed, or contributed to the construction of, female characters that reinforced the image of women as submissive and weak, subjugated to the will of a strong male hero (Retali, “El grito”).⁵⁰

Ferreyra’s first sound film productions which starred his pet actress Libertad Lamarque — among others, *Ayúdame a vivir* (1936), *Besos brujos* (1937) and *La ley que olvidaron* (1938) — consisted of repetitive plots that involve an innocent and respectable young woman of humble origins pursued by a villain, betrayed by an unfaithful husband (Retali, “El cambio”) or victimized by a society divided into the “irreconcilable universes” of the rich and the poor (Karush 310). Not only did this strategy offer a populist version of national identity by encouraging viewers to identify with the working poor, but moreover the targeted female spectators identified with Lamarque’s hardships and shed many tears in solidarity. As a result, similar stories later performed by other actresses created a whole tradition of filmic melodrama around this central theme (Retali, “El cambio”). From these melodramas emerged the female stereotypes that Silvia Oroz classifies as: “la madre, la esposa, la novia, la hermana, la prostituta” that I shall discuss in the next section. Suffice it to say that these film’s androcentric perspective reduced female characters into two morally oppositional stereotypes: the selfless mother/wife/sister

⁵⁰ The strength of Argentine film studios and its successful films created a source of tension with the United States’ film industry (Falicov 13). As Falicov explains, Jorge Schnitman (1978) postulated that this was the reason that the U.S. decided to produce Spanish-language films for Latin American consumption. Although this effort was largely unsuccessful, countries such as Argentina, Cuba, and Mexico felt threatened by the influence of English on the national language (14).

excelling in domestic virtues and the prostitute/ femme fatale/cabaret dancer who uses her sexuality to tempt men into perdition (Fontana 7), reinforcing the timeless, Judaeo-Christian binaries of virgin and prostitute (Siles Ojeda 10).

While the circumstances of the period demanded the urgent participation of women in the labor force, the difficult working conditions that women experienced during this era in menial and low paying jobs as shop employees, factory workers, seamstresses, and pressers did not appear as plot material in cinema. The theme prevailed mostly in the publication *Nuestra Causa*, in which feminists Alfonsina Storni and Alicia Moreau promoted woman's independence through work and their incorporation into the labor force. Film director Manuel Romero, who contributed articles to their feminist magazine, celebrated working women in his film *Mujeres que trabajan* (1938), which describes the human and economic difficulties of a group of women who work in a department store. In the film's array of feminine characters, Pepita Serrador represents a novelty — a left-wing intellectual who reads Karl Marx at breakfast, encourages her friends to concern themselves with humanity and to participate in demonstrations (Cabrera). As Retali observes, these working women appear in a positive light with no hint of dishonour or moral corruption associated with working outside the home. However the women are represented superficially in humorous and melodramatic scenes that devalue the film as a testimonial of women's hardships (Retali, "El cambio").

A film industry that depended on actresses to represent women as either sexual objects or as figures admired for their domestic virtues was not likely to allow them access to the same opportunities as men when it came to the creativity and responsibility involved in filmmaking (Trelles 16). From the beginning of

sound film in 1928 until 1960 there were no female directors and only a handful of female script-writers expert in melodramas. Trelles concludes that, apart from their predominance in acting, their negligible presence is due primarily to the traditional exclusion of women from positions of responsibility and their relegation to the home (16).

Along with their predominant presence in front of the camera, women did work behind the scenes in secondary tasks that were understood to be specifically female: as costume designers, seamstresses, hairdressers and make-up artists (Siles Ojeda). Within film production, costume design is considered a minor technical skill, far from the creative responsibility of filming. However, as Conde explains, costume design indirectly influenced mass culture through the particular way of dressing and accessorizing the body. Film stars like Mirtha Legrand, Tita Merello, Zuly Moreno and María Duval moved on the screen donning fashionable evening clothes, hair styles, and accessories that they accompanied with the appropriate gestures and posture (Conde). This image cemented a relationship between the star and the audience in which the former became not only the model of fashion, but also of seduction (Conde).

Largely absent in filming, photography, and directing, women first appear in the creative sphere in production. Although today production incorporates all the essential components for the delivery of the complete product, including cost and profit, in the past, production was related to artistic matters. The filming team was less a hierarchical pyramid headed by a director as it is today and more a lateral working group that included the contributions of lighting technicians, photographers, scenographers, directors and producers (Conde). It appears that

women who were privileged with more responsible tasks in filmmaking were related to studio owners. Lina C. Machinandiarena for example, a relative of the Spaniard Miguel Machinandiarena who owned Estudios San Miguel, produced *Los isleros* (1950) and *Las aguas bajan turbias* (1951) (Conde). Theatre and film star Paulina Singerman had also formed her own theatre company in 1932 in the Teatro Odeón; following in her husband's footsteps she also became a producer (Conde). Olga Casares Pearson, whose career spanned from radio, silent film and theatre to sound film, scripted *Surcos en el mar* (1955) and *Continente blanco* (1956). Women were also instrumental in screenwriting plays and other literary works to film; for example Nené Cascallares authored and wrote the screenplay for *Fuego sagrado* (1950), and María Teresa León screenwrote *La dama duende* (1945), *Los ojos mas lindos del mundo* (1943) and *El gran amor de Bécquer* (1946). However, as Conde explains, much of the women's scriptwriting work in film reproduced patriarchy, as evidenced in *Fuego sagrado's* initial monologue written by Cascallares:

Mujer: en el hogar hay un fuego sagrado cuya llama hay que cuidar con las manos, la sangre, el ahínco y la fe: el amor. Piensa que amando a tu marido, criando a tu hijo, cuidando tu casa y adorando a Dios, has comenzado a conocer desde aquí abajo la dicha perfecta y suprema de allá arriba. (qtd. in Conde)

The woman directs these words at the female protagonist condemning her plan to become independent by working as a model, for this would result in her husband's shirt not being ironed or her daughter's illness not being diagnosed in a timely manner. Since this film had originally been broadcast as radio theatre, an

incremental number of female recipients had now heard this message transmitted over two different media (Retali, “El cambio”). Film now joined other media to reiterate its hegemonic message and reinforce gender roles — a woman’s place is to care for her husband, her children and the home.

Far from the naive comedies and melodramas of the era, the decade of the 1950s also saw the emergence of a cultured cinema in the collaboration between director Leopoldo Torres Nilsson and author Beatriz Guido. A new female voice in the literature of the decade, Guido won the Argentine Emecé prize for *La casa del ángel* (1954), a novel that her partner, film director Torres Nilsson, transposed to film in 1956-57. As Retali elucidates, the film introduced for the first time the psychology of an adolescent girl, not as the stereotypical virginal world of fantasies, but rather as an accumulation of worries, frustrations, sexual impulses and helplessness in front of external pressures. With the action set in the 1920s, adult female spectators could identify their own rigid upbringing and education while younger ones could recognize the dangers of accepting conventional norms without question (Retali, “El cambio”).⁵¹ Although Torre Nilsson directed the film adaptation of Guido’s eight most successful literary texts,⁵² Guido screenwrote only a handful: *Fin de fiesta*, *El secuestrador*, *La mano en la trampa* and *La terraza* (Saïtta).

Between 1940 and 1960, two women are conceded assistant directorships but only in a small number of films. The thirteen-year gap between Alicia Míguez

⁵¹ Bemberg uses a similar strategy in *Miss Mary* (1984). Released in 1984 but set in the years 1938-1945, the film is meant to reach women of her generation as well as younger ones.

⁵² Guido’s eight most successful literary texts are: *El secuestrador*, *La caída*, *Fin de fiesta*, *La mano en la trampa*, *Piel de verano*, *Homenaje a la hora de la siesta*, *La terraza*, *El ojo que espía* and *Piedra Libre*.

Saavedra's first job as assistant director in *Turbión* (1938), and her second in *El honorable inquilino* (1951) underline a lack of continuity in a specified task (Conde), suggesting that women were granted very limited opportunities in this role. Vlasta Lah is another example. Although she is acknowledged as the first female director in Argentine cinema, this position came late in her career considering that her function as scriptwriter, second unit and assistant director began with *Camino del infierno* in 1945, and continued in seven films in the 1950s before she finally made her debut as a director with *Las furias* (1960) (Conde). Moreover, Italian-born Lah was exceptional because she had studied cinematography at the *Centro Experimental de Roma* and *La Academia Nacional de Arte Dramático de Italia*. Married to Italian filmmaker Catrano Catrani, she assisted him in many of the films he directed in the Estudios San Miguel and also taught film at the *Ateneo Cultural Eva Perón*. Unlike Míguez Saavedra, Lah's training, position and experience provided a wealth of opportunities to develop her skills, yet she appears to have had few occasions that allowed her to perform tasks for which she was intellectually and technically trained (Conde).⁵³

Due to its perceived pro-Axis sentiments, Argentina preferred neutrality during the war and in retaliation for not supporting the Allied cause the U.S. imposed an economic boycott that included raw film stock.⁵⁴ By then the most

⁵³ In the 1970s María Herminia Avellaneda directed *Juguemos en el mundo* (1971) while Eva Landeck directed *Gente de Buenos Aires* (1974) and *Este loco amor* (1979) (Vilaboa): the former's career was spent directing some of the most successful Argentine television programs, while the latter specialized in representing the social reality of Buenos Aires. Neither focused on feminism.

⁵⁴ The U.S. Good Neighbor Policy was another factor that contributed to the general decline of economic and political stability in Argentina (Falicov 15). Created during World War II, the policy's objectives were twofold: first, to ensure Latin American support of Allied forces and the

profitable and technologically advanced in Latin America, the Argentine film industry began to lose its hold on the Spanish-language market and in 1942 the scarcity of raw film stock due to the U.S. boycott created a crisis in the industry that caused the shutdown of many film studios. Film production slid from its zenith of 56 films in 1942 to 24 within two years (Falicov 16). Under severe pressure from the United States, Argentina reluctantly broke off diplomatic relations with the Axis countries in 1944 (Carlson 186).

Despite the success of Argentine film in the 1930s and early 1940s, producers were largely a weak and divided group at the mercy of foreign controlled distributors or those with investments in promoting North-American films. Before and during his presidency (1946-1955), Perón propagated the state protection of national industries in order to bolster Argentina's industrial development and its position in international markets (King, *Magical* 40). To protect the film industry specifically, Perón organized the first state support of Argentine cinema: established film quotas, a percentage-based distribution system, state bank loans and subsidies for financing film productions and restricted withdrawals of earnings by foreign controlled companies (King, *An Argentine Passion* 36). As King explains, the Perónist era was viewed as one of "cultural obscurantism by most intellectuals and artists" (40). Film fell under the control of the Subsecretariat for Information and the Press, a form of propaganda ministry that monitored the media (newspapers, radio broadcasts and cinema) and imposed official censorship (40). Although Argentine filmmakers had continued to produce high quality examples of

war effort; second, to allow U.S. access to Latin American raw materials and markets for goods, including films, to compensate for losses incurred in Europe due to the war (15).

“golden age” cinema throughout the mid-1940s despite the U.S. boycott, Perón’s sanctioned film legislation and imposed censorship in 1946 contributed to the film industry’s deterioration (Falicov 14) as many intellectuals, artists and film directors went into exile during this period: for example, Luis Saslavsky and Libertad Lamarque. Perón’s measures had little effect as the quality of Argentine films quickly declined along with ticket sales (King, *An Argentine Passion* 41).

In 1940, the Argentine feminist movement was at a virtual standstill since feminists had shelved women’s issues to work in war relief agencies (Carlson 180). When a pro-Axis, anti-oligarchy and anti-feminist coalition of military men overthrew Castillo’s conservative government in 1943, feminism was seen as a foreign doctrine that threatened the core of Argentina’s “spiritual Catholicism.” The cultural concept of “Hispanidad” — the rediscovery of Spain and its spiritual bond with its former colonies — developed into a powerful political concept for the Church, the army and the university, allied to Mussolini’s fascism (Carlson 185). The old feminist militants and their associated organizations immediately renewed their struggle to achieve women’s suffrage (Calvera 25), but as in the past, they did not reach out in any meaningful way to working-class women to join them as equal partners. Their failure to attract broad masses of women was a significant weakness in the movement and a major obstacle in the advancement and support of the feminist causes as the lower classes of women could not identify with their efforts (Mercer).

This accounts in great part for Eva Perón’s attraction for working-class women; as she herself came from a lower-class background, the masses felt that she understood and cared about their predicament. Her influence on Argentine

women's political life was important because a mass of women who cared little about women's rights, and were indifferent to the concerns of middle-class feminists, entered politics because of Evita (Mercer). In 1947, Argentine women obtained the right to vote largely through the intermediary efforts of Eva Perón but quickly understood that the existence of a law did not guarantee women's presence as electoral candidates. As a result, in 1949, Evita, together with other politically active women, formed the *Partido Peronista Femenino*, the first official political party that sponsored the election of women candidates. Delegated census-takers not only managed party affiliation but were also responsible for political indoctrination. Additionally they offered courses (typing, sewing, and weaving) and other skills with which women could improve their standard of living (Mercer).

New avenues opened up in women's education during the 1940s. If previously women had studied to become teachers — the only occupation outside the home considered a respectable career — now there was a significant increase of female students in universities (Retali, "El cambio"). Although women were encouraged to pursue their studies, however, they were not to neglect their family obligations; a message made clear in the comedy *Cosas de mujer* (1951). The film reflects the new realities of the 1950s in which more women work outside the home, some embarking on professional careers. A significant change in female melodramatic characters is evident in *Cosas de mujer* (1951). The plot represents a complete gender role reversal that collapses the home into chaos. Although it is unlikely that a film's plot could condition the social conduct of a generation of

women, it serves as an example of how film products conveyed ideology (Retali, “El cambio”).

The First Lady also had a direct impact on the film industry. In 1950, Evita conceived the *Ateneo Cultural Eva Perón* to propagate Peronism in the artistic environment (Narvaez; Retali, “El cambio”). Almost all actresses at that time participated in the activities of the Athenaeum; many because of their sympathies with the regime, others in order to protect their careers since refusal meant immediately ostracism (Retali, “El cambio”). In reality, as Retali explains, there was never any true cultural content as the activities were strategically designed to promote Perón’s re-election. Actresses appeared photographed in different magazines relaxing, or celebrating a new party member in the *Ateneo*’s luxurious rooms. Instead of representing elusive screen images whose hairstyle, dress design or public conduct women sought to imitate, actresses became beings of flesh and blood, capable of defending or proclaiming an idea publicly. Women reading newspapers and magazines saw a different side of their favorite actress: not only as the beautiful woman who spent her days in the film studio or the theatre, but also as engaged in political life. Women began to speak up at family gatherings, offering political views that, for the first time, did not necessarily coincide with those of the man of the house (Retali, “El cambio”).⁵⁵

The *Partido Peronista Femenino* was the only party that presented women as electoral candidates in 1951; six senators and fifteen deputies were elected (Calvera 26) and Perón won the presidency with massive women’s support. But women

⁵⁵ To my knowledge, Retali is the only scholar to explore Eva Perón’s role in the *Ateneo Cultural*.

soon realized that citizenship was insufficient against their long-suffering situation, especially now that the post-war world had begun to focus on channeling women back into the home under the guise of new technological and scientific appliances designed to emancipate them (Calvera 35).⁵⁶

When the revolution of September 1955 put an end to the first Peronist era, a conservative military government returned to power and women's political activity also fell into oblivion. The divorce law, won under Perón's government in 1954 was repealed in 1956 and the male's patriarchal role restored (Retali, "El cambio"). Torn between right-wing and left-wing ideologies in an atmosphere of growing instability, Argentines suffered a series of weak governments until Perón's return in 1972. Although women continued to enlist in educational institutions and enter the labor market, many left to raise their children; even among the most progressive, this task was regarded as natural for women. Feminism languished during this period of political polarization (B. Smith 130).

During the Peronist era, Argentine cinema fell into a quagmire that only saw a partial recovery in mid-1957 when the local screens populated films from Hollywood and European countries. French, Italian and Swedish films presented a new female image of strong, sensual, self-assured women in charge of their lives, their relationships with men and their sexuality without reverting to the stereotype of a *prostitute* or *femme fatale*: this is evidenced, for example, in Sofia Loren's first

⁵⁶ Calvera refers to North America's post-war refocus on bringing women back into the home through the invention of state of the art appliances. Since men were fighting in the war, women had replaced them in factories and various industries in support of the war effort, achieving economic independence. As men were demobilized after the war, women were expected to relinquish their jobs and return to homemaking and raising children through the baby boom generation (Walls). Modern appliances were part of the strategy used to entice women back into the home, delaying the evolution of feminism until its second wave in the 1970s.

films or those by Ingmar Bergman, Arne Mattson and Alf Sjöberg (Retali, “El cambio”).

The almost non-existent Argentine films of the time rarely replicated the physical exuberance and challenging questions of the new European female image. Retali claims that the abundance of films directed by Armando Bo starring Isabel Sarli portrays women as objects: of desire, lust, cruelty and submissiveness. In the majority of these films, the actress embodies a variation of the same character: a woman unleashes violent passions while she pines for the man who will truly love her and rescue her from such debasement. It repeats the traditional message that undermines women’s freedom: on her own, a woman cannot change her destiny and salvation rests in the hands of the male (Retali, “El cambio”).

Argentine feminism and film stagnated in this political schism until the 1970s. Before delving into the second wave of feminism, we can summarize the first wave that began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as focusing on women’s legal rights. Despite the original demands that were based on equality, gender roles, and improved wages and working conditions for women, the 1940s saw Argentine feminist organizations all rallied around the common goal of women’s suffrage. As I have shown, the Argentine feminist movement and the film industry evolved side by side, yet the two seldom intersected in any meaningful way. The male-dominated film industry reinforced patriarchal culture and traditional values by underlining women’s domestic virtues. Although Eva Perón encouraged women to attend universities, she also reminded them not to forget

their family responsibilities, an ambiguous message transmitted in the 1951 film *Cosas de mujer* (Kriger 244).

The number of Argentine films that portray female characters in a political activity, participating in some demonstration or exercising her right to vote is negligible: *Nacha Regules* (1950) includes a female participant in a labor demonstration of 1910 but this is a minor role; *Mujeres que trabajan* (1938) inserts a left-wing intellectual and working woman. The only relevant example is *El grito sagrado* (1954) which shows the transgressions of pioneering feminist Mariquita Sánchez de Thompson, a woman who not only rebels against her father's authority and refuses an imposed marriage, but who is also portrayed as a strong political and cultural activist, participating in street demonstrations and meetings on independence. The film ends with then president Sarmiento's recognition of the elderly Thompson as an example for all Argentine women (Kriger 244).

If the first wave of feminism focused on women's political rights, the second, which surfaced in the United States in the early 1970s, was a "consciousness-raising" that touched on women's civil rights in every area of experience — including family, sexuality, and work (Walls). Post-war feminism sprang from two sources: the dissatisfactions of privileged white women, during a time of economic prosperity, with male-prescribed roles, and the awakening anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist consciousness of the 1960s (Anthony). Despite the socioeconomic transformations following the Second World War, cultural attitudes concerning women's work and legal precedents still reinforced sexual inequalities. The stirrings of the second wave began with Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième*

sexe (1949) in which she urged women to stop allowing themselves to be considered the weaker sex and to fight for rights that were still exclusively male. The first public indication that change was imminent in North America came with women's reaction to the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan spoke of the problem that "lay buried, unspoken" in the minds of the suburban housewife: dissatisfaction, boredom and lack of fulfillment (Friedan 57).

Influenced by the resurgence of the movement in North America, María Luisa Bemberg links the beginning of the second feminist wave in Argentina to her film *Crónica de una señora*:

Todo partió de un reportaje aparecido en un importante medio con motivo del lanzamiento de mi primera película *Crónica de una señora*. En esa nota me declaré abiertamente feminista y preocupada por la postergación de la mujer en todas las áreas: política, científica, técnica, económica y artística. A poco tiempo recibí varias llamadas telefónicas y cartas de mujeres que manifestaban compartir mis inquietudes. (Calvera 31)

Along with Gabriela Christeller, an Italian countess living in Argentina, Bemberg founded the *Unión Feminista Argentina (UFA)* to take up the torch lit 150 years earlier and continue the work of Argentina's pioneering feminists. While most of the *UFA* women had read Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, the material now coming from the North-American movement had a new tone. In pamphlets, leaflets and journals as the popular means of communication, the North-American feminists were outlining

the cause; the movement was defining itself around painful testimonials, articles, anthologies, inquiries and birth control issues (Calvera 32-33). The *UFA* met to discuss material that Bemberg and Christeller brought back from their travels almost from the moment of its appearance in North America. This feminist wave focused on sexism as the enemy: specifically, gender assigned roles as obstacles that prevented women from achieving economic independence and the right to think as a self-determining individual (Calvera 48).

Argentine feminism and film finally intersected when Bemberg ventured into the male-dominated industry. A member of Buenos Aires' privileged aristocracy, with no education other than that of the private governesses, divorced and raising four children, she managed to write two scripts and direct two short documentaries. She won scriptwriting awards for *Crónica de una señora* and *Triángulo a cuatro*, but was unsatisfied with the films. Convinced that "no man could understand what was happening with the new awareness of women" she decided to go behind the camera herself (Bach 20). Compared with Vlasta Lah's extensive formal training, Bemberg had no filmmaking experience when she ventured in at age fifty-six, already a grandmother.

As a feminist, Bemberg was frustrated with the image of women portrayed in film and television and vowed to use film to promote women's rights by offering images of women that were different from what she considered the traditional "sweet, corrupt, complacent" female stereotypes (Bemberg in Pauls 112 and King 221).

2.2 Female Stereotypes in Argentine Golden Age Films

Simone de Beauvoir's states that "One is not born a woman, but becomes a woman" and film, as another socio-cultural apparatus in a patriarchal bourgeois society has, through its narrative discourse, helped to create female imagery that has contributed to this "becoming" (Siles Ojeda 11). Whether in classical Hollywood or in its derivatives in Argentina's Golden Age of cinema, woman's inferior status is reinforced at every opportunity with images of the feminine aligned with patriarchy and the goal of preserving the hegemonic order (Siles Ojeda 11). A female character that fails to comply is punished for her transgression with banishment, marginalization or even death (Kuhn 34). While the period from 1933 to 1955 covers an evolution in film production — the emergence of sound film, its zenith in the 1940s and its consolidation and standardization in the 1950s — the images of women represented throughout are generally linked to the same destiny: home, family and motherhood (Conde). Through a selection of Argentine 'Golden Age' films, I shall examine female stereotypes⁵⁷ and the conventions of spatial movement to offer a point of comparison for Bemberg's filmic aesthetics.

With the introduction of sound film in 1928, the Argentine film industry capitalized on its popular musical legacy — the tango (Falicov 11). Motivated by José Moglia Barth's success with the first sound film, *Tango* (1933), filmmakers hired renowned theatre and tango performers, such as singer-actress Libertad Lamarque, comedic actress Tita Merello and singer Azucena Maizani, to ensure

⁵⁷ For the purpose of this dissertation I shall use the Schweinitz's definition of "stereotype" as "culturally specific patterns of a conventional nature." Schweinitz explains that "with respect to employment in a cinematic narration, this means that the concept of a stereotype focuses on situations and processes of a narration or stories, which at a given period belong to the conventional repertoire of different individual types of filmic narration" (Schweinitz 56).

that audiences of popular theatre and *radionovelas* would attend the newly developed sound cinema (Falicov 11). New production companies such as Argentina Sono Film and Lumilton began by importing film equipment. Basing its studio on the Hollywood model, Lumilton also imported Hollywood technicians to work with their staff (12). This phase inaugurated the Argentine film industry's *época de oro* that lasted until the 1950s. Tango, detective and gangster films, comedies and melodramas were the dominant genres throughout the 1930s and 1940s (Falicov 12).

During this period, Argentine cinema developed ideologically in two directions: one, the bulk of production, inspired by filmmakers Mugica's and Amadori's dominant bourgeois style characterized by parlor-room melodramas and costume dramas; the other, the popular (people's) cinema of working-class appeal, the *sainete*, mostly produced by filmmaker Mario Soffici, extended beyond Argentina throughout the Spanish-speaking world (Falicov 12; Pérez Villarreal 1581).⁵⁸ The *sainetes* were theatre sketches set in poor urban neighbourhoods familiar to the audience, or alternatively in the rural pampas of the dramatic gaucho films (Falicov 12-13). Mugica's and Amadori's bourgeois films, on the other hand, always dealt with the lifestyle of the middle and upper classes; the exterior world and its problems rarely entered the household. In these films, women are portrayed as sheltered from anything not related to the stability of the home and are dependent on their husbands (Pérez Villarreal 1581). The female protagonist is usually

⁵⁸ Manuel Romero, Mario Soffici, Leopoldo Torres Ríos, Carlos Hugo Christensen, Hugo del Carril and Lucas Demare represent the major directors of that time, and famous artists such as Carlos Gardel, Niní Marshall, Libertad Lamarque, Luis Sandrini and Tita Merello become known in the Spanish-speaking world ("Cinema").

represented by the same actresses, a practice that predisposed the spectator's expectations. The action occurs usually in the same stage setting — large living-rooms with grand staircases which the star ascends or descends; husbands who work in important offices with salaries that can afford the luxury shown on the screen, and plots based on marital conflicts or misunderstandings that end happily resolved. There are also films about women who seek other avenues of personal fulfillment: women from the poor areas of Buenos Aires who aspire for success in life to become famous cabaret singers, dancers, or *femmes fatales* (Pérez Villarreal 1581). Films during the Peronist era (1945-1955) portray women working as maids, office clerks, or professionals who struggle to achieve happiness. Mostly blond with their hair styled like Eva Perón's, their feminine conflicts are diluted in love stories in which the masculine discourse and gaze predominate (1582).

Sylvia Oroz explains that women receive an extensive repertoire of character types in the film industry's moral encoding because the patriarchal system assigns her a regulatory function that embodies the redeeming virtues of the established order (131).⁵⁹ The extensive film production of comedies and drama written and directed by men manipulated female spectators through the fundamental stereotypes of the virgin (in the mother, daughter, fiancé, wife and sister) and the prostitute (in the *femme fatale*, cabaret entertainer, lover, "evil one," and independent woman), which formed part of the film narrative accepted by mass

⁵⁹ According to Silvia Oroz, the images of women aligned with patriarchy were not exclusive to Argentine film but were also present in Mexican and Brazilian cinema in that period. Oroz suggests that this common strategy was used to uphold their shared Iberian ethnic and religious traditions (qtd. in Retali, "La virgen" 69).

culture (Oroz 131). From the melodramas⁶⁰ emerged the female stereotypes that Oroz classifies as “la madre/la hermana (abnegada), la esposa (niña), la novia, [and] la prostituta (la mala)” (131). The selfless mother/sister had to sacrifice herself and renounce everything for her children/siblings; the *esposa* stereotype had to be faithful, modest and selfless, the *novia* virginal and innocent. The prostitute would receive her final punishment, unless she was redeemed by some heroic or charitable act for which she usually paid with her life (Retali, “El cambio”).⁶¹

La madre/hermana abnegada, who sacrifices her life to uphold traditional family values, appears in *Así es la vida* [Francisco Mugica, 1939] and *Las tres ratas* [Carlos Schlieper, 1946]. In the former, the eldest daughter Felicia plays the *hermana abnegada*. As the dutiful daughter, Felicia breaks off her engagement to Carlos, a socialist, to defend traditional values and her political position echoes the patriarchal norm. As Retali explains, she embodies all the different models of maidenhood for she is at once daughter, substitute wife of the father (when the mother passes away) and mother of her nephews and nieces (Retali, “La virgen”⁷¹). *Las tres ratas* offers the selfless, self-sacrificing eldest sister as the maternal continuity of the socio-domestic order. The film exemplifies three of Oroz’s stereotypes in each of the three sisters: the eldest Mercedes portrays *la*

⁶⁰ Karush cites scholars James Daniel and Judith Walkowitz to suggest that Argentina’s popular melodrama spoke to working-class concerns when industrialization and internal migration were eroding traditional lifestyles. More specifically, Karush states that scholars Guy and Archetti have argued that melodrama expressed working-class men’s anxieties about women’s growing presence in the workforce and in the world of public leisure. This argument has been made most often for the case of the *tango*, in which women abandon their natural domestic roles within the barrios to pursue dreams of upward mobility. It is in this context that Karush maintains that scholars have depicted melodrama as essentially conservative (Karush 308-9).

⁶¹ However, as Oroz explains, these representations remain inconsistent because consumer markets required adjustments that had to be reflected in the films (133).

hermana abnegada; Eugenia, represents *la mala*; and the youngest, Analisa, goes to secretarial school and becomes *la novia-esposa* of her professor.

Besos brujos [José Ferreyra, 1937] and *Joven viuda y estanciera* [Luis Herrera, 1941] offer a variation on the stereotype of the innocent and helpless *novia* pursued by a villain, or betrayed by an unfaithful husband or fiancé, and saved by the male hero. In *Besos brujos*, Marga, a famous tango singer engaged to Alberto Pisano, heir of an aristocratic family, has realized every woman's dream: to marry into a higher social class, and as a result promises to give up her artistic career. The film transmits an important message: that once a woman finds marriage, she has no need to pursue a career since her feminine duties center on the home and children. Despite the deceptions, misunderstandings and ordeals that ensue, Alberto's sweet and patient *novia* remains steadfast and true. A similar image of the faithful *novia* appears in *Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina* [Manuel Romero, 1936]. After Alberto Rosales breaks his engagement with his aristocratic fiancé Camila, the patient *novia* states: "Seguiré esperándote por si algún día me necesitas." Doña Elena, the gullible *novia* in *Joven viuda y estanciera* loses her ranch to the underhanded activities of her executor and fiancé, but is rescued from destitution by the male hero, the foreman, reinforcing the message that women are incapable of managing financial affairs.

In Ernesto Arancibia's *Casa de muñecas* (1943), the Argentine interpretation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Nora Helmer exemplifies Oroz's *esposa-niña* stereotype, a carefree wife with no responsibilities, not even that of the children (Oroz 136), who consider her a playmate and call her Nora instead of "mom." Her husband Osvaldo does not consider her a woman, but calls her *muñeca*.

In contrast to the sweet and/or selfless *novia*, *madre*, *esposa* and *hermana*, the *prostituta* stereotype represents a transgressor of patriarchal law. Normally the *prostituta* is punished in some way for her crime although occasionally she is redeemed by an act of generosity or self-sacrifice. The stereotype can appear in several manifestations: a prostitute, *femme fatale*, cabaret entertainer (singer-dancer-actress), lover (other woman), evil one (*la mala*) or an independent woman (Retali, “La virgen” 68). Variations of this stereotype are evident in *Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina* [Manuel Romero, 1936], *Nacha Regules* [Luis Cesar Amadori, 1950] and *Deshonra* [Daniel Tynayre, 1952]. As the “other woman,” the cabaret entertainer, the prostitute, and the lover invade and unbalance the ordered family life (Oroz 135), as evidenced in *Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina*, in which tango singer La Mireya disrupts her upper-class boyfriend’s family, studies and home life. In Golden Age films, the prostitute was usually portrayed as an exceptionally beautiful *femme fatale*, independent and sexually liberated but, as Retali clarifies, this sexual “freedom” was reduced to sexual relationships outside matrimony and the forced acceptance of men’s sexual advances (Retali, “La virgen” 72) as evidenced in *Nacha Regules*.⁶² Both La Mireya and Nacha Regules represent the woman who abandons the protected space of the home to venture into a life of prostitution or alternatively, a kept woman who will serve the man who best defends and supports her (Soria 522). *Deshonra*’s Flora portrays the “other

⁶² As Karush explains, women in these narratives are drawn into dangerous sexual attachments when they abandon their natural roles within the domestic sphere of the barrios to pursue dreams of upward mobility amid the bright lights of downtown. He argues that melodrama projects an essentially conservative function, structured by a sense that destiny controls one’s future and as such melodramatic narratives discouraged any attempt to transform the social order. Melodrama eschewed any depiction of collective struggle and portrayed the division between rich and poor not as a class conflict but as an immutable, backdrop for individual stories of romance, transgression, punishment, and occasionally, redemption (Karush 308-9).

woman,” the lover in an adulterous relationship whose punishment for her transgression is imprisonment after being framed by her deceitful lover for the murder of his crippled wife. Her escape from prison serves to reveal the truth, but she dies and leaves her newborn orphaned.

Oroz observes that in Argentine Golden Age cinema the *prostituta*’s transgression from established order does not constitute a liberating act. The women either become insane or fall ill and die because they have not redirected their lives (Oroz 140); for example, La Mireya’s degenerates into “La Loca” in *Los muchachos de antes* and the prostitute Eugenia dies in *Nacha Regules*. Occasionally, *the prostituta* can redeem herself through a charitable act which allows her to reintegrate into society, normally through the patriarchal institution of marriage (140), as evidenced in *Nacha Regules* and *Las tres ratas*, although at times, she still must pay with her life as in *Deshonra*. As I shall demonstrate in this dissertation, Bemberg breaks away from the typical representation of the non-liberating, negative consequences associated with transgressions against patriarchal norms.

A few films in this period deviate from the stereotypes of the self-sacrificing mother/sister and complacent wife to touch on feminist issues, women’s independence or the new realities of the 1950s in which more women pursue a college education and embark on professional careers. Manuel Romero’s *Mujeres que trabajan* (1938), Carlos Schlieper’s *Cosas de mujer* (1951) and Ernesto Arancibia’s *Casa de muñecas* (1943) and *La pícara soñadora* (1956) are the most notable examples. Although the films generally portray new images of professional and working women in a positive light, they also end with an ambiguous message:

women are encouraged to pursue professional careers and work outside the home as long as they do not neglect their primary responsibilities as wives, mothers and homemakers.

Cecilia in *Cosas de mujer* and Sylvia Vidal in *La pícaro soñadora* portray these new images of women: Cecilia has a successful career as a professional lawyer while Sylvia is a salesgirl and law student. Conversely, in *Casa de muñecas* Nora Helmer's college education only served to secure a husband; her higher social status prescribed that a woman educate herself before marriage so that she was culturally prepared for the role of mother and housewife (Mastantuono 94). If Nora represents the stereotype of the dutiful *esposa*, her friend Cristina symbolizes the single woman who must work out of financial necessity. The female characters in *Mujeres que trabajan* share the same economic circumstances. During a breakfast conversation in the Helmer's bourgeois dining room, Cristina expresses some modern feminist views that clash with Osvaldo's traditional patriarchal ones and he argues that if she were married, he would not offer her "un puesto que puede y debe ocupar un hombre." When Nora is asked her opinion on the matter, she replies "No sé. De soltera obedecía a mi padre, ahora *no tengo más voluntad* que la de Osvaldo" (emphasis added), reinforcing the traditional social norm — the *esposa's* submissiveness to the male in the family — and, I suggest, an example of Bemberg's "sweet complacency." Towards the end of the film Nora rebels and departs on the road to self-discovery, but in a clear deviation from Ibsen's finale, the Argentine version of the film closes with her return home after two years to embrace her family responsibilities. In *La pícaro soñadora*, also directed by Arancibia, the young and penniless law student, Sylvia, lives in the Sares

department store, where she works by day as a salesgirl in the toy department and her uncle works by night as the security guard. She sleeps in the different bedroom suites and keeps meticulous records of the store items that she “borrows,” so that she can repay the store when she finishes her studies. Although she completes her law degree, she marries Freddy, the store-owner’s son and it is not clear whether she will pursue her career. The protagonist Cecilia in *Cosas de mujer* portrays a hard-nosed, efficient and successful female lawyer who displays masculine behavior and quick decision-making skills in her dealings with clients (Kriger 234). The plot represents a complete gender-role reversal that collapses the home into chaos. The cook, the nanny, and the servants all complain about the irregular lifestyle of the couple and abandon them.

As this dissertation aims to study Bemberg’s feminist strategy in the framing of, and her characters’ movements through, architectural spaces, I shall briefly, as a point of comparison, explore some filmic techniques and conventions regarding women’s movements in these classic Argentine films. Generally, classic Argentine films follow Bordwell’s definition of the canonical plot narrative: an initial undisturbed state of affairs is violated by a disturbance, from which a struggle or conflict ensues that must be set right by eliminating it (Bordwell 18). The character is usually the principle causal agent, who has clear goals and/or problems and will face conflicts with other characters and/or external events. Through conflict, the main character can learn and change. Women as main characters often have to sacrifice and suffer (Lesage) — clearly evidenced by Mercedes in *Las tres ratas*, Felicia in *Así es la vida* and La Mireya in *Los muchachos* — while minor characters serve as recognizable stereotypes. The

classical storyline conventionally adheres to one of three types: a chronological order in which events occur, *in medias res*, or a flashback usually motivated by a character's memory, used by Nora Helmer in *Casa de muñecas* for example. Dissolves, fades and wipes conventionally indicate different lapses of time and/or place. The setting of the story and a character's movement through it must appear completely natural. After a scene introduces the basic setting and characters, it generally moves from a wide, or establishing, shot to a medium shot, and then to close-ups of the characters, a process that is commonly referred to as "coverage." (Lesage). As Bordwell explains, a character will most often be framed "between *plan-american* (the knees-up framing) and medium close-up (the chest-up framing); the angle will be straight-on, at shoulder or chin level" (Bordwell 27- 28; original italicized). In classical film, there is a strong preponderance of medium shots for actions and of close-up shots for dialogues. Cinematographic conventions assure linearity and continuity by using shot/counter-shot and the 180 degree rule,⁶³ for example (Triquell 126). These filmic conventions constitute a cinematic language understood and employed by all filmmakers (G.M. Smith 41), and

⁶³ The 180 degree rule is "a central convention of 'continuity in film' that states that the camera must stay on one side of the axis of action (also known as the 180 degree line) — an imaginary line running through the space of the scene (often between two key actors). When the camera stays on only one side of this line, the shot will have consistent spatial relations and screen directions. That is, characters and objects on the right side of the screen remain on the right from shot to shot, and those on the left will always be on the left (at least, until they move and a new axis of action is established). We consistently see the same side of the actors. Sightlines obey the axis of action principle. An actor looking from the left side of the screen to the right will not suddenly, in the next shot, appear to be looking from the right to the left. Beyond maintaining consistent spatial relations and directions of movement and looking, the 180 degree rule also insures that the space in each shot will be immediately legible, since there will be more or less consistent and recognizable background from one shot to the next" ("Film Lexicon").

Bemberg is no exception in her use of conventional techniques and “spatial attachment”⁶⁴ to create stronger alignments with her major protagonists.

With respect to film and architectural elements, Elsaesser explains that cinema, as window and frame, offers a rectangular view to accommodate the spectator’s visual curiosity and permits him/her to look into an imaginary three-dimensional space that appears to open up beyond the screen (Elsaesser 14). In the film itself window and frame manage complex relations of distance and proximity that coalesce in a cinematic style known as classical. Perfected in Hollywood in the late 1910s and common until the late 1950s, this style keeps its disembodied spectator at arm’s length as an invisible witness in an unfolding narrative that does not acknowledge his/her presence, while simultaneously drawing him/her into the space (Elsaesser 18). Since the objective of this style was to keep the film crew and technology invisible both to the spectator and the subjects being filmed, an actor’s direct address or direct look into the camera is absent in classical film language. This style prevails in the Argentine films under discussion, although director Schlieper exceptionally subverts this rule by having his protagonist Cecilia look into the camera and address the audience both at the beginning and end of *Cosas de mujer*.

In addition to window and frame, Elsaesser also considers cinema as door and screen that allows the spectator to metaphorically cross or enter another world (Elsaesser 54). In the film itself, the motif of the door not only signals a crossing

⁶⁴ All filmmakers, Bemberg included, traditionally use what Greg Smith defines as spatial attachment, strategies to create a stronger alignment/*approchement* between major protagonists and the audience: framing them in more close-ups, following the major characters more than the others, for example, to emphasize their importance (G. M. Smith 44).

from one physical space to another, but at times underlines that doing so produces a specific meaning. In classical film Elsaesser posits that doors focus on women's role in the domestic sphere while the Hollywood melodramas of the 1950s and 1960s prolifically used door and window motifs to graphically evoke suspense and cliché situations of the plots. Surprise, anxiety and horror were conveyed through the opening and closing of doors (52). As I shall demonstrate in subsequent chapters, Bemberg breaks away from these meanings and generally uses the window and door motifs to signal passages of transgression.

In examining the female protagonists' movements through architectural spaces in the selected Argentine Golden Age films, I have found that a relationship can be linked to the virgin and prostitute stereotypes. A male director's framing of a virgin stereotype's (*novia*, *hermana abnegada*, *esposa*) position in, and movement through architectural space, differs from that of a *prostituta* stereotype (*la mala*, *la femme fatale*, the lover, the cabaret singer). The position within, and movement through, architectural space of the virgin stereotype is usually limited to the confines of a room or the home environment to underline the cultural norm that a woman's place resides within the domestic sphere. In contrast, the *prostituta*'s transgressive breach from the patriarchal norm is captured by correlating her spatial position and movement with her gradual degradation. This spatial correlation is not exclusive to the *prostituta* but can also be found in a transgressive act by a *novia* or *esposa* who deviates from the norm; for example, in *Besos brujos*, when Marga Lucena escapes stardom to perform in a rural cabaret or when Nora Helmer in *Casa de muñecas* breaks patriarchal law by forging her father's signature to borrow money without her husband's permission. Although Marga and Nora do not fit the

prostituta stereotype, their transgressions from the norm are still portrayed as non-liberating; Marga's action results in her kidnapping and Nora anguishes over her accomplice's threat to reveal her secret.

Film convention requires that a story usually begin with an establishing shot that describes the environment in which actions will take place and defines the spatial coordinates by situating the characters' movements in a precise setting so as to provide the spectator with a framework for the subsequent shots (Oubiña). *Así es la vida* opens with a bustling urban scene in 1900 in which carriages and people move about on the streets. The street scene switches to an interior office and closes in on the desk to focus on a family photo. The photo's frame acts as a window that opens into the film as the next shot captures the same photo now as a portrait on a wall. From the portrait, the camera recedes to reveal the open space of a hallway. It stops to frame two French doors in an establishing shot beyond which two young women dance a waltz in a large living room. The sense of distance created by this sequence suggests a large bourgeois home full of light. The three siblings are all dressed in white; one plays the piano while the others dance. A still camera frames a close-up of the bottom of their swirling skirts and they dance away from the camera until their continuous movement frames the girls' full height. One of them then moves across the room towards a window, drawn by the music from a street organist. The other two join her and peer through the lace curtains as the camera frames the street scene with the organist in a shot/reverse-shot sequence, revealing the girls' point of view. One of the girls boldly crosses onto the balcony and gives the organist a coin to play a tango, after which the sisters attempt the dance, forbidden in the bourgeois household because of its lower-class origins (Retali, "La

virgen” 71). The flurry of movements captured in this initial scene represents the height of the girls’ activity in the entire film. From here on, the three daughters always appear enclosed within the walls of the home; the still camera frames their limited movements as they pursue their domestic chores. As they later sit around the table in silence while the men converse, each daughter is a picture of sweet innocence and propriety. The only time the young women are shown outside the home is to attend their younger sister’s wedding. Most of the scenes take place in the house’s interior courtyard, or in the spacious, light and airy living room.⁶⁵

In *Así es la vida*, the women’s subordinate role is reinforced by their silence, complacency and self-sacrifice to traditional patriarchal values and religious mores. With respect to woman’s movement and her placement in architectural spaces, the best example is found at the beginning of the film when the girls dance in the spacious living room and later in the repetitive linear movements of setting the table. After this scene, the younger sisters marry and no longer appear in the film and Felicia’s role becomes secondary as the *hermana abnegada*. Windows and doors serve a technical purpose: to support the “frame within a frame” technique, as evidenced in the French doors in the initial scene that open to the living room, or in the use of the photo as a window to transition from one location to another.

Typically, films of the 1930s contrast the bustling views of urban modernity, as evidenced in the panorama of Buenos Aires’ modern skyscrapers and bustling

⁶⁵ Towards the end of the film, set four decades later in 1939, the same sequence as the opening scene is replicated. The camera frames skyscrapers, and cars driving around a bustling metropolis have replaced the carriages of the initial scene. The movement of the girls’ dancing in the initial scene is replicated by that of a car traveling along a rural landscape. Margarita’s daughter, Tota, is driving up from her family home in Patagonia with her boyfriend. The camera then repeats the initial sequence by switching to a framed photo of Tota and then recedes to reveal the grandfather’s living room.

streets in *Así es la vida*, with the quiet and rural life portrayed in *Joven, viuda y estanciera*. Wealthy ranch-owner Doña Elena rides on horseback with friends across the sunny expanses of her property in the pampa, basks poolside, or circulates comfortably in the sunny rooms of her huge homestead, oblivious to her executor's and fiancé's deceitful plans. Both *Joven, viuda y estanciera* and Bemberg's *Miss Mary* are set in the late 1930s, for the most part on an estancia. Bemberg, however, does not frame Mecha or the Martínez-Bordegain girls galloping on horseback across their property on the open pampa. The director captures the barren expanse of the pampa through cropped views to correlate with the empty lives of the women in the film.

In *Las tres ratas* the movement of the three sisters within the homestead in the initial scenes serves to accentuate the expansiveness of the hacienda's living area; Victorian furniture is scattered in huge empty spaces, divided by arches to create a sense of depth. At times the classic convention of "coverage" is inverted; instead of moving from a wide, or establishing, shot to a medium shot, and then to close-ups of the characters, in the initial scene inside the hacienda, the opposite camera movement occurs. The camera recedes from a "chest-up" framing of the eldest, Mercedes, to a knees-up framing of the three sisters, Mercedes, Eugenia and Analisa, together, and then to their circulation back and forth within the homestead to reveal its huge interior space. At the time they had just inherited the hacienda, and a window is used to frame the passing of time with images of the changing seasons.

Once they move to the city, Mercedes and Analisa's movements are limited to crossing the huge, empty and airy architectural space of their apartment. Outside

of their apartment, they are normally shown seated: Mercedes sewing at the fashionable shop; Analisa typing at the secretarial school; the three sisters eating in a restaurant. On the other hand, Eugenia, who represents the fun-loving and transgressive *mala*, travels the city: for example, she frequents a cafe-bar, a department store, and her boyfriend Carlos' apartment. Moreover, Eugenia is the only character framed closing doors or crossing thresholds in the film, each time signaling a transgression which leads to a further debasement: closing the door as she leaves her aunt's house to find work and independence, only to cross the threshold into Carlos' apartment to become a kept woman and then cross it again when Carlos forces her to leave. Later a knock on the door of the sisters' apartment reveals Eugenia's presence. Here the opening of the door not only conveys Analisa's surprise — a typical conventional use described by Elsaesser (52) but also to signal the disruptions that she will cause in her sisters' lives. Eugenia moves in and compromises them with stolen merchandise, requiring Mercedes to sacrifice her life and her love to ensure Eugenia's redemption.

In *Besos brujos*, the framing of the protagonist in architectural space changes as events unfold. The film opens theatrically to a voiceover of Marga Lucena singing a tango as the credits appear on the screen, after which the camera focuses on the theatre curtain in another example of the conventional "frame within a frame" technique. To the sound of thunderous applause, the theatre curtain opens to an ecstatic Marga taking a bow.

At the beginning of the film, the architectural spaces reflect Marga's success and her fiancé Alberto's aristocratic wealth and opulence. The star's luxurious dressing room presents an airy, bright space filled with vases of flowers. As in *Las*

tres ratas, here too the classic convention of “coverage” is reversed. The camera tends to recede from a close-up to a long shot to accentuate the horizontal expanse of an architectural space; for example, from a medium close-up of Marga and Carlos having coffee, the camera recedes to capture the scene in a long shot. In this film passages through doors do not produce any specific meanings and are used to switch scenes to another location or to cross from one physical space to another: the scene in which Laura, Alberto’s cousin, enters from the right, closes the door, traverse the entire length of the dining room, and passes through another door into the library, only serves to draw attention to aristocratic wealth in the breadth of architectural space.

The framing of Marga positioned in, and moving through, architectural space then connects with her change in circumstance. Upon hearing that Alberto loves and will marry Marga Lucena despite his mother’s wishes, Laura deceives Marga by saying that she is carrying Alberto’s child. Heartbroken, Marga flees to a distant province. From the patient and faithful *novia*, Marga transgresses by taking a job as a cabaret singer in a theatre-bar of dubious reputation. The camera frames a *plan-american* shot of Marga seated in front of a small vanity mirror and recedes to reflect the compacted architectural space of her new dressing room with her previous luxury. Again, the “frame on frame” technique is used as the camera captures Marga’s dressing room through horizontal window blinds to correlate the small boxed-in space with her reduced status as a rural theatre bar cabaret singer.

The theatre bar, captured in a high-angle shot from the stage, reveals boisterous men seated in a small smoke-filled space. The camera then switches to an outdoor shot of men arriving at the bar to establish continuity with the next shot

of the bar as seen from the main door with the theatre stage in the background. This establishing shot is intentional because it serves to further underline Marga's diminished status as the curtain opens to the small distant figure of Marga coming on stage to the sounds of applause. As she begins to sing, the camera switches to a *plan-american* shot to underline her seductive bodily gestures as she descends the stairs to the audience floor. The camera pans right to left over the medium close-ups of men staring at her mesmerized and transforming her into a sexual object with their gaze. She compounds this fetish by singing "Mírame, bésame dame miel de tus ojos [. . .] acúname que está llorando mi corazón," and gesturing flirtatiously with the men as part of her act. After her debut before this audience of lustful men, the greedy bar owner auctions a kiss from the singer without her permission. The winner, Don Sebastián, a wealthy, solitary and crude landowner then kidnaps and hides Marga in his cabin deep in the jungle, hoping to win her love. Architecture and civilization is replaced by the oppressive and isolating landscape. Marga is framed trapped in the enclosed jungle space, her efforts to escape frustrated at every turn. Despite the ordeal of her situation, Marga protects her honor and reputation by refusing Don Sebastián's food and courtship, so that when Alberto rescues her, the film ends with the couple's happy reunion.

In *Besos brujos* and *Las tres ratas*, Marga and Eugenia's transgressions from the norm are framed differently to accentuate the consequences of their naïve, misguided actions. A transgression is usually framed in or through an architectural space — a doorway, a dressing room or a theatre stage — which signals a further

debasement, although both these women are “redeemed” through matrimony at the end.⁶⁶

In *Casa de muñecas* the film’s beginning and ending differ significantly from Ibsen’s play. Instead of a living-room scene, into which Nora sails loaded with parcels, the film begins with the ship’s arrival into port. The protagonist is introduced through her voice as she announces her name “Nora Helmer” and her marital status “casada” to the immigration officer, who comments on her extensive traveling. As she looks at a child through a department store window, the window initiates a flashback, opening into the film to recall the events that led to her departure two years earlier when she was Christmas shopping for the children. The department store scene that initiates the flashback is another obvious deviation from Ibsen’s play. I shall return to the department store space in this and other films later in this chapter.

Nora’s financial dependence on her husband contrasts with Cristina who, less fortunate, is looking for work. Nora’s economic dependence is further accentuated by the fact that she must compile a price list for her husband’s perusal before he gives her money to buy Christmas toys. However, she astutely overstates the prices in order to get more money. A subsequent scene also suggests that she has been clandestinely working as an English translator for *Editorial Norte, sección femenina*; after asking for a cash advance, she makes all her Christmas purchases, the total of which is double the amount presented to her husband. Later, in her private boudoir, she locks away the balance of her paycheck in a drawer that

⁶⁶ Bemberg also uses doors and similar architectural elements to frame her protagonist’s transgressions but in contrast, these serve as passages to emotional spaces of female subjectivity or apertures for self-development.

already contains a substantial amount of money. Afterwards, she sits down to write as the camera focuses on an English dictionary on her desk, revealing that she is using her education after all, to secretly secure additional income as a translator. It is not clear whether she does this to repay a loan or to save for her later escape. Nora's boudoir is her private space, one in which she keeps secrets. Following the breakfast scene at the Helmer home, Nora and Cristina chatter amicably as they enter the children's playroom. The conversation reveals Nora's acceptance of Osvaldo's control over every aspect of the house, including the décor, although he permitted Nora to decorate the children's playroom, a task he would have considered beneath him. With the children in the nanny's care, the playroom serves as a private space in which secrets are revealed: Cristina gave up her true love to a marriage of convenience and Nora secretly secured a loan to finance medical treatment for her husband. Since women were not allowed to borrow money without their husband's permission, this act reveals Nora's transgression against a patriarchal norm.

At the beginning of the film, Nora's movements, punctuated by her child-like gestures and facial expressions, center on playing with the children and chasing them around the house in a game of hide-and-seek. Later, while she is playing the piano, the children run in and she begins chasing them again. The repetition of Nora's movements is important for two reasons: first, it underlines her carefree and child-like behavior; secondly, it serves to contrast with her sudden mood change after Dorcas threatens to expose her unless she intercedes to save his job. Nora had forged her father's signature on the loan document that she secured through

Dorcas. After Dorcas appears on the doorstep of her home to deliver the threat, her movements become subdued and she no longer plays with the children.

Elsaesser explains that windows, staircases, and mirrors are sometimes used in film to emphasize inner turmoil against a keen sense of visual confinement; this technique allows women to come into focus, but only to enforce their own sense of captivity (Elsaesser 53). After Dorcas leaves, a high angle shot from the staircase banister captures Nora pensive and deflated on the couch. The next day, Nora's inner turmoil and sense of entrapment are captured in an alternating shot/reverse-shot sequence. The scene begins by framing the view of the front gate to then zoom in on the mailbox, the method by which Dorcas threatens to reveal her duplicity to her husband. This shot reflects Nora's point of view as the reverse-shot frames a close-up of Nora inside a French window pane. The camera then reverts to Nora's view of the mailbox and gate, framed through the bars of the French window, and then back to a knees-up framing of Nora looking out from behind the French door. Later, after a couple has left, she crosses the threshold back into the house, closes the door and lies against it, her feeling of entrapment evident. She then moves to the window, sits and stares out, waiting for the mailman so that she can intercept Dorcas' letter. A third example of Elsaesser's technique is suggested when Nora is framed descending the stairs after kissing the children good-night. The sense of Nora's turmoil and feeling of impotence as she awaits her fate is emphasized by framing her descent through the prison-like bars of the staircase's banister.

Osvaldo's discovery of Nora's loan and forgery of her father's signature reveals him to be a cowardly and selfish man whose only concern is the damage this revelation will have on his good name. He allows Nora to stay to keep up

appearances but she is denied any authority over the children. In a moment of recognition and rebellion, Nora accuses Osvaldo with:

te divertía tenerme a tu lado como juguete. [. . .] Nunca me has tratado como una verdadera mujer, [. . .] no he sido tu compañera de vivir, sino tu muñeca. [. . .] Y ésto ha sido nuestro matrimonio — una casa de muñecas [. . .]. Cuando salí de mi casa a la tuya no hice más que cambiar de dueño. [. . .].⁶⁷ Si tengo todas mis responsabilidades, quiero tener todos mis derechos. Me marchó a educarme yo sola y a ganarme mi propia vida.

His reply that he will never agree to a separation or the abandonment of her most sacred duties is met with Nora's realization that:

Antes que esposa y madre, soy un ser humano igual que tú, [. . .] sólo cuando seré dueña de mi propia vida, sabré qué hacer con ella [. . .]. Volveré cuando seré una verdadera madre y no una compañera de juegos para ellos.

In an act of rebellion, Nora abandons her husband and home in order to find herself, only to return two years later like a repentant adolescent to embrace the same patriarchal values (Oroz 136). The camera frames her leaving through the open front gate in the fog. The flashback ends with a return to the filmic present with Nora in front of the store window, avowing that the two years of struggle have made her free and strong, and that only the strong can forgive. Her efforts to

⁶⁷ Bemberg echoes a similar statement in a 1971 survey in *Sur*, in which she replies to a question with: “la mujer tiene que dejar de sentirse una ‘menor de edad’ que pasa de la tutela paterna a la tutela marital” (Bence 198).

achieve freedom and independence are implicitly censored by tying freedom to the “strength to forgive” in the stereotype of the mother who must be strong and selfless for her family.⁶⁸ After pondering her return, she opens the door and enters the house. Nora returns home to forgive her husband and assume the responsibilities of motherhood as she embraces her children, who in this final scene call her *mamá*. The final shot frames the huge architectural suburban house with a warm glow emanating from its windows. Nora’s return home clearly deviates from Ibsen’s ending and serves to sanction the culturally accepted values of the *status quo*, in which the spectators recognize their normal, balanced daily lives (Oroz 136) and in which feminist goals are implicitly or explicitly censored (Retali, “La virgen” 69).

The correlation between architectural space and a protagonist’s degradation is a strategy also used to signal the non-liberating transgressions of the *prostituta* stereotype. Set in the 1900s, *Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina* and *Nacha Regules* portray their protagonists, La Mireya and Nacha, as beautiful, independent and sexually liberated *femmes fatales*, but their transgression into the world of prostitution is not a liberating act. These cabaret women are sumptuous, decorative, phallic objects through which the local *caudillo* highlights his virility (Soria 522) and their “freedom” and luxurious lifestyle rests on his whims. In *Los muchachos*, La Mireya is only a consumable object of desire over which the men in the tango cabaret fight, as evidenced in the young aristocrat Alberto’s comment: “Hay tres

⁶⁸ An example of this strength of forgiveness in women is shown in *Te sigo esperando* in which the wife, responsible for the education of her children, suffers her husband’s deceptions. When he abandons her and the children, she takes charge of their support and education. She ensures that the family has a good memory of their father for whom she waits faithfully for twenty years, forgiving him when he returns old and poor (Oroz 131).

perros por una salchicha. Se la lleva él que muerda más fuerte. Yo me juego por ella.” Dressed in elegant clothes, Nacha Regules defends her status with, “soy libre, tranquila en mi casa,” but circumstances change and she soon finds herself economically destitute. These films show that the *prostituta* pays for her freedom with society’s contempt and usually ends up alone and marginalized.

Nacha Regules is set in 1910 in an era in which both organized and clandestine prostitution presented a real social problem (Retali, “La virgen” 72), as evidenced by the numerous brothels that Dr. Monsalvat visits later in the film in his search for Nacha. She enters the initial scene elegantly dressed and seated in an open carriage as it attempts to navigate through a socialist uprising. Recognized and scorned for what she is, the working class mob tries to physically pull her from the carriage and she is saved by the aristocrat Dr. Monsalvat. In the initial scenes she is dressed in stylish clothes, moving about in a spacious and elegantly decorated apartment, attended by a maid. In a subsequent scene Nacha, seated in front of an ornate vanity, moves to the threshold of her boudoir and the chest-up framing captures her surprised reaction to see Dr. Monsalvat. The camera zooms in on the doctor and then tracks Nacha as she crosses the hall to meet him. Having discovered that she is a kept woman, he urges her to abandon the life and redeem herself through self-sacrifice. Nacha Regules defends her freedom, but the veracity of Monsalvat’s retort — “no vive ni tranquila, ni libre, ni esta casa es suya” — manifests itself in the next scene in which the situation changes and she is forced to leave, taking only her personal belongings.

Architectural space is used in parallel with Nacha’s gradual decline as her economic situation causes her to revert to prostitution. The closing of a door, in

particular, is used to signal changes in Nacha's circumstance that lead to a further debasement. Although she decides to change her life, all her attempts to find a better job and a place to live fail because of the stigma of her transgression. From the spacious and luxurious apartment her living quarters are reduced to a modest bedroom at the *Pensión de lujo Mademoiselle Dupont*, which she rents under her real name Ignacia Regules. After pawning her jewelry, she soon finds herself penniless. The landlady discovers that she had been a prostitute and she is forced to leave. After giving Nacha her eviction notice, the landlady slams the door, and the camera zooms away from a worried Nacha and fades. She finds a position in a department store in which she had previously worked, and meets old friends, but before she even starts, the forelady advises her that her employment has been cancelled. The forelady leaves and closes the door behind her, a symbolic closing of an opportunity for Nacha. A dejected Nacha moves slowly across the room, framed between a long table and the wall upon which her shadow is reflected. As she nears the arch, the space behind her is cast in shadow. Light from a window frames her standing with the closed door behind her, accentuating society's continued censure of her transgression. Nacha then tears off her uniform and collapses on the table in tears, repeating "No se puede," in reference to the inability to transcend her situation.

Dressed more seductively, Nacha is seated in a house of ill repute but her thoughts, expressed in a voiceover, reveal that she recognizes her descent into prostitution and wishes that Monsalvat would come and find her. Left alone in a salon with her male companion, she is forced to accept his sexual advances. As he approaches her lewdly, the camera zooms in quickly to close in on Nacha's

horrified look. She refuses to prostitute herself, the customer complains and the *madame* throws her out, forcing her to leave through the back egress. As Nacha moves across the small dark room and exits through the back door, the threshold then becomes enclosed in darkness, foreshadowing a further degradation. This is confirmed by the *madame*'s words to Dr. Monsalvat, who indeed has come looking for Nacha. She lies that Nacha was never there and states that “esta casa tiene demasiada categoría para ella,” suggesting that he may find her “en alguna pensión barata,” adding that “cada mujer está donde merece estar.”

The houses of prostitution where Nacha works from now on reflect her progressive descent to the dark and crowded lower-class brothels in which women work the shadowy street and live in shared quarters. In parallel, her attire changes from the white, elegantly luxurious garments in the initial scenes to sober, dark and plain clothes, and finally to *décolleté* ones as she descends into lower levels of degradation. In one of the brothels, she works only as a seamstress, but is pressured to contribute financially for an ailing prostitute's medical needs and she reverts to prostitution. The ailing prostitute, who turns out to be Monsalvat's long-lost sister Eugenia, receives the stereotypical social and divine punishment by dying in poverty and isolation without reconnecting with the family she has disgraced (Retali, “La virgen” 72). Nacha escapes again and finds work waiting tables in a low-class cabaret bar. In the scene she moves across the space with a deflated posture only to suffer the vulgar patrons' lewd embraces. Deceived by the bar owners, she decides to start a new life and leave this city. The finality of her decision is complemented by her spatial movement. The still camera frames her departure as a dwarfed shadowy figure walking the street in the dark of night: first

away from the camera, then towards it and then again away from it as an indistinguishable figure receding in anonymity against a distant light. In a final humiliation, Nacha is reduced to washing floors in a mansion, a job she secured through her estranged sister. Several years later, she learns that Monsalvat is economically destitute and is now blind as a result of a beating. Nacha has lost her youth, beauty and seductiveness and has redeemed herself through humility, charitable acts and poverty, which is the only way that the ex-prostitute and the man she cares for can consecrate their love in holy matrimony (Retali, “La virgen” 72). The film ends in a long shot of the marriage ceremony in which the couple is dwarfed beneath the architectural height and breadth of the church.

The initial scenes of *Los muchachos* contrast bourgeois and lower class environments: Alberto Rosales’ dull aristocratic home with the cabaret’s atmosphere of violence; the lively ambiance of tango-dancers with the monotonous circular movement of the men and women in the bourgeois Sunday promenade. High angle camera shots are used for bourgeois activities — the dinner party leaving the Rosales home and the Sunday promenade — while eye-level shots capture the rowdiness of the cabaret scenes. During the promenade, Alberto breaks his engagement with the aristocratic Camila because he wants to marry the famous cabaret performer La Rubia Mireya. In these initial scenes, Alberto and Mireya are framed seated by a window in a spacious living room and then outdoors having five o’clock tea. After Mireya receives the news that Alberto will marry his *novia* Camila, she moves across the room against a backdrop of antiques, sculptures, wall tapestries to phone her previous escort, signaling a return to the decadent cabaret life. Later in her apartment with friends, she is framed in a long shot on a pedestal,

offering a toast of love and happiness, but then the camera zooms in as she collapses to frame a still shot of her body convulsing in sobs against the chair. Thirty years later, the old Mireya has lost her beauty and seductiveness and has become *La Loca*, jostled about and denied entry to the same cabaret.

In contrast to the bourgeois home of the virgin and the cabaret and brothels of the prostitute, the department store represents a new architectural space in film and reflects the rise of its function as one of the first public spaces accessible to women. England's department store Selfridges, established in 1909, crusaded to dispel the notion of separate public and private spheres and positioned the department store as a leader in women's reform. By this point in history, the United States had already been celebrating the dawn of retail emporiums since Gimbel's opening in 1887 and Macy's Department Store in 1898 (Dubois 32). As Dubois explains, the department store branded the idea of a woman's pleasure being derived from public space and the very ideology of buying and selling pleasure became the norm. This notion ingrained in women that expressions of self could be outwardly directed through tangible goods and leisure commodities (Dubois 33). The department store is featured in *Casa de muñecas*, *La pícara soñadora* and *Mujeres que trabajan*, although in the latter, it may be a place of pleasure for the affluent bourgeois clients, but not necessarily for its working-class female characters.

The department store window serves as the architectural element that initiates Nora Helmer's flashback, opening into the film to recall the events that led to her departure two years earlier. Nora's recollection takes her back to her visit at Christmas. As she enters the department store, the fashionably dressed Nora

circulates among other equally stylish bourgeois women. Her elegant clothes contrast with her behavior, however, which recalls the effervescence of a little girl as she runs with unbridled enthusiasm from one toy to the next. The department store is also a site where women can sit with friends and chat, as evidenced in the chance encounter with her college friend Cristina. Arancibia's setting of the collegiates' meeting in the modern department store cleverly updates Ibsen's play⁶⁹ and, similar to the urban views of modern skyscrapers and bustling streets, reflects Buenos Aires' modernity.

La pícara soñadora, also directed by Arancibia,⁷⁰ takes the department store a step further. The young but penniless law student, Sylvia Vidal, lives in the Sares department store, where she works by day as a salesgirl in the toy section. Everything that she "borrows" from the store to live on, she writes down in a little book so that she can repay it when she finishes her studies. As in *Casa de muñecas*, the toy department is again featured.

If *Casa de muñecas* used the department store window to "open" the film with Nora Helmer's flashback, in *La pícara soñadora*, the opening is more complex. As the credits unfold, a camera moves from left to right along the department store window to offer a depth perspective inside the store. The camera captures a man crossing diagonally across the department store from the distant right, revealing an opulence of merchandise amid floral arrangements until he

⁶⁹ In Ibsen's play, there is obviously no department store and Mrs. Linden (Cristina) surprised Nora at her home after ten years.

⁷⁰ In the film's credits, women's contributions are limited to Teresa Miguel as "peinadora" and Aurora Ferre for "maquillaje." In addition to the male director, all other functions from scriptwriting to designing and creating the décor and outfitting the actors were undertaken by men.

reaches a curtain. After he calls “Sylvia,” he moves the curtain to reveal an empty bedroom suite. He walks through the area until he reaches a paneled room divider, only to reveal another shot of an empty bedroom. He continues and finally the camera zooms in on Sylvia sleeping in another tastefully decorated bedroom.

As McDonald explains, the department store is architecturally designed to invite:

drift: solid walls having been replaced by columns, the divisions between one department and the next are vague; wide aisles, like generous avenues, encourage movement along the lines of horizontal display cases and arouse *flaneur*-like observation of other shoppers; mirrored columns make self-scrutiny easier and, at the same time, multiply one’s focus and desire. (McDonald 234)

The film replicates this architectural space faithfully as it appears that Arancibia wished to show that the layout of the Sares department store in Buenos Aires and its profusion of merchandise were equal to those found in New York, London or Paris. Arancibia demonstrates this by beginning the film with Sylvia’s godfather’s movement through the department store. The department store encouraged women to educate their tastes by closely observing real objects in virtual settings: furniture displayed in staged drawing rooms, flowers artfully arranged, clothing draped on mannequins of ideal size or worn in lavish fashion shows by beautiful live models (McDonald 234). In the film, this is evidenced in the three bedroom suites shown in the beginning. McDonald also points out that the “business” of the business “was kept out of sight, normally on the uppermost floor” (234). This aspect is also evidenced in the film in the scene in which Sylvia and Freddy share an elevator, an

architectural element reflecting modernity, up to the owner's office, located at the end of a long, columned and high ceilinged hallway intended to diminish its visitors.

By day, Sylvia works in the toy department; surrounded by the merchandise, her movement within this space is limited to her duties. Although men also patronize the Sares store, women's presence predominates: usually they appear in clusters either on, or stepping off, the modern invention of the escalator, or moving slowing through a crowded aisle hemmed in by a plethora of crystal, fine china and the latest fashions. However, the day-time shots of the department store are usually limited to escalators and the toy department with the rest of the merchandise appearing in a distant background. Sylvia is shown seated in other small spaces during her breaks, studying for her upcoming law exams. The architectural expanse of the department store and its many floors of merchandise are only revealed after closing hours when these different spaces become Sylvia's "home," through which she lives her dreams of a wealth she cannot afford by using different bedrooms, vanity mirrors, and the breakfast china. More importantly, the architectural space of the department store is amplified after Sylvia passes her law exams and agrees to marry Freddy. Since she refuses his offer to walk her home, he follows her and discovers that Sylvia lives in the store. It is at this point that Sylvia travels through architectural spaces as she shares her dreams and explains that everything belongs to her since, unlike the owner Mr. Gandara, she knows the store intimately.

Architecture and movement coalesce as she gives Freddy a haptic tour of every floor; alternating between long, medium and close-up shots, the camera frames the couple skipping together towards their reflections in Gandara's mirrors,

then, as Sylvia runs barefoot on Gandara's carpets, plays music on his pianos, reads his books, smells his perfumes and his flowers, and tastes his delicacies. Sylvia and Freddy imagine themselves in elegant evening wear and dance the night away in the spacious music department, the camera zooming in on the circular movement of Sylvia's ballgown. The scene ends with the sunrise streaming through a rose window and as they depart, her friend Rosa's child, Titi, attracts their attention. Sylvia explains who he is and Freddy leaves saying "que lindo verte con un chico en brazo," recalling the maternal role of women. After Sylvia learns that Freddy has misrepresented himself and that he is in fact Gandara's heir, she feels betrayed. She runs along the dark department store's façade and back to the toy department. The conflict is happily resolved at the end with the couple reconciled. Although Sylvia is now a lawyer, nothing is mentioned about pursuing this career. Rather, the film ends with Freddy's promise to share a life in poverty on the department store's rooftop apartment.

Given its emphasis on display and spectatorship, the correlation between the department store and the theatre was inevitable. The department store window became the stage and the window dresser its set designer, creating at times a *mise-en-scène* or implied narrative (McDonald 234). Eventually the urban dweller's desires for creature comforts or entertainment developed the department store's function to include standard venues for *shows*, for example, *fashion shows*. Beautiful live models of an ideal size, draped in the latest clothes, bejeweled with accessories, with impeccably applied cosmetics and hairstyles strut down a runway in lavish fashion shows designed to "educate" women's tastes (234). Although the department store as an architectural space does not appear in Bemberg's three

historical biographies, she does criticize the manipulation of women in a similar marketing venue in her first short-feature documentary film, *El mundo de la mujer*.

Cosas de mujer (1951) represents a complete gender role reversal. The film also breaks with classical norms of invisibility because it begins with the star looking at and speaking directly to the audience to relay a past experience responsible for her current happiness. The protagonist, Cecilia, portrays a hard-nosed, efficient and successful female lawyer (Kriger 234) who occupies the traditionally masculine spaces of the time — the office, the courtroom and the media. Her movements in her home are those traditionally associated with the husband's role — coming home after a long day at the office and kissing the children goodnight once they are already asleep. After she almost loses her husband to infidelity, Cecilia postpones her career advancement in the name of conjugal peace. However, instead of assuming the role of a housewife and mother, she recovers her femininity by becoming a *femme fatale*, enjoying ballroom dancing with various men and playing cards. She is so successful that her husband urges her to return to her profession. As Kriger explains, the female character is not a transgressor because humour and absurdity highlight the new situations that occur in daily family life in those years (238). The film ends with the husband calling her from the bedroom, off camera; presumably waiting for an intimate encounter. The protagonist winks at the audience and with a huge satisfied smile to the spectators, suggests that they imitate her experience (238). Kriger explains that despite these feminine changes, the idea of happiness for women is still tied to the home for although women now work in traditionally male professions, they do not lose their sensuality (239). An ambiguous message emerges that encourages

women to pursue professional careers but not to forget their domestic responsibilities. In sum, it is possible for a woman to have it all — career, love and children — but her husband and family must always be her first priority.

In *Mujeres que trabajan*, the female characters all admit that they are working as department store salesgirls “por necesidad,” and would probably abandon their work if they could find a rich husband. The protagonist is the exception; the aristocratic Ana María del Solar was forced to enter the workforce because of a change in her financial circumstances. When the conflict is resolved and she is reunited with her fiancé, their marriage will reintegrate Ana María into her aristocratic class. Karush observes that numerous melodramas of the era emphasize the disparity of Argentina’s two-class system at the time: the indolent, hypocritical, and unscrupulous rich versus the honest, hardworking, and generous poor (310). *Mujeres que trabajan* also underscores this issue. However, the aristocrat Ana María has learnt from her experience as a working woman and the film ends with her affirmation that she will continue to work after they marry. Surprisingly, her fiancé responds that he too will now work for a living. The film’s ending calls on future aristocratic generations to become productive, contributing citizens.

In conclusion, the stereotypical representations of women as “sweet, complacent” wives, fiancés, mothers and even working women underline the value of motherhood and domesticity. In the films discussed with these stereotypes, most female characters aspire to find romantic love and assume their passive domestic role as wives and mothers, and the working women among them abandon their careers once they marry (*Besos brujos*, *Mujeres que trabajan*. *La pícaro soñadora*,

Casa de muñecas). In *Cosas de mujer*, Cecilia subverts the stereotype of self-sacrificing mother and complacent wife. Although the film encourages women to pursue professional careers, their happiness is attached to their home and family; Cecilia represents the happy compromise between professional career and domestic stability. Aligned with the Feminist Movement's goal to break with traditional representations of women in film by creating a strong female subject, Bemberg's rebellious socialite Camila, the independent governess Miss Mary and the subversive nun Sor Juana could not be further removed from these stereotypes.

The open urban views of Buenos Aires with modern skyscrapers and bustling streets in both the 1900 and the 1930 scenes in *Así es la vida* and *Los muchachos de antes* reflect the male director's positive view of modernity. As I shall demonstrate, Bemberg's urban views and street scenes are framed in a cropped perspective to underline overpowering repression, in both *Camila* and *Miss Mary*. In *Así es la vida*, *Las tres ratas*, *Besos brujos* and *Joven, viuda y estanciera*, women's movements are confined to the home to underline their domestic role, or to convey their class wealth through architectural spaces and elegant décor. Bemberg breaks away from this conventional use of women's movement in several ways. Although Camila's family is wealthy, the views of the O'Gorman home and its rooms are intentionally cropped to underline women's oppression; the O'Gorman women do not move across expansive rooms to exhibit their class wealth. Their movements within the home are constrained not to underline their domestic role but to communicate their repressed status. Although *Miss Mary* and the films mentioned above are all set in the 1930s, Bemberg's framing of the interiors of the Martínez-Bordegain's *estancia* differs significantly. The warmth of

the bourgeois rooms in *Así es la vida*, the huge floral arrangements and well appointed luxury of Marga's apartment and Alberto's aristocratic home in *Besos brujos*, the Victorian furnishings in the homestead of *Las tres ratas* and *Joven, viuda* are all noticeably absent in the cool, soulless interior of Mecha's *estancia* living room.

In the Golden Age films discussed, I have shown that a male director's framing of a virgin stereotype's position in, and movement through architectural space, differs from that of a *prostituta*. The architectural space of the virgin stereotype is usually limited to the confines of a room or the home environment to underline the cultural norm: a woman's place resides within the domestic sphere. As most of these films have a bourgeois setting, women's movement within the home serves to highlight class wealth. In contrast, a transgressive breach from the patriarchal norm by the *novia* in *Besos brujos* and the *esposa* in *Casa de muñecas* are just as non-liberating as the *mala's* in *Las tres ratas* and the *prostitutas* in *Nacha Regules*. The spatial position and/or movement of these characters after their transgressions reflect their gradual degradation. Generally, windows, staircases and doors in these films have no special function other than to transfer from one location to another. However Elsaesser's theory that film has used windows, staircases, and mirrors to emphasize inner turmoil against an intense feeling of entrapment is especially prevalent after Nora Helmer's transgression comes to light. Bemberg breaks away from these conventions by correlating her protagonists' transgressive acts with movement through architectural spaces: windows, doors and thresholds become passages to spaces of emotional subjectivity or self-determination.

In her three historical biographies — *Camila*, *Miss Mary* and *Yo, la peor de todas* — Bemberg subverts the stereotypes perpetuated by her male and female predecessors with female protagonists that are neither sweet nor complacent; nor are their transgressions presented as non-liberating or degrading. Rather, Bemberg redefines transgression as a positive and self-affirming act. Her belief that feminists are transgressors is transposed onto the new female models embodied in *Camila*, *Miss Mary* and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, whose rebellious acts represent liberating actions through which they take charge of their destiny.

Chapter 3

The Framing of Feminist Transgressions in *Camila*

María Luisa Bemberg's third film, the historical biography, *Camila*, centers on the life of Camila O'Gorman (1828-1848), a young Catholic socialite from Buenos Aires and daughter of a wealthy oligarch. During the repressive regime of Juan Manuel Rosas in mid-nineteenth century Argentina, Camila transgressed the established codes by falling in love and eloping with a young Catholic priest, Ladislao Gutiérrez. In the secluded village of Goya in the northern frontier of Corrientes, the lovers assumed new identities and ran a children's school. However, as *el Restaurador de las leyes*, Rosas maintained order through repression and violence, and issued a country-wide warrant for their arrest. The couple's short-lived happiness was shattered when they were recognized by Father Gannon, a priest who had known them in Buenos Aires. Apprehended by the local authorities, the pair was incarcerated in the prison barracks of Santos Lugares. With the Catholic Church, government officials, the court of public opinion, Rosas' enemies in exile and Camila's own father all demanding punishment for the sacrilege, Rosas ordered their execution. Although Camila was pregnant at the time and could not legally be executed until she gave birth, Rosas stood by his decision and Camila, Ladislao and their unborn child were put to death by firing squad on August 7, 1848.

Little is known about Camila O'Gorman's life and what motivated its key events, but the nineteen-year-old's cruel and tragic death is not forgotten. The historic incident was not only recorded in Adolfo Saldías' *Historia de la*

Confederación Argentina (1886), but also documented in Manuel Bilbao's *Vindicación y memoria de don Antonio Reyes*,⁷¹ and later in Manuel Vizoso Gorostiaga's *Camila O'Gorman y su época* (1943) (Rivarola 59). William Henry Hudson's memoirs, *Far Away and Long Ago* (1918),⁷² disseminated the account in English (Fontana 29). O'Gorman's story has also been memorialized in literature and film. In addition to Juana Manuela Gorriti's short story "Camila O'Gorman" in *Panoramas de la vida* (1876) and Enrique Molina's novel, *Una sombra donde sueña Camila* (1973), John Masefield also mentions Camila in his poem *Rosas* (Fontana 29).

Camila's story was sealed in celluloid when Mario Gallo produced the first cinematographic account as early as 1912, starring Blanca Podestá in the role of Camila. Juan Batile Planas' film, *El destino* (1968), also includes an episode of the historic event. However, other attempts to retell it were suppressed. During the Perón years (1946-1955), César Amadori tried to film the story, but Perón advised him against the project, for fear of the reaction of the Church (King, *An Argentine Passion* 34). When film director, Mario Soffici, tried to approach the theme, it appears that he was deterred by the censors (Fontana 30).⁷³ Lita Stantic, the

⁷¹ Captain Antonio Reyes was chief of the Santos Lugares prison barracks during the time of Camila and Ladislao's imprisonment and execution.

⁷² In his text, Hudson observes: "some of his [Rosas'] acts were inexplicable, as for instance the public execution in the interests of religion and morality of a charming young lady of good family and her lover, the handsome young priest who had captivated the town with his eloquence" (Hudson 130).

⁷³ Fontana suggests that censorship was involved since Graciela Borges had already been slotted for the leading role. She also indicates that Bemberg had remarked that the actress Graciela Borges was one of the first to speak to her about Camila's story and had revealed that she had been selected to play the title role in Soffici's version of the film (Fontana 30). Nowhere have I found any mention of a date around which Soffici would have planned a version of the film, however the time frame would have had to have been in the early 1960s, given that Graciela Borges was born in 1941, and

producer of Bemberg's *Camila*, explains that "the story could only be released under a democracy" (King, *An Argentine Passion* 34). After the *Proceso* regime's involvement in The Falklands War ushered in the long-awaited return to democracy in 1983,⁷⁴ Stantic recommended to Bemberg that she direct *Camila*. Since reviewers had claimed that Bemberg would be unable to film a love story, this would be a suitable challenge for the filmmaker. Given the uncertain post-dictatorship political environment, the film was co-produced with Spain. This clever move not only secured the human resources required for the historical reconstruction, but more importantly this strategy guaranteed the film's release at least in Spain, should the subject matter irritate the Catholic Church in Argentina (King, *An Argentine Passion* 23).

Scholars generally agree that Bemberg approaches gender issues in the power relations between the institution and the individual. The Church, the Family and/or the State is represented as an oppressive agent intent on subordinating a character, who is normally a woman (Rodríguez 140). Stephen Hart, for example, argues that the film encrypts a political allegory about the recent *Proceso*'s repressive rule through a love story set under Rosas' tyrannical dictatorship which, like the *Asociación Anticomunista Argentina* of the *Guerra Sucia*, operated by sheer terror (Hart 75). Hart interprets love's triumph over death suggested by the voice-over at the end of the film "as an allegory of the transcendence of the Dirty War through the hope inspired by the new democracy" that followed the military regime's

Soffici died in 1977. Between 1958 to 1966 the Argentine government alternated between military rule and fragile civilian governments.

⁷⁴ As King explains, Argentina suffered almost 52 years of consecutive military dictatorships with only brief intervals of democratic government (King, *An Argentine Passion* 34).

demise (Hart 83). For her part, Michèle Soriano studies the celebrations and rites in the film to analyze its reconstruction of Rosas' federation as a critique of the values of order and authority (277). However, according to Katherine Gatto, Bemberg constructs layers of power, madness and gender politics to create a world-in-reverse that questions norms of sanity (108).

The feminist perspective presented in *Camila* has been studied through an interpretation of the love affair. Julia Burton-Carvajal, for example, considers the film a "captivity" narrative (*Cinema* 38). Many Western women filmmakers perceive a love affair to be a form of "captivity" that allows the female protagonist to display her self-defined eroticism by seizing the authority of her oppressors (Quart 253). By placing this illicit love affair within the confines of the Church, eroticism serves to subvert clerical authority (Burton-Carvajal, *Cinema* 38). Conversely, Richard Curry proposes that, in addition to the important role of motherhood and the anti-*machista* tone, the film's erotic vision underscores its feminist perspective (13).

Scholars have also examined the female gaze, gendered vision and gendered space in *Camila*. Bruce Williams' two articles on the feminine gaze in the film re-examine the notion of female eroticism through the lush sensorial topography of the film ("Reflection" 69), and the dynamics of the gaze and its absence in Bemberg's study of female sexuality ("In the Realm" 62). Alan Pauls studies class and transgression through Bemberg's female gaze as well as the use, relationships and the symbolism of colors in the film (Pauls 112-13).

Over time, Camila O'Gorman's story has appeared in different narrative genres: in historical documents, a memoir, a poem, a short story, a novel and film.

Fernanda Bueno argues in her dissertation that mythologies of Camila O’Gorman reappear in Argentina in times of political change and launch different discussions about women’s place in society. Bueno analyzes the myth of Camila O’Gorman in Gorriti’s short story, Molina’s novel and Bemberg’s film. According to Bueno, Gorriti’s “Camila O’Gorman” (1876) represents a narrative of costumbrismo structured to convey the morals of a perfect liberal society (54). If the short story portrays Camila as a negative symbol for women (Bueno 54), Molina’s novel, *Una sombra donde sueña Camila* (1973) depicts her as a muse. Bemberg’s filmic portrayal of Camila as a defiant daughter, on the other hand, complies with the feminist views of the 1980s (Bueno 7).

Notwithstanding how fiction, film, and myth have perpetuated the Camila O’Gorman story, Jimena Sáenz observes in “Love Story 1848: El caso de Camila O’Gorman,” that everything in Camila and Ladislao’s romance had to be imagined, for nothing remained of the history of a young girl who, like most nineteen year olds, lacks a history (Sáenz 69). While historical accounts confirm the scandalous affair and the challenges that it created for the institutions of the time, they omit the details. In the introduction to the film’s screenplay, Bemberg asserts that her film is based “en hechos históricos pero es una ficción que parte de ellos” (Bemberg *Camila: Guión* i). The lack of written documentation on Camila O’Gorman’s short life⁷⁵ required that Bemberg imagine the psychology and personality of a young Catholic girl who falls in love and elopes with a priest. As she explains:

⁷⁵ The historical Camila’s age at the time of her death is not entirely clear. In an interview, Bemberg states: “Y como los datos y las crónicas históricas no son demasiado precisas ni abundantes, hubo que ir llenando esos vacíos con la imaginación y el sentimiento. Traté de imaginar cómo habrá sido esa niña de 20 años [. . .] que, católica ferviente [. . .] se enamora del sacerdote Ladislao Gutiérrez”

En esa psicología — *en buen parte supuesta* — que atribuí a Camila, la concebí como un ser esencialmente libre. Pese a las condiciones del medio, de la educación, de la época, Camila fue una mujer que comprendió cabalmente que el requisito para alcanzar la libertad era ser valiente. (Torres 12; emphasis added)

Bemberg concluded that Camila must have been exceptionally daring to challenge the conventions of her time, and she included this trait in her protagonist.

As a committed feminist, Bemberg vowed that she would use film to promote women's rights, and wanted to offer images of women that were different from the traditional stereotypes (Pauls, "Rojo" 5). Bemberg observes that Argentine historians have also contributed to the creation of these female stereotypes. With respect to Camila, she states, "Busaniche, Gálvez and Ibarguren hablan de la inocente, dulce y pura Camila que fue seducida" (Bemberg qtd. in Pauls, "Rojo" 5). By perceiving her as courageous and daring, Bemberg sees the opportunity to subvert the stereotype and to imagine a different Camila:

¿Y si hubiera sido al revés? Pensé: una chica tradicional, católica, virgen, reprimida, se manda mudar con un sacerdote. [. . .] ¡Qué pelotas debió tener! Entonces supuse que no era la mujer tradicional que se queda en el

(Torres 12). In this quote, Bemberg states that Camila was twenty. When Camila and Ladislao fell in love in 1847, she was nineteen. They eloped on December 12, 1847 and were executed on August 8 1848. As her exact birthdate is not documented, her age remains unclear. Bemberg's film includes a scene of her nineteenth birthday celebration. However, in the *Clasificación de Camila O'Gorman* by the Justice of Peace Felipe Botet in August, 1848, Camila declares that she is twenty-one: "*Camila O'Gorman hija de D Adolfo O'Gorman y de Da. Joaquina Giménez –Natural de Buenos Ayres – Edad 21 años – Estado soltera –Domicilio: Buenos Ayres – sabe leer y escribir en prueba de ello firma a continuación– Color blanco rosado – Pelo castaño – Es sana . . .*" (Bueno 1). Bueno references the *Clasificación de Camila O'Gorman* reprinted on page 314 in Molina's *Una sombra donde sueña Camila O'Gorman*.

molde, sino *rompe todas las barreras*. Una mujer con mucha audacia, mucha vitalidad y mucho temperamento: [. . .] un ser libre. Y hay pocas mujeres libres en el cine. (qtd. in Pauls, “Rojo” 5; emphasis added)

From this premise, Bemberg creates her protagonist Camila as a new model of woman aligned with her feminist vision: a daring, bold transgressor who breaks conventional moulds and crosses barriers in the pursuit of freedom. When asked in an interview whether she considers Camila a precursor of feminism, Bemberg replies:

Camila es libre y la libertad forma parte de la lucha de las feministas. Ella es *una transgresora*, las feministas somos transgresoras, estamos *rompiendo el molde* milenario de la familia tradicional donde la jerarquía es el varón, el padre. Para mí Camila es un personaje atípico de nuestra sociedad y por eso me interesa. Me llega su valentía, su dinamismo, su total prescindencia del “qué dirán,” rasgos pocos frecuentes en una mujer. (González 10; emphasis added) ⁷⁶

Bemberg’s claim that Camila is “breaking moulds” and “crossing barriers” links her view of feminists as transgressors with Bruno’s perception of the female subject as a *voyageuse* and Braidotti’s theory on nomadism. As a transgressive female character that defies patriarchal authority and subverts set conventions, Bemberg’s Camila adopts a nomadic way of being that contrasts with the rigid and static boundaries of a repressive state. She travels outside the permitted gendered spaces as evidenced in her choice of reading material, in her calm defiance of her

⁷⁶ Schettini, on the other hand, questions whether Camila would even have had the time to formulate a strategy of rebellion at her young age and argues that perhaps she just wanted to fall in love (Schettini 382-3).

father's authority, and in her passionate pursuit of the taboo, a love affair with Padre Ladislao. Moreover, Cresswell's view of transgression as a questioning of symbolic boundaries (*In/Out* 48) can also be applied to the film. Bemberg has invented a series of transgressions through which her Camila questions limitations historically imposed on women.

Bemberg would agree with Bruno regarding the inclusion of emotion and women's subjectivity in film. In an interview with Nissa Torrents, Bemberg states: "I felt that the story had to appeal basically to the emotions" (Torrents 174). In another interview she confesses, "I think [women directors] are more connected with feelings" (Brunette 16). As we have seen in the introduction to this dissertation, Bemberg was quite aware that women's emotion required a new way of framing; she expressed dissatisfaction with de la Torre's uninspired framing of Fina's existential anguish in *Crónica de una Señora*, among other examples. By applying Bruno's film theory on spatial circulation and the *voyageuse* to Bemberg's *Camila*, I propose that the director frames her protagonist's movements and her representation of home, landscape and geography through a fresh female perspective.

This chapter first analyzes Bemberg's approach to home, geography and landscape. For example, urban architecture and rural landscapes are juxtaposed to contrast environments of repression and confinement with those of promised limited freedom. Further in the chapter, I show that elements of Bruno's feminist film theory can be applied to position Camila as a nomadic *voyageuse*. In order to project Camila as a passionate, rebellious and independent woman, I claim that Bemberg perceived that a different feminist framing was required, as evidenced in

her use of haptic elements — the sense of touch and its relation to movement, for example. Bruno's theory of *transito* can be discerned in Bemberg's representation of architectural spaces in relation to acts of transgression, through which Camila questions symbolic boundaries historically imposed on women. In these instances, apertures such as doors, windows and thresholds, and transport vehicles such as a carriage, signal Camila's passages to marginal sites and to the emotional spaces of feminine subjectivity.⁷⁷ This chapter concludes with a study of the four confessional scenes as examples of Bruno's *transito* in conjunction with *trasporto*. Defined as "the attraction of two human beings to one another that moves them towards each other" (Bruno 7), I argue that the cinematic framing of each *trasporto* scene maps a point on an itinerary of *rapprochement*.

3.1 Framing Landscapes and Architecture

Bruno explains that architectural views, urban frames and landscape itineraries have much to offer cinema studies and can act as a vehicle for the haptic grounding of film and the theory of "e-motion" pictures (Bruno 72). In defining landscape as a tension between self and world, John Wylie contends that self and landscape are not fixed and separate categories but are "essentially enlaced and intertwined in a 'being-in-the-world'" (Wylie, *Landscape Keys* 3). Similarly, Bemberg's framing of urban architecture and rural landscape to contrast repression and freedom, often include and complement a character's emotional state.

⁷⁷ Soriano states that thresholds as signifiers of transitions or transgressions are recurring elements in the film (214), but does not relate this trope exclusively to Camila or to the idea of transgressions as passages to female subjectivity or to questioning of boundaries.

The film's first sequence starts with spatial movement: the journey of Camila's grandmother, La Perichona, to the *estancia*. The opening shot of the pampas bathed in morning light is disrupted by the sound of horses, and the camera's frontal long take down a tree-lined lane reveals the arrival of horses, soldiers and a carriage. Bemberg subverts the image of the pampas as an open space traditionally associated with freedom, and would appear to align it with Bachelard's view of the pampas as a prison. In his discussion of the dialectics of outside and inside, Bachelard recalls a text by Supervielle which describes the pampas as a jail precisely because of their vastness and immensity (Bachelard 221). Instead of traveling through an open landscape, the carriage turns down a tree-lined lane; in the final approach to the house the tree trunks resemble prison bars and the dense oppressive tree canopy creates a claustrophobic tunnel effect. In the camera shift from the pampas bathed in morning light to the shadows of an enclosed tree-lined lane, the landscape becomes reshaped in the image of confinement. The scene of their grandmother's carriage moving towards them is juxtaposed with the voiceovers of the O'Gorman children, who question the motives of her arrival, inquire about her reputation as a spy and confirm that she is being jailed at the *estancia*. As the mother's reply neither addresses nor denies their comments, the children's voices reveal the historical facts.⁷⁸

⁷⁸Historically, the O'Gormans emigrated from Ireland in 1789. Camila's grandfather Tomás O'Gorman married Ana Perichon de Vandeuil, a Frenchwoman from Mauritius. Having a wife and two sons, one of them Camila's father Adolfo, did not impede O'Gorman from traveling incessantly, leaving Madame O'Gorman to engage in numerous extramarital affairs, including with the viceroy Santiago de Liniers, who had her exiled to Brazil when it became evident that she was spying for the British and conspiring against Spain ("La Perichona"). There she continued the lifestyle to which she was accustomed and in addition to her adulteress transgressions, welcomed into her home Argentine exiles that were conspiring for independence. Expelled from Brazil, she led an errant life along the coast or on the ever welcoming British ships until the first Junta government

Bruno's theory of *transito* suggests that architectural features such as doors, windows and hallways serve as "in-between" spaces, passages or apertures to emotional sites of female subjectivity and/or possibility (Bruno 71). An example of *transito* is evidenced in the frontal long take with a stationary camera that seizes the movement of the carriage's approach up the lane, followed by a switch to a 180 degree tracking shot that frames the carriage's arrival at the *estancia*'s portico. The lane serves as a passage that transports La Perichona on the last leg of her journey to this final destination. The camera frames the arrival of the carriage to the main house: the tower (the *mirador*) in which presumably the grandmother will be imprisoned, dominates the upper left corner of the frame. Spatial movement, landscape, geography and architecture combine in this *mise-en-scene* to create an atmosphere of repression and confinement that underscores the impending imprisonment of La Perichona. Moreover, the vertical length of the tower framed off-centre against the sky is repeated again in two subsequent scenes: in the prelude to the attic scene in which Camila visits her grandmother several years later; in the prison tower of Santos Lugares in which Camila is imprisoned. The end of the film, as I shall demonstrate, is a complete reversal of this first journey scene on several levels.

The external landscape of confinement is then transposed onto an interior landscape of emotion — La Perichona's displeasure is mapped on her face as she disembarks from the carriage and greets her son. The carriage itself represents, in

allowed her to return on the condition that she remain confined at the farmhouse La Matanza (Schettini 385). In Bemberg's screenplay of *Camila*, a night scene at the La Perichona's gravesite shows a group of men leaving her tombstone denigrated with the word '*traidora*,' but this scene is omitted from the film version.

Bruno's terms, a vessel of transport, an "in-between" space in a journey. By stepping across the threshold of the carriage door, La Perichona symbolically enters a final passage, one that leads to her confinement at her son Adolfo's *estancia* for private and public transgressions. The children's earlier reference to "spy" implies her political betrayal to the nation in addition to the private betrayal of adultery with Liniers and others (Soriano 237). Adolfo rebukes her displeasure at being confined at the *estancia* by revealing that the alternative would have been a jail cell, intimating that the authorities granted this exception to La Perichona as a goodwill gesture because of Adolfo's position, wealth and allegiance to Rosas.

This first journey scene not only introduces the carriage as the "vessel" of transport for transgressions, a theme which will be repeated throughout the film, but more importantly it establishes a correlation between La Perichona and her first meeting with Camila, who appears on the scene confined in a small carriage with a goat attached. No doubt intentional, Bemberg appears to suggest that Camila was already transgressing and challenging the limits imposed on her; Camila is too big for the carriage and it appears to be a way to control her movements, especially since Mrs. O'Gorman is carrying a small infant. Hart presents an evolution of the spaces that Camila occupies as being gradually reduced throughout the film; from this opening shot of the pampas to the tower in which she is imprisoned and finally to the funeral casket in which her dead body is placed, Hart sees her growth into love accompanied by an increase in her experience of imprisonment (Hart 79). While this correlation between space and love is perceptive, Hart's statement that Camila's space begins in the open pampas is debatable; in fact, she is shown confined inside a small carriage, which at the end of the film is replicated in the

confinement of the funeral casket. Bemberg juxtaposes the two carriages to underline their significance in this initial scene; La Perichona's arrival by carriage to end her days in confinement contrasts with Camila in her small carriage pointed out towards the lane, poised to initiate her own journey. The *mise-en-scène* suggests a symbolic transfer of La Perichona's legacy of transgression to Camila.

The theme of oppression and confinement captured in the landscape of the *estancia* and the pampa continues in Bemberg's urban and architectural representation of Buenos Aires in 1847. Bemberg has stated that in her films women always rebel against the family, the State and the Church but that ultimately they are defeated because "the atmosphere is too oppressive, too rigid. The class pressures and the patriarchal power of Family, State and Church are too strong" (Torrents 171). This strong oppressive atmosphere translates cinematographically in Bemberg's urban views of Buenos Aires; the external and internal architecture of its public institutions of Church and State and the private O'Gorman home are framed to express repression, confinement and fear, recalling Wylie's definition of "landscape" as a tension between self and world (Wylie, *Landscape Keys* 3).

In *Camila*, Bemberg avoids aerial views and long shots down a street or avenue and few shots show depth perspective. Generally Buenos Aires is framed by partial architectural structures and angular street views that end abruptly. The camera frames a façade, a section of wall edged with a bit of surroundings, a walkway, a patio or interior courtyard, a doorway or a window. The scene in which the *mazorca* raids a household at night is an example of Bemberg's strategy of using architecture and haptic elements to express repression, confinement and fear.

Framed inside the architecture of a barred window, a close-up shot maps the anxious faces of Camila and her brother Eduardo as they listen to screams, galloping horses and shouts of “¡Viva la Santa Federación!” A quick shot/reverse-shot confirms that three men on horseback galloping through the streets are the enunciators of these shouts, but Camila and Eduardo are not privy to this view. As the shot reverts back to the siblings in the window, Camila whispers: “otra vez, como cuando éramos chicos ¿hasta cuándo, Dios mío?” As several critics have noted, Camila’s words remind the audience of Argentina’s political history of violence and the terror of its numerous dictatorships, not only of Rosas’ regime but of those that preceded it as well as those that followed; most recently the violence against Argentine citizens who disappeared in a similar fashion during the military *Proceso* government (Soriano 253; King, “Assailing” 164). In an interview, Bemberg says that she was inspired by Camila’s story:

Detrás de esta historia de amor está reflejada la violencia, el abuso del poder y sus consecuencias: la desprotección de sus ciudadanos [. . .] Ellos son los juguetes, las víctimas de las arbitrariedades y caprichos de un dictador y de la confabulación de una sociedad temerosa e hipócrita. (“Contra el poder”)

In her opinion, this reflected a *rioplatense* reality: how the individual continues to be unprotected and legally defenseless in this region (Torres 12).

For an urban metropolis, few people circulate through the streets in the film. The restriction to the citizenry’s movement is highlighted in the scene in which Camila, her sister and fiancé round a corner and venture into a crowd that has gathered, only to be stopped by a guard. The camera captures the guard’s back on

the left side with his arm extending diagonally like a barrier across the middle of the frame. Announcing that they are expected in the sacristy with their wedding papers, the trio is allowed to pass, but the guard holds back the others. Suddenly Camila's sister screams as they look up in horror to see, in a shot/reverse-shot, the decapitated head of the bookstore owner, Mariano, the victim of the previous evening's *mazorca* raid. As a disembodied voice cries "asesinos," the camera frames a rare aerial view of the crowd and Mariano's widow enters the frame showing her shawl covered in her husband's blood. While Camila's sister faints and is carried off to the left, Mariano's widow is grabbed by a guard and carried off screaming "asesinos" to the right. The building's wall and solid vertical columns bear down on the left side of the frame while on the right the remaining guards form a barrier to restrain a silent, immobile crowd, powerless and afraid to intervene to console a fellow citizen. Braidotti explains that mobility is one of the aspects of freedom — the ability to move about and to go where one wants (Braidotti 256). In this scene people cannot circulate freely, guards hold them back. This *mise-en-scène* captures the citizenry's lack of freedom and highlights the state of repression, violence and fear of reprisal if orders are disobeyed. Bemberg's cropped urban and architectural views, together with the characters' restrained movement within these spaces, not only represent the political climate of oppression and the limited spatial circulation of Buenos Aires' citizenry during Rosas' regime, but also hint at the repression, violence and fear most recently experienced under the military regime of the *Proceso*.

The partial images of architectural structures and buildings and the characters' limited movement within these spaces continues into the O'Gorman

home. The initial view of the house is reduced to a low horizontal façade. From the façade, the camera switches to the interior courtyard to capture the activity of the bath day ritual. The camera again frames cropped partial views, none rising above the height of a door frame and most revealing only thresholds and the lower parts of buildings and walls. The courtyard is an “in between” space that separates the public street and the private home, a marginalized area trekked by the servants fetching water on bath day, travelled by the family in celebration of Camila’s birthday, and practiced by the servants to sleep the siesta.

Bemberg is equally unforgiving with the interior views. These are usually framed as small claustrophobic spaces, again using partial angles in shots of a dining room, a living room, a store’s interior. What is particularly clear about these interiors is the repression of women in society, perhaps best captured in the O’Gorman living room. In a small confined space with no natural light, the camera pans the O’Gorman women hunched over sewing or knitting in the shadows of the background or in corner spaces, with eyes cast down on their work, and ends with the patriarch Alfonso O’Gorman’s angular profile dominating the frame. The confining architectural interior of the O’Gorman house reflects the restrictions of patriarchal rule on women; in these interior spaces, the women are silent with eyes downcast, hands busy at work, in a house devoid of motion and with closed doors. The house appears claustrophobic, like a prison, and correlates with Camila’s cell space in a later scene, in a cinematographic confirmation of Bemberg’s view that patriarchal repression begets political repression.

Architectural space is framed not only to convey a repressive atmosphere, but also to set apart the individual from the crowd. Bachelard posits that the

horizontality of buildings deprives them of intimacy; buildings on one level create a sense of everyone being an indistinguishable part of the crowd. In contrast, intimacy can only be encompassed by vertical structures because these allow an individual to be apart from the crowd, in an intimate space in which to have and to assess distinctive ideas (Bachelard 26). These horizontal and vertical architectural considerations are present in *Camila*.⁷⁹ The horizontal breadth and vertical height is emphasized in the representation of the Church. Movement and speech are restricted in this interior, as evidenced by the continuous camera pan across the still and silent congregation; the horizontal pan conveys Bachelard's view that everyone becomes an indistinguishable part of the crowd. The structure of the cathedral does not provide any intimate space and all areas flow together to create one whole. Conversely, Bachelard's argument that a vertical structure sets an individual apart materializes as the camera pan moves from the crowd to a portrait of Rosas and up to the pulpit where Padre Ladislao, perched vertically and high above the congregation, preaches a controversial sermon on Mariano's recent assassination. Ladislao's vertical framing not only isolates him but serves to underline the radical commentary of his message to the silent cathedral crowd. The camera then focuses on Camila's face, which appears emotionally transported by Ladislao's words. This same horizontal and vertical pan shot is repeated in a later scene in which the vertical shot ends on Padre Elortondo y Palacios reading an equally radical message from the same pulpit — Rosas' decree condemning the lovers to death in order to restore law and order.

⁷⁹ In the interiors of every political and ecclesiastical institution, walls hold Rosas' portrait, his gaze reinforcing his omnipresence and omnipotence.

The Catholic Church represents a gendered space. Ideologically, the ministry is accessible only to men, while the women's role is limited to religious tasks. This binarism is reinforced spatially in the film; conveying a position of inferiority and passivity, veiled women are seen seated separately from the men, who are normally standing. Only women are shown circulating around the confessional, sitting in the choir or kneeling on the floor during daily mass, overseen by the only male present, the priest. By framing women in this way in the film, Bemberg implicates the Church as in part responsible for the repression of women. As she states in an interview: "Las religiones suelen ser muy misóginas, discriminan contra la mujer desde el momento, por ejemplo, que no pueden ser ordenadas como sacerdote. Discriminación ciertamente anacrónica en la época en que vivimos" (Braceli 53).

Bemberg's haptic grounding of repression and confinement in the cinematographic framing of landscapes, cropped urban views and architectural spaces extends to the female body and clothing design. Bruno considers clothing apparel as a haptic element that works as a mobile frame that encompasses a range of functions, from picturing class to framing gender (Bruno 122). In the initial scene at the *estancia*, La Perichona's descent from the carriage suggests that fashion also ensures the female gender's repression. Fashion designed to restrict the body is evidenced in the women's stiff and curtailed movements; puffed full-length sleeves, gloved hands, cumbersome dresses, hats with facial veils convey an ideology of repression of the body. While the grandmother's veiled face and her daughter-in-law's lowered hat are designed to obstruct the women's gaze, the haptic emerges in a tactile feminine contact as La Perichona touches and kisses the girls in the family. However, when she meets Camila, the exchange between them

is not only a tactile, but also a verbal and a visual connection that initiates their future complicity in transgression. The grandmother's question "Te gustan las historias de amor?" is an invitation, to which the child Camila answers "No sé." Later in the film, the adolescent Camila, in a transgressive act of disobedience, visits her grandmother specifically to find out the answer for herself.

The galleria scene in which the choir sings during a church service offers another example of fashion used to picture class and gender. The camera pans horizontally from right to left across the backs of women in the foreground, whose white veils stand in sharp contrast to the bareheaded men foregrounded in shadow. The horizontal panning again conveys the sense of an indistinguishable crowd, except for the obvious gender differentiation — the women are veiled. The spaces between the choir members reveal the church's interior in the background. Architectural space, fashion and body work together as haptic elements. The interior of the church appears a cavernous space and the Church is metaphorically referred to as the body or the bosom of Christ. Moreover, although the church is divided into different spaces, it forms one body. In this scene, architecture and fashion frame class and gender in the usage of the lace mantilla in church, signaling the cultural practice of respectable ladies in nineteenth-century Spain and Latin America. As the camera pans across the women's backs, it simultaneously moves closer to bear witness to one of Camila's many transgressions — speaking in church to ask who the new priest is, to which no one replies.

Camila's transgressions finally lead to her most extreme — the lovers' escape. If the first journey scene established a correlation between La Perichona's carriage and the child Camila's confinement in a small carriage, the carriage scene in Camila

and Ladislao's escape midway through the film connect two simultaneous transports: the lovers' escape from Buenos Aires through the countryside, and the "carrying away" of emotion inside the carriage.

Bemberg's use of a carriage for the lovers' escape is an intentional deviation from historical fact. On December 11, 1847, Camila and Ladislao actually escaped on horseback, he dressed as a peasant, and she in mourning dress due to her grandmother's recent passing (Schettini 390). There is no consensus on the exact route they followed but twenty days into the journey, after detours to avoid populated centers, they arrived in Rosario. From there they passed to Santa Fe in a small sailboat and at some point in the journey they traveled down the Paraná where they obtained the passports in the name of Máximo Brandier and Valentina Desand required to travel between provinces. In January 1848, they arrived at the secluded provincial village of Goya in Corrientes, and with their new identities, earned a living running a children's school from their own home (Schettini 395).

The carriage allows the camera's shot/reverse-shot sequence that correlates the exterior and interior transports mentioned above. Similar to the first carriage scene that brings La Perichona to the *estancia*, here again the carriage's movement is framed with frontal long takes using a stationary camera followed by tracking shots to construct a geography of passages in which landscape, bodies and architecture share a haptic dynamic. As Bruno explains, one usually views a landscape while in motion and most often this viewing of a landscape evokes an emotion (Bruno 219), making it possible for the exterior landscape to be transformed into an interior one and vice versa (213). In the film, Bemberg correlates the carriage's movement through the landscape with the couple's lovemaking. While the carriage travels

through the exterior landscape unraveling a sequence of views, the intimate space of the carriage releases tactile explorations over the terrain of each other's bodies. In turn, this tactile traveling of the body becomes the vehicle for stimulating emotional journeys: of passion, pleasure, anxiety and the erotic aspect of the taboo. This internal journey becomes reversibly reflected onto the land. Hart notes that one of the models for this film was Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*; in a similar love scene between Emma and Leon in a carriage ride from Rouen cathedral, Flaubert's detailed description of the carriage's movement represents the couple's lovemaking (80). Camila and Ladislao's journey of escape represents the ultimate act of transgression, an act of scandal and sacrilege that offends the patriarchal powers of Church, State and Family, and the lovers will experience the fallout from their transgression. The movement away from Buenos Aires along the road through the countryside dislocates Camila from home and creates an "in-between" space between home and destination. The destination is elusive since Camila and Ladislao embark on a nomadic wandering to escape patriarchy, state repression and violence. The "in-between" space of the road opens a passage to an emotional space of feminine subjectivity. Freed from the patriarchal constraints that defined her identity, Camila releases her emotions and desire by actively engaging in the lovemaking.

Bemberg's framing of the carriage and the road correlate two simultaneous journeys: one inside, the other outside. This series of interior carriage shots and exterior landscape reverse-shots lasting approximately two minutes occurs about halfway through the film and stands in sharp contrast with the confined architectural interiors and protracted urban views of Buenos Aires leading up to this point. The scene begins with Camila and Ladislao inside the carriage and then

switches to the carriage on the road as it enters the frame from the left; the camera then closes in on the carriage as it passes as if intentionally to obscure what lies beyond. The purpose of this framing is threefold: first, it serves to visually “open” to an expanse of clear sky and stretches of sea, land and road not seen previously or afterwards in the film. The vast rural landscape also evokes an emotion of freedom and creates distance from the repressive and confining atmosphere of the capital. Third, the view of the open, unobstructed horizon correlates to the opening of Camila’s own horizons inside the carriage. The camera follows the carriage’s movement, panning 180 degrees from left to right as the road cuts through the landscape — a wide road bordered by trees swaying in the breeze flanked by a tranquil sea and an expanse of blue sky. The camera again pans the sea’s horizon in the distance as a reverse-shot opens to the carriage interior to find Ladislao caressing Camila’s shoulder. A shot of the carriage as it travels along a narrower vertical passageway in the road is echoed in a reverse-shot of Camila and Ladislao’s bodies in a vertical position inside the carriage — verticality again expressing the idea of intimacy. The carriage is a moving site of transformation; outside the vehicle the landscape becomes a body of land and a body of water while inside, the bodies conversely become an itinerary that, in Bruno’s words, maps “intimate sites” (Bruno 233). This idea of mapping can be extended to include non-representational geographical definitions of landscape. Camila and Ladislao’s passionate exchange that resonates in corresponding external views evokes both MacPherson’s perception that body and landscape interact in a performance in which they involve and complement each other (3), and Wylie’s

view that self and landscape are essentially intertwined in a “being-in-the-world” (*Landscape Keys* 3).

Bemberg again subverts the association of the pampa’s open spaces with freedom. After Camila’s father learns of their escape, the camera frames a sunset over the expanse of the pampas and the illusion of freedom with distance is destroyed with the voiceover of the bishop: “Ni un chingolo se mueve en la pampa sin que lo sepa el gobernador.” The traditional image of the pampas is inverted to convey the extension of Rosas’ power and repression over the entire land, even to its distant borders. There is nowhere to hide or escape because the whole country is a prison, here again aligning with Bachelard’s view of the pampas as a prison as well as with Wylie’s view of the “landscape” as a tension between self and world (*Landscape Keys* 3), or as specifically conveyed in this shot, between the individual and the controlling institutions.

Bruno also states that geography plays an important part in fostering a haptic grounding of film because with “mapping” one can amplify motion with the inscription of emotion; this empowers geography with the transportable “emotional” component (71). In *Camila*, geography is mapped in the ecclesiastical, governmental and public reactions to the scandal and sacrilege of the elopement. In the emotional appeals for their search, capture and punishment, the Church asks for a search of the city and the entire countryside in “*cualquier punto del territorio que se los encuentre*,” and Camila’s father describes it as “el acto más atroz jamás oído *en el país*” (emphasis added) mapping Argentina in the spectator’s mind and possibly correlating the “horrible deed” with the activities of the recent military regime.

In contrast to the confining and protracted cinematographic framing of the urban homes in Buenos Aires, the camera frames the entire length of the small home and school-house where the lovers have started their new lives in the secluded provincial village of Goya in Corrientes. Framed from the outside, the small house is surrounded by a heavy proliferation of vegetation with no adjoining buildings; the light through its window at dusk bespeaks intimacy and conjures ideas of solitude, refuge, and privacy that suggest Bachelard's image of a nest.⁸⁰

Bemberg transforms again the intimate surroundings of the exterior topography into an interior landscape of emotion. The hut becomes a site of self-fashioning as Camila and Ladislao reinvent their lives in an ambiance of intimacy, fabricating a series of lies to build their new identities. In its own way the hut-home creates possibilities for gender nomadism. Patriarchy can be erased and Camila can circulate freely in its interior to live out the dream of wife and lover against the odds. However, when she fabricates a honeymoon in Rome so that Ladislao can ask the Pope for permission to marry, Rome becomes mapped emotionally with Camila's desire for a religious, conventional acceptance of their love in matrimony. Unfortunately Camila's tragic flaw, as Foster explains, is her "belief that she can pursue unhindered a relationship with the priest and that love ought to triumph over social conventions" (Foster, *Contemporary* 20). As a nomadic *voyageuse*, Camila has subverted conventions with her transgressions; the most extreme against Church, State and Family has required a journey of escape. Now the nomadic assumes the literal act of traveling, characterized by movement and change, to live

⁸⁰ Bachelard associates the nest, an image of rest and quiet, with the image of a simple house that, I suggest, can be extrapolated to the image of solitude suggested by the hut. Together the nest and the old house (or hut) weave a web of intimacy (Bachelard 33, 72, 99).

as nomads and continue to move within the *intermezzo*. Emotions of hope, happiness and anxiety emerge to reveal Camila's subjectivity: her wish that they were old so that this were but a recollection. This mapping of emotions creates an itinerary that, as Bruno explains, "touches the most tender filaments of our inner cells, [. . .] that draws the universe in the manner of an intimate landscape [. . .] a place where the drawing becomes a space, an architecture" (Bruno 245). The exchange of intimate feelings between Camila and Ladislao leads to lovemaking. In a landscape of tranquility, they re-invent themselves as teachers, dwell in a hut-like structure that serves both as a private home and a public school and refashion themselves in *campesino* clothes. In contrast to the O'Gorman home in Buenos Aires, the hut has few interior walls and melds into one living space that Camila and Ladislao equally share and as such the house and home appear to have dissolved gender division.

The movement in this idyllic site of relative happiness is confined to the interior and to the outside yard of the hut, juxtaposing the private exchanges of intimacy with the fear of being discovered. There are no doors, or at least they always appear ajar as thresholds for passages. It is only with the appearance of the Chief of Police that Goya and Corrientes are mentioned, thus mapping their location. Other than the Chief of Police's courtyard on the night of a party and the church, there are no other views of Goya.

Certain historical events are not included in Bemberg's *Camila*. In the historical account, Father Gannon advised the local authorities and the couple is arrested and interrogated separately; during this time gaps in their story about their identity and marriage force them to confess. With orders issued for their return to

Buenos Aires, they arrive in San Nicolás, where Camila testifies to the Justice of the Peace, Felipe Botet: “Que si este suceso se considera un crimen lo es ella en su mayor grado por haber hecho dobles exigencias para la fuga pero que ella no lo considera delito por estar *su conciencia tranquila*” (Schettini 398; emphasis added).⁸¹

Following their arrest, the film version presents discussions by both the government and the Church concerning recommendations to Rosas on Camila’s and Ladislao’s fate. Public pressure and even Rosas’ enemies in exile clamor for severe punishment; no one wants to pursue a trial. In the following scene, when the O’Gorman family learns that Camila and Ladislao are in Santos Lugares, the patriarch’s remark “No está arrepentida [. . .] Lo lleva en la sangre” reiterates an opinion that he had expressed earlier to Camila: “la mujer soltera es un caos, un desorden de la naturaleza,” implying the need to be controlled. Her father will not forgive her betrayal nor use his influence to save her. Bemberg criticizes patriarchal rigidity and its absolute support of government injustice through the normally silent and passive Mrs. O’Gorman. In a rare display of rebellion, Camila’s mother denounces the malaise that permeates all levels of society by declaring that the Church, State and patriarchy are only concerned with reputation, honor and power; her final words, “pero nadie piensa en mi hija,” convey Bemberg’s view that the individual is defenseless against these institutions. On another level, Camila’s choice to subvert hegemonic conventions can be perceived as the nomadic awareness that moves within her, “in her blood,” and since her conscience is at peace, there is no need to repent.

⁸¹ Schettini includes the *Clasificación de Camila O’Gorman* in her text.

In the historical account, Rosas' sister-in-law writes to the governor on Camila's behalf. It is evident from her letter that she agrees with the majority with respect to the need for punishment but she writes: "Pero debes recordar que es mujer y ha sido indicado por quien sabe más que ella el camino del mal [. . .] Si quieres que entre recluida en la Santa Casa de Ejercicios, hablaré con doña Rufina Díaz" (Schettini 400). Historically, it appears that Rosas makes an effort to respond to this plea. As Schettini explains, some suggest that nine days before the execution, Rosas' daughter Manuelita, a close friend of Camila, buys furnishings for the room that Camila is destined to occupy in the Casa de Ejercicios and apparently writes a letter to Camila giving her hope (400). Whether this letter is written by Manuelita's own hand or whether this is a tactical maneuver by Rosas, and Manuelita is forced to write this letter as her father dictates, remains unclear. However while on the journey to Buenos Aires, their boat runs aground in San Pedro; a message from Rosas arrives, decreeing that they be brought to the barracks of Santos Lugares. This is stated in Captain Reyes' memoirs, Rosas' aide-de-camp, as it was he who received Rosas' written orders to execute them (Torres 12).

Following Father Gannon's discovery of the couple in the film, Camila's journey transports her to her imprisonment in Santos Lugares, where the night landscape meshes with the architectural exterior of the prison tower, emanating a tiny window of light from Camila's cell. The angle framing of the prison tower recalls the one used on the tower of the farmhouse when La Perichona was imprisoned. The exterior landscape switches to the interior space of the confining prison cell. The walls close in on Camila in the cell; the tiny window in the tower is

a passage to nowhere. In this architecturally-confined space, only corners and partial views of the wall are framed with ochre light surrounded by dark shadows. The haptic element is present in Camila's contact with the architecture, as she maps the wall with her presence by etching the passing of each day in a dynamic convergence of body, emotion and architecture. Approximately thirty days have already passed since her arrest.

In a subsequent scene, the confined space is accentuated by close-up shot/reverse-shots of Camila and Captain Reyes as the latter reveals that the lovers will be executed by firing squad. The scene begins with the frame divided diagonally; while the top part of the frame is in shadows, the bottom part reflects an ochre light that reveals the dirty hem of Camila's dress, the same one that she had worn on Easter Sunday. As she moves forward, clutching her stomach, her flushed face is framed by light as she asks the Captain: "Nos van a matar así, ¿sin juicio ni nada? ¿Sin darnos la posibilidad de defendernos?" Bueno suggests that Camila's words "Nos van a matar así, ¿sin juicio ni nada?" address a parallel violence during the Proceso years (1976-1983) when thousands "disappeared" without trial under the military regime (Bueno 2). However the remaining words also allude to the Dirty War because they express Bemberg's opinion that Camila's fate reflects the ongoing *rioplatense* reality of the unprotected and legally defenseless individual (Torres 12).

After mapping her 43rd day of imprisonment on the wall, Camila learns that she is pregnant. A close-up framing reveals the mixed emotions that travel across her face: from incredulity to bittersweet joy as she shouts the news through the bars to Ladislao, to tears and anguished sobs as she realizes the reality of her

predicament. Ladislao cannot hear her because the architecture of the prison blocks any communication. Camila has passed through childhood, adolescence, adulthood and now to motherhood. Braidotti argues that the changes in a woman's body during pregnancy can defeat the notion of a fixed bodily form because it moves and stretches to reshape itself and drastically alters the body's contours (80). This idea can be applied as another example of Camila's association with passages and movement. Even though she is imprisoned, her body knows no such boundaries and continues to move and change to support new life; these bodily changes become evident in the final scene.

According to law, Camila's execution should be stayed until she gives birth, and Captain Reyes sees her pregnancy as a way to save her. However, Rosas stands by his decision and Camila and Ladislao each receive the news that they will be executed together in four hours. In another example of the haptic, the letters A-S-E-S-I suggesting "asesinos" are etched on the wall as the Captain advises Ladislao of the execution time. Recalling the earlier scene in which Mariano's wife shouted the same word after his execution, the inscription "asesino" serves to remind audiences that Ladislao and Camila's execution is an act of violence by a repressive regime against its powerless and unprotected citizens.

To the sound of drumbeats, an emotionally exhausted Camila crosses another threshold, a passage to her final journey to the execution wall. The front of her dress around the abdomen is unbuttoned due to her pregnancy and it is at this moment that Ladislao learns of her condition. In an inversion of La Perichona's arrival at the *estancia* in the first scene, when La Perichona alights from the carriage to enter her prison, Camila instead crosses the threshold out of the prison

to the waiting “carriage” that, flanked as her grandmother’s was by servants and redcoats, will transport her to her execution. Forbidden to speak or to touch Ladislao, the only means of communicating their feelings is through a prolonged emotional gaze that recalls Bruno’s “feeling with the eye,” until they are blindfolded. Strapped into the chair that serves as a makeshift open carriage and recalls the carriage in the first scene, she and Ladislao are transported down a narrow, walled-in corridor lined with prisoners behind bars.

A gateway opens and the entire spatial movement plays out in the inverse direction of La Perichona’s journey, from left to right. The tree trunks are replaced by a pan of prisoners behind bars. In the sequence of La Perichona’s arrival, the final carriage scene is captured right to left before coming upon the tower of the *estancia* at the top left. Now the final “carriage” scene here is from left to right before seeing the prison tower in the centre-right of the frame. The camera pans left to right to the darkened wall where the two empty stools await. The next shot shows Camila and Ladislao in their execution chairs, spatially distanced against the wall, followed by close ups of their blindfolded faces in a shot/reverse-shot. After each one is executed, the bodies are lifted and put in a casket side by side. The voiceover in which Camila asks if Ladislao is there and he answers, “a tu lado, Camila” implies a fictional romantic notion of love surviving beyond death, with the casket serving as a vessel of transport on that journey.

The framing of natural landscapes and urban and interior architectural spaces intensifies the contrast between environments of repression and confinement with those of promised limited freedom. By interweaving landscape, architecture, the body and emotion from beginning to end, Bemberg ensures a haptic grounding of

the film. The closed-in and overbearing architectural space underpins an atmosphere of repression and confinement that is palpable. Bemberg's cropped, shadowy urban views and architectural camera angles are intentionally constructed in sharp contrast with the framing of Camila, usually positioned against lit, open architectural apertures such as doorways, windows or thresholds, as I shall demonstrate in the next section of this chapter.

3.2 Transito and Transgression

Having established that the film's external and internal architecture is framed to express repression and confinement, I shall now apply Bruno's theory of the *voyageuse* as a nomadic subject who subverts conventions to Camila's acts of transgression. Bemberg's filmic technique is generally perceived as traditional, and while it is true that the film *Camila* follows many characteristics of melodrama,⁸² Bemberg used a different framing in order to project Camila as a passionate, rebellious and independent woman. Camila's every act of transgression is represented as a passage through, or in close proximity to, an architectural aperture, most often a door or a threshold, a trope that supports Bruno's theory of *transito*.

By crossing a doorway, a threshold or by entering a carriage, Camila transports herself to "in-between" spaces of transgression and circulates towards

⁸² Karen Voss includes the following among the characteristics of melodrama in film: a virtuous character or couple struggles within a repressive social situation, a focus on a central emotional crisis, the key role of providence, the use of music for dramatic effect, and the scrutiny of key social institutions in the narrative (Voss). Camila and Ladislao struggle within a repressive social situation in which providence and justice play important roles, as evidenced by the couple's discovery in Goya and the ensuing events leading to their arrest and execution. Camila and Ladislao's impossible love affair represents the central emotional crisis, and the key social institutions of Family, State and Church are questioned throughout.

sites that are marginalized and socially or politically taboo: for example, the attic, Mariano's bookstore, her grandmother's *mirador*, the belfry, Ladislao's bed chamber, and the ultimate transgression, the lovers' journey of escape, to name but a few. An analysis of these scenes will demonstrate how the film combines haptic elements, architectural apertures, spatial movement and emotion in a feminist strategy to reveal repressive cultural, political and social issues that continue to repress women.

In the film, Camila is portrayed as a free spirit who underlines the issues of repression by challenging the norms. Movement underscores Camila's sense of freedom and sets her apart from the other women in the film. As Braidotti explains:

Mobility is one of the aspects of freedom. [. . .] Being free to move around, to go where one wants [. . .]. The physical dimension is only one aspect; mobility also refers to the intellectual space of creativity, that is to say the freedom to invent new ways of conducting our lives, new schemes of representation of ourselves. (256)

Mobility is an aspect of freedom that Bemberg confers to Camila by framing her moving about; as Camila becomes more daring and asserts her freedom with every new transgression, the framing of her movements noticeably lengthens to correlate with their increasing magnitude. While minor transgressions in the initial scenes are accompanied by minimal displacements, the prolonged framing of Camila's movement as she leaves her grandmother's funeral service and crosses the courtyard of the presbytery to Ladislao's room correlates to the magnitude of her transgression into the realm of the socio-religious taboo. The lengthiest stretch of movement culminates with the lovers escape, the ultimate transgression against

Family, Church and State. Conversely, Camila's mother, sisters and the women in church are framed either seated, kneeling, standing, fanning themselves or taking only a few steps.

Courageous, daring and free spirited, the fictional Camila embodies a woman's right to pursue her desires and to expand her intellectual and creative capabilities. Franz Fanon wrote: "In the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I shall initiate my cycle of freedom" (qtd. in Bhabha 12). With each transgression Camila crosses a boundary, recreating herself through a series of small acts of defiance that question the norms of patriarchy, Church and State, in this way exemplifying Cresswell's view of transgression (48). Camila's transgressive acts sprout from "in-between" spaces and grow, reflecting a nomadic consciousness, which as Braidotti explains, is a "form of political resistance to hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity" (Braidotti 23).

Camila's first passage into an "in-between" space of transgression is on bath day. After Camila's introduction as a child in a stroller in the first scene, the second time Camila appears is as a young woman in 1847. The next sequence of scenes is important at three levels: first in the framing of Camila close to an aperture to signal an act of transgression; secondly, in Bemberg's correlation of Camila as a free spirit with women's mobility, and finally in the association of Camila with madness and the clandestine.

From the onset of this initial scene, Camila is not where she is supposed to be, neither in her room nor bathing with her sisters. When asked by their mother, her brother Eduardo answers that Camila is probably avoiding the bath. The next

scene finds the patriarch O’Gorman bathing and commenting on the British blockade he is reading about in the paper while the nanny’s voice is heard twice in the background calling out “niña Camila.” The sound of the nanny’s voice in search of Camila in this scene alerts the patriarch that something is amiss, and ties in with his later appearance in the attic scene, after he has obviously followed Eduardo in search for Camila. In the scene in which Camila’s sisters are bathing, the nanny’s comment about her workload on “bath day” and the sisters’ queries about Rosas’ daily bathing habit appear to suggest that the “bath day” is a ritual imposed by Rosas; as the nanny confirms that people do indeed say that he bathes daily, she adds: “el hombre tiene sus rarezas, parece.” By choosing to avoid the bath ritual, Camila defies Rosas’ imposed norm and hides in the “in between” cluttered and private space of the attic, where Eduardo finds her illuminated by sunlight, smiling at the sounds of mewling kittens hidden in her lap. As Eduardo approaches, the light source is revealed as emanating from a small square architectural opening; the light now washes over Camila’s profile in the first framing of an aperture, a window, in relation with an act of transgression. Camila’s presence in the attic is an example of Braidotti’s freedom of mobility for she transports herself to the attic in clear defiance of patriarchal rule. As Bemberg demonstrates in the film, the female experience is centered on confinement and limited space: a woman’s place is either at home or in church. I would argue that through Camila’s action, Bemberg’s feminist voice calls for women to defy the limits imposed on them and to venture out and find their own space, perhaps to where they are traditionally “not supposed to go.”

In *The Madwoman in the Attic* Gilbert and Gubar criticize the limited, patriarchal representation of female characters as either pure, angelic women, or rebellious, unkempt madwomen and stress the importance of eliminating both figures. They argue that neither the angel nor the monster is an accurate representation of women and that the female artist should strive to move beyond this dichotomy. Bemberg's framing of Camila in the attic scene answers Gilbert and Gubar's call to go beyond the traditional patriarchal representations of women as angel or madwoman. If the framing of Camila bathed in a pure white light suggests an angelic dimension, her presence in the attic is an act of defiance or rebellion. Bemberg subverts the traditional image of the rebellious unkempt madwoman by creating a defiant woman who is neither mad nor disheveled.

Clandestinity is expressed on several occasions in relation to Camila throughout the film and usually in an intimate "in between" space. In the attic scene, Eduardo admonishes Camila's tendency to hide: "Siempre con esta manía tuya de esconderte." Thus far there has been no interaction between Camila and her father in the film, and there appears to be no indication in the historical accounts that Camila was rebellious at nineteen. Yet by using the words, "manía," "siempre" and "esconderte," the fictional Camila is introduced as someone who chooses to be different and defies convention in the simplest routines. When her brother asks why she does not let people know her whereabouts, her response, — "¿Para que Tatita se entere y los mande a ahogar?"⁸³ — implies that there is an existing tension between Camila and her father. Camila escapes his patriarchal rule by wandering to her own space in the isolated, marginalized areas of the house, in this

⁸³ In this instance she is referring to the kittens in her lap.

way mapping herself out of the rooms where women are supposed to be. Having heard the nanny search for Camila while he was taking a bath, the father appears to have followed Eduardo to the attic; the next scene confirms Camila's prediction as a servant drowns the kittens.

Both madness and the clandestine in relation to Camila are repeated in later scenes: among them, in her grandmother's mirador; by Ladislao in the confessional when she reveals her love for him and he accuses her of madness; and later, in their clandestine encounter in the belfry when Ladislao again accuses her of madness. Finally in the ultimate act of transgression, the lovers' escape is perceived publicly as an act of madness, and will require the couple to move about clandestinely and hide their true identity.

If Camila's first act of defiance is framed in relation to a window, the door as an aperture or passage for Camila's transgressions is linked to the first confessional scene. This scene in which Camila, veiled with a mantilla, is kneeling outside the confessional is important because in it she refers to an open door in a dream, a door that does indeed represent a passage for Camila. This scene also introduces haptic and erotic elements. According to Bachelard, a mere door can evoke images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security and welcome (Bachelard 224). The scene opens on a portrait of Rosas enshrined with candles as a disembodied female voice whispers "Yo no tengo remedio"; the camera moves to a back view of a woman kneeling at the confessional as she explains that she has yet again quarreled with her arrogant father, whom she wishes dead. As the camera advances closer towards the woman's back, she confesses her dream by starting with: "Abrí una puerta." She relates that in her dream, she opened a *door* and was on the threshold looking

in at a man and a woman having sex. They were mewling like kittens, and when she moved closer, she recognized herself as the naked woman. With the admission of this statement, “esa mujer era yo,” the camera moves to reveal the profile of Camila.

Scholars have related this dream to Camila’s sexual awakening (Gatto, “Camila” 107; Williams, “Camila” 64), but have not recognized Bemberg’s use of the architectural element of a door as a passage to that sexual awakening that enables a transition to a different subjectivity. Camila’s seeing herself in her dream evokes the idea of seeing oneself in a mirror. Bruno proposes that the reflective image of the mirror conveys both an expansion of space while suggesting an opening into interior space (Bruno 115). Similarly, Camila’s dream unlocks and opens to an interior space of repressed erotic thoughts, which her Catholic upbringing has taught her are taboo. Yet she cannot help herself from looking at the couple because, as she confesses, the emotional attraction was stronger than her. Her passage through the door in her dream provokes a mixed emotional response of excitement and shame; as she admits “Sentía tanta vergüenza.”

Although the architectural element of a door in Camila’s dream represents a passage to her sexual awakening, the mixed emotions of excitement and shame that she felt leads her to concede that she has sinned because her mind has transgressed into the realm of erotic desire, sexually repressed by Church, society and patriarchy. Indeed Camila’s need to confess recalls Foucault’s argument that in the nineteenth century, the Church attributed an increasing importance to confessing “all insinuations of the flesh; thoughts, desires, voluptuous imaginings, delectations henceforth had to enter, in detail, into the process of confession and guidance. [. . .

] Everything had to be told” (Foucault, “The Repressive Hypothesis” 303). As Foucault explains, since sex became the root of all evil, the moment of transgression shifted from the act itself to the stirrings of desire. Foucault suggests that perhaps it was at this juncture that Western society’s peculiar obligation of “telling oneself and another, as often as possible, everything that might concern the interplay of innumerable pleasures, sensations and thoughts” that had any affinity with sex (303) was laid down in order to repress it. Since traditionally women visited the confessional regularly, the Church’s goal must have sought the sexual repression of women. Bemberg blames sexual repression as responsible in part for the woman’s condition in the 1970s. As she states in an interview: “To me, [sexual repression] is the foremost repression. It is very hard to imagine how a person can be free if s/he is sexually repressed. It is one of the reasons why women have found it difficult to break away with the past, to express themselves” (Torrents 173). The open door through which Camila passes to sexual awakening is contrasted with the closed door and the latticed grille of the confessional booth, designed for anonymity and exclusion; a door and a window that do not permit a passage for women. In a later scene the confessional is subverted to allow such a passage, deconstructing the institution that discriminates against women and is responsible, in part, for their sexual and social repression.

In his discussion of Bemberg’s female gaze, Williams examines how desire in the film is constructed using a sensorial topography of non-visual processes (hearing/touch/smell) traditionally considered feminine: Camila first hears Ladislao’s voice in the confessional, then later touches his face in the *gallina ciega* game and finally sees him upon removing her blindfold. Williams notes further that

the concluding segments offer an exact reversal of this sequence, as the lovers are deprived sensorially of each other first by touch, later by sight and finally by sound (“Camila” 63-64). In addition to Williams’ sensorial topography, this initial auditory exchange between Camila and Ladislao can also be interpreted using Bruno’s haptic theory, as a tactile emotional exchange. Upon hearing the disembodied voice of the priest, Camila realizes that this is not her confessor and, embarrassed and annoyed, she leaves abruptly. Camila has not only revealed her erotic thoughts to an unknown priest, but has felt the emotional reaction of doing so — shame. A sensation that travels through and is felt by the body is the very basis of emotional knowledge and, according to Bruno, places emotion in the moving realm of physiological activity (Bruno 261). Ladislao’s voice touches her by provoking an emotional response of anger and embarrassment.

Braidotti claims that mobility also refers to the intellectual space of creativity, that is to say the freedom to invent new ways of conducting our lives and of representing ourselves (256). Camila has just crossed the threshold into Mariano’s bookstore in a scene that combines circulation, *transito* (passage), transport (vessel) and transgression to portray her as a nomadic voyageuse and express this dimension of mobility. Bruno’s theory of *transito* can be applied to Bemberg’s framing of Camila “in-between” the doorway and the bookcase. In passing through this doorway into Mariano’s bookstore, Camila circulates as a nomadic *voyageuse* as she moves away from the permitted, and transgresses into forbidden spaces. She subverts conventions by pursuing her desire to read censored books and to educate herself. The idea of passage as aperture is further enhanced as

she circulates to the left, and is framed between the open door and an open window.

By entering the shop even though she knows it to be a subversive site, Camila intentionally crosses a boundary, exemplifying Braidotti's nomadic consciousness as a form of political resistance against hegemonic practices (23). This political resistance is further evidenced when we realize that Camila is not merely browsing but she is in the shop to purchase a censored book that she has previously requested. After Mariano approaches her and pulls the book out from inside his jacket, he hides it inside music sheets in an intimate secretive exchange and whispers that the item had just arrived from Montevideo. As Camila moves awkwardly through the store holding the book behind her back, her act of transgression is caught by her intended beau, Ignacio, who has followed her in order to protect her from being seen inside the store. Camila again breaks the norms of feminine decorum when she tells her sister, Carmen, that Ignacio will accompany her home; Carmen's exclamation "¡sola!" highlights the impropriety of traveling without a chaperone. This social transgression occurs in the interior "in between" space of the carriage, in which Camila again transgresses by reading aloud from Esteban Echevarría's censored book.⁸⁴ Her reading of the text in which Echevarría equates his exile with death resonates not only with the exile of many Argentine artists and scholars during the recent Dirty War but transcends to universal issues of exile. Through these scenes Bemberg criticizes patriarchal and political repressions of personal freedoms: through censorship of intellectual and

⁸⁴ The name of the book is not mentioned in the film or in the script but the text that Camila reads is from Echevarría's "Emigrar por fuerza" a loose page that has been included in *Obras completas*.

artistic material, through forced exile and through the hypocrisy of imposed social decorum designed to protect a woman's honor in a male-dominated society.

The relationship between circulation, haptic contact and Camila's transgressions continues in the "in between" space of the courtyard during Camila's birthday party. Wearing a white blindfold used in the game *gallina ciega*, Camila frantically tries to touch someone as she zigzags around the courtyard. As Ignacio slips out of her reach, she grabs Padre Ladislao who happens upon the scene; her hands immediately travel over his face, neck and shoulders, in a tactile mapping of his features and torso in order to identify him. In this "in-between" space of the courtyard, Camila's tactile connection causes Ladislao's ambivalent reaction to the erotic potential of female hands (Williams, "Camila" 65).⁸⁵ Camila's intimate contact with the priest dissolves a boundary because it transgresses into the socially taboo, as confirmed by the seated women who stop fanning themselves to observe Camila inappropriate behavior.

When Camila removes the blindfold, Bemberg subverts the ideological obstruction of female desire by showing its genesis from a female perspective; Camila appropriates the gaze and transforms Ladislao, through the camera, into an object of desire (Erausquin 52; Kantaris 130). At some point between the screenplay and the film version, Bemberg made two important changes: in the screenplay the celebration and the game of *gallina ciega* occur at twilight by the river instead of in the courtyard; secondly, in the screenplay, Camila removes her

⁸⁵ In her historical account, Schettini reveals that Ladislao Gutiérrez was four years older than Camila. The nephew of the governor of Tucumán, he arrived in Buenos Aires in 1846 with letters of recommendation guaranteed to open doors in the most influential porteño families. Gutiérrez was at the point of being assigned the Navarro parish, but as Fate would have it, he is assigned a vacancy which becomes available at the Iglesia del Socorro. Camila's brother Eduardo, a friend of Gutiérrez during their seminary years, invited him to the family's social gatherings (387).

blindfold and “*sin mirar a Gutiérrez*” (emphasis added) moves towards the buffet (Bemberg, *Camila: Guión* 13).⁸⁶ The change in location to the courtyard represents a more intimate “in-between” space for Camila’s transgressions: Camila’s tactile appropriation of Ladislao’s body culminates with her appropriation of the gaze in two acts of transgression that define Camila’s identity as a free spirit. Averting Ladislao’s gaze as originally planned in the screenplay would have been the expected behavior of a repressed, innocent, respectable young lady. By appropriating the gaze, Camila resists this exclusionary view of subjectivity.

The sensorial experience of touching Ladislao’s face has already produced an effect in Camila, which, in turn, has opened a passage that transports the external tactile experience into an interior terrain of emotion, described by Bruno as “a touching experience of feeling through the eye” (Bruno 219). Her challenging gaze is another way of touching Ladislao by taking hold of him visually, defying him to respond in kind but knowing that as a priest he has no choice but to avert his gaze.

Having committed sexual, social and political transgressions, Camila’s nomadic journey continues in her calm defiance of patriarchal authority as we find her visiting her grandmother’s *mirador* against her father’s wishes. The scene begins with the camera panning diagonally across a black iron fence in the foreground as the façade of a coral building with shuttered windows remains in the background. The camera then travels up to the square tower of the farmhouse framed at the top left. The tower’s exterior architecture is a heavy stone structure with a closed, windowed door in the center and a small railing. The architecture of

⁸⁶ Henri Lefebvre explains that the relation between space and the body is an extension of one into the other with the possibility of mapping their intersections (182), and in the intersections of bodies and spaces one may recognize “intersubjectivity taking part in the making of intimate space” (184).

the tower with a door in its center is combined with the haptic — the sound of Camila's voiceover reading "Afuera escucho cómo se preparan las armas que dispararán contra este corazón; que quiero que sepa estará con usted hasta el último de sus latidos." The scene switches to reveal Camila's grandmother in the *mirador*, the space in which she has been confined since her appearance in the first scene when Camila was a child.

If in the first scene La Perichona appeared elegantly attired and her manner was indignant and defiant, the years of confinement in the *mirador* of the *estancia* have not been kind as La Perichona appears like Gilbert and Gubar's unkempt rebellious madwoman in the attic. Dressed in a housecoat, her hair disheveled, Camila's grandmother has grown delusional. Her appearance and the way she lives and acts are determined by the solitary confined space that she now inhabits. The end of the first scene in which La Perichona asked Camila "¿Te gustan las historias de amor?" and to which the child Camila answered "No sé" links with this scene in which Camila, now a young woman, has come to find out if she does like love stories. By having Camila read a letter that describes La Perichona's passionate love affair with the viceroy Liniers, the grandmother introduces a world of forbidden passions to a complicit Camila. Camila colludes in her grandmother's delusional fantasy by confirming that she has indeed made all the arrangements for the party and they dance to music that only they perceive. La Perichona and Camila's shared "madness" exemplifies Deleuze and Guattari's view of schizophrenia (madness) as a resistance to the status quo and regulation, in this case, as a way to transcend La Perichona's situation of confinement.

As Fontana points out, passion itself is an emotion that has a transgressive quality, and it becomes embodied in Camila (Fontana 33-34). Here again, Camila and her grandmother are framed in front of a window, as an architectural aperture of passage through which Camila receives her grandmother's legacy of passion and transgression. As Camila reads Liniers' erotic letters that confess that he loved La Perichona to the point of madness, "Te amo hasta la locura," and listens to her grandmother describe her passions and transgressions, Camila wants her grandmother to confirm that the love and passion she experienced is like the one described in the love novels that Camila has already been reading clandestinely. The grandmother's confirmation of her erotic lovemaking fuels Camila's desire.

Braidotti describes a feminist mother-daughter relationship as an imaginary couple that enacts the politics of female subjectivity (Braidotti 181). Since, as we shall see later, Camila's mother enforces patriarchy with her mandate, "Calla y escucha," it is instead Camila's relationship with her grandmother that may constitute an enactment of female subjectivity. Through La Perichona's descriptions about passion and the pleasures of the body, Camila and her grandmother discuss forbidden and sexually repressed topics, sharing a nomadic consciousness that refuses to recognize borders — in this case the confined limits of the *mirador*.

Their attempt at transcending the limits of the space is interrupted by the appearance of Camila's father through the doorway. He admonishes her for defying patriarchal rule yet again; his statement, "Cuántas veces tengo que decirle lo mucho que me disgusta que suba al mirador," implies that this is not the first time that Camila has defied his orders. When asked whether she understands that this

woman is confined, Camila's answer, "Sí, pero es mi abuela," subverts the imposed patriarchal condemnation by underlining the importance of the matriarch. Even when he orders Camila with "obedezca y dese prisa," she defies him by taking the time to kiss her grandmother and to tell her that she is beautiful before taking her leave.

Fortified by her grandmother's legacy of passionate transgressions, Camila is convinced that she wants a marriage based on love and passion. After she witnesses the horror of Mariano's execution, Padre Ladislao's controversial sermon denouncing the brutal slaying by the repressive regime moves Camila and she sees in Ladislao a masculine ideal, a kindred soul who shares her ideals of passion, liberty and human dignity (Bemberg, *Camila: Guión* i). From then on her desire for Ladislao amounts to what Antonioni defined as "*la malattia dei sentimenti*" (qtd. in Bruno 103) — the sickness of emotions — an erotic nomadism which dislocates Camila from family, home and the norms of everyday life, including a marriage to her approved beau; Camila crosses a boundary and transgresses into the realm of the erotic and the taboo in that her object of desire is a priest.

Camila transgresses again into the political realm as she breaks social convention by voicing her defense of Padre Ladislao's controversial sermon during the O'Gorman Sunday dinner. In this scene, Bemberg highlights social and cultural problems related to patriarchal rule that have resulted in submissive, passive and insecure women: the repression of women through control of their behavior, the silencing of their voice and subjectivity, and especially the enforcement and dissemination of patriarchal norms by women themselves. While the men voice their opinions and make eye contact with each other as they speak, the women

remain silent with eyes downcast. As Carmen's beau enumerates a litany of Rosas' achievements, Camila questions the use of violence and openly casts doubt on Mariano's culpability, silencing everyone with this breach of protocol. When Carmen's fiancé explains that *Unitarios* and *Federales* are not the same, Camila's retort "No estoy tan segura" is a form of political resistance to a hegemonic view and an attempt to include female subjectivity. However, Camila's mother stops the discussion to enforce patriarchal authority with "Cállate y escucha." Women are to remain silent and listen. When mocked that she is attempting to defend her new confessor, Camila refuses to be silent and in so doing, transgresses into hostile territory in her criticism of government repression, violence and censorship that everyone cowardly chooses to accept. Having disobeyed her mother's admonishment, the patriarch O'Gorman silences Camila and censors her voice by ordering her to leave the table.

If Camila is a nomadic *voyageuse* for subverting conventions, the ultimate subversion of Church, State and Family has resulted in a need to escape and now the nomadic assumes the literal act of traveling, characterized by movement and change, within the *intermezzo*. In preparation for her escape, the camera captures Camila fashioning herself out of her social class by removing her jewelry and then sitting in front of the vanity mirror to restyle her hair.⁸⁷ The escape scene is replete with thresholds and open doorways representing Camila's passages into a new life. First, Camila passes through the threshold of the doorway from the courtyard to the street.

⁸⁷ As Elsaesser explains, "the look into the mirror marks the point at which a character's action and its exteriority in relation to the body and the self give way to an inescapable interiorization and subjectification. Unlike a window and door, the mirror directly implicates the self in what it sees (Elsaesser 83).

As she closes the door behind her, she is symbolically closing the door on who she was, and thus begins the journey that will dislocate Camila from house and home. Camila passes the threshold into the world as a self-fashioned *voyageuse* as she moves away from hegemonic conventions, and travels down the street with her clothes in a bundle to a waiting carriage. Here again a door opens, a hand reaches out, and as she steps through the aperture, she passes into the “in-between” space of the carriage, which becomes the vessel of transport that will carry the lovers away to a new life. By framing this journey’s beginning in conjunction with the architectural element of doors, Bemberg appears to support Bruno’s idea that a voyage supplies a hinge for woman’s own passage and openings to new possibilities.

Bemberg’s use of the door as a passage continues in a later scene in which the Chief of Police warns Camila. In yet another passage through a door, Camila is confronted with the fact that the subterfuge has been discovered. The Chief of Police proposes the possibility of an escape to Brazil offering two horses and provisions, as long as they are gone by dawn; if not he is duty bound to arrest them. Again, this option is presented with the image of a door, as the chief explains: “En la puerta de su casa va a encontrar a dos caballos. Brazil no está lejos” (emphasis added). The possibility of another passage for Camila, a journey to a new life of exile, maps Brazil into the geography. Camila’s eyes light up in hope at the possibility of another journey of escape. The nomadic *voyageuse*, whose desire is forward-looking to the future, is now willing to dislocate from country to live a nomadic life in exile. In this sense Camila represents a true nomadic spirit because her desire to love is more important than statehood or citizenship. She runs in search of Ladislao and finds him in the church, kneeling in front of a crucifix. In

the close-ups of Camila and Ladislao, he is absorbed in prayer and appears to have found peace, but Camila's face is wrought with emotion. Soaked from the rain, her appearance is disheveled as she moves towards him, her mouth open, out of breath but ready to speak. However, the reverse-shot of Ladislao back as he raises his head towards the crucifix, stops her short. The emotional realization that she has lost him to God surfaces and is mapped on her face in a series of movements: her mouth closes and drops downward in sadness, her face and neck contort as she holds back tears, as her head and gaze drop down in defeat.

The next scene frames a tranquil landscape at dawn with the promised horses and provisions stationed outside the hut. Ladislao travels home to confess that he cannot be anyone else but Gutiérrez; he has no regrets but he cannot fight God. She breaks down in tears and then turns to take comfort in his arms; a close-up of her face reveals emotions of disbelief, powerlessness, frustration and defeat. The opportunity of escape to Brazil is gone at the approaching sound of horses' hooves. When they are arrested, the scene ends with another frame of the waiting horses, a missed opportunity. Camila's voyage goes painfully astray as her nomadic journey to the frontier of the country ends in prison.

Camila's transgressive acts of resistance question patriarchal, social, religious and political hegemonic practices, and chart the growth of her nomadic consciousness. She crosses social boundaries by traveling home un-chaperoned and by appropriating Ladislao with her gaze. She breaks political conventions by refusing to participate in the communal bathing ritual, by reading censored books, and by voicing her opinion on political violence at the dinner table. She defies patriarchal dictates by disobeying her father's wishes. Her religious transgressions

are evidenced in her resilient pursuit of the taboo — her love for Ladislao. Through these acts Camila reflects Braidotti's nomadic configuration by expressing a desire for an identity made of transitions, ultimately questioning norms and crossing boundaries “regardless of where they may lead in an attempt to connect dimensions of self” (Braidotti 22). Religious transgression is further evidenced in the subversion of the confessional's emblematic exclusion of women and their subjectivity.

3.3 Deconstructing the Confessional

Camila's emotions function in line with Bruno's definition of *transporto* as the attraction of human beings to one another; Camila's pursuit of Ladislao “transports” him into her world, her desire. In this section, I argue that the cinematic framing of each confessional scene maps a point on an itinerary of *rapprochement*, or Bruno's *trasporto*, of two human beings attracted to one another and moving towards each other as a result of that attraction (Bruno 7).⁸⁸

The confessional exemplifies a gendered space because the entrance into the booth, and by extension into the ministry of priesthood, excludes women. I already analyzed the open door of the first confessional scene through which Camila passes to sexual awakening as a contrast with the closed door and the latticed grille of the confessional booth, designed for anonymity and exclusion; a door and a window that do not permit passage for women. The Church exercises its power over women

⁸⁸ Soriano presents a compelling analysis of the nine “confession” scenes to show how the rite slowly transforms from a sacrament at the beginning of the film to an unorthodox profession of faith at the end. Ladislao's final confession embraces a return to God; Camila's refusal to confess subverts patriarchy, refusing to acquiesce to God as a father figure. I shall analyse only the four scenes that transpire in the architectural structure of the confessional box.

through religious rituals like daily mass, confession and works of mercy in the name of maintaining order (Gatto 106). This idea is confirmed in a second confessional scene in which Camila tells Padre Ladislao “Usted me ordena los pensamientos, Padre. Como una brújula” to which Padre Ladislao answers, “Por eso estamos los sacerdotes.”

In this second confessional scene the camera frames a series of shot/reverse-shots of the priest inside the confessional with a frontal view of Camila on the outside, in what may be interpreted as reinforcing the gendered male versus female space. However, a closer inspection of the cinematographic framing of this space reveals that in this scene, the architecture of the confessional box has all but disappeared, reduced to a shadowy pattern over Padre Ladislao’s face. A relaxed Padre Ladislao and Camila appear to be having more of a conversation between friends than a confession; this is confirmed when Camila tells him, “Me siento bien después de hablar con usted” and then, “No sé qué haría si no pudiera venir a contarle mis penas,” to which Padre Ladislao reminds her: “Y tus pecados. Este es un confesionario, no lo olvidemos.” While Camila replies “No lo olvido,” her face betrays a disappointment and she reveals that “Voy a tener que pecar muchos pecados” in order to keep in touch with him. This subverts the purpose of the confessional which is to avoid sins (Soriano 266). The fact that there is no framing of the lattice grille or of the apparatus of the confessional box transgresses to the erotic realm because it dissolves boundaries and contributes to a sense of *rapprochement*.

The third confessional scene differs from the first one in which Camila confessed her sexual awakening, in that Bemberg subverts the confessional and

creates a passage for Camila, deconstructing the institution that discriminates against women and is responsible, in part, for their sexual and social repression. Overwhelmed by her feelings, Camila has nowhere to turn; while Ladislao turns to prayer and self-flagellation, Camila seeks resolution in the confessional booth. In this third confessional scene, Camila confesses that she is madly in love; she tells Ladislao, “Me muero de amor, Padre.” Stephen Hart sees this shot/reverse-shot sequence in which Camila’s face appears framed within an aperture of the confessional lattice as one of confinement, designed to produce a more angular, unsettling version of a verbal interaction between two people (Hart 80). The framing of Camila inside what appears to be a single aperture in the lattice of the confessional grille does indeed confine Camila. However, a different reading would suggest that the framing of Camila’s full sensual face within a single aperture of the lattice puts her on the threshold of the grille, in another act of *transito*. The view of Camila’s face framed by the camera cannot be captured with the human eye; a priest would not be able to see anyone in this way. Therefore the cinematographic framing of Camila’s face in this manner is intentional. The full-blown close-up of Ladislao’s anxious expression in the confessional further reduces the space between them, as if the confessional grille had disappeared, leaving only its shadow on Ladislao’s face as a reminder of the site and that what is happening is taboo. Ladislao accuses Camila of madness with the words, “estás loca y no quiero escucharte,” and shuts out her image by firmly slamming the confessional’s screen.

Before discussing the fourth confessional scene, it is important to understand what transpires between the third and fourth scene, after Camila declares that she is

emotionally sick with love. For his part, Ladislao is not spared from *la malattia dei sentimenti* (Antonioni, qtd. in Bruno 103) as his self-flagellation infects him with a delirious fever. Upon hearing of his illness, Camila leaves her grandmother's funeral service and single-mindedly transgresses into the courtyard of the presbytery to Ladislao's room. Venturing into the realm of the socio-religious taboo, she opens his bedroom door and passes into a priest's room. The passage through this doorway is important on two levels: on the one hand, it is a passage to a space of transgression; Camila goes where she is forbidden to go. On the other hand, the passage through this doorway is an example of an aperture for women's horizons, for Camila discovers that Ladislao, in his delirium, is clutching her handkerchief, the one that he had found in the clothes she had given to charity and had tried to return. As she kisses him in his delirious state, he grabs her hand and places it on his penis and she discovers his state of arousal. This erotic touching of the taboo, along with the presence of her handkerchief leads Camila to conclude that Ladislao shares her passion and she pursues him in earnest.

Undaunted, Camila tracks him up to the belfry after he has presumably just rung the church bells. She travels to this vertical, out-of-the-way place where he would be and transgresses by being where she should not. The use of the belfry is deliberate, for as Hart points out, not only does it emphasize the notion of concealment and underscore the link between love and confinement, but more importantly it echoes the tower where La Perichona was imprisoned for past indiscretions (Hart 81), and foreshadows the prison tower where Camila's own indiscretions will take her.

As discussed above, Bachelard argues that intimacy can only be encompassed by vertical structures (Bachelard 26). The belfry is such a high, vertical architectural space removed from the world below, and its intimate confined space allows for the occurrence of a tactile exchange. It offers not only the ability for contact but also extends to Bruno's expanded definition to include "the ability of our bodies to *sense* their own movement in space" (6). In the belfry scene, Ladislao moves towards Camila and it is the second time that he tells her "tú estás loca Camila." As they embrace, the architecture becomes a haptic site not only through the contact of their bodies but also in the camera's framing of their movements. The belfry is a site of *trasporto* because by seducing Ladislao, Camila transports him into her world of desire. This is evidenced in the next scene when Ladislao is now mad with love; he says "estoy loco, no puedo dejar de pensar en ti." The haptic contact continues in this scene as Ladislao *smells* Camila's handkerchief, imagines *hearing* her voice, and erotically caresses his lips and his neck with her handkerchief imagining it to be Camila's hand, evoking a subliminal contact.

The sanctity of the confessional is completely subverted in Camila's fourth visit. Camila kneels outside the confessional to confess not her sins but rather her desire to spend her life kneeling at Ladislao's feet. This declaration is stated in parallel with Camila's hand erotically caressing the confessional lattice as if she were imagining herself running it over Ladislao's body. This contact conflates the spatial movement of her hand across the architecture with an imaginary movement over the body and connects it with Ladislao's haptic exchanges in the preceding scene.

The four confessional scenes trace Camila's journey as that of, to paraphrase Bruno, an erotic nomadic *voyageuse* affected by a restless love (Bruno 99). Thus the confessional scenes unfold like a map of Camila's private emotional journey: it charts the initial embarrassment of the sexual awakening; travels to the intimacy of a *rapprochement* in the second; touches madness in the third; to finally express an erotic love in the fourth, in which it records the point in the itinerary that leads to the decision to escape together in the ultimate act of transgression.

The final subversion of the confessional occurs in her last hours before Camila's execution. She refuses confession and does not surrender to the hypocrisy of the Church although she does accept to drink the holy water for the baptism of her unborn child. As a nomadic *voyageuse* whose transgressions questioned and crossed boundaries in a subversion of patriarchal norms, she remains true to her convictions and confirms that her conscience is clear, with no regrets.

In conclusion, I have shown that the film's cropped urban and architectural views, together with the characters' restrained movement within these spaces, not only represent the political climate of oppression and the limited spatial circulation of Buenos Aires' citizenry during Rosas' regime, but hint at the repression, violence and fear most recently experienced under the military regime of the *Proceso*.

In order to project Camila as a passionate, rebellious and independent woman, Bemberg accomplishes a different framing to distinguish her protagonist from the other women in the film. Through Camila's movements, the protagonist breaks away from the permitted and transgresses into forbidden spaces to challenge the moral, social and cultural conventions of her time. In so doing, Bemberg

criticizes Argentina's patriarchal society that sought to keep women in their allotted place (Bemberg, "Being an Artist" 221). She fashions Camila as a nomadic subject not afraid to travel through the intimidating landscapes of patriarchy in order to map her female subjectivity. Bemberg correlates Camila's subversion of conventions with the questioning of norms and the subsequent rebellion against authority figures in the Family, Church and State initiated by the 1970s movement for individual, and especially women's, rights and freedoms.

Bueno suggests that while Bemberg portrays an image of Camila as a liberated woman in the development of the narrative, during the final scenes the protagonist succumbs, which reinforces the director's view that women are not yet fully emancipated (Bueno 4)⁸⁹. Bemberg recognizes that women are not fully liberated, but perhaps the film can also be read as an appeal to women — to have the courage to change the status quo and emancipate themselves. Bemberg states in an interview that women's lack of courage and audacity "constituyen la razón por la cual la mujer está tan borrada de nuestra sociedad" (González 10). This perhaps explains why Bemberg did not end the film with the original screenplay version, a voiceover in which Rosas states that no one came forward to speak on Camila's behalf, based on a statement written by Rosas' in 1877, six days before his death in England:

Ninguna persona me aconsejó la ejecución del cura Gutiérrez y de Camila O'Gorman. Ni persona alguna me habló ni me escribió a favor.

⁸⁹ Bueno opines that "Bemberg portrays women facing the challenges of their own condition without giving them the promise of liberation" (Bueno 106). She concludes that "The traditional melodramatic ending, predominating over the image of a rebellious Camila, is congruent with Bemberg's point of view. In all her films women are not yet emancipated" (135).

Por el contrario, todas las personas del clero me hablaron o escribieron sobre el atrevido crimen y la urgente necesidad de un castigo ejemplar, para prevenir otros escándalos semejantes o parecidos. Yo creía lo mismo, y siendo mía la responsabilidad ordené la ejecución. (Schettini 403)

Such an ending would have meant that patriarchy cannot be overcome. Instead the film ends with Camila's voiceover, "¿Estás ahí, Ladislao?" and Ladislao's reply "A tu lado, Camila." This exchange remains aligned with the mutual support displayed in moments of weakness and relates to Bemberg's view of marriage.⁹⁰ With this ending, Camila and Ladislao symbolically live on in a new world in which women share marriage in an equal partnership.

Bemberg's transgression from the traditional stereotypical image of women in film is embodied in a strong female character that dared to rebel, to speak her mind, and to follow her heart but whose efforts were silenced by the oppressive patriarchal powers of Church, State and Family (Bemberg, "Being an Artist" 221). However, Bemberg's revised ending envisions a new world in which those marginalized find a place. The film *Camila* becomes itself a site of *transito*, a passage through which the female spectator, moved by Camila's courage, audacity, and subjectivity, ponders her own female condition.

⁹⁰ Asked if she opposed matrimony, Bemberg answered: "Contra cierta especie de matrimonio, sí. Pero no contra la pareja planteada en términos democráticos. [. . .] el matrimonio democrático es posible si la mujer es lúcida, ambiciosa, valiente y honesta en el planteo de su vida con el hombre a quien quiere y por quien es querida" (Barceli 52).

Chapter 4

International, Domestic and Interior Journeys in *Miss Mary*

Bemberg's fourth film, *Miss Mary* (1986), also breaks from stereotypical representations by focusing on the repression of women in Argentina's aristocratic class during the 1930s and 1940s; as Bemberg conveys in the film, this repression was transmitted by women from one generation to another partly through the teachings of a conservative Catholic Church and partly through the influence of a British Puritanical education. Clara Fontana points out two dominant problems within this social class: sexual repression and blindness with respect to impending social change (37). With respect to the latter, Bemberg states in an interview that "*Miss Mary* aborda un tema más político y social a partir de un fresco familiar:"

Considero que la clase ganadera oligarca argentina, a la cual pertenezco, fue muy responsable de las enormes injusticias que hay en mi país y que contribuyó a las primeras fuerzas del Peronismo. [. . .] *Miss Mary* me permitió salirme de lo psicológico y aproveché para mostrar [. . .] que la represión familiar engendra la represión política. (Trelles 115-117)

Born into the aristocratic class, Bemberg accuses it of being responsible for the ills that befell the country. As she discovers, existing films about the Argentine aristocracy would lapse into the absurd because they were usually produced by people who did not belong to that social class, while conversely the upper class did not engage in film production. She concluded that "se fue llegando al punto de que

si no lo hacía yo no lo hacía nadie. Me parecía que era un testimonio importante” (Trelles 117).

Although the film’s conflict revolves around the aristocracy’s sexual repression of women, Bemberg also demonstrates that their repression extends beyond the sexual to encompass emotional, intellectual and creative dimensions. Explaining that the aristocracy represented in *Miss Mary* suppressed all public shows of affection and sentiment, she contrasts the aristocracy’s concern with form, appearance and displays of apparent and actual luxury with a lack of spiritual values and tenderness (Torrents 127). She expounds that *Miss Mary* is a film about a great emptiness, made up of nuances and of silences; an effect, she explains, that she sought to capture with “a cool palate, huge empty sets, leisurely gestures and hushed voices [. . .] all with a touch of elegance and an edge of melancholy” (Burton-Carvajal, “María Luisa Bemberg’s *Miss Mary*” 342-5). As she clarifies in an interview, *Miss Mary* is not an autobiography but a compilation of childhood memories and emotions that she wanted to examine (Tabbia 8). One key autobiographical element that serves as the basis for this film is the British governess, a familiar figure in wealthy Argentine families whose Puritanical instruction ensured the continued repression of their daughters.

A common practice among the Argentine aristocracy of the time was to contract a governess to provide their children with a coveted British education. As Carbonetti explains, contracting a governess and the use of the English language guaranteed class distinction and satisfied the Argentine aristocracy’s desire to model itself after the British (“Deseos” 88). María Luisa and her siblings were raised and schooled by twenty-three British governesses, of which the character of

Miss Mary Mulligan is a composite (Tabbia 8). While Bemberg claims that “Las gobernantas eran mujeres victorianas que colaboraban con el sistema represivo y autoritario familiar” (“María Luisa Bemberg,” *La Nación* 12), she also wanted to convey in her film:

esta mezcla de rechazo y de amor que muchas de [las gobernantas] me suscitaron. Ahora las veo como criaturas respetables, exiliadas en tierras ajenas, cuidando hijos ajenos en casas ajenas. [. . .] Eran víctimas de su educación y del puritanismo de la clase media inglesa.
(Tabbia 8)

Bemberg cleverly chooses the British governess’s perspective, rather than an adolescent’s autobiographical viewpoint, to critique the political and social life of the Argentine aristocratic class. Although Bemberg perceived them as foreign collaborators in the patriarchal system of repression at the time, the governess’s viewpoint provides credibility and dissociation to the critique, both of which would have been difficult to achieve had Bemberg used the adolescent perspective of Terry or Carolina for example.

Filmed on the Bemberg *estancia* in San Simón, a Normandy castle constructed in 1918 (Erausquin 53), Bemberg produced two versions of *Miss Mary*, one for the First World (primarily U.S.) consumption and one for Latin American audiences.⁹¹ In addition to a few subtle differences between the two versions, the Spanish version contains a set of final photos not present in the English one, which

⁹¹ Unless specified, this chapter uses the U.S. version.

conversely contains a pre-text and post-text explaining the historical significance of the dates mentioned in the film (Mennell 102).⁹²

The film begins with a short initial sequence in black and white: a stylish couple enters a well-appointed bedroom in a Buenos Aires mansion in 1930 to say goodnight to their daughters and their English nanny, Miss Justin, before leaving to celebrate General Uriburu's presidency. Achieved with the support of the far-right aristocracy, Uriburu's military coup initiates the "Infamous decade" (Erausquin 53). The film's title and credits overlay photographs of the "revolution" of 1930 which unfurl to the song "Ain't she sweet?" — the same song that also ends the film. The film then jumps to a tiny apartment in the filmic present, Buenos Aires, October 16, 1945, to find Miss Mary Mulligan packing her trunk to return to England. As the audience will learn, not only is October 16, 1945 the day before Miss Mary's departure from Argentina, but more significantly it is the day before a major event in Argentine history, Juan Domingo Perón's release from prison. Set between 1930 and 1945, the film covers the fifteen years of political repression and fraud from the Uriburu days to the rise of Perón, but it centers on Miss Mary's recollections of the summer of 1938, while she was employed as a governess for the Martínez-Bordegain family (Williams, "Down Argentine Way" 19). After Miss Mary momentarily stops her packing to reread the wedding announcement of Teresa Martínez-Bordegain in the local paper, she rummages through her trunk to retrieve a grey suit. From then on the film adopts an episodic structure as Miss

⁹² As Bemberg states, "I shot this film simultaneously in Spanish and in English because a North American distributor was interested in buying it, and North American audiences are so spoiled that they are reluctant to read subtitles, and won't accept dubbing either. I would never do it again. It was exhausting to have to shoot each take twice, once in each language. It was like making two movies" (Burton-Carvajal, "María Luisa Bemberg's *Miss Mary*" 347).

Mary recalls, through a series of flashbacks, the summer she was employed as a governess for the Martínez-Bordegain family. As Bemberg confirms: “The film’s gaze is broken up, like memory itself, which weaves in and out” (qtd. in Burton-Carvajal, “María Luisa Bemberg’s *Miss Mary*” 342). The film’s gaze is achieved through eight fragmentary flashbacks of varying lengths, arranged in essentially chronological order with the exception of the last one (Mennell 102). The initial four flashbacks are linked to Miss Mary’s subjectivity: the first recalls her arrival at the Martínez-Bordegain’s *estancia*; the second, her interactions with the children, Teresa (11), Carolina (14) and Johnny (16);⁹³ the third, her memories of a wedding on the *estancia*; and the fourth, a family crisis. The next three flashbacks shift to the perspective of a now adult Johnny Martínez-Bordegain, who relates what has transpired in his family during the eight years since Miss Mary’s departure as governess.

In contrast to Miss Mary’s flashbacks which take place on the country *estancia*, Johnny’s occur in Buenos Aires and its immediate surroundings. An interviewer for *La Nación* indicates that Argentine literature and film of the 1930s was characterized by the juxtaposition of the country with the city of Buenos Aires, and asked Bemberg whether she had followed this traditional structure. Bemberg cites several scenes that take place in the city: “un paseo en yate, una boda, un gran baile social [. . .] una pequeña manifestación peronista y varias escenas desoladas en el marco de una casa esplendida” (“María Luisa Bemberg,” *La Nación*: 13), all of which, coupled with the scenes on the *estancia*, conform to the literary and

⁹³ The age of the children appears in José Abel Martín’s article “Elenco infrecuente rodea a Julie Christie en *Miss Mary*” (12).

filmic traditions of the 1930s. The final flashback reverts to the *estancia* using Miss Mary and Johnny's shared perspective to recall the events of the latter's sixteenth birthday party, which lead up to their sexual transgression and the governess's subsequent dismissal. In the journey between past and present, the audience learns that in the intervening eight years, Miss Mary has been living in Buenos Aires and earning a living teaching English. The last scene reverts back to the city, in Miss Mary's apartment.

Bemberg's choice of a foreigner's point of view to critique the political and social life of the Argentine aristocracy has allowed scholars to approach Miss Mary's gaze from different perspectives: for example, a female gaze (Carbonetti, Fulks), a tourist's gaze (Kantaris, Williams), and a British colonizer's gaze (Mennell, Morris). As Bemberg admitted, she "wanted to show through this English governess the influence of the English commercially and culturally on the Argentine upper classes" (qtd. in King 8).

Carbonetti, Kantaris, Williams and Fulks have emphasized the gendered and/or foreign gaze. Carbonetti filters Miss Mary's feminine and foreign gaze through the English language and culture coveted by the Argentine aristocracy at the beginning of the twentieth century (Carbonetti, "Representation" 240). Kantaris reviews Miss Mary's tourist gaze through the patriarchal institutions that confine women within Argentine socio-political realities (Kantaris 136). Similarly, Williams posits that Bemberg uses the tourist gaze to equate sexual repression and cultural colonialism through the vehicle of language, but moreover he suggests that the gaze is employed as a "socio-political image by which Argentina asserted itself as a national subject in the decades leading to Perón" (Williams, "Down Argentine

Way” 27). For her part, Fulks applies Lacan’s theories of the “Big Other”⁹⁴ to show that the female gaze in the film is always turned upon itself; Miss Mary, Mecha, Carolina and Terry are all subjects controlled by patriarchal culture (106).

In contrast, Morris and Mennell examine the influences of cultural imperialism. Morris focuses on how the protagonist Miss Mary, herself the product of the repressive Victorian society, is used by the dominant socio-political and religious order to enforce women’s dependence (Morris 262). Conversely, Mennell explores how, as the “stereotypical representative” of the British Empire at the *estancia*, Miss Mary serves as a mechanism of social cultural colonization and ponders the effects of cultural imperialism on the Argentine upper class (Mennell 100).

These perspectives on the film have led to analyses of Bemberg’s objectives to depict, on the one hand, upper class Argentine women and their repression by subordination to the patriarchal system and, on the other, the processes of British cultural imperialism. These interpretations have focused on three critical approaches to the film: Bemberg’s historic representation of the aristocracy during the Infamous Decade, the cultural impact of British imperialism on the Argentine aristocracy, and the director’s feminist project — specifically the gender issues in the power relations between Argentine patriarchal institutions and the repression of upper class women.

Bemberg’s feminist consciousness was influenced by Simone de Beauvoir’s vision on women’s rights and freedoms, and her underlying objective in

⁹⁴ Fulks explains that the “Big Other” refers to the systems of meaning that control the culture of the subject— religion, family, government, language (102).

filmmaking was to project different ways that women could channel their energies into political struggles that challenged and ultimately changed the *status quo*. Anthropologist James Clifford has noted that, “women have their own histories of labor migration, pilgrimage, emigration, exploration, tourism. Because it was taken for granted for so long that a woman’s place was in the home, the history of her movement was ignored” (Clifford 5-6). Indeed, I claim that Bemberg’s Mary Mulligan is an example of a woman with her own history of labor migration for she journeyed to Argentina to work as a governess. In addition to the tribute Bemberg wished to give the governesses who raised her, I would argue that her composite of Miss Mary recalls a genre of independent women who broke the mould and stepped out of place by traveling to foreign lands, albeit perhaps with imperialistic or ideological agendas. In this way, the governess serves as another model of a daring and transgressive woman that Bemberg aspired to create in film.

Keeping in mind Bemberg’s motivation in filmmaking, I claim that Miss Mary embodies a paradigm shift. From the sweet, complacent and submissive woman forced into a monotonous existence of marriage, childrearing and tending house as evidenced in traditional Argentine films, Bemberg proposes a new *feminist* model:⁹⁵ an independent, educated, single woman who has the courage to travel alone to foreign lands to earn a living and guarantee certain personal and economic freedoms. Although Barbara Morris argues that Miss Mary’s freedom to travel is imposed by financial necessity and the fear of war in Europe (261), it is

⁹⁵ In “Deseos argentinos” Carbonetti mentions that Miss Mary’s education and her independence in traveling alone represents a new type of woman from an Argentine perspective (96), but she does not relate this new woman to a feminist model or paradigm for Argentine women.

nevertheless a freedom that satisfies not only her desire to travel but also her income needs, allowing her the option to survive and to live out the Second World War years in Argentina. Additionally, *Miss Mary* not only demonstrates the historical impact that the British governess had on Argentine aristocracy but also creates an intimate, female perspective of women, be they Argentine upper class ladies or British bourgeois governesses, who would otherwise have been written out of history.⁹⁶

Historically, women's travel writing and reports interpret specific aspects of daily life, people's habits and behaviors, social and private lives, and their concern for diverse expressions of space (Bruno 374). Since *Miss Mary* has been contracted as a governess, her actual displacements as a traveler within Argentina are limited to arriving at the *estancia*, occasionally moving about on its lands, and later leaving the *estancia* to live in Buenos Aires. Rather than the travel represented as an itinerary of displacements, *Miss Mary*'s flashbacks serve as her journey: between past and present, between what she was then — a governess for a prestigious Argentine family, and what she is now — an English teacher in Buenos Aires. I shall argue that if the flashbacks represent *Miss Mary*'s journey, then like women's travel writing, they provide an intimate view of the habits and behaviors of the Argentine aristocratic class, and specifically of its women, from the perspective of a female traveler. This perspective is affected, however, by all her imperialistic and ideologically biased subjectivity and the selective filters of her memory.

⁹⁶ As discussed in "Chapter 1," films of the 1930s and 1940s exist that depict Argentine aristocratic women but these are represented as stereotypical expectations from a male director's perspective. These films do not infer that patriarchal institutions are responsible for the physical, sexual and intellectual repression, which, in Bemberg's view, constrained Argentine women of the aristocracy.

In the film, women's habits and behaviors are framed with minimal spatial movement, mostly in and around the home. The women appear either in a state of stasis or engaged in some repetitive activity, reinforcing their physical, sexual and psychological repression. However, by applying Bruno's film theory of "traveling in dwelling" to *Miss Mary*, I argue that a different reading of female space and mobility is possible that allows Miss Mary and her employer, Mecha, to pursue their own emotional journeys of dwelling. I shall prove that elements of Bruno's theoretical reconstruction of "dwelling as voyage" and as travel through "a montage of living signs" that house memory, subjectivity, and affect, can be applied to the circulation of Bemberg's female protagonists. Bemberg's use of both haptic elements and architectural spaces are connected to the female protagonists' movements in space and time. In line with Bruno's theory (82), Bemberg not only uses haptic elements as a feminist strategy for reading space but, moreover, she employs interior design and architectural spaces, especially motifs such as doors, windows and thresholds, as well as vehicles of transport, as apertures which signal a change for the female character. In *Miss Mary* this change usually opens a passage to an "in-between" emotional space of feminine subjectivity.

Finally, I shall argue that Bemberg's contrast between movement and stasis in her female protagonists affects the representation of home, landscape and geography, a framing that reveals new ways of presenting political, social and cultural institutions that continue to repress women. Home, landscape and geography are especially prevalent in *Miss Mary*, as the external scenery and the internal landscape of emotion are connected in a way that reflects Wylie's view of landscape as a tension between self and world: the emptiness of the pampa and the

cold, sterilized, empty spaces of the house's interiors mirror the emptiness of women's lives and their interior spaces of desire, memory, loss and self.

I have divided this chapter into six sections that follow the different concepts of movement identified in the previous paragraph. In the first section, I posit that Bemberg cinematographically conflates Miss Mary's journey into the interior countryside with British cultural penetration of Argentina. Bruno's theory of "travel in dwelling" is used in the second section to argue that Miss Mary and Mecha's journey through the house are framed to deconstruct the gender boxing of dwelling (home) with female stasis and passivity. Bruno's theory of "a voyage around a room" in the third section shows that the camera pan of Miss Mary's and Mecha's respective rooms connects movement to a revealing voyage of the self. In the fourth section, I maintain that Bemberg juxtaposes movement, iteration (repetitive movement) and stasis in the film and argue that framing women in stasis and repetitive routines correlates to their repression, while framing women in movement is associated with rebellion or change. Two alternative readings of Mecha's piano playing are offered in the fifth section, while the last one shows how Miss Mary develops into an example of Bruno's nomadic *voyageuse* in her subtle crossing of boundaries. I contend that captured as movements, dislocations or performances, these crossings — usually framed through a doorway, a hallway or a threshold — accompany acts of transgression and conclude that Miss Mary can be conceived as a possible "new" model for women.

4.1 Journeys into the Interior

From the initial scene of *Miss Mary*, haptic elements signal passages to emotional sites of feminine subjectivity. In this section, I show how the film conflates haptic elements and movement to trigger Miss Mary's journeys of emotion and memory. Standing in a corner of her apartment, a middle-aged Miss Mary reads a wedding announcement in the Buenos Aires newspaper on October 16, 1945. She moves to a trunk into which she packs an armload of folded clothes and then walks back to reread the announcement. Moving back to the trunk, she rummages through the contents to pull out a grey suit, the same one that she wore eight years earlier when she arrived at the *estancia*. As she rubs the collar with her hand — a tactile gesture — the suit triggers a flood of memories. As Mennell observes, Bemberg uses a traditional technique of cutting from the pensive face of the character to the events remembered in order to link us emotionally with the presumed interior of the character, clouded with her psychological interpretation of events (103). Mennell posits that when Miss Mary turns to pack things into the trunk in the filmic present, this action sets off a series of flashbacks that constitute the main body of the film (112). While I agree with Mennell's compelling analysis of the trunk as a recurring leitmotiv to contribute to the filmic discourse on colonialism (112), I would argue that it is not the trunk that triggers the flashbacks. In the first scene, Miss Mary has just finished packing clothes into the trunk before returning to it, and with the exception of the last scene in which the trunk is lifted onto the ship to signal Miss Mary's departure, the other appearances of the trunk are in the filmic past and therefore cannot serve as triggers to the flashbacks. It is actually the tactile handling of the suit itself that triggers the memory and the first

flashback — Miss Mary’s journey back in time to her first day at the *estancia* eight years earlier in the summer of 1938. Similar haptic elements are used to trigger each of Miss Mary’s subsequent flashbacks: for example, in the second, Miss Mary touches the window curtain as she looks out on the rebel rousers and recalls happier times; in the third, the architectural space of the church triggers the recollection of a *puestero* wedding; while, in the fourth, the sound of a wedding march evokes the memory of a family crisis.

Miss Mary’s flashbacks are not only triggered by a haptic element in the present, but moreover the memories themselves, especially of her first day on the *estancia*, are also a series of haptic movements recalled through the senses. As Rosenfeld explains, recollection is intimately connected with movement:

All acts of recollection require some kind of motor activity. We come to perceive and understand the physical world by exploring it with our hands, our eyes and the movement of our bodies; our recollections and recognitions of the world are intimately related to those very movements we use to explore it. [. . .] In fact we are “redoing” the past. (79)

Bruno suggests that in this “redoing” we may remap the emotions associated with the event in the present (263). As I shall argue, Miss Mary’s flashbacks are examples of such a remapping for each one contains a sequence of emotions. Normally a scene begins in a psychologically neutral state, but is then interrupted by an event that triggers an emotional response in Miss Mary. However, Miss Mary’s emotion as the flashback ends differs from her emotion with respect to that specific recollection in the present. In other words, while a flashback may end fixed

on an expression of anger this emotion is remapped into one of sadness when the camera returns to frame Miss Mary in the filmic present.

Miss Mary's arrival at her destination in the first flashback is framed by a series of haptic elements. The tactile handling of the suit in the filmic present that triggers Miss Mary's flashback to her first day at the *estancia* is immediately accompanied by the sound of a train whistle. This sound bridge⁹⁷ connects the filmic present to the next scene in which a train is arriving at a rural station, with the caption "summer of 1938." If memory involves haptic movements recalled through the senses so too does the experience of travel, as Henri Lefebvre explains in *The Production of Space*:

When "Ego" arrives in an unknown country or city, he first perceives it through every part of his body, through his senses of smell and taste, all through his legs and feet. His hearing picks up noises and the quality of voices; his eyes are assailed by new impressions. For it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived — and produced. (Lefebvre 162)

Miss Mary's arrival at the train station and her subsequent journey to the *estancia* correspond to Lefebvre's haptic perception of a foreign space. Perched on the top step at the door of the wagon, Miss Mary takes in the scene visually before descending; she looks up and down the platform, and then hears voices speaking Spanish. As Erausquin explains, Bemberg's framing of the governess descending from the train points to the ideological accord between the governess and the

⁹⁷ A Sound bridge is "a transitional sound device in which either 1) the sound from shot A is carried over for a few seconds into shot B, or, more commonly, 2) the sound from shot B begins a few seconds before the end of shot A" (Film Lexicon).

railroads; the railroads had contributed to the Argentine upper class's respect for Britain and its language (Erausquin 54). Miss Mary panics as she sees her trunk being carried off and her cries of, "My trunk, my trunk [. . .]. It's all I have in the world," are drowned out by another train whistle, signaling its departure. Miss Mary's words, "it's all I have in the world," suggests that her identity and sense of self are defined by the material possessions contained inside the trunk. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard describes trunks, wardrobes and other assorted forms of chests or containers as "veritable organs" of the secret psychological life (78). In this way, the trunk becomes an extension of the intimate self and one's life experiences: the memories, the souvenirs, and the personal and emotional "baggage" that any individual accumulates and carries with him/her wherever s/he goes (Mennell 112).

The train station is a transient "in-between" space, and it is in this space that Bemberg superimposes another "in-between" element, speech, to underline the encroachment of British culture in Argentina. Miss Mary is met by Ernesto Guevara, the *estanciero's* brother-in-law, who translates his preliminary reassurances in Spanish into English: "Don't worry. This is a civilized country." Although she is a British foreigner in rural Argentina, Miss Mary makes no effort to speak Spanish, while Ernesto starts by speaking Spanish, but then must switch to English to calm Miss Mary. The penetration of the English language into Argentine culture correlates with a vehicular movement over the landscape. As the car driving Ernesto and Miss Mary travels inland on the road to the *estancia*, Ernesto asks Miss Mary, "¿Habla español?" she answers in English, "I understand it a little, but you speak English, don't you?" Ernesto's reply, "No, no hablo inglés," underlines

that his nationalist animosity for the English (Erausquin 54) extends to the language itself. However, Miss Mary's insistence on speaking English could be perceived as an example of Henri Lefebvre's argument on the space of speech as:

forever insinuating itself "in-between" [. . .] between bodily space and bodies-in-space. To ask "who speaks?" and "where from?" in terms of this mapping is crucial for understanding transcultural sites, both in theoretical and political terms. (251)

Miss Mary's assertion of English speech, cleverly framed by Bemberg inside a moving vehicle that transports her inland, creates an audible and visual image of British foreign penetration through language and culture into Argentine territory.

Bemberg also conveys British foreign penetration into Argentine territory by framing Miss Mary's point of view as she travels from the railroad station to the *estancia* in a car (a status symbol of wealth and mobility in Argentina of the 1930s). An aerial view of the car frames it traveling from the top left down across pampa grasslands to the centre of the screen, and then moving right along a dusty terrain. In his discussion of dominated spaces transformed by technology and practice, Henri Lefebvre observes that the motorway (and I would venture to include the railroad), "brutalizes the countryside and the land, slicing through space like a great knife" (Lefebvre 165). Although not quite a motorway, the aerial framing of the car traveling along the road reveals a similar view of brutalization: the penetration of the country's interior by the oligarchy and modernity. Additionally, I would argue that in this framing, Bemberg wants to capture the expanse, emptiness and isolation of the landscape, reflecting her own words that

“para mí la pampa es el paisaje metafísico de la nada” (“María Luisa Bemberg,” *La Nación* 12).

Mennell astutely observes that, seated beside Ernesto in the car, Miss Mary’s body language expresses a desire to establish a distance from him, and her sideways glance expresses a certain wariness that exposes her mistrust of the “natives” (105). While I agree with this observation, I would add that Miss Mary’s internal emotional landscape of unease is then linked with the external landscape of the pampa. Miss Mary’s feeling of being exposed, vulnerable and alone with a stranger in this isolated place is immediately replicated by the openness and isolation of the exterior landscape in the next frame. This framing echoes the concept of landscape as an emotional tension between self and world in a performance in which they involve and complement each other (Wylie, *Landscape Keys* 3; MacPherson 3). Miss Mary’s emotional need to distance herself is mirrored in the distant view of the flat barren landscape as it reveals itself through the windshield. By including the close-up of the steering wheel on the bottom right of the frame, it is conveyed that this is Miss Mary’s own view of the landscape; a view that, I suggest, causes an internal emotion in Miss Mary, reminding her of how far she has travelled from home in distance and in time. As the car circles the road to the house, the camera captures Miss Mary moving forward in her seat, her face expressing anticipation. Traces of the house are slowly revealed through the trees until an imposing Tudor manor emerges into view, taking up the entire camera frame. As Mennell observes, the house, a distorted mirror image of the European architectural model, is discordant with its surroundings and with Miss Mary’s expectation of the exotic (105). As Bemberg explains of the traditional

ruling Argentine families: “Those families carry with them accumulated generations of money and travel, which explains how they have absorbed customs and fashions that they later put into circulation in their own home countries” (Burton-Carvajal, “María Luisa Bemberg’s *Miss Mary*” 343).

The use of haptic elements and motion not only trigger Miss Mary’s emotional journeys of memory, but also conflate Miss Mary’s movement inland, her persistent use of English and finally her own viewpoint of the landscape with the encroachment of British culture on Argentina at the time. With Miss Mary’s point of view thus established, the protagonist’s journey is completed with an interior tour of the manor. Miss Mary’s movement through the domestic space discloses an intimate, female perspective of women’s lives, as well as local habits, architectural interiors and sartorial fashions of the period.

4.2 “Traveling in Dwelling” and the Deconstruction of Gendered Space

In challenging the binarism that associates travel with mobility and *domus* with the static site of female domesticity, Bruno proposes a theory of “traveling-in-dwelling” that considers the home itself as made up of “voyages of habitation” and interactions; the house is a site of emotion and generates stories of dwelling, of comings and goings and of journeys within. As such, it becomes a form of travel indoors, a site of *transito* (103) in which the female “traveler” or *voyageuse* can travel at home by exploring the architectural out-of-focus spaces of its interiors, deconstructing the house/home’s correlation with stasis and female domesticity (Bruno 87-88). I claim that Bruno’s “traveling theory of dwelling” can be applied

to Bemberg's film. In this section, I argue that several scenes frame Miss Mary and Mecha circulating in these out-of-focus spaces in the home and creating sites of self-expression that embrace emotional journeys of dwelling.

Miss Mary's travel through the house at the *estancia* involves a haptic exploration of its architectural space. After being greeted by Mecha Martínez-Bordegain, both women take a tour of the house. Miss Mary perceives the house and *estancia* through every part of her body: through her legs and feet as she tours the house; her sense of touch as she enters her room and closes the door; the sense of smell as she steps outdoors, breathes in the air and exclaims "how lovely"; and finally the sense of sound when she hears the lunch bell. As in *Camila*, Bemberg again uses the *leitmotif* of a passage through doorways and thresholds, but instead of a transgression, here they signal a change. Bemberg's framing of Miss Mary passing the threshold, into the house with Mecha signals her passage into her new position and a new life. Moreover, by capturing the two women walking into the house side by side, Bemberg accentuates their social and cultural differences: the middle class governess in a practical travel skirt, blouse, gloves and hat, and Mecha in a long, narrow-fitted dress reflecting the sartorial elegance of high society.

Once again, Lefebvre's vision of the "in-between" space of speech insinuates itself into Mecha and Miss Mary's tour. While their bodies move in the space of a home located in Argentina, their foreign use of English penetrates Argentine culture and maps the space as an "in-between" transcultural site because English has crossed into and become part of that local space. This transcultural space is evidenced more importantly in the women's conversations about World War II in Europe. This aspect of "in-betweenness" is achieved by switching the conversation

between what is happening abroad and the present tour of the house: for example, Mecha's statements on Hitler and Europe are interjected with announcements such as "and this is your room" or "This is Johnny's room." Thus as they travel through the hallway space, their conversation travels to distant Europe. This scene is important on three levels: first, its critique of the patriarchal system's repression of women; secondly, the recuperation of a feminine subjectivity that has gone unexpressed; and thirdly, the content of speech maps geography into the restricted space of the hallway.

By having Mecha voice her husband's opinion about Hitler, the film presents a criticism of the patriarchal system's intellectual repression of Argentine women that denied them access to the same education and schools as men, and as a result allowed them to achieve no informed opinion of their own regarding local, national or global issues. When Mecha asks "What do people say in England?" Miss Mary's reply of "People are afraid" prompts Mecha's retort: "of Hitler!? ...he's a maniac. You should not take him that seriously." Mecha demonstrates a feminine ignorance about global issues that is later replicated in Miss Mary, when she reveals a similar *naïveté* about Perón and national politics in a conversation with her landlord. Secondly, Mecha's desire to know what is being "said" in England invites Miss Mary to bring this discourse into the space of the Argentine home. Moreover, the women's subjectivity is articulated in the space of speech as their bodies move through the "in-between" space of the hallway. By including this exchange, Bemberg challenges and destabilizes the dominant, teleological view of history by articulating the views of two women. In this way, she recuperates a feminine subjectivity that, because of the patriarchal society of the time, has gone

unrecorded. Finally the words “Hitler,” “England,” and “Europe” map geography and history into the “out-of-focus” space of the hallway, so that the home becomes a site of travel.

A similar destabilization occurs when Miss Mary is shown her room. Mennell observes that the manner in which the governess enters it, puts her purse on the bed, and exits it carefully closing the door behind her conveys filmically a “staking claims and setting boundaries” that metaphorically recall the territorial invasion, occupation, and colonization by early European explorers and colonizers (107). This is amplified by Mecha’s introduction of the playroom with the words: “This is your kingdom. The playroom. For rainy days and for after sundown.” The use of the word *kingdom* is a significant metaphor for the playroom because it not only reinforces the idea of colonization but also the British patriarchal values that Miss Mary is expected to transmit. Irene Gedalof defines the “reproductive sphere” of motherhood as extending from the role of childbearing to the work of reproducing cultures and structures and passing on culturally-specific histories and traditions regarding food, dress, family and other inter-personal relationships (81). Mecha’s social class forces her to abdicate her role of imparting Argentine culture in favor of the British Victorian upbringing and education of her children by a foreigner and I suggest that Bemberg criticizes the Argentine aristocracy’s desire to adopt a culture other than its own.

Continuing their voyage through the house, Mecha and Miss Mary leave the hallway and the next scene finds them in another “out-of-focus” space, the staircase. As they descend the stairs, the servants travel upstairs carrying Miss Mary’s trunk, its movement upwards insinuating another penetration of British

culture into the home. While moving through this “in-between” space of the staircase, Mecha reveals an intimate detail of her interior state of being to a stranger; she stops on the landing to point to a closed door and announces: “This is the little cry room [pause] for when I am sad.” Miss Mary’s facial expression conveys her bewilderment at the inappropriateness of this personal revelation from her perspective. Moreover, her recollection of this event in the flashback touches on an aspect of women’s travel writing, in that she reports the habits and behaviors of women’s private lives. As Carbonetti correctly observes:

the character thus officializes an intimate condition in which she grants a physical space within the architecture, which in addition has the value of being the mistress’s own personal space and that at the same time has a public dimension the moment in which it is communicated to a stranger. (“Deseos” 91)

In the “in-between” space of the stairway, a woman reveals an intimacy to another woman who is a stranger. The camera focuses on the door to the cry room for a second longer after the women have moved on, so that the audience can capture its significance — that Mecha has claimed a physical and private, gendered female space in the architecture of the home to deal with emotional crises.

The voyage through the home moves outside. As Mecha and Miss Mary cross the threshold of a glass patio door onto the grounds, Miss Mary visually consumes the surrounding landscape like a tourist and breathing in the air exclaims “how lovely.” Yet, when she is introduced to Mecha’s mother-in-law, the children and her father, the empty words and the lack of warmth in this exchange is reflected in the landscape. A huge expanse of manicured lawns and surrounding

grey shore bespeak a great emptiness and isolation that is also mirrored in the emptiness of the huge house.

Travel through the house's out-of-focus spaces of passage have introduced a paradigm shift: from the notion of the home as correlated with stasis and female domesticity to the home as a site of voyage, as the women map geography, history, politics and emotion with their subjectivity.

4.3 Traveling Indoors: a Voyage around Mecha's and Miss Mary's Rooms

Bruno explains that dwellings exemplify another notion of travel through "a montage of living signs," a "psychogeography" of memory, subjectivity and emotion (Bruno 103). The house is not a still architectural container with material boundaries but a site of mobile habitats because houses incubate stories of comings and goings which create a "tactile continuum" (103). Although Mecha has identified a physical and private space in which to hide any emotional release in her "little cry room," the house itself is a site of emotion and interior journeys. The sound of Mecha's piano playing, for example, represents one such montage of psychogeography. As Mecha's haunting Satie music travels through the house, the camera captures the landscape beyond the open, glass patio doors, moving across a grey sky and a body of water in the distance all framed in a cool white light that reflects her own melancholy. These emotional journeys extend beyond the living room where Mecha plays her Satie music; they continue in the dining room where she sits hiding behind dark glasses that suppress her frustration and sadness and into the girls' room as the site of Carolina's first menstrual flow and passage into

womanhood. They also reach into Miss Mary's own room, for in it not only does she cry on three different occasions but, moreover, her bedroom becomes the site in which her sexual desire is fulfilled. In addition to the concept of travel in dwelling, Bruno posits that a house is an assemblage of objects that makes up a moving landscape (Bruno 103) and a voyage around a room can become the location of travel (167-169). In this section, I argue that through a meticulous tour across the landscape of objects in Mecha's and Miss Mary's rooms, Bemberg connects movement to an intimate voyage of the self.

Janet Carlsten explains that the house can be conceived as an extension of the person: "like an extra skin [. . .] or a layer of clothes, it serves as much to reveal and display as it does to conceal and protect"(2). Mind and body constantly interact with the physical structure and furnishings of the house, simultaneously facilitating, shaping, and constraining the activities and ideas that unfold within it (2). By meticulously panning Mecha's and Miss Mary's room as a voyage through an assemblage of objects, a montage of living signs of memory, subjectivity and emotion is created that intimately link house and body in a mobile dwelling. To demonstrate this construction of filmic space, I shall start first with the voyage around Mecha's living room and then proceed to Miss Mary's bedroom.

After framing the landscape through glass patio doors described above, the camera moves in from the left across to Mecha. The motif of the doorway is again used as a passage, for Mecha is seated close to the open doorway, playing the piano. The music travels with the camera as it pans the interior landscape of objects: the mirrored, out-of-focus reflections of the glass objects on the piano's lid, a transparent lamp, a clear, empty vase, a crystal plate, a desk ensconced by

symmetrical paintings and glassware, the gaping bare hearth of the fireplace and the stiff chairs. The predominant display of glass in this room is a mnemonic for the embodied person, Mecha. Her cold, hard exterior masks a delicate emotional state, one that can easily break in the emotional outbursts of hysteria. The luxurious items suggest emptiness, rigidity and lack of warmth. The camera pan ends with Mecha's mother-in-law playing solitaire with photos of friends and sorting them by those who are dead or alive. Mecha's melancholic piano playing is juxtaposed with the mother-in-law's senility. Carbonetti opines that the women in the film are passive and mentally ill: — Mecha's neurosis, her mother-in-law's senility, Carolina's eventual mental illness and kleptomania, — and concludes that Bemberg condenses in the person of Mecha her perception of the women of her social class ("Deseos" 92). While I agree with this observation, I would add that in this representation of Mecha and her mother-in-law, Bemberg criticizes the women of her aristocratic class for having passively accepted patriarchal repression.

If Mecha's Satie music accompanies the voyage through the living room, Miss Mary's voiceover accompanies the camera's movement over the objects in her room, as she relates the private contents of a letter that she is writing to her mother. Having retired to her room on the first night at the *estancia*, the camera frames a lit window, through which Miss Mary is caught taking a drink from a flask in an intrusion of privacy that reveals a weakness to the spectator. Reminiscent of Miss Mary's position in the household, the room is in an "in-between" state of order and disarray in the process of unpacking her trunk. As Bachelard explains, the chest or trunk contains things that are "unforgettable." Opening a chest dissolves the dialectics of outside-inside; even the cubic

dimensions of the exterior have no more meaning because “a new dimension has opened up — the dimension of intimacy” in which the past, present and future are condensed (84-85). Miss Mary’s trunk has been emptied and the contents inside, everything that she has in the world that evokes her past and defines her present circumstance, is now exposed outside in the intimacy of the site.

The first objects that the camera frames are a sequence of photographs that lie on top of the clothes that have been unpacked: the first of a man, possibly Miss Mary’s father, then of a couple, possibly her parents and lastly that of a young soldier. Feminist geographer Gillian Rose explains that family photographs are powerful triggers for feelings of proximity, togetherness, order and a “gathering-in” of those not present. Women arrange, store, view and care for their family photos as household objects, rather than texts. Family photos are seen as a trace of a person’s presence; but they are also taken, displayed and circulated in awareness of the pervasiveness of absence and distance. Photos bring near those who are far away and this constitutes the spatial stretching of domestic space beyond the home (G. Rose 12). Miss Mary carries the photos and their corresponding unforgettable memories with her. She may have looked at them again when she unpacked them, causing an emotional surge of feelings. In contrast, there are no photographs of the family in Mecha’s living-room or anywhere in her house, emphasizing the lack of intimacy and warmth within the home. Eight years later as the camera pans the objects in Miss Mary’s Buenos Aires apartment, it begins by framing the same photos, now displayed on the dresser, always stretching the domestic space beyond the home and bringing close those who are absent. In contrast to Mecha, Miss Mary appears to be a warm, caring individual with close family ties.

Alone in her room on her first evening on the *estancia*, the camera travels over pairs of shoes neatly lined up against the wall, while her clothes lie in disarray. The voiceover that accompanies the camera's movement reveals Miss Mary's lies in the letter that she is writing to her mother. Having just witnessed Miss Mary's recollection of her first day on the *estancia*, the spectator is confused by her written account of the events. Instead of describing the grand Tudor manor and manicured lawns, the trick the mischievous girls played on her, or the oddity of having a dedicated cry room, she relates a series of stereotypical lies. She states, for example, that the whole family met her at the station, that everyone is warm and friendly and that the two little girls are delightful. She describes the house as a low white Spanish house with a large patio, and that in the evening the whole family danced the tango to the sound of throbbing guitars. Mennell suggest that the gap between what occurred and what she writes demonstrates the unreliability of imperial travel writing and chronicles in general, and Miss Mary's version of filmic events in particular (108). In her letters home, she perpetuates an exotic vision of the South; they are filled with Spanish guitars and homes that were not a copy of European mansions. Miss Mary looked to Argentina from the British perspective, with superiority, and when confused about her place, stated "I should have gone to India; there it is clear who the natives are" (Mennell 110). On the one hand, Miss Mary may be following the trend of colonial travel writing and tailoring it to meet the expectations of those at home. On the other, it may reflect Homi Bhabha's concept of "the world in the home" to describe how the "unhomely" moment comes into being. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha explains that it is experienced when a woman takes measure of her dwelling:

It is at this point that the world shrinks [. . .] and then expands enormously. [. . .] “Unhomeliness” [is] inherent in that rite of extra territorial and cross cultural initiation. The recesses of domestic space become sites of history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and the world become confused. (Bhabha 9)

I would argue that Miss Mary’s reaction reflects Bhabha’s sense of “unhomeliness.” What she expected of the Argentine culture is incongruous with what she experienced and she finds herself culturally in an “in-between” space, and is thereby confused about the “natives” since their behaviors and lifestyle appear to be little different from those of England. The aspect of “in-betweenness” is also captured in her expressed desire to learn the tango; as a British subject in a foreign land performing an exotic element of the local culture expresses a desire to grow in some way from the experience. Her exotic visions of the south and her recognition of the natives do materialize in the second flashback when she travels to visit the *puesteros*, and in the third when she attends a *puestero* couple’s wedding. As I shall demonstrate, both are examples of Bhabha’s cross cultural initiation in which Bemberg, in these later scenes, captures life on the *estancia* from a different class perspective.

Through the calculated camera pan over Mecha’s and Miss Mary’s possessions, their different circumstances are contrasted in what ultimately reveals a voyage of the self. On the one hand, the house and living room are an extension of Mecha; the predominance of luxurious glass objects reflects Mecha’s cold, rigid exterior that masks a delicate unbalanced emotional state. On the other, Miss Mary’s objects reveal a warm and caring individual; although she breaks down in

tears in the privacy of her room, she draws strength and composure through the photographs and the memories of her loved ones.

4.4 Mecha's and Miss Mary's Spatial Circulation

In *Miss Mary*, Bemberg juxtaposes movement, iteration and stasis. Women on the *estancia* are framed seated in stasis, or engaged in some repetitive activity, their iterative motions stilted and their circulation limited to the home and the surrounding territory. Occasionally, the film represents women in action or movement. Normally in these instances, Miss Mary's movements are linked to a change while Mecha's show attempts at rebellion or a reaffirmation of self. Even in Johnny's flashbacks, the Martínez Bordegaín women's movements appear as acts of rebellion. Caught in her sexual transgression, Terry swims away from the yacht, crossing the threshold and entering the empty, cavernous hallway of their Buenos Aires mansion as she travels across it to find Carolina. As I shall demonstrate, the framing of women in stasis and repetitive routines usually correlates to their repression, while the framing of women in movement is associated with rebellion or change.

Morris, Mennell and Kantaris have identified both Miss Mary and Mecha as responsible for the reproduction of the socially dominant order that continues to repress women (Mennell 100; Morris 262; Kantaris 127). Nowhere is this more evident than in the second flashback in which the reproduction of patriarchal culture is demonstrated by women in a state of stasis.

This flashback begins with the movement of a horse-drawn carriage traveling down a dusty road in a flat empty landscape to the chorus of voices singing *Daisy Daisy*. The journey has a purpose: Mecha and Miss Mary are accomplishing their missions of imposing patriarchal rule. As Carbonetti observes, Mecha is responsible for Christianizing the barbarism of the countryside by ensuring that the *puesteros* comply with the Catholic sacraments: specifically that their children receive communion and that the *puestero* couple living “in sin” are married (“Deseos” 88). The scene also shows the feudal relationship between landowners and *puesteros* and the corruption that guaranteed power to the rightwing. As the *puestero* reveals that his documents and voting card are in the hands of Mecha’s nationalist brother, it is clear that the elections are fraudulent and that the voting cards are used to sway the vote according to the oligarchy’s preference (Carbonetti 88-89). Mecha does not appear to understand the implications of this fraud but it is this type of political corruption that led to the Peronist movements in the 1940s.

After the camera frames Mecha reproducing Christian culture and values with the *puestero* couple, her voiceover in Spanish continues as it slowly pans from left to right across a low, flat one-storey white Spanish house, hanging laundry, drying cattle skins, with gauchos riding in the background; all elements of the “exotic” that Miss Mary wrote about and expected to find upon her arrival. The Spanish language transfers seamlessly over to English as the camera pans a young peasant girl swinging on a fence against the backdrop of the pampa just as Miss Mary’s voice is heard beginning the story of *King Lear* with “once upon a time.” The peasant girl cannot understand this language, which enforces her class difference from the privileged aristocracy.

The use of haptic elements in this scene captures the absurdity of the Argentine oligarchy's desire to be British. After the camera stops at Miss Mary seated inside the carriage narrating the story, it then pans across the empty dusty space of the pampa as her voiceover describes "a snowy evening [. . .]," her voice recounting the cold and distant climate of England against the backdrop of the warm and sunny Argentine pampa. Only the camera moves in this entire sequence while the characters are immobile in stasis, Mecha and Miss Mary each isolated in their respective camp ministering their patriarchal duties, as Mecha's conservative Catholicism is juxtaposed by Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The choice of *King Lear* is intentional because Miss Mary's reading foreshadows the collapse of both personal and political power, both in Argentina and in England. The collapse of personal power is reflected in Bemberg's view that patriarchal repression in the family — here transmitted by Mecha representing the aristocracy — begets political repression. The Argentine oligarchy's loss of political power to Perón and the history of political repression imposed by Argentina's many dictatorships substantiate this claim. The story of *King Lear* not only foreshadows the imminent collapse of the British Empire after World War II but also the collapse of Miss Mary's Puritan values through her rebellious sexual transgression.⁹⁸

While Bemberg applies elements of *transito* — opening a door, or crossing a threshold to signal a change for Miss Mary — she frames Mecha's repetitive routines to reveal her neurosis and repression. Mecha's moments of repression are

⁹⁸ Another possible reason for selecting *King Lear* is that readings such as Coppelia Kahn's "The Absent Mother in *King Lear*" (1986) interpret the story as an exploration of gender identity and the role of women in a father-dominated family, which captures the idea of patriarchal repression and gender division.

framed in stasis and iteration, while her single moment of rebellion is captured in motion. Iterative movement, for example, characterizes the legacy that Mecha passes onto her daughters — her primordial, irrational fear of male violation and all the subjection that has traditionally victimized women (Burton-Carvajal, “María Luisa Bemberg’s *Miss Mary*” 345). The camera captures the reproduction of this legacy by repeating the scene in which she bids the girls goodnight and reminds them to look under the beds: the first occurs at the beginning of the film when the girls are children in 1930, the second in *Miss Mary*’s first flashback to the *estancia* in 1938. In the latter, Mecha opens the girls’ bedroom, crosses the threshold and asks if they have looked under the beds while she moves to open the closet and check inside, justifying her movements by saying that she has seen a strange man near the woodshed.

What is left unsaid but implied is the iteration of Mecha’s reminder to look under the beds; it is repeated every night at bedtime in a form of patriarchal indoctrination. Fontana explains that the mothers Bemberg creates are conventional and dominating, whose function in the domestic space serves as:

transmisoras (conscientes o no) de los mandatos sociales más reprobables, prédica de valores patriarcales: el hogar, el sometimiento, la abdicación de todo proyecto personal. De su propia madre, Bemberg dice: “Era una víctima, pero que se ocupaba de formar futuras víctimas. [. . .] Ella podría haberme ayudado a romper con mi medio. En cambio se había transformado en custodia de los valores que habían cercenado su existencia.” (Fontana 34)

A victim of repression, Mecha projects her frustration onto others in a cycle that travels from generation to generation (Burton-Carvajal, “María Luisa Bemberg’s *Miss Mary*” 343). Irene Gedalof argues that as aspects of women’s labor, both childbirth and imparting heritage tend to be conceptualized in the history of Western thought as being linked to sameness, “mere” repetition, in contrast to the more dynamic or creative generation of difference and becoming that is associated with the public sphere of production (Gedalof 81). As Munt further explains, this representation of domestic space and order is what Pierre Bourdieu termed a *habitus*. *Habitus* is the practice of everyday life, which is written on the body. In Bourdieu’s *habitus*, the bodyspace “re-enacts its placement — according to social taxonomies such as class, gender, and sexuality — in social frameworks” (qtd. in Munt 10). The domestic space in the Martínez Bordegain home represents the social patriarchal order that Mecha is expected to reproduce and her body-space re-enacts its placement within that order, as the custodian of the patriarchal values and habits that she recreates iteratively through a bedtime practice.

In another nightly iterative practice, Mecha travels outdoors and patrols the grounds in the dark, armed with a flashlight and a gun, looking for men hidden in the woodshed. Her nightly movement outdoors complements Mecha’s interior landscape of neurosis, irrational fears, depression and anxiety. Bemberg attributes these fears to sexual and physical repression, and I argue that these emotions of fear and anxiety propel her spatial displacement in the film.

Mecha is a *voyeuse*: her vigilance of her daughters is contrasted with her covert surveillance of her husband’s whereabouts. The scene in which Mecha discovers her husband’s infidelity begins with Satie music accompanied by the

sound of thunder and a restless landscape that echo Mecha's unease with the presence of the recently widowed Perla in the billiard room with her husband. As Foucault notes, in Puritanical and patriarchal society, sex is confined to the home but restricted to the parents' bedroom for the sole purpose of reproduction. It was prohibited in any other room and proper demeanor avoided contact with other bodies. Any transgression would be driven out, denied, silenced and made to disappear upon its least manifestation, whether in acts or in words (Foucault, "We 'Other Victorians'" 292-3). By seducing Perla in the billiard room, the patriarch, Alfredo has transgressed established convention and Mecha is obliged to take action to eradicate the deed. The sound of gunshots interrupt the sexual foreplay in the billiard room and the next scene finds a hysterical Mecha outdoors, shooting her gun amid shouts of "I want to kill him."

Carbonetti observes that Mecha's adherence to social class expectations, manners, personal attire, details and use of English is contrasted with her lack of action. She claims that when women do act in the film, they do it hysterically, as the attempted shooting of the husband demonstrates ("Deseos" 93). While a valid observation, I argue that Mecha's hysterical movements in this scene enact her one attempt at rebellion; although perhaps an unsuccessful one, it nevertheless represents an expression of self. Perhaps Mecha's hysteria is not a negative act to which Mecha is reduced but rather an entry point for questioning the female condition. Locked in a loveless marriage of convenience arranged by her father, she is trapped and dependent on her husband's income. During the 1970s, feminist students of Lacan selected the idea of hysteria and feminine *jouissance* as prospective sites for feminist rebellion, as well as possible approaches for asserting

feminine difference to offset the prevalence of the masculine subject. As Kristine Klement observes,

The hysteric was an important figure for these French feminists. In *La Jeune Née* (*The Newly Born Woman*), Cixous and Clément debate whether the hysteric is ultimately the vanguard of feminism or could remain only ever the victim of the patriarchal culture, impotently suffering from her inwardly directed rage. It is Clément's position that while the hysteric is a rebel her protests remain inert, invested within and enclosed by the imaginary of the family romance. Cixous, on the other hand, lauds the hysteric for bearing the force of feminine *jouissance* and using it against the patriarchal masters. (Klement)

As a committed feminist who traveled and brought back the movement's latest ideas to Argentina in the 1970s (Calvera 34), it is possible that Bemberg was familiar with these thinkers. Mecha suggests Clément's hysteric, a rebel whose protests remain inert, impotently suffering from her inwardly directed rage, as evidenced in the only scene of Mecha in the cry room. Leading up to this scene, and following the attack on her husband, the camera frames a close-up of Mecha dressed for the first time in black and wearing dark glasses. She interrupts her piano playing to swat a fly; the slow stealthy movement of a *voyeuse* that ends in the quick blow of the kill, representing a metaphorical execution of her husband and by extension, of patriarchal order. Previously, her piano playing had been an impenetrable space in which she belonged to herself and during which she would not allow interruptions. Now this space has been penetrated and, like the glass objects on her piano, shattered by her husband's betrayal. During dinner, the

camera frames Mecha's profile on the left, wearing dark glasses at the table. Unable to don the impassive face that would normally mask her inner turmoil, she circulates slowly behind the table and leaves. Carolina whispers to Terry that Mecha is going to the little "cry room," a place in which, as Carolina reveals, she had already spent time in the previous day.

Mecha takes refuge in the private, female space that she carved out for herself in the house's architecture to deal with an emotional crisis. Bemberg shows the interior of this room only once. The camera frames a close-up of Mecha's face, her eyes hidden behind dark glasses, and zooms out to reveal her upright body sitting in a chair, with hands folded across her knees, ensconced in a cocoon of white covered furniture. Like the sheeted furniture in the room, she is abandoned and no longer needed. Her interior, emotional turmoil of anger and rebellion is echoed in the thunder that torments the outdoors, exemplifying MacPherson's interaction of body and landscape in a performance that involves and complements the other (3). Mecha's cry room appears to have been originally designed as a room for her own creative pursuits. In addition to her music, an easel and some frames in the corner suggest that she may have been an artist as well. These lie against a wall collecting dust in an image of stifled creativity. With an aristocratic upbringing that does not permit displays of emotion, her feelings are so repressed that she cannot release them even in the intimacy of the room. The extent of Mecha's patriarchal training is evident in the scenography; framed in a state of absolute stasis, Mecha takes control of her emotions and stifles them in a suppression, instead of an expression, of self.

In contrast to Mecha, Miss Mary's movements correlate with change and becoming.⁹⁹ Miss Mary's act of traveling has already broken the mold and opened a passage that refashions her identity as a woman. While Mecha sits in the living room playing Satie in a state of stasis, Miss Mary moves about indoors and out. Even when seated, Miss Mary is engaged in creative activities: she writes outdoors on the patio, throws a party for the girls on the grounds, spends time in the playroom drawing, and has no doubt choreographed the girls' dance number for Johnny's party.

If Bemberg associates Mecha's iterative movement with her neurosis and repression, she applies haptic elements of *transito* — opening a door, or crossing a threshold — to signal a change for Miss Mary that opens a passage to an “in-between” emotional space of feminine subjectivity. Not only are each of Miss Mary's four flashbacks triggered by the trope of her passing through a door, a threshold or looking through a window, but the trope appears as well within each flashback to signal a change in the filmic past. Furthermore, each flashback contains the movement of emotions. Normally a flashback ends with an event that elicits an emotional response in Miss Mary, which in turn triggers a journey back to the filmic present where that emotion is remapped. In the first flashback for example, Miss Mary travels through the house, apparently at ease until the girls play the trick of giving her a gift of bottle of perfume filled with urine. Miss Mary's smiling face contorts to one of disgust and her eyes then blaze with anger. The flashback ends with a distraught Miss Mary in her bedroom; back in the filmic

⁹⁹ I use “becoming” in the sense of develop, grow, mature or be transformed.

present, her distress is replaced by sadness. I shall first analyze Miss Mary's circulation in the filmic present and then her movements in the four flashbacks.

The return from the first flashback to the filmic present in 1945 serves to demonstrate Miss Mary's change in circumstances. The doorbell interrupts her reverie and she opens it to find the landlord warning her about the Peronist activists. The representation of Miss Mary opening a door is important on three levels. In the first place, it allows the audience to learn that there is turmoil in Argentina and foreshadows its impending change; secondly, it allows the audience to learn of Miss Mary's current status through the posting on the door; and lastly, it triggers another flashback through which Miss Mary recalls a gentler, more stable time in the summer of 1938 on the *estancia*.

Miss Mary's discussion with the landlord not only reveals the turmoil in Buenos Aires in 1945, but more importantly demonstrates her cultural "in-betweenness" as in a heavily accented Spanish she shows the naïveté of a foreigner who does not understand the political implications of the Peronist demonstrations. In what recalls Bhabha's concept of "the world in the home" and how the "unhomely" moment comes into being, Miss Mary's world expands enormously as an unknown world outside is possibly threatening her "home." As she closes the door, the camera focuses on a note that reads "Miss Mary Mulligan, Profesora de inglés." The spectator thus learns that from her post as a governess in 1938, the filmic present of 1945 finds her teaching English. As Mennell observes: "The proud 'portavoz' of the British Empire, whose role initially was to bring 'civilization' to the children of Argentine elite on the form of language, culture and 'upbringing' has been reduced to a strictly superficial linguistic role: teaching

English to anyone who can pay” (Mennell 112). Indeed, despite the great demand for English governesses that apparently existed, cited by Miss Mary as one of the reasons for coming to Argentina, she has not been able to secure a position in another household. Yet, I argue that her resourcefulness has allowed her to secure enough income from teaching English and to live independently for eight years in Buenos Aires after her dismissal.

As Bhabha explains, in the displacement between domestic and historical space, the borders between home and the world become confused (Bhabha 9), as they do for Miss Mary. In yet another combination of haptic and architectural elements, the next scene switches to Miss Mary as she walks down the hallway, circulates to the right, and opens the window to look out as the sound of shouting in the streets, of history in the making, invades the recesses of the domestic space. Her confusion is evidenced by contrasting the lack of understanding about what is happening in the filmic present with her recollection of a kinder, gentler past on the *estancia* in 1938. As her hand touches the window frame, she lifts her head and closes her eyes to blot out the present as the pull of memory takes her on another voyage back in time.

While the first two scenes in the filmic present show Miss Mary in her apartment, the next three framed outdoors are all characterized by change. In the first of these three, Miss Mary is framed walking on her way to church to attend Terry’s wedding; in the second, upon her arrival, she crosses the nave and from her pew, takes another voyage back in time; in the third, she is framed walking back to the apartment after Terry’s wedding. The time sequence from the first scene in the apartment to Miss Mary’s walking home encompasses an afternoon, since the

announcement in the newspaper stated that the wedding was that very day. In an earlier scene the landlord had warned Miss Mary to close the shutters due to the Peronist rebel rousers. As Miss Mary leaves her apartment building to attend the wedding, it is made clear that the trouble has escalated. When Miss Mary approaches a taxi, the driver's words — “Yo no la puedo llevar por ese lugar. Andan todos los negros sueltos” — reveal that Perón's supporters are demonstrating in the streets and he refuses to take her to her destination, forcing Miss Mary to walk to the church.

In crossing over the threshold into the church, Miss Mary will witness another change, Terry's wedding. After crossing the nave, she walks to the far right and up the rows of pews before taking her seat. While the camera frames her face as she kneels in apparent prayer, her mind wanders as the interior of the church triggers another memory of 1938. The haptic sound of the wedding march takes Miss Mary back to the *puestero* couple's ceremony outdoors on the lands of the *estancia* and begins with their procession towards the priest, amid those gathered in attendance. This flashback will end and come full circle with the same wedding march as Terry's wedding party advances up the church aisle in the filmic present. As Miss Mary's gaze fixates on Mecha in her elegant gown, hat and dark glasses, she comments on the wasted lives of these sad women with painted faces as in another flashback she recalls Mecha's unhappy and empty life as an aristocratic wife. The sound of music switches back to the filmic present where the end of Terry's wedding ceremony inaugurates the beginning of a fate similar to Mecha's own.

As Miss Mary walks alone in the dark street after the ceremony, a truck full of demonstrators propels past her chanting Perón's name. The camera frames Miss Mary gazing after the rebel rousers as she reveals her thoughts: "Who are these people and where do they come from?" The darkness and surrounding grey landscape create a sense of gloom and impending threat. Through Miss Mary's movement outdoors, Bemberg not only conveys the unstable climate in the streets of Buenos Aires on October 16, the day before Perón's release, but also a foreigner's incomprehension of these events and their implications.

Mennell posits that Miss Mary's first words — "Perhaps you should have gone to India, Miss Mary, where it's clear who the natives are"— are designed to alert the audience "not only to the character's monolithically Eurocentric orientation (her conception of self as master subject), but also to her patronizing and clearly negative attitude with respect to Argentina and its inhabitants" (104). While this may be a valid statement, I would suggest that after living in Argentina for eight years Miss Mary has discovered an aristocracy who denies its identity and desires to model itself after a foreign culture, her own. Moreover, in this scene in the filmic present of 1945, she sees the "clean and peaceful" Buenos Aires where she lived out the war years now being overrun with Peronist agitators, and she may indeed ask herself, "Who are these people? Where do they come from?" If neither the Argentine aristocracy who aspires to be British nor the Peronist agitators represent the real Argentina, then as a foreigner the identity of the true native is unclear to Miss Mary. Rather than patronizing and negative, both these statements could simply reflect the "ambiguity" of nationhood and national identity in Argentina at that time. As her landlord points out to her, her naïve beliefs are those

of a foreigner who does not understand what is transpiring. If Miss Mary is naïve about Argentine politics, so too is Mecha about the situation in Europe where, as mentioned previously, she demonstrates the same naïve beliefs in her assessment of Hitler as “a maniac” who should not be taken seriously. Rather than patronizing, I suggest that the film shows that women’s naïveté in local and global politics stems from the patriarchal repression of their education.

In the four flashbacks, Miss Mary’s movements are associated with “the political realm, the social realm and the cultural realm, but their association with emotion is equally important. Bruno posits that “emotion” is a matter of voyage because the idea of movement is embedded in the very word; its Latin root suggests the route this motion will take: a moving out, a migration, transference from place to place. Bruno explains that the physical effect of emotion’s pull is “inscribed in the very experience of spatial transfer and dislocation and, in such a way underwrites the fabrication of cultural travel” (Bruno 262). One source of this type of dislocated emotion is the moving architectonics represented in the art of memory, allowing Bruno to conclude the deep relationship between movement and memory (262).

In contrast to Mecha who cannot release her emotions even in her cry room, Miss Mary breaks down and cries in this intimacy of her bedroom on her first day on the *estancia*.¹⁰⁰ Miss Mary’s lies in her letter home serve to hide the real emotions that she feels — perhaps insecurity in her new position, loneliness

¹⁰⁰ Mecha’s and Miss Mary’s movements in the first flashback and their association to politics, culture and social relations have already been discussed at length above in Miss Mary’s journey to the *estancia* and in the “traveling in dwelling” of the women’s tour of the house.

brought on by separation and distance. More importantly, however, her letter reflects Miss Mary's "in-between" state. Not only is she "in-between" culturally as a British subject in a foreign space, but she is also "in-between" socially, as Bemberg describes the governesses as being:

just as alien from the kitchen as they were from the living room, because the servants thought they were traitors. They were in-between. They all seemed to be carrying the world in their trunk, under their bed [. . .]. All drank a little at night, I guess because they were so lonely and depressed. (qtd. in King 8)

The camera frame of an emotional Miss Mary sitting immobile and looking at herself in the vanity's mirror as she takes another drink from the flask recalls Foucault's mirror as a placeless place where one floats between a corporeal self and a disembodied other (Shipton 190) and as such, another example of "in-betweenness."¹⁰¹ Miss Mary's reflection in the mirror also suggests the other place where she is not — at home in England in 1938; yet in a way she is there in spirit because in writing to her mother, she travels mentally to where she is absent. Then, when she smiles and finds strength at the prospect of learning something exotic, she starts from her gaze in the mirror and directs her eyes toward herself and back to where she is. In so doing her emotions act as a vehicle of transport back to the

¹⁰¹As Foucault explains: "In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface. [. . .]. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass [. . .] I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am"(Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*).

filmic present day in her apartment, in front of the open trunk remembering the loneliness of her arrival.

This scene conveys a parallel between the home and the body as memory stores. As Bachelard explains, “Not only our memories, but the things we have forgotten are ‘housed.’ The soul is an abode. And by remembering ‘houses’ and ‘rooms,’ we learn to abide within ourselves” (6). In recalling the events of that first day on the *estancia*, especially reliving the tour of the house and the evening alone in her room, Miss Mary also recalls the forgotten emotions associated with that day, demonstrating that they are indeed still “housed” in the soul. Her bedroom is her cry room: therein she wept when she arrived, sobbed after she transgressed and cried when she was dismissed. By remembering her “room” and the house at the *estancia*, not only has she journeyed to the past, but she has also brought to the surface emotions that were “housed” in her memories.

While the first flashback embraces Miss Mary’s internal journeys of emotions and memories, it also contains a social aspect for she travels through the interior and the exterior of the house to meet the family. Conversely, her visit to the *puesteros* home in the second flashback reveals a series of social issues: political fraud, Catholic compliance, sexual repression and cultural reproduction. In this second flashback, Miss Mary’s crosses the threshold into the girls’ room to witness a change, Carolina’s induction into womanhood with her first menses. In this scene, Miss Mary transgresses by speaking about the taboo subject of reproduction. This second flashback begins with the movement of the carriage to an exotic site — the *puesteros* home — and switches to a framing of the women in stasis during their respective reproduction of culture. Mecha’s role is this transmission of culture

is to ensure the *puesteros* compliance with Catholic doctrine. In the process, however, her nationalist brother's political corruption in the electoral process is revealed. The flashback ends with a bodily movement; the raising of Miss Mary's arm as she repeatedly canes Carolina's hands for play-acting with a bisexual doll, in an iterative movement that enforces bourgeois morals and sexual repression. Miss Mary's anger at the end of the flashback is carried back in the filmic present where the recollection is emotionally remapped as regret.

Miss Mary preconceived expectations of the exotic will be met in the third flashback as the wedding and communion festivities on the *estancia* are framed as a haptic experience. In a shot/reverse-shot sequence, the camera alternates between the religious ceremonies and the roasting carcasses of meat smoking on an outdoor pit that evoke the smells of cooking. Miss Mary's movements are again associated with the cultural as she participates in the festivities and interacts with the "natives." The entire scene captures the exoticism that Miss Mary was seeking in her journey and again she experiences it through her senses in the aroma of cooking meat, the strumming guitars, her dancing the tango and her exchange with the "natives." Moreover, Miss Mary's social "in-betweenness" as a governess is compounded by her cultural one: her inability to understand Spanish puts her culturally in a position of weakness because she does not fully comprehend what is happening socially or politically as I have shown previously. In this flashback, Johnny intentionally translates the groom's words incorrectly to Miss Mary when he states that the groom is asking her to dance. He then incorrectly translates her response to the groom by stating that Miss Mary wants to dance with him. Here the space of speech is used to deceive and play a joke.

As couples dance in the open air, Miss Mary moves into the frame as she dances in the arms of the *puestero*, her face revealing an emotional journey of contentment that she confirms with, “If only they could see me at home.” While not a tango, she is moving to the rhythm of an “exotic” dance to local music, recalling Paul Fusell’s statement:

What distinguishes the tourist are the motives, few of which are ever openly revealed: to raise social status at home and to allay social anxiety; to realize fantasies of erotic freedom; and most importantly to derive secret pleasure from posing momentarily as a member of a social class superior to one’s own. (42)

Miss Mary’s psyche would appear to entertain all these motives; her words —“If only they could see me at home” — suggest a wish to raise social status at home while conversely realizing fantasies of erotic freedom that would not be permitted in a Puritanical household. Yet when another *puestero* tries to dance with her, she shuns him with a derogatory “You native!” demonstrating a sense of British superiority and her higher social class. Although he does not speak English, the *puestero*’s facial expression indicates that he has understood the message. The scene ends with Miss Mary’s angry face having just uttered the derogatory remark as the camera switches back to the church in the filmic present, and Miss Mary’s past anger is substituted by regret at her behavior.

Lastly, in the fourth flashback, Miss Mary’s movements are also associated with the sexual. Alone on the morning after her sexual transgression with Johnny, Miss Mary circulates anxiously about the bedroom then lingers to caress the bed where they made love, perhaps to recall and recapture the emotions she felt. The

release of her repressed sexuality is echoed in Miss Mary's attire, the high-necked nightgown that covered her body is replaced by a loosely tied robe revealing her bare neck and cleavage for the first time and suggesting her nudity beneath.

The sexual transgression is silenced and erased with Miss Mary's removal from the *estancia*. Dismissed, she crosses the threshold of the house again, holding back her emotion as she hears the cries of the girls. She was not allowed to bid them goodbye and she has lost Johnny as well. Her departure by carriage without a word of farewell contrasts with her arrival by car and meeting the family. While it moves away from the *estancia* the camera focuses on the trunk, everything Miss Mary has in the world sits on the back of the carriage as it heads onto a dirt road towards a blurred horizon in the distance, symbolizing another change in her life as she begins another voyage into an uncertain future.

4.5 Mecha's Journey of Belonging

The repetitive motion of Mecha's hands playing the same piece from Eric Satie's *Gnossiennes* reflects, in Cabonetti's view, a sterile practice, one that complements the overall rigidity of her movements (92).¹⁰² Indeed Mecha's rigid gestures and exterior composure mask her sadness, frustration and feelings of entrapment. The repetitive playing of Satie's *Gnossiennes* may be read as reflecting the lonely circularity of her existence in the isolated expanse of the pampa, an existence shaped perhaps by the aristocratic women's passive acceptance of

¹⁰² In an interview with NissaTorrents, Bemberg's perception of Mecha's personality appears to enforce a sense of reproduction as circularity and repetition for, as she avows: "That is why I have her always playing the same piece by Eric Satie. To indicate the *crippling circularity* of her existence" (Torrents 127; emphasis added).

patriarchal repression. However, Olof Höjer suggests in an interpretation of Satie's music that, in theory, the *Gnossiennes* could begin in any of a series of places, continue for any amount of time and end in many different places (Höjer). In Höjer's words, I see a description of Satie's music as embarking on a nomadic journey, an erratic wandering that carries one to a different place every time. By extension, I argue in this section that different readings of Mecha's repetitive playing of Satie are possible, ones that allow her to embark on her own internal journeys.

Recalling that the scene begins with the familiar motif of the doorway, one can read Mecha's piano playing as a passage that allows her to extend beyond the limitations imposed by patriarchy. Initially one might view her seated position at the piano as a state of stasis. However, Mecha's body moves to the music and her shoulders lift as her hands travel across the piano keys in a tactile exchange with an object that produces an auditory release of sound. Her emotions are released in the music that travels throughout the house, erasing the gender divisions of space as it invades her husband's billiard room, and then spills over beyond its material boundaries onto the surrounding landscape making her presence known through sound, as if Mecha were shouting "I am here." As night falls, the camera captures the silhouette of the house at dusk, and then frames Mecha still playing the same or a similar Satie piece on the piano. The six *Gnossiennes* all resemble each other, making it difficult to conclude that Mecha is repetitively playing the same piece. Indeed, she could be alternating between any one of the four that would have been in circulation in the 1930s; while the structure may be repetitive, the individual sequence of notes may not be. Mecha's piano playing embraces a movement that

has traveled inside and outside the house for hours in a reaffirmation of self. Moreover, since every one of Miss Mary's flashbacks contains scenes or sounds of Mecha playing Satie's music, the circularity of this movement, rather than crippling, can be interpreted positively as repetitive reaffirmations of self.

A second reading of Mecha's piano playing is also possible using Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero's revision of the mythic figure of Penelope, the archetypal patient wife who keeps the home fires burning for her traveling husband-hero Odysseus. Cavarero focuses on the specificities of Penelope's "unending work of weaving and unweaving" the same shroud, the one task that stands between her and an unwelcome betrayal of her husband through a forced second marriage (12). Cavarero acknowledges that while Penelope's is "a small story, repetitive and motionless, that reflects the rhythm of a single place" (12), she argues that "Penelope has a symbolic power of her own that is open to different readings" (13). Just as the endless, "tempo of sameness that Penelope weaves and unweaves delineates an impenetrable space where she belongs to herself" (Cavarero 17), so too is Mecha's space during her repetitive piano playing similarly impenetrable; this is evidenced by the fact that she does not allow her mother-in-law's questions to interrupt her playing. Like Penelope, Mecha's resistance flows through the repetitive movements of her hands — in her case onto the piano keys. Although Bemberg suggests in reference to this film, that "the mother might have become a good pianist had she been born elsewhere" (Torrents 127), Mecha has nonetheless internalized the Satie melodies and like Penelope uses them to carve out her feminine space of quiet time. Cavarero explains that if this time were measured against the action of her traveling husband-hero, or against the

endless repetition of domestic service, Penelope's quiet time would be empty and futile. However, if judged by its own measurements and standards, this time defines a feminine space where women belong to themselves and that displaces the patriarchal order because it creates an impenetrable distance between the order and itself (Cavarero 17). In unweaving what she has woven, Penelope defines her own time and space, "engaging in a process of meaning-making and liberation that is rooted in and inseparable from the body" (18).

A similar analysis can be applied to Mecha. If measured against the action and production associated with her husband, Mecha's time is repetitive, characterized by sameness and thus empty; if measured in terms of the repetition of domestic activity it is futile. If, however, it is judged by its own measurements and standards, then the time Mecha spends playing the piano creates a feminine space in which she dislocates herself from patriarchal order and belongs to herself. Similar to Penelope, Mecha's repetitive music engages her in a process of liberation and wholeness that does not permit a separation of body (her hands) and mind (the playing of the music).

4.6 Miss Mary's Journey of Becoming

In the very act of traveling, Miss Mary has already opened a passage to becoming, to remaking her identity as a woman. Although Bemberg may have wished to pay tribute to her many governesses, I claim that Miss Mary is not a typical one but rather fashioned by Bemberg as a possible feminist model of the new Argentine woman. Indeed Miss Mary represents the genre of educated and independent women admired by Bemberg for breaking the mould and stepping out

of place, in this case by traveling to foreign lands.¹⁰³ More importantly, however, Miss Mary is atypical because she even dares to break from the repressive measures imposed on governesses by finding her own ways of rebelling and evolving. If Mecha's passivity epitomizes Bemberg's concern that Argentine women are submissive recipients of patriarchal repression, Miss Mary's almost imperceptible transgressions demonstrate a subtle evolution of self-awakening and challenging of the status quo that recalls Creswell's definition of this term as a questioning of symbolic boundaries that are constituted by place. In this section, I shall focus on Miss Mary's transgressions and their correlation with changes in her self.

Rather than expose herself with overt acts of rebellion, Miss Mary journeys forward and becomes her own person through discreet, almost imperceptible acts of transgression. The first indication of transgression is evidenced in her masked defiance of the patriarch Alfredo's mandate to instill a healthy dose of Catholic conservatism and to use caning, a phallogocentric practice, to punish his daughters. In the scene in which Alfredo instructs — "I also want lots of religion. Religion keeps women out of trouble"— scholars have interpreted Miss Mary's nod as agreement to enforce patriarchal rule. However, Carbonetti astutely observes that Miss Mary never discusses religion with the girls, but rather teaches or corrects their behavior using Victorian and biological concepts, to explain Carolina's first menses for example. Additionally, Miss Mary explains inappropriate behavior as

¹⁰³ Erausquín acknowledges that Miss Mary's image is positive in that she works and lives by herself in a foreign country, but concludes that from the perspective of gender, Bemberg does not offer a single possible identification with a feminine character. Although the governess could potentially be a good role model, she insists on transmitting to her students the same prejudices from which she suffers. Erausquin sees the feminist message as a dead end (54-55).

unhygienic rather than reverting to sin and guilt. When she finds the girls kissing, for example, she admonishes them that they are not to kiss on the mouth because it is “unhealthy” (“Deseos” 96). While Miss Mary appears to acquiesce to the patriarch’s orders for managing his daughters, she briefly closes her eyes because she is afraid that they will betray her intention not to comply with either religion or caning. When she opens them again, she offers back a blank stare which masks her disagreement.

In the scene in which Carolina initiates her menses, Carbonetti correctly observes that Miss Mary transmits Victorian repression in a Puritanical association of sex as reproduction in marriage and not in love or pleasure (“Deseos” 96). While Miss Mary does communicate her prejudices to her charges, as with most women of her time she responds by rote with what she had been taught within the repressive patriarchal institutions. Yet, as Foucault elucidates, if sex is repressed and condemned to prohibition, non-existence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression (“We ‘Other Victorians’” 295). In another subtle transgression, Miss Mary speaks about this forbidden topic in front of both girls, one of them still a child who “has no sex.” Her usual answer “that’s the way it is” to Carolina’s challenging “Why?” is important because it underlines that Miss Mary has never questioned anything. Eventually, Carolina’s persistent challenges to her empty replies cause Miss Mary to hesitate and she appears to doubt the beliefs, instructions and prejudices with which she has been raised. When, for example, the girls ask why they cannot kiss or why they cannot play with flies, after a moment’s hesitation her answer is the

same Puritanical ethic for both actions: “because it is unhealthy.” However, her facial expression reveals that she questions the meaninglessness of those words.

In sharp contrast to Mecha’s isolated playing of Satie, Miss Mary shares her passion for popular music with the girls. After having strenuously objected to Carolina’s wish for a party to celebrate her first menses and induction into womanhood, Miss Mary again transgresses by having a private girls’ party in the woods. The scene begins with a close-up frame of a phonograph playing “It’s been so long,”¹⁰⁴ a British love song popular in the 1930s. I argue that the choice of this song represents a transgressive act because the theme runs counter to the association of sex with marriage and reproduction previously communicated in the girls’ bedroom. The lyrics in the song are subversive because they describe relationships based on love, pleasure and intimacy, as demonstrated in the following verses:

'Cause it's been so long/ Since I held you tight/ When we said good
night/It's been so long/Honey, can't you see/What you've done to me?
/I've been in a kind of daze/For days and days and days/Feelin' blue,
missin' you/In, oh, so many ways/'Cause it was so nice/When we had
that date/Every night at eight.

Popular in 1938, Miss Mary may have chosen it for its cultural import but personally it could have brought memories of the soldier who had not returned from the First World War some twenty years earlier and the memory of being held in his arms.

¹⁰⁴These lyrics are by Benny Goodman (1938).

If Mecha's playing of Satie allows her an impenetrable space of belonging, Miss Mary's playroom serves as a site for self-growth. Like Mecha's cry room, there is only one scene in the playroom with Miss Mary and the children. Rather than the expected transmission of patriarchal rules inferred by Mecha's words "This is your kingdom," it reveals an intimate space for the pursuit of female creativity. Set in the fourth flashback, Miss Mary draws while Carolina acts out a play. Bemberg's message appears to be aligned to Virginia Woolf's premise that a woman must have an income and a room of her own in order to create. Miss Mary represents this new woman that is financially independent and has carved out a space and time for creative pursuits: as evinced in the playroom, a room associated with *recreation* in which Miss Mary is framed sketching, the patio where she spends a quiet moment writing, the choreography that the girls' perform at Johnny's party — no doubt the result of her artistic input.

While the playroom space is shared with the children and their interruptions into her private life, Bemberg demonstrates that Miss Mary still has the time to nurture creativity, not only her own but the children's as well. This image suggests that women listen to their inner voices and develop their creative potential, although this pursuit may place them in an awkward "in-between" state, much like that exemplified by the governess, in which they will no longer appear to fit socially during their transition from the conventional, subjected women they were, to the independent free persons they aspire to become.

Since any flirtation between a gentleman and a governess was strictly forbidden, a governess was obliged to downplay her own sexuality by being strict and stern in order to avoid any misperceptions (Peterson 17). Yet Miss Mary

behaves atypically in this respect. In the scene in which she is writing outdoors on the patio, Miss Mary transgresses by flirting with Johnny. Her answer to Johnny's prying question regarding her age, "My precious boy, I'm as old as the hills," causes Johnny to retort "I am not your precious boy." Miss Mary's attraction is evident in the gaze with which she appropriates him; she stares at him and challenges "oh yes you are!" and it is Johnny who averts his eyes. Additionally she flirts with Johnny as the family is enjoying Carolina and Terry's dance on the evening of his birthday party. While the girls execute the dance steps, Miss Mary's body subtly stirs to the beat of the music as she exchanges suggestive glances with Johnny. On the night of his birthday, when Miss Mary opens her bedroom door to admit a distressed Johnny, she crosses a boundary that will lead to her ultimate transgression — the fulfillment of her sexual desire. Disillusioned by his sexual experience with a prostitute, Johnny wants the governess. The desire is mutual. Miss Mary breaks the rules of her profession and rebels against sexual repression and bourgeois hypocrisy by satisfying her sexual needs.

As I have shown, Miss Mary defies patriarchy and discreetly rebels by not teaching "lots of religion" to keep the girls out of trouble, by speaking about the taboo subject of sex to the girls, and by breaking the rules of her position to fulfil her sexual desire. Although this last act resulted in Miss Mary's dismissal, she did not return to England but chose to stay in Argentina. Despite the attitude of British superiority evidenced by Miss Mary's first words in the film — "Perhaps you should have gone to India, Miss Mary, where it's clear who the natives are"— the mention of India as an option suggests a certain freedom of choice in travel. In the scene in which she first meets her employer, Miss Mary admits that she enjoys

traveling, but also discloses having no income at that time. In the last scene in Miss Mary's apartment in 1945, Johnny has come to call after Terry's wedding and has been updating Miss Mary on what has transpired in the family during the last eight years. Miss Mary admits to Johnny that she chose to stay in Buenos Aires because it was clean and peaceful, far from the bombings that were going on in England. However what is left unsaid is that possibly she had to save money for the trip. In the first scene in Miss Mary's apartment, she is wearing the same dressing gown that she had on the *estancia* eight years earlier and she unpacks the suit that she wore when she arrived in 1938 to wear again to Terry's wedding.

Yet she appears to have earned enough money to rent an apartment, and not share living facilities in a *conventillo*, a tenement arrangement that was typical in the 1930s and 1940s in Argentina. As depicted in Rios Torres' 1936 film *El conventillo de la Paloma*, the tenant, normally a migrant worker or immigrant, had his/her own room but shared the kitchen, facilities and common living areas with other tenants. While Miss Mary's apartment is small compared to the huge empty spaces of the *estancia*, it is nevertheless comfortable. More importantly, her apartment is free of gender divisions, it is a female space. Furthermore as a rental property, the apartment suggests the impermanence of a temporary arrangement so that one has the freedom to change location or move on. In the eight years since her dismissal, Miss Mary has evolved from an employed governess to a self-employed teacher of English, and has moved from a small room in a repressive and isolated house in the countryside to renting her small apartment in Buenos Aires where she has the freedom to come and go as she pleases, and leave, like a nomadic *voyageuse*, when the place no longer suits her purposes.

The final frame ends with her trunk and everything that she has in the world being lifted onboard the ship that will take the *voyageuse* home. In contrast to the traditional male traveller who suffers from nostalgia and a desire to return home, Paola Melchiori observes about the female traveler: “Women who leave are not nostalgic. They desire what they have not had, and they look for it in the future. The desire does not take the shape of a ‘return’ but rather as a ‘voyage’” (qtd. in Bruno 86). As a nomadic *voyageuse*, Miss Mary had dislocated herself from house and home in England in 1938 and expressed no nostalgia for return. In 1945, when the situation in Buenos Aires has become politically volatile, Miss Mary is now ready to leave Argentina and return to England. However, the England to which she is returning is not the same home that she left eight years earlier but rather a homeland that has been ravaged and changed by the war. Miss Mary’s desire, perhaps like the country’s itself at the time, is focused on advancing. Miss Mary’s departure does not take the shape of a “return” but rather as a continuing journey forward.

To conclude, in *Miss Mary* Bemberg’s feminist perspective demonstrates that patriarchal institutions were the root causes of repression in the women of her generation, not only in Argentina but in all societies. Bemberg’s concern went beyond the sexual repression of women in the Argentine aristocratic family of the 1930s and 1940s to include their emotional, intellectual and creative repression. Her travels and her own experience growing up with British governesses showed her that women were intellectually repressed by not being afforded an education. Moreover, in *Miss Mary*, Bemberg recaptures for the women of her generation the image of their mothers and themselves at a younger age to show them what they

have become — a replica of their mothers and transmitters of the same repressive patriarchal values to the next generation. Mecha's mother-in-law and Mecha have accepted repression and, as shown at the end of the film, have secured for Terry and Carolina a fate similar to their own. As I have demonstrated, Bemberg connects the external scenery with the internal landscape of emotion in these women: the barrenness of the pampa and the cold, sterilized spaces of the house's interiors mirror the emptiness of women's lives and their interior spaces of desire, memory, relationships, loss and self.

More importantly, however, Bemberg juxtaposes movement, iteration and stasis in the film. As I have argued, Bemberg's framing of women in stasis and iteration correlates to their repression, while her framing of women in movement is associated with attempts at rebellion or change. Mecha repeatedly patrols the grounds to assuage her neurosis, while her presence moves through the house through her music and through her hysterical attempts at rebellion. Yet Mecha ends as an example of Clément's hysteric; she rebels but her protests remain inert, her rage directed inward and interned in her mind. In contrast, Bemberg correlates Miss Mary's movements with change and becoming. Rather than expose herself with overt acts of rebellion as Mecha has done, Miss Mary moves forward and becomes her own person through discreet, almost imperceptible acts of transgression; acts that by extension, demonstrate a subtle evolution of self-awakening.

Mecha's passivity epitomizes Bemberg's concern that Argentine women are submissive recipients of patriarchal repression, and in the figure of Miss Mary she shows a woman who discreetly begins to challenge the rules and to rebel subtly

against them. Miss Mary is not the rebellious, free-spirited Camila, but she nevertheless represents a viable alternative model of a new woman, one whose freedom stems from her economic independence. Rather than a “portavoz del discurso masculino” (Morris 262), or having “fallen from grace” and been “reduced” to teaching English (Mennell 112), Bemberg demonstrates that Miss Mary’s skills, education and resourcefulness have allowed her to become self-employed with sufficient means to rent her own apartment and purchase a ticket back to England, no small feat for a woman alone in 1945. Rather than a composite of twenty-three governesses, I claim that Miss Mary is unique and embodies a paradigm shift, encompassing the characteristics of another feminist model for women. Miss Mary represents a resourceful and educated woman who has the courage to travel abroad, to earn a living in the process and secure her personal and financial independence. Consequently, she forges a place and a space of her own, of self-expression and belonging and, more importantly, of freedom and self-sufficiency.

Chapter 5

Nomadic Approaches to Intellect and Emotion: The “New Woman” in *Yo, la peor de todas*

Bemberg’s third historical biography, *Yo, la peor de todas* (1990), again breaks from stereotypical representations of women in its portrayal of the life of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (1648-1695), a seventeenth century nun in colonial Mexico celebrated for her intellect and her prolific production of Golden Age poetry, plays and philosophical meditations. Bemberg expands the theme of the sexual, emotional and creative repression of women found in her previous films to now include their intellectual repression, choosing the historical figure of Sor Juana to serve, in the words of Deborah Shaw, “a contemporary feminist purpose” (Shaw, “Representing Inequalities” 123). As Bemberg herself remarks, “El personaje de Sor Juana me interesa porque es para mí la expresión de una liberación. Sin temor a la exageración, puede decirse que fue la primera feminista del continente americano” (Burton-Carvajal, “Firmar” 78).

The paucity of autobiographical material about Sor Juana has created much speculation about what motivated the key events in her life. Beyond what she herself wrote, little is known about her childhood. Born in San Miguel Nepantla, Viceroyalty of New Spain near Mexico City in 1648, Juana Inés de Asbaje was one of six illegitimate children of Isabel Ramírez and, probably, Pedro Manuel de Asbaje. The couple never married although they had another two daughters together (Maroto Camino 193). In his major study, *Sor Juana, o, Las trampas de la fe*, Octavio Paz explains that Juana Inés never knew her father who was from

Viscaya (Spain) and may have been the local priest, and that she tried to hide the fact that she was illegitimate (Paz 65).¹⁰⁵ In the document in which she signed her profession in the Convent of San Jerónimo in 1669, she indicated that she was the legitimate daughter of Pedro de Asbaje y Vargas and Isabel Ramírez (Paz 118). During the first years of her life, Sor Juana lived in her grandfather's *hacienda* in Panoayán, close to her birthplace, where she had access to a huge library and, by her own account in *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, could read and write by the age of seven (Maroto Camino 193). When her grandfather died in 1656, eight-year-old Juana was sent to Mexico City to the house of a maternal aunt, where she lived for a further eight years before moving to the court around 1664, at age sixteen (193). There Juana remained as lady in waiting of the Vicereine Doña Leonor Carreto for five years, until 1669. While at court she became known for her learning and at one point the Viceroy Antonio Sebastián de Toledo, Marquis de Mancera, assembled forty professors and other learned men to test her knowledge (Ramírez 50). In 1667, she did abandon her position as lady-in-waiting to join the Discalced Carmelite Order, following the suggestion of her confessor, Padre Antonio Nuñez de Miranda. Sor Juana however left the convent three months after joining because she became ill and could not endure the rigors and the strictness of its rule (Maroto Camino 193). Two years later, at the age of twenty-one, she entered the Convent of Santa Paula of the Order of San Jerónimo and took her final vows. While San Jerónimo was considered a center of culture and learning and celebrated for its classes in music, dance and theatre, it was also reputed for the laxity of its discipline (Ramírez 51).

¹⁰⁵ Parenthetical references are from the English version, *Sor Juana: or, the Traps of Faith*.

Sor Juanistas have debated the reason for her entering the convent when many of her writings do not reveal a spiritual calling. The general consensus among scholars is that she did so because it provided a space in which she could pursue her academic interests and avoid marriage and domestic responsibilities (Shaw, "Representing Inequalities" 121). In contrast to other convents where poverty was the rule, the nuns in San Jerónimo had their own possessions and Sor Juana was able to maintain a library of some four thousand volumes and an array of prized objects such as her telescope, astrolabe and obsidian mirror (Ramírez 51). Versed in Latin and classical literature, Sor Juana had two volumes of her works published in her lifetime and a final volume five years after her death (Shaw, "Representing Inequalities" 121). However the rule of cloister was observed at the convent, and when visitors were permitted, they were usually separated from the nuns by wooden bars. Sor Juana's renowned wit and scholarship secured her the patronage of a succession of viceroys who attended her *audiencias* behind the bars of the convent's visiting room or *locutorio* (Miller 137). Yet as Paz observes, the atmosphere at San Jerónimo was relaxed compared to other convents; the nuns conversed, debated, composed both sacred and secular poetry and musical performances, and even received visitors in the sacristy without a veil (Paz 125).

Sor Juanistas have also pondered the reasons behind her fall from grace and the renunciation of her writings and former identity as a writer at the end of her life by signing a confession that she, "the worst of all" was unworthy (Shaw, "Representing Inequalities" 121). Paz speculates that Sor Juana's final renunciation was not voluntary, but rather a humiliation imposed by Church authorities for her critique of a sermon by Antonio de Vieyra, a Portuguese Jesuit priest closely

associated with ecclesiastical interests in New Spain (106). Although the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, admired Sor Juana and may have enticed her to write the critique, he was nevertheless an official of convent governance. He appears to have betrayed her because the cover letter that the Bishop included as a preface when he delivered her critique to the press, and which he had signed as “Sor Filotea,” contained not only a public admonition but a threat of persecution (Arenal 13). This letter prompted Sor Juana to write *La respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* to explain and defend herself. The former Vicereine, Countess María Luisa de Paredes, tried to help Sor Juana’s cause by circulating the manuscript of her critique in Spain, where it was favorably received. In Mexico, by contrast, it was refuted with hostility because Vieyra was favored by the Jesuits. Discouragement and inquisitional attitudes ultimately led the poet to silence herself and, in 1692, the same year that her second volume of works was published in Spain, Sor Juana sold her library and musical and scientific instruments and contributed the proceeds to charity (Arenal 13-14). Two years later in 1694, she renewed her vows, signed a statement of self-condemnation and turned to penance and self-sacrifice. She died in 1695 when, while caring for her ailing sisters, she fell ill to the same epidemic (13-14). Bemberg’s film, *Yo, la peor de todas*, focuses on the eight years before her death.

Many scholars have deliberated on Sor Juana’s poetry, identity and mysterious persona over the years and much controversy and disagreement stem from Paz’s own interpretation in his essay on the nun. With respect to the film, *Yo, la peor de todas*, several scholars (Bergmann, Williams, Scott, and Stone) examine whether Sor Juana’s rapport with the Vicereine, the Countess María Luisa de

Paredes, represents a passionate friendship or a lesbian relationship. The first to approach the problematic depiction of lesbian desire in the film, Bergmann argues that Bemberg's work is implicated in Paz's homophobic interpretation of Sor Juana's poems as a passionate friendship towards the Vicereine and that the film works against itself to obscure lesbian readings (230). Supporting Bergmann's affirmation of the lesbian dynamics at play in the film, Williams further contends that desire is integral in the text and shown through the visual mechanics employed in *Yo, la peor de todas* (Williams 134). Nina Scott opines that while Paz attributes Sor Juana's erotic verses to the Vicereine as within the realm of poetic convention, Bemberg's film portrays a definite physical attraction between the two women. Stone, for her part, maintains that the abundant references to non-visual sensory stimuli destabilize the traditional equation of filmic desire with the male heterosexual point of view, allowing for an ambiguous presentation of the love between the two female protagonists.

Other scholars (Ramírez, Shaw, Camino Maroto, Carbonetti and Miller) explore Sor Juana's relationship with the Church and the Crown in the film. Ramírez posits that Bemberg leaves the lesbian issue unresolved to focus instead on the nun's issue with the Catholic Church, while Shaw analyses how the female space of the convent has been invaded by oppressive patriarchal forces (Shaw, "Representing Inequalities" 127). Corroborating these views, Carbonetti maintains that the conflict explored focuses almost exclusively on the power of these institutions over women, observing that Bemberg ultimately removes Sor Juana from a position of active resistance to one of passive acceptance ("Representation" 242). Conversely, Maroto Camino upholds Sor Juana's silence as a powerful

statement against repression and misogyny (192). For her part, Miller claims that while the film's thrust is towards a final image of renunciation, as reinforced by the last words of Sor Juana's confession in its title, Bemberg presents Sor Juana as a pawn, whose circumstance as a revolutionary woman and intellectual in a male-dominated world ends as the ultimate female victim of patriarchy (Miller 138).

Diverting from the homoerotic interpretations of Sor Juana, María Claudia André focuses on what Bemberg's multifaceted description of Sor Juana offers to feminist criticism and suggests that by representing an alternative subject that resists categorization, the director deconstructs conventions and reaffirms the feminine by taking it to a deeper level ("Empowering" 164). Conversely, Rodríguez claims that Bemberg does not limit herself to the situation of women and that time and again the director returns to the plight of the individual and the place/space that s/he occupies in the social framework, concluding that consideration of Bemberg's oeuvre must include both her universal reach as well as the individual's (Rodríguez 140).

A universal scope appears to be Bemberg's motivation behind this film, and in the process of inventing scenes and situations, she also decided that it was important to "deconventizar al convento y desmonizar a la monja" (qtd. in Burton-Carvajal, "Firmar" 81). After considering a joint production with film companies in the United States and in Mexico, she abandoned the idea of filming abroad. Bored and demoralized after viewing the film *Extramuros* in Spain, a story about a recent novice, Bemberg decided to "de-nun" the convent setting. Instead of filming in an existing convent that would relate the setting to a specific geographic place, she opted instead for abstract sets designed by Voytek and to shoot the entire film in

the old abandoned studios of Pampa Films in Argentina (83). Moreover, Bemberg concedes that by using abstract sets, she was able to give Sor Juana's story a more a-temporal tone, and to make hers a story of repression and brain-washing that the director perceived to be universal and ongoing (83).

As Bemberg admits, the film is neither a biography nor a psychological portrait but a desire to imagine Sor Juana living the last eight years of her life cloistered in a convent, in a cell which was both prison and refuge (Burton-Carvajal, "Firmar" 80). Based on autobiographical details found in Sor Juana's *Respuesta a Sor Filotea* and in Paz's biography, Bemberg deduced that Sor Juana had serious confrontations with the Church, but the director also wanted to portray the misogyny that exists within it. Bemberg reveals that her challenge was in dramatizing situations and inventing conflicts; for example, the rivalry between the abbesses, the kiss from an admirer at court, the Vicereine's lack of protocol in trespassing into Sor Juana's chambers and the Vicereine's kiss are all inventions. The sequence that alludes to an amorous relationship between the two women is a visual dramatization based on Paz's analysis of Sor Juana's poems dedicated to the Vicereine, which Paz believes exceeded the poetic etiquette of the era (Burton-Carvajal, "Firmar" 80).

While visiting a convent in Salamanca, Bemberg observed that the *locutorio* with bars to separate the cloistered nuns from their visitors still existed, a space that she uses abundantly in the film. Moreover, as a cloistered nun, Sor Juana could not leave the convent except in extenuating circumstances, namely the death of a father or mother. Since Bemberg did not want the entire story to take place in the convent, she fabricated the illness of Sor Juana's mother as a pretext to bring her

home and therein include a few biographical details about her childhood. The scene communicates an issue that is important to Bemberg – a woman’s right to an education. Through a flashback, an eight-year-old Juana appears dressed as a boy and states that she plans to attend university in a male disguise since access is forbidden to females (Burton-Carvajal, “Firmar” 81). Bemberg demonstrates that a university education was an opportunity denied not only to women in Sor Juana’s time but also to Bemberg’s generation in Argentina. Bemberg felt deprived of an education and her film serves to warn women of their intellectual repression by highlighting how patriarchal institutions punish women who, like Sor Juana, dared to think independently in a male dominated world. Of this film, Bemberg discloses:

Pero antes que nada, espero emocionar. Porque yo creo que el cine es emoción. [. . .] en esta [película] más que en ninguna, espero que los espectadores salgan del cine modificados con una visión más fortalecida de la mujer como ser pensante. A Juana la destruyen por ser así. No pidió permiso y no admitió fronteras, hasta que las presiones fueron tales que se derrumbó. (qtd. in Burton-Carvajal, “Firmar” 85)

Bemberg’s vision of Sor Juana as a thinking woman who subverts conventions and crosses boundaries without permission again links Bemberg’s view of feminists as transgressors with both Bruno’s conceptualization of the female subject as a *voyageuse* and Braidotti’s definition of nomadism. Bruno defines her *voyageuse* as a nomadic subject based in part on Braidotti’s theory that perceives nomadism as a “critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior” (5). Bemberg’s fictionalization of Sor Juana embodies Braidotti’s description of a nomadic subject. By applying elements of Bruno’s theoretical

concepts to *Yo, la peor de todas*, I shall demonstrate that the director's feminist strategy for reading space has evolved since *Camila* and *Miss Mary*; not only in her more sophisticated use of architectural spaces but also in her novel approach for framing women in Argentine film.

If *Camila* and *Miss Mary* demonstrated how Argentine aristocratic mothers transmitted patriarchal repression from one generation to the next, in *Yo, la peor de todas*, the nuns' lack of solidarity as women in the convent community allows the group to be manipulated by patriarchal strategies designed to divide and conquer them. Leonor Calvera, who along with Bemberg was one of the founders of the Unión Feminista Argentina, underlines the importance of solidarity in the feminist movement and the patriarchal counteroffensive that sought to destroy it:

Como sucediera con nuestras precursoras, como sucede actualmente, se desencadenó una contraofensiva a nuestra labor casi silenciosa. Por una parte esta estrategia tendía a alejar a las mujeres del feminismo. Se decía que eran “guerrilleras,” “amargadas,” que todas tenían *conductas lesbianas*. [. . .] Por otra parte se tendía a desanimar a las feministas atacándolas personalmente . . . *saboteando sus opiniones, polemizando constantemente sin dejarles explicar sus teorías, estimulando las rivalidades internas*. (Calvera 47; emphasis added)

One reading of *Yo, la peor de todas* is as a metaphor for how patriarchal society marginalized the feminist movement in Argentina, with the figure of Sor Juana representing the feminist movement's desire for equality and intellectual emancipation, and the convent as a microcosm of that society in which a faction of nuns enforce patriarchal rule. Conversely, through the careful framing of women's

circulation in the film, Bemberg deconstructs the patriarchal binary of male as active voyeur and female as passive object of the gaze in favor of alternative representations of feminine desire. I contend that the scenes with Sor Juana and the Vicereine construct a female complicity and solidarity against the patriarchal order, and that this is accomplished through the use of architecture, haptic elements and cinematographic framing of movement that signal passages to “in-between” sites of transgression or emotional spaces of female subjectivity.

Bruno also states that geography can foster a haptic grounding of film through the use of “mapping” by amplifying motion with the emotional response evoked by the movement of simultaneously viewing and traveling through landscape (71). With this premise, seeing and traveling become inseparable and “sight” and “site” are also irrevocably connected with “motion” and “emotion” (Bruno 16). To enrich my analysis I shall integrate Bruno’s cultural theories with Wylie, Cresswell and MacPherson’s concepts of cultural and non-representational geography, as well as their expanded redefinitions of mobility and landscape, where applicable. As I shall demonstrate, Bemberg reverses traditional encodings of mobility and landscape in the film; usually men are framed as seated and immobile, while the women, specifically Sor Juana, are usually captured in some manifestation of mobility, a mobility that is meant to reveal political, social and cultural tensions. These tensions are underscored in the film’s representations of interior architecture and landscape.

In order to support the statements above, this chapter first analyzes how the cinematographic framing of the cloistered convent’s interior suggest a landscape of repression and confinement. Architectural spaces are used to communicate the

nuns' lack of solidarity as women in the convent community, which causes some to be swayed by patriarchal strategies designed to divide them. Secondly, I apply John Wylie's definition of landscape as a tension between self and world to the framing of architectural spaces. Bruno's theory of "travel in dwelling" is used in the third section to illustrate that the framing of Sor Juana's cell as a "voyage around a room" deconstructs the gender boxing of dwelling/home as synonymous with female stasis and passivity (Bruno 169). By framing Sor Juana's room as a voyage, movement is related to a voyage of the self; Sor Juana travels through geographies of mobility and identity in a desire for subjectivity. The fourth section presents Sor Juana as an example of Bruno's nomadic *voyageuse*, who crosses boundaries without permission and subverts conventions in her pursuit of knowledge and self development. Captured as movements, dislocations and performances in the film, Sor Juana's transgressive crossings are usually framed through a doorway, a hallway or a threshold.

Concluding this chapter, I interpret Bemberg's alternative representations of feminine desire as ways to deconstruct the patriarchal binary opposition between male domination of the gaze and female passivity. According to Bruno, desire moves through space because it is an emotion that harbors the movement of all senses and therefore is related to the haptic; as eroticism, desire is strongly associated with ideas of the taboo and the transgressive (96). The combination of distance and proximity in framing the scenes with Sor Juana and the Vicereine is designed to construct a space of female solidarity against the patriarchal order. More importantly, however, I claim that Bemberg intentionally frames the two women together in close proximity and reciprocating each other's gaze to achieve

what Chris Straayer calls a “lesbian look of exchange and female bonding” (Straayer 344). Whether or not a lesbian portrayal was intended, the director’s framing of the women is a novel approach that subverts the traditional male gaze in order to give pleasure to both the lesbian and heterosexual female spectator.

5.1 Movement in the Architecture of Confinement

In his definition of landscape as a tension between subject and object, self and world, immersion and observation, John Wylie contends that in this “mutual embeddedness and connectivity of self, body, knowledge and land, observer and observed,” self and landscape are not fixed and separate categories but are “essentially enlaced and intertwined in a ‘being-in-the-world’” (Wylie, *Landscape Keys* 3). Furthermore, adding to this relationship between self and landscape, Loretta Lees explains that both as a practice and a product, architecture is not only representational, but also performative because it “involves ongoing social practices through which space is continually shaped and inhabited” (Lees 53). Bemberg uses the architectural spaces of the convent to suggest an internal landscape that becomes reshaped and inhabited by repression and confinement. This interior landscape can be conceived as a “landscape in tension” that is acted upon and shaped by the nuns’ social practice of everyday life. My exploration of Bemberg’s framing of architecture first demonstrates the convent spaces’ sense of enclosure and confinement. Then, I analyze the film’s use of haptic and architectural elements as a feminist strategy for reading spaces as passages to emotional sites of female subjectivity. I shall begin with a brief description of

historical convent design and use to underline how these traditional concepts are subverted in the film.

The convent is a single sex community, gendered female, but architecturally designed by men to meet strict patriarchal demands for the enclosure and confinement of women. Initially, however, convents appeared to serve other purposes. In *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer discusses a curious fourteenth-century tract entitled *Hali Maidenhead* addressed by a monk to the virgins of the time urging them to enter a convent instead of marrying if they enjoyed studying (Mourao 6). According to Greer, the monk stressed:

if [women] really liked reading in Latin, illuminating manuscripts, embroidering (precious vestments and magical tapestries) and writing poetry and music, then they were better off in the all-female society of a convent, where they were not surrounded by the bustle and brutality of the barracks as military whores or condemned to dangerous childbirth and the rough caresses of a husband. (200)

As Mourao explains, this description of a convent presents the possibility of refined occupations and intellectual pursuits that would otherwise be totally out of the question for women. In addition, there is also the promise of freedom from subjugation to father or husband or any other direct male interference, although their indirect intervention could not be avoided since women's convents were always ruled on the basis of orders formulated by male members of the church. There is no mention of a calling or vocation; only a desire to seek peace and quiet and to dedicate herself to study and to delicate works of embroidery, tapestry and manuscript decoration (Mourao 6).

Over the centuries the convent's function evolved to meet the personal, social and spiritual needs of women. Those with means considered the convent as a place of refuge, of safety and self-protection, while for men it was a place of containment to protect women and their virginity from the world, or alternatively to protect the world from corrupt women (Vollendorf 136). Lisa Vollendorf describes the convent as part of "the geography of women's existence, specifically it served as a counterpoint of men's hegemony over women's bodies" (136). The need to protect women and maintain conventual authority internally and externally led to architectural renovations that allowed the constant surveillance of inmates and visitors. Most of the convent space was accessible to nuns only and thus walls functioned to divide and contain; sensitive spaces, such as dormitories or cells, were located on the first floor, up regularly policed staircases (Hills 140). The physical structure of the convent demonstrates the dichotomy of the nun's profession — voluntary confinement in order to attain divine spiritual freedom (Jones 123).

In the New World, convents were often built in response to social conditions, such as economic and educational limitations for women at the time (Meyer 155). Women living in this society generally had two respectable options for their lives: marriage or the convent. In the seventeenth century, the definition of a nun changed from a spiritual calling to a profession. As the number of women who entered the convents increased, so did the diversity of their spiritual motivation and social class (Meyer 155). Moreover, for a woman desiring an education, the convent was the only realistic option, as universities were exclusively male and married women had little private time to study (Meyer 155). In *Yo, la peor de todas*, this reality is

captured in the scene in which Sor Juana, sitting at her dying mother's bedside, visualizes a childhood memory of entering the room dressed in male clothes to announce her plans to enrol in university disguised as a man. While her mother's scoff — “ya te he dicho que las mujeres no entran en las aulas ni disfrazadas”— underlines the exclusion of women from academia, Juana's whisper —“Como no me pude vestir de hombre me vestí de monja”—underscores that her reason for entering the convent was to fulfill a secular need, her education.

In theory, the convent of San Jerónimo in Sor Juana's time was considered cloistered: nuns were expected to practice a spiritual life of religious seclusion and only allowed to leave in extenuating circumstances. In practice, as mentioned previously, it was celebrated as a centre of culture and learning, but also reputed for a lax discipline inconsistent with cloistered life. The issue of the convent's laxity is conveyed when the newly appointed archbishop to Mexico, Francisco Aguiar y Seijas, visits San Jerónimo. After attending Sor Juana's secular play *Los empeños de una casa* he quips, “Eso no es un convento. Es un lupanar,” words that trigger his plan to restore a repressive order and discipline that will reshape convent life.

The framing of the architectural space in *Yo, la peor de todas* thus underlines a parallel trajectory. On the one hand, the convent transforms from a space of freedom, exuberance and light in the initial scenes (prior to the archbishop's utterance), to one of oppression, silence and darkness in the last ones. In parallel, it underlines Sor Juana's own journey within it, from acclaimed *femme savante* whose fame carried her beyond the convent walls, to a defeated nun subjugated into the patriarchal fold. The pivotal moment of change is structured around two

key events: the first, affecting convent rule, occurs in the first half of the film with the election of a new Mother Superior. Sor Ursula immediately implements reforms which at this stage have little effect on Sor Juana because she is protected by the Viceroy. However, the pivotal change in the second half has a direct consequence, because her provocative critique of Portuguese theologian António Vieira crosses a boundary that triggers her demise.

In her study of seventeenth century convent spaces and religious women Elizabeth Jones makes clear that the architectural space called a cloister is in fact an enclosure within an enclosure, an open space within the compound surrounded by arcades with columns or piers on three or four sides. It serves as a place for contemplation and prayer that is outside under the sun and stars. In most cases, it includes vegetation, gardens, flowers and a fountain (124). If traditionally the cloister is a wide, outdoor open space surrounded by walls and archways, Bemberg's cloister is a narrow oppressive architecture of solid verticality. A towering façade of heavy grey stone buttresses its three sides, while a colonnade of arches on the ground floor leads to hallways and passages that demarcate the nuns' space. The fourth wall consists of an immense iron *grille* that physically and symbolically separates the cloister and the nuns' private spaces from the public church and outside world. Bemberg usually creates a sense of oppression by framing a shot between imposing dark columns in the foreground, which heighten the vertical compression of space. If in the initial scenes, the walls serve to enforce the boundaries of enclosure from the secular world, as the film progresses their verticality becomes more oppressive as it closes in on the cloister space.

Bemberg's architecture creates a landscape of light and shadows that play light, half-light and darkness against each other. The play of light and dark in the early stages of the film gradually gives way to increasing grayness and crushing darkness. The architecture of light that surrounds the nuns' emotional displays of freedom and exuberance in the initial scenes in the cloister and in the assembly room transforms into the greyness of the towering façade and the somber mood at the film's midpoint, in the scene in which the new Mother Superior imposes new reforms. The final scenes show a dramatically changed cloister as the nuns stagger in the oppressive darkness around its perimeter, dragging their exhausted bodies, drenched by pouring rain and bloodstained by self-flagellation, in a practice that embodies submission. The last assembly meeting, convened to witness Sor Juana's capitulation, is punctuated by a cold light, and by the silence and resignation of the nuns' decimated number, reduced to a mere twelve. The final oppression that culminates in Sor Juana's surrender is accentuated by a visual and auditory downpour of rain through her open window, while nuns execute the patriarchal mandate by invading her private space to strip her of her earthly possessions.

Helen Hills explains that elaborate separate systems for the control of bodies were devised to keep cloistered nuns physically separated from other people in clearly demarcated and separate spaces. This required "attention to apertures and sight; to lock and to place gratings in the parlatories . . . [and] to block the windows of the garden and to furnish the same with bars" (140). The parlatory (*locutorio*) was situated close to the main entrance in a small grated niche where the nuns received visitors and allowed them to communicate with the outside world, for which architectural safeguards were essential (140). In the film the lack of

windows to the outside world or any window views of landscapes or open skies contributes to define the convent as a prison. For example, there are no windows in the room in which the nuns work. Significantly, the only open windows in the film are in Sor Juana's room, recalling Bruno's feminist reading of architectural spaces such as windows, doors and hallways as passages for women's subjectivity, tropes that Bemberg used in both *Camila* and *Miss Mary*. The only other scene with a window is the one in which a 17-year-old Juana, then a lady in waiting, answers questions from authorities convened to test her unusual female intellect; a light-infused opaque window frames her in a metaphor of knowledge as light.

Bruno's feminist strategy of using haptic and architectural elements as transports to emotional spaces of feminine subjectivity can be applied to *Yo, la peor de todas* as well. The initial scene in the cloister intimates community and sisterhood. The camera tracks the nuns as they participate in recreational activities. The apparent laxity of the convent is evident in the lack of contemplative prayer expected in a patriarchal definition of a cloister. Indeed, prayer and contemplation in *Yo, la peor de todas* are rare if not totally absent in a silent resistance to patriarchal dictates as Bemberg focuses on the social and political aspects of convent communal life.¹⁰⁶ In theory, the convent is an example of a world inhabited and shaped by a sisterhood of women. In a way, it is a metaphor for the vision of the feminist movement. However, in practice, as Bemberg demonstrates in the film, it becomes contaminated by patriarchal voices that institutionalize

¹⁰⁶A parallel on the absence of religion where it is demanded can be drawn with Bemberg's film *Miss Mary*, as the governess never complies with the patriarchal requirement to teach religion to the girls under her care.

repression and destroy the freedoms gained; much as women who were influenced by patriarchy weakened and discredited the feminist movement in Argentina.

Although the term “cloister” denotes restriction and confinement, the physical manifestation of the cloister is a place of movement, activity and spiritual growth. Jones explains that the cloister is the locus of movement for the nuns from their living quarters, to their working spaces, and to their church. Their entrance and egress to and from the church converges at the cloister garden (Jones 125). Using haptic elements, the film captures this bustle of activity in the initial scene of the cloister, framing the novitiates around a fountain behaving like children, splashing water on each other, screeching, laughing and running. Other nuns congregate in little groups; one nun plays an instrument while others sway to the music; another pirouettes wearing a flowered head piece as her sisters admire her; others simply chat as the laughing novitiates run past them unchastised and disappear through convent arches in the background. Not only is this cloister space a manifestation of movement and activity, but it is an “in-between” space of communication and contact with other nuns, between the private space of their cell and their limited contact with visitors. The initial scene, in which the nuns enjoy recreational activities, switches to a pan of Sor Juana studying in her room, which highlights from the onset that she is indeed different, “a rare bird.” Not only is she not participating in the recreational activities outside, but she is also absent from the meeting of the assembly in the subsequent scene.

The convent is not only the building but also the organization inside. The nuns’ general assembly meeting subtly reveals a schism within the sisterhood: those who applaud Sor Juana and those who begrudge her, as evidenced by Sor

Ursula's outburst and by a nun's comment on her absence. In this scene there is also a shift from stasis to movement. An establishing shot frames the nuns seated, silent and listening, but when the Mother Superior, Sor Leonor, mentions an event relating to Sor Juana, the nuns break into movement: facial and bodily gestures, whispered and vocal verbal exchanges, circulation, all of which echo the nuns' emotional responses. From these initial three scenes, Sor Juana is framed "in between" two spaces that house two practices of the convent community, the social (recreational) and the political (the governance of the convent), showing that Sor Juana's practices differ from those of daily convent life.

Throughout the film, Sor Juana is notably absent from many of the daily practices of the nuns' communal and religious activities. Sor Juana is privileged as she does not partake in the daily, repetitive domestic chores undertaken by the other nuns. In an example of feminine tasks being associated with the tactile, the nuns are represented as silent and immobile in their daily practice of ironing, folding laundry and embroidering, all of which takes place in a small and crowded room with no windows, an oppressive low ceiling and grey walls reminiscent of a prison. In contrast, Sor Juana's isolation, disconnection, and distance from the nuns and their activities are underlined in her movement through this space in answer to Sor Leonor's summons. As she herself admits to the Vicereine, she is spoiled by Sor Leonor who allows her the freedom to pursue her studies; indeed her only responsibilities are to teach music and accounting, activities that are considered the purview of men. When Sor Leonor proposes that Sor Juana run for the position of Mother Superior as a counter strategy against Sor Ursula's campaign of intrigues and alliances, politics takes over the convent; Sor Juana wants no part of it and

declines. Sor Juana is also absent from the meeting in which the newly elected Sor Ursula imposes the surrender and sale of the nuns' possessions for charity. Nor does she participate in the procession and self-flagellation at the end of the film. In these ways, Sor Juana is neither present nor participating in the political reforms of patriarchy.

Bruno's theoretical concepts of *transito* and *transport* describe how travel in relation to the home can be described in the form of a passage by using architectural terms and interior design; for example how women's movement through "in-between" spaces can subvert the idea of the home as correlated with female stasis and domesticity (88). As previously discussed, the oppressive architecture described in the nuns' workroom represents such a scene of domesticity, stasis and female passivity. As in her films *Camila* and *Miss Mary*, Bemberg continues to use architectural "out-of-focus" spaces of hallways, landings and staircases to signal a change, a transition or a passage to an emotional site of women's subjectivity. In *Yo, la peor de todas*, the camera frames Sor Juana in these out-of-focus spaces in numerous scenes; for example, in the scene mentioned above in which Sor Juana is summoned by Sor Leonor to listen to a proposal that would change her role, she circulates down a hallway into the nuns' workroom. Later, she is interrupted in the passageway of her library by a musical note; she circulates right, lifts a curtain to cross the threshold and finds the Vicereine in her quarters.¹⁰⁷ In yet another scene, Sor Juana "travels" through her telescope,

¹⁰⁷ In a subsequent scene, the Vicereine passes through a curtain into the room to signal her presence to Sor Ursula and her protection of Sor Juana. The last time Juana is shown traveling a hallway or passage is when, upon returning to the convent after her mother's death, she climbs the stairway to her room and learns that the Bishop has published her critique of Vieyra prefaced with a

crossing the threshold of her window to study the stars. While visiting her ailing mother, in what seems like an out-of-body experience, a young Juana dressed as a boy crosses a threshold and approaches Sor Juana as the white light of a window can be seen in the background. The double trope of threshold and window represents a passage to an emotional site of Sor Juana's subjectivity as well as an aperture of her horizon through education. In a defiant stance, she announces that she will take charge of her destiny and pursue her studies. In the final shot of the film, Sor Juana is framed below the window of her now empty cell as if reflecting on where her life of transgression and resistance to patriarchy has led her.

This chapter has argued that architectural spaces and the interplay of light and shadow reveal an internal landscape progressively reshaped by patriarchal regression. The internal landscape of the convent is also acted upon and shaped by the nuns' social practice of everyday life. Finally, haptic and architectural elements are used as a feminist strategy for reading spaces as passages that signal a change or transition for Sor Juana. The next section will show that architectural spaces become progressively reshaped as patriarchal reforms are imposed, linking characters and two key architectural spaces with themes of repression.

5.2 Landscapes in Tension

Bemberg creates an atmosphere of enclosure, isolation and repression by limiting the use of external landscapes in the film and focusing on interior ones. Indeed, the few external landscapes employed by Bemberg only project the

letter of veiled threats. From here on, patriarchal forces fall upon her for daring to write and think about philosophical matters, an example of the Church's exclusion of women's subjectivity.

insidiousness of oppression onto the natural surroundings: the shadowy branches of a tree in the cloister; the abstract grey landscape through which Sor Juana travels to visit her ailing mother; the rain pouring over the nuns' procession and outside Sor Juana's window in the final scenes. Bemberg's predominant framing of interior spaces over external ones suggests a correlation with non-representational theory and its expanded definition of landscape as a "process" or "tension." Hannah MacPherson explains that in non-representational renderings of the concept, "landscape, like the body, becomes understood as being a variably constituted 'process' (Rose 2002) or 'event' (Massey 2006) which 'animates' (Rose and Wylie 2006) and is constantly in formation" (MacPherson 6). No longer understood as simply an inert background or setting for human action, nor as solely a pictorial or discursive form of representation, landscape is recognized as a "practice" (Cresswell 2003) that comes into being by unpredictably drawing on "embodied, material and discursive domains" (MacPherson 6). This approach acknowledges that the body and its surrounding landscape are understood to be complementary concepts that are being constantly reshaped by one's movement through space. In this interaction, both body and landscape involve and complement each other in a constant process of "becoming" through the other (MacPherson 6) that includes biological and emotional drives, relationships with others and affirmation of one's self and values.

Bemberg's framing of interiors can be conceived as non-representational landscapes because they correlate body and architectural space with emotions and relationships. The scene in which the body of Sor Leonor rests in state, for example, begins with a close-up shot that pans slowly over the entire length of her

body; as it travels over her robe, the close-up framing of the overlapping folds of the black scapular and the white habit creates a grey and desolate landscape¹⁰⁸ in a picture that echoes the sadness and emotional emptiness of the convent brought on by the loss of one of their own. After pausing on a sad Sor Juana, the scene ends in a long shot that frames the body in state flanked on both sides by the somber congregation of nuns in a linear landscape perspective. Sor Ursula is centered in the distance as the vanishing point in the culmination of the new order. This framing links with Bruno's multiplicity of perspectives in cinema's way of "site-seeing" in its use of filmic shots: for example, shifts in viewing positions, camera angles and camera movements (Bruno 62).

If architecture like geography is "more than representation" and, like landscape and body, is performative because it involves ongoing social practices through which space is continually reshaped and inhabited (Lees 53), then I contend that architecture can be conceived as a landscape of tension through which self and world emerge intertwined. Although Sor Juana enjoys personal freedom through her confinement in the convent, Bemberg creates two "in-between" architectural spaces as "landscapes of tension" between self and world through which space is reshaped: staircase landings and the iron *grille*. In three scenes, a landing appears as a site of tension between self and world that alters the landscape of convent practice: the first, during the meeting between Sor Ursula and the

¹⁰⁸ The habit is the main robe or tunic that is worn over the body. A "scapular" is a long apron-like garment that is worn over the tunic and extends down the front and back. The veil is worn on top of the head and extends down the back and is usually attached to a white cotton cap or "coif"; this headpiece conforms to the shape of the skull and often ties under the chin. The veil is pinned over the coif head coverings and could be worn down to cover the face or up to expose it. A "bandeau" is the piece that stretches across the forehead, normally attached at the ears behind the veil. The white wimple is a fabric piece that covers the neck and chest and sometimes extends to under the chin, and is sometimes covered by a thin layer of black crape (Kuhn 5).

archbishop; the second, in Sor Ursula's triumphant procession; and the third, in Sor Juana and Sor Ursula's confrontation.

In the first of these scenes, the archbishop and Sor Ursula plot to reform the convent's laxity in a conspiracy designed to divide the sisterhood in order to conquer and control it. Framed in a small narrow landing and dark passageway of the archbishopric, the scene bespeaks anonymity and secrecy. From his position on the landing, the archbishop immediately creates tension by chastising the nuns for not lowering their veils. The nun's habit is already a form of enclosure, covering everything but her hands and face in an effort to conceal the body and its gender; the further veiling of the face in the presence of men is a complete effacement. The camera frames a middle close-up shot as the nuns pull down their veils and cover their faces. The fact that they are faceless as they speak not only emphasizes their anonymity in this exchange, but more importantly they become faceless pawns in a patriarchal game. As Doane explains in *Femmes Fatales*, on the one hand, the veil's work would seem to be that of concealing or hiding a secret (Doane 48), which in this scene would be the conspiracy. On the other, Doane posits that close-up shots of veiled women represents a veiling over of desire (48); in this scene, it covers Sor Ursula's desire for power; her wish to become Mother Superior. A male-female tension is also evident in the archbishop's continued misogyny as he refuses any contact with a woman and tells Sor Ursula to give her list to his secretary. Dismissed, the nuns move through the darkness of a small hallway, their faces still veiled and only the hems of their habits lit against the stone. A door is opened and their passing over the threshold symbolizes that a change is imminent. Once the door is closed, a priest swings a venser filled with incense in a circular

motion, evoking a sense of smell, which rises upward to purify the space, to remove the scent of the women (Stone 4) and the tension created by their presence.

The second scene in which the landing reflects a site of tension is when Sor Ursula is paraded down the hallway in triumph as the newly elected Mother Superior. After the voting scene in the cloister, the camera switches to the private hallways of the convent, where three architectural elements — a hallway, a landing and a stairway— intersect. The reshaping of the landscape of convent life by a new order is cast in a movement through space; a still camera frames the nuns parading through a dark passageway into a hallway in a linear horizontal movement, as others descend in a single file forming an “S” shaped movement down the stairs. The tension is created by this fluid movement set against the three immobile nuns standing on the landing whose expressions betray their genuine conflict with the outcome, as a close-up of Sor Ursula’s profile wearing a crown of flowers enters the screen from the left. In the subsequent scene, Sor Ursula has immediately initiated changes by collecting and selling all the nuns’ personal possessions for charity. An aerial high angle shot frames the dark towering walls of the cloister as the nuns observe, standing small against the far wall, in front of columns and under archways. The nuns’ physical distance contrasts with the close-up profile of Sor Ursula foregrounded on the upper-right of the screen, symbolizing a distancing in the relationship between the nuns and the new abbess.

The landing is also a site of tension between Sor Ursula and Sor Juana when the latter arrives on the landing to her room and discovers that the doors to her library have been sealed by the archbishop. The scene actually begins in the darkness of the cloister garden as Sor Juana lies beneath a tree contemplating the

stars. Interrupted by her servant, Josefa, the scene switches to Sor Juana passing a threshold and climbing stairs to the landing. She senses movement and turns to find Sor Ursula descending the stairs; an almost imperceptible reaction of distaste crosses Sor Juana's face, initiating the tension. As Sor Ursula towers on the stairs above the landing, she informs Sor Juana triumphantly that the archbishop has forbidden her access to her books. The emotional tension of the moment is reflected in performance through movement: Sor Juana paces back and forth, calls the archbishop "ese viejo lunático" and after a violent gesture of frustration, reflecting the psychological and emotional weight of the moment, attempts to break the wax seals. As Sor Ursula moves into the frame to leave, Sor Juana confronts her with chin lifted and, looking down at Sor Ursula, vows that she will continue studying without the books, in the sky, the grass and the kitchen, indicating that knowledge is everywhere. The emotional weight of the outburst penetrates Sor Juana's body as she clutches her heart, moves over to the wall, leans and crumples down against it and falls ill in an intertwining tension of body, emotion, and architecture.

If in the initial scenes, the walls serve to enforce the boundaries of enclosure from the secular world, as the film progresses their verticality becomes more oppressive as the walls close in around the cloister to compress the space. Moreover, as Hills explains, bars, *grilles*, screens and curtains in convents not only separated nuns from laity but served to draw attention to that separation. Nuns' choirs inside their churches were often framed by elaborate gilt iron *grilles* that billowed out into the space above the entrance to the church, resembling the elaborate cages of exotic birds. Architectural attention focused on the elements

symbolic of enclosure (Hills 166). Bemberg recreates this cage-like enclosure by juxtaposing the *grille* wall and *locutorio*'s bars in the foreground with solid grey walls in the background in what appears to be a vertically compressed space. In the film, Sor Juana's first meeting with the Vicereine begins with an establishing shot, which captures the floor to ceiling length and width of the *locutorio*'s iron *grille*, creating not only a physical barrier of distance between the nun and her visitors, but also a social and psychological separation as one contemplates the distance between the nun's and the Vicereine's roles. However, this distance dissolves as the approaching proximity of the camera correlates with an invitation to closeness, in the Vicereine's proposal of friendship.

An architectural space of tension between self and world continues in the framing of the iron *grille* and its extension on the convent floor. As I shall demonstrate, Bemberg's specific framing of the *grille* not only serves to show the progressive invasion of oppressive patriarchal reforms and reduced freedom that reshape convent life, but moreover is specifically used to signal moments of conspiracy and betrayal. The iron grille, which dominates the scenes in which the nuns vote for the new Mother Superior and Sor Juana sings in the choir, underlines the lack of solidarity among women in the convent, some of whom have allowed themselves to be swayed by patriarchal strategies designed to divide and control them.

Conspiracy underlines the scene in which the nuns vote for the new Mother Superior. Once the archbishop grants permission to begin the vote, the camera zooms in on the hands of the first three nuns, Sor Juana's among them, as each reaches through an opening in the *grille* to cast her ballot into the box in a symbolic

crossing of a threshold that will usher a change. The nuns' freedom to vote is an illusion and a travesty of that privilege since the conspiracy between the archbishop and Sor Ursula suggests that the outcome is predetermined. Bemberg implies that political corruption is not limited to governments but extends to the sanctity of the Church. To underline this illusion of freedom, the camera then zooms out in an aerial shot of the *grille* to capture another "S"-shaped queue of nuns as they snake through the cloister. Their slow progress from the archways in the distant background towards the voting box not only creates an illusion of depth and perspective but embodies the movement that will reshape the internal landscape of convent life. I have mentioned Sor Ursula's collection of the nuns' possessions as an example of this reshaping, but perhaps the most dramatic occurs in one of the final scenes. The landscape of the cloister garden is reshaped by the movement of the nuns through it in another daily practice of Sor Ursula's reforms. Carrying a huge crucifix in the shadow of darkness, Sor Ursula enters from the bottom of the screen, leading a procession of nuns, who reduced to wearing only a coif and a sackcloth,¹⁰⁹ stagger in the pouring rain, flagellating themselves. The upward movement of the nun's procession is vertically compressed within the two overbearing walls of the cloister, again correlating the framing of architectural space with oppressive reforms.

If the nuns' voting scene breathes conspiracy, the scene in which Sor Juana sings in the choir reveals betrayal. If the aerial shot of the nuns' movement towards the ballot box in the voting scene affords a sense of perspective and depth, the

¹⁰⁹ This is also known as a hair shirt; an undergarment made of rough material such as goat hair (Bianchini).

cloister space becomes flattened in the choir scene. The façade of arches in the background and the full length of the iron *grille* in front of the nuns appear to compress the choir in a cage-like structure, reshaping the architectural space to echo the advancement of repressive reforms. Bemberg extends this concept of a prison further through lighting; presumably a ray of sunlight enters the enclosure from above to cast the shadow of the *grille*'s pattern onto the public side of the floor, suggesting that repression and control of women is not limited to institutions such as the convent but spills onto the public sphere of daily life. Yet as Henri Lefebvre explains, architectural dimensions ensure a correlation between the rhythms that they entertain (gaits, ritual gestures, processions, etc.) and their musical resonance (225). Through a clever combination of architecture, landscape and melodious sound, the nuns are framed physically confined within a compressed architecture of stone and iron *grille*, while the sound of singing, like the *grille*'s shadow, travels beyond the confines of the cloister and onto the surrounding space. The cloister landscape conflates with a performance enacted in the non-visual — voices in song — that allows the nuns to embark on a journey of belonging and solidarity. Yet as the camera frames a profile shot of Sor Juana singing in solidarity with her sisters, their voices carry over to the next scene in which two nuns are in Sor Juana's room, surreptitiously copying her texts by dim candlelight, as a close-up shot of the title page, *Primer sueño*, confirms. The three nuns violating Sor Juana's privacy are following patriarchal orders designed to investigate her, and the covertness of this activity suggests that the apparent solidarity of the singing choir is another illusion.

Bemberg's use of two architectural spaces, the staircase landing and the iron *grille*, represent internal landscapes in tension. While the tension between characters in the staircase landings scenes is associated with conspiracy, those associated with the *grille* reflect tensions related to betrayal. Both sites are used to demonstrate how the daily practices of convent life and eventually Sor Juana's own are reshaped by patriarchy in a gradual transition from limited freedoms to oppressive reforms. However, as I shall demonstrate, the spaces of tension between the self and the world dissipate in the representation of Sor Juana's room.

5.3 A Voyage Around a Room

The confining architecture and out-of-focus spaces in the convent contrast dramatically with the framing of Sor Juana's dormitory. Bruno posits that a house is an assemblage of objects that makes up a moving landscape (Bruno 103) and a voyage around a room can become the location of travel (167-169). Bemberg appears to support this view of a voyage around a room by using the camera to pan across Sor Juana's private cell. While the film is replete with still shots in which the characters enter a camera frame from off-screen, camera tracking and pan shots create a sense of mobility. A tracking shot travels through space forward, backward, or laterally, and usually follows a character or object as it moves along the screen, physically accompanying the entire range of movement; for example, when Sor Juana enters the nuns' workroom. In contrast, a camera pan shot, with the camera body turning to the right or left, mimics a turning head. On the screen, it produces a mobile framing that scans the space horizontally ("Film Lexicon").

The film's four tracking and pan scenes of Sor Juana's room occur at the beginning, at midpoint and at the end. The first pan reveals Sor Juana's identity in a voyage through the assemblage of objects that maps her room in a moving landscape. In her room, Sor Juana embraces her intellectual, scientific and artistic journeys. In the second, a tracking shot, Sor Juana herself circulates about as she presents "her children," while the third signals the beginning of her diminishing influence as Sor Juana packs her works for the Vicereine to publish in Spain. The last voyage of her room closes full circle to contrast Sor Juana's now reduced state with the first pan sequence. The final two pans correlate the gradual emptying of the room with Sor Juana's disempowerment.

Sor Juana's room contrasts with the rest of the convent's architecture filmically in that it is a circular space. Bemberg said of the room: "I wanted Juana's cell to be like a round prison, as if it were the equivalent of her own head, like a labyrinth that surrounds her with books, a kind of half-jail, half refuge" (qtd. in Pick 80-81). The initial scene that captures the nuns' recreational activities cuts to Sor Juana's dormitory. Bemberg pans this space from right to left beginning with the colonnades of floor-to-ceiling book cases, each shelf teeming with books, a contrast with the convent's stark grey façade and the floor-to-ceiling bars of the iron *grille*. As the camera continues left, two pillars in the foreground frame a desk with two candlesticks, creating a sense of depth. The books scattered on her desk and stacked on shelves intimate a voyage; each one functions as a location of travel, offering a journey through which Sor Juana gains knowledge and studies the world. Interplaying proximity and distance, the camera pan pairs the shadowy outline of an obelisk shelf, with measuring instruments in the foreground, with the

distant outline of a telescope in front of an open arch window. This high angle distant shot of an open window not only reveals a patch of blue sky in a rare external view, but also adds the dimension of height and depth to Sor Juana's space, dimensions that are absent in the rest of the convent architecture. The camera pans left again to foreground an armillary globe (astrolabe). A skeletal sphere with the earth at its center encircled by brass bands that represent the outer sphere of fixed stars, it reveals Sor Juana's journeys into the universe and astronomy. Positioned in the room, the sphere represents an accessory of her knowledge, passion and power of inquiry. The camera approaches the sphere to reveal hints of Sor Juana through the grill pattern formed by its intersecting rings.¹¹⁰ This resulting image inextricably enmeshes Sor Juana with knowledge. Similarly to *Camila* and *Miss Mary*,¹¹¹ Bemberg also introduces Sor Juana framed next to a window, in the familiar trope of passage for women's horizons. Laughter travels from the cloister below into her space, as the camera reveals her studying at her desk.

This image associates Sor Juana with isolation and disconnection and defines her persona within the convent. Absent from the daily practices of convent life, she is physically distant and socially disconnected from the congregation of her sisters, as confirmed by the amount of time that she is framed isolated in her room, preferring, as she herself reveals, the calm silence of her books and “soledad y silencio para poder pensar.”

¹¹⁰ Bemberg used a similar introductory technique in *Camila* and *Miss Mary*; the camera weaves through the cluttered attic to reveal *Camila* and in *Miss Mary*, it steals glimpses of the house through the trees before revealing the pompous mansion.

¹¹¹ *Camila* appears framed near an open attic window that bathes her in light; *Miss Mary* is similarly captured against a window as she rummages through her trunk.

The enclosing aspect of protection offered by the cloister is recast in the framing of Sor Juana's circular room as a voyage, in which she is seated at the helm of an "enveloping house of knowledge" to paraphrase Bruno (210). The voyage of her room maps a geographic space through which one can look figuratively through her instruments, as the panning across books, obelisk, telescope, armillary sphere, and measuring tools forms a circle — like the globe — representing a voyage of the interior, over a landscape of global knowledge.

The second scene involving a voyage around a room occurs when the Vicereine transgresses into Sor Juana's room. Bemberg's strategy for reading feminine space is introduced again by haptic elements. Recalling the circular movement of baroque architecture (Jones 85), the concave and convex spaces of the library appear to move around Sor Juana as she peruses a book. The touch of fingers to page and the auditory flip of a turning sheet suggest a contemplative Sor Juana deep in study, a voyage of knowledge at her fingertips. Suddenly a musical note resonates into her space and interrupts her research. As she circles left, she opens a curtain, which reveals the open arch window in the background beyond, before the camera switches to the Vicereine strumming a musical instrument. Bemberg admits inventing this lack of protocol intentionally to allow the Vicereine access to the nun's private space. Justifying her transgression with "No soporto los barrotes de tu *locutorio*," the Vicereine cannot stand the imposed physical barrier that impedes her access and proximity. As she moves in from the left, Sor Juana enters the frame from the right and they are framed together as they exchange a

gaze.¹¹² The Vicereine peruses the titles of Sor Juana's books, mentioning Erasmus, Descartes, Gasendi, and Kircher and cautions that these books are dangerous.

If the camera pan frames the first "voyage" to reveal Sor Juana, the second one, triggered by the Vicereine's question on whether the nun regretted her vow of celibacy, is steered by Sor Juana's own assertive movement around her room. Upon discovering the Vicereine's pregnancy, she clarifies her initial reaction by explaining: "*Tengo un cuerpo que en un romance mío llamé abstracto*" (emphasis added). Caldwell explains that the erasing of gender seems to be a goal of both male and female monastics and is related to the conventional definition of monastic life — not mere celibacy, but the denial of sexuality itself (Caldwell 16). Sor Juana's reference to her abstract body can be perceived in this context. In response to the Vicereine's query on whether she regretted not having children, she asks the Vicereine to follow her and in a tactile exchange holds the Vicereine's hands. She then circulates to introduce her "children," moving from one instrument to the other, touching and caressing each one, and then hitting a note on the lyre. Most of the instruments she mentions are associated with her study of the controversial German Jesuit scholar, Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680),¹¹³ mentioned by the Vicereine at the beginning of this scene. In a voyage around the room that forms a circular motion and crosses geographical and cultural boundaries, she cites, "*Mi telescopio, mi reloj solar,*" then walks away to the left and picks up "*Mi espejo de*

¹¹² In the last section of this chapter, I discuss the importance of this framing.

¹¹³ The telescope, automata, the astrolabe, the magnets are references to Kircher and his studies.

obsidiana” (an Aztec stone used in divination) “en que leo el pasado y vislumbro el futuro, mi autómeta, mi astrolabio.”¹¹⁴ As she proceeds to “mi lira, tan antigua que me gusta pensar que la tocó el mismo Orfeo,” a bright white space is framed beyond the open arch window, and then she mentions “mis imanes” in another reference to Kircher’s study in magnetism. Sor Juana’s studies clandestinely transport Orfeus’s music and Kircher’s controversial work to New Spain. The culminating moment in this voyage is her final reference to “mis plumas” after which she leans over and places her hands possessively over “mis escritos” before concluding passionately “estos son mis hijos.” Sor Juana does not know her body materially, and considers it “abstract;” her “children,” as an extension of her body, are instruments used to measure and map the abstract — astronomy, magnetism, automation and other non-visual elements that constitute her universe. Sor Juana’s circular room is an example of Bruno’s “global vessel” which includes the instruments to transport her on intellectual voyages that fill her desire for knowledge and discovery.

Sor Juana refutes the Vicereine’s claim that a woman without children is incomplete: “No todas somos iguales, señora. Algunas necesitamos la soledad. Soledad y silencio [pause] para poder pensar.” This statement links to the feminist movement and the recognition of the differences in class, race and culture that existed between women. The difficulty of Sor Juana’s choice of profession in order to study and write is expressed geographically as a journey, “un camino áspero,” implying that companionship would be welcome.

¹¹⁴ An astronomical device designed by Kircher used to locate astronomical bodies and keep time. The diagram was published in Kircher's *Magnes sive de arte magnetica* (2nd ed.) in 1643.

Bruno includes writing as a haptic activity, in which artists use these creative methods of communication as a means of exploring their sense of inhabited, traversed space (377). Sor Juana's writings can be considered a form of *écriture féminine* that exemplifies Cixous's statement "Write the self. Your Body must be heard" (Cixous 880). As her hand writes words on a page, the experience is one of traversing space as the words appear and move with the performance of mental creativity. As Cutler explains, writerly space becomes geographically inhabited by words that create images of people, objects and places. The written landscape of the manuscript in turn transforms to the performance of poetry or drama (Cutler 117). Sor Juana's two-dimensional writings on ink and paper map the mental creativity of a private, interior world, which becomes externalized in the enactment of her plays, as performed in the initial scenes, in the voiceover readings of her poems and, ultimately, in the printing of her volumes in Spain.

Voyage is linked thematically to Sor Juana's room in a third scene in which Sor Juana allows the Vicereine to publish all her works in Madrid, a historical fact that is deliberately included in the film (Connelly 78). Gestural movement defines the scene as Sor Juana sorts her works and passes them down to be packed into the trunk, a vehicle of transport. The camera closes in on the two titles: *Primer sueño* and *Villancicos*. The voiceover of Sor Juana's silent recital of a few verses not only reveals her emotional state, but moreover has made the poem mobile as the words travel from Sor Juana's memory into the volume of voice. Sor Juana's body of work, which houses her intellectual creativity, now lives in the metonymy of her writings and poetry, the pieces of her that will travel to Spain to be published into volumes. Her works connote a writerly space inhabited by words and images that

create people, objects and places. The volumes have become mobile and Sor Juana has become “global” as her name, fame and works travel geographically in space and time, a volume of which returns to her years later through Sigüenza. A door closes after the trunk is carried out, symbolically closing a chapter in Sor Juana’s life and bringing in another change — the departure of her protectors that will leave her vulnerable and exposed.

By day Sor Juana writes, by night she travels the universe. Although each space in her room appears to be defined — library, observatory, writing desk, obelisk shelf — the boundaries between them are open and compositionally form a site of spatio-visual knowledge. Although this space is constructed sequentially, she travels freely through it in a way that the relationship between the “rooms” or territories of study in the foreground and background sets out a meandering path. In the scene in which Sor Juana climbs a staircase by the light of the moon through an open arch window, she sits on a deck and looks through a telescope. Dressed in a nightshirt and wearing only a coif, she reads her notes and makes adjustments to the telescope to gaze into the night sky, yet again signaling a woman’s unprecedented and daring passage to the new horizons of outer space. Interrupted by sounds of voices and bells ringing, Sor Juana places her sheet on an easel to reveal the cartography of astronomical mappings. In mapping universal space, Sor Juana’s calculations transcend the space of the room in yet another voyage.

The penultimate voyage of Sor Juana’s room returns full circle to repeat the camera pan of the first one, but this time it travels a room stripped bare of its possessions, symbolizing Sor Juana’s gradual disempowerment under patriarchal pressures. As a penance following her confession, Padre Miranda orders that she

detach herself from all her worldly possessions, “tus papeles, tus objetos preciosos y sobre todo tus memorias,” and sell her books for the poor. The scene switches to her room where the camera closes in on a hand as it lifts Sor Juana’s glasses from an open book, closes it and stacks it on top of other books; a close-up of the top one reveals that it is her published volume from Spain. One by one, all the items are removed, but instead of the circular camera pan of the initial scene, the nuns move horizontally in a criss-crossing linear fashion, invading and traveling the room from left to right and then right to left as they remove objects, each movement through the space reshaping the landscape of the room. Standing immobile in centre frame, Sor Juana follows the nuns with her eyes, holding the Vicereine’s gift of the plumed head dress, which represented the rare bird that she was and now clings to symbolically. As she moves slightly to the left, the arched window behind her frames the oppressive pouring rain, a melodramatic trope used in both *Camila* and *Miss Mary* in which the exterior landscape reflects an emotional moment of loss, surrender, and defeat. Finally, the task is completed as a nun takes away the headdress while another removes a basket with her papers. Sor Juana stands immobile with her arms by her side and turns full circle to view her room, emptied of her possessions.

In the last scene, the same pan sequence is repeated as in the first voyage of the room, but now the room is in darkness as the camera travels over the empty bookshelves and a desk that only holds a candle and a crucifix. Instead of finding Sor Juana writing or studying at her desk, the camera closes in on Sor Juana seated at the window holding her knees, the arch of the window above bathing her in light. Dispossessed of “her children” — her books and the writing and scientific

implements of her studies — convent life loses its purpose. As Miller suggests, Bemberg's final scene supports Paz's view that Sor Juana's surrender was not that of a supplicant of God but that of an unwilling captive to the church (Miller 167). Recalling Sor Juana's words to the Vicereine with respect to the sealed doors of her library, "Sin mis libros no existo, Señora," the landscape of the empty room reflects an internal emptiness; a blank distant expression on her face captures the emotional void of her mind and soul, as if the Sor Juana's brilliance has indeed been extinguished.

Furthermore, this scene not only reiterates Bemberg's belief that the individual is powerless against the institutions of State and Church but also, I suggest, that women, as individuals, are powerless if they stand alone. In this last scene, Sor Juana's room has become a prison cell. Her public confession to Padre Miranda, Sor Ursula and the remaining nuns in the previous scene used terminology related to the secular justice system; for example, her statements, "comparezco ante este *tribunal*," "declaro que en *el pleito* que se me sigue," "hallo que *ser condenada a muerte eterna*," "porque mis *crímenes*" (instead of sins) (emphasis added), suggest that Church and State are indistinguishable in their hegemonic practices of repression, especially against transgressors. By using the secular terminology of the justice system in Sor Juana's confession, Bemberg equates Church and State as partners in oppression, especially regarding women. She also reminds viewers that forced confessions and subsequent injustices committed against individuals by these institutions are a historical and ongoing global phenomenon, recalling the most recent performed by the Argentine military during *El Proceso*.

5.4 The Transgressions of a Nomadic *Voyageuse*

Bemberg's Sor Juana embodies a nomadic *voyageuse* who subverts conventions and questions norms through her transgressions in knowledge, intimacy, and the taboo. By crossing patriarchal boundaries, Sor Juana travels on a voyage that continuously explores the intellectual, creative and emotional dimensions of her self. Cresswell points out that transgression, literally "crossing a boundary," is defined in geographical terms. Geography, then, informs us on transgression, and transgression, conversely, provides valuable insights into the way places affect behavior and ideology (Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place* 30). Furthermore, society's geographical ordering is founded on numerous acts that create ambiguous boundaries and simultaneously introduce possibilities for transgression. As Cresswell explains, places have associated characteristics that influence our description of the people in them or from them, while ideologies on the other hand are "action-oriented" beliefs or ideas that promote some actions while discouraging others. Transgression thus represents a questioning of symbolic boundaries that are constituted by place (Cresswell 48). When an expression such as "out of place" is used it is impossible to clearly demarcate whether a social or geographical place is denoted — place always means both (20). Here, I shall show that Sor Juana's transgressions in knowledge, intimacy, critical thought and disobedience in the film serve to question hegemonic norms.

In order to pursue her studies, Sor Juana subverts the social conventions through which patriarchy subjugates women by selecting a convent life over the normal prospect of marriage. The Vicereine's comment regarding marriage and convent life in their first meeting, "Me pregunto, ¿para cuál de las dos es más

pequeño su mundo?” questions the normality of their respective place and space. Indeed, the daily practices of convent life are designed to subjugate women through prayer, spiritual contemplation, humility, self-abnegation and penance, confined in a prison-like space that includes an iron *grille*. Although Sor Juana has chosen a convent life, she herself admits that she does not engage in its daily practices. In the scene in which Sor Leonor asks her to run for the position of new Mother Superior, Sor Juana confesses, “No me flagelo las carnes. Ni hago duras penitencias para ganar el cielo. Tampoco soy demasiado piadosa.” Her resistance to patriarchal subjugation is characterized by her absences from these daily practices, absences through which Bemberg underlines Sor Juana’s *otherness*, her being “out of place.” Furthermore, by limiting her obligations to teaching music and handling the convent’s accounting, Sor Leonor enables Sor Juana’s freedom to write and study. As Shaw explains, Bemberg shows the convent as a space where enlightenment and obscurantism do battle. On the side of enlightenment are Juana’s friends, Sigüenza y Góngora, Madre Leonor (first Abbess) and the Viceroy and Vicereine, all fighting for intellectual exploration and a woman’s right to study; on the side of obscurantism, the Archbishop of Mexico, Sor Ursula and the Bishop of Puebla (Shaw, “Representing Inequalities” 127-8). Bemberg positions Sor Juana as a strong woman who dares to break the mould imposed by patriarchy and carve a space for her intellectual and artistic pursuits.

Sor Juana’s sharp intellect, controversial studies and her intimate friendship with the Vicereine are but three examples of transgressions through which she subverts the hegemonies of everyday convent life. The first transgression in her pursuit of knowledge occurs in the meeting with the viceroys who have come to the

opening of her play. Miller describes this scene as an orchestration of shots that move from a wider space of open quadrangle, to royal dais, to a series of close ups of an intense and almost uncomfortable public exchange of intimacy between the Vicereine and Sor Juana in which the only sense of physical movement within the frames is in the play of expressions on the protagonists' faces (158). While I agree with Miller's observation, I posit that the scene also unveils the first clear act of spatial transgression. The nuns are only supposed to receive visitors behind the bars of the parlatory *grille*, yet there is no *grille* separating Sor Juana as she crosses the threshold from the nuns' space behind the archway into the public realm. While the Viceroy's *voyeur* gaze and comments about Sor Juana's talent and beauty reduce her to a fetish, the Vicereine remarks on the paucity of cultured women. In a sequence of close-up, shot/reverse-shots, the Vicereine introduces a cultural deficiency which Sor Juana expands geographically. To the Vicereine's statement "Serán pocas las mujeres ilustradas en México," Sor Juana responds: "en todas partes Señora. Tampoco abundan en España por lo que he leído en Cervantes y Fray Luis. A Santa Teresa la han tratado de loca. Quizás lo fuera por atreverse a escribir y a pensar, una española." In this exchange, Sor Juana's transgression is expressed by questioning this norm, which she identifies as a lack of educated women, not only in Mexico and in Spain, but in the world. She then associates herself with one of the few thinking women of her time, Santa Teresa de Avila, to emphasize how society marginalizes women who dare to think and write by treating the Carmelite nun as "loca," in a way foreshadowing her own fate. In a subsequent *locutorio* scene, Sor Juana's reply to a visitor's comment — "El conocimiento es siempre una transgresión. Y más para una mujer" — reconfirms

her recognition of women's pursuit of knowledge as a transgression of the hegemonic norm.

Sor Juana's transgressive quest for knowledge carries over to her reading of Church-censored material. As I have shown, Sor Juana not only reads and admires the censored scholar and Jesuit priest, Athanasius Kircher, but also displays an array of his controversial instruments in her room. Bruno describes him as a polymatic thinker; he covered a world of knowledge from astronomy to magnetism, and he also created mechanical devices of "perpetual motion" related to scientific, geographic, anatomic projects (Bruno 145). A contemporary of Sor Juana, their lives share some similarities. Reminiscent of Sor Juana's own status in the convent, Kircher's scholarly research was deemed so valuable that he was relieved from his teaching duties so that he could devote himself entirely to his writings and experiments and entertain important visitors who came to Rome to see the famous Father Athanasius (Findlen 11). When Rome was struck by the bubonic plague in 1656, Kircher became involved in researching its cause and caring for the sick (Findlen 34; Merrill xxv), similar to the film's portrayal of Sor Juana during the plague outbreak in Mexico. In the 1670s Kircher found his work increasingly under attack and began to withdraw from high-profile intellectual life in part due to failing health (Findlen 1), like Sor Juana later in life. Although both were celebrated intellectuals in their time, their contributions would be ignored for centuries until a renewed interest in their works surfaced in the twentieth century.

In addition to scientific knowledge, Sor Juana's studies and artistic pursuits are also associated with performance: writing, theatre, music and singing. However, these normal conventional genres were associated with male social

performance at that time. As a woman and nun, Sor Juana's creative pursuits in any of these conventional genres can be conceived as crossing a boundary. In "The Expediency of Culture," George Yudice posits that performativity is based on the assumption that the maintenance of the status quo (i.e. the reproduction of social hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality) is achieved by repeatedly performing norms. In our daily practices, the rituals of conformity are repeated in the manner of dress, gesture, gaze, and verbal interaction within the purview of the workplace, the school, the church, the government office. But as Yudice explains, repetition is never exact; people, particularly those with a will to dis-identify or "transgress," do not fail to repeat, but rather "fail to repeat loyally" (423).

Bemberg's Sor Juana does not "loyally" mimic social performance. Although she wears the nun's habit, she does not participate in many of the nun's daily rituals. The nun's habit is designed to enclose the body and erase gender, and Sor Juana capitalizes on the erasure of gender to transgress into male intellectual and artistic pursuits that were excluded for women. Indeed the fictionalized Sor Juana confirms that she is masquerading as a nun, claiming that since she could not disguise herself as a man, she disguised herself as a nun. Recalling Deleuze and Guattari's *nomad* as traveling the "in-between" path that benefits from its own autonomy and direction (380), Sor Juana enjoys a "sexual mobility" (a term used by Doane 23) as a nomadic *voyageuse* who independently directs her various projections of self by transgressing into the hegemonic male domain: as playwright, as poet, as student of controversial sciences and astronomy, and as critic of philosophical and religious treatises.

Sor Juana's denial of her femininity and her self-perception as an androgynous *cuerpo abstracto* is perhaps behind the Vicereine's desire to know the real Juana; not the external performances of one who is more poet than nun, more nun than woman, but the woman buried beneath. This desire leads the Vicereine to question the norm that impedes her access to proximity and intimacy, and she subverts it by trespassing into the most remote space in the convent, the nun's private dormitory. The scene in which Sor Juana finds the Vicereine in her room is a transgression of protocol intentionally invented by Bemberg to establish both women as transgressors; each, in her own way breaks with conventions and crosses boundaries to forbidden places. As Gilchrist explains, "secular and monastic women demonstrated constructions of female sexuality which centered on monogamy and chastity facilitated by spatial segregation," adding that "the strict, perpetual enclosure of medieval nuns may be seen as an extension of the segregation of aristocratic and gentry women within a domestic domain" (qtd. in Gilchrist 169). The Vicereine's transgression into Sor Juana's space subverts not only the norms imposed in the convent but also the segregation within the domestic domain imposed on aristocratic women. More importantly, however, the intimacy of this encounter serves to reveal Sor Juana's intellectual transgressions through the Vicereine's observations.

This scene portrays how social and cultural norms and other phenomena (religion, economy) vary geographically. As the Vicereine peruses the titles of Sor Juana's books, she cautions that reading these authors is dangerous: "En España nadie se atreve a leerlos." If on the one hand the Vicereine is "out of place" geographically in Sor Juana's room, on the other she underlines how Sor Juana's

reading material is socially, politically and religiously “out of place.” Sor Juana’s reply speaks of a physical, geographical distancing, which intimates a cultural deviation or permissiveness: “Pero estamos en la Nueva España, más lejos de Roma.” “Far from the constraints of Rome” implies not only the geographical location of the city but also the location of the Catholic Church, the patriarchal hand of censorship. As Cresswell explains, “ideas about what is right, just, and appropriate are transmitted through space and place, which structure a normative landscape.” Therefore, “something may be appropriate here but not there” (Cresswell, *In/Out of Place* 8). With the Vicereine’s reply, “Pero no de la Inquisición,” Bemberg ties the historical symbol of torture and censorship of religious dissidents with that of political dissidents by the Junta Militar, reiterating Bemberg’s concern for the powerlessness of the individual against the institutions of Church and State.

Eventually the intimate friendship that develops between Sor Juana and the Vicereine is externalized in the former’s sensual poetry, examples of which clandestinely find their way into the Archbishop’s inner circle. In reviewing the texts the nuns had copied, the group judges Sor Juana’s poetry as lascivious, morbidly sensual, and bordering on sexual deviance, as evidenced by the lesbian implication of their comment: “escritas por una mujer [pause] a otra mujer.” Cresswell explains that a “moral geography of exclusion” underlines the basis by which people may be labeled as “out of place” if their behavior transgresses the dominant moral order” (*In/Out* 23). Sor Juana’s punishment for this transgression is the closure of her library. Her confessor makes clear that there is no room for love verses in a convent and little more out in the real world: “En el convento, esos

desordenes amorosos no pueden llevarte más que el castigo. Tampoco *en el mundo hay* esperanzas para ellos” (emphasis added). It intimates lesbianism, or at the very least that her poetry exhibits an unacceptable sexual deviance. Bemberg’s Sor Juana remains ambiguous, neither admitting nor denying these amorous “disorders.”

María Claudia André explains that the fear of “women without men,” “of women indifferent or resistant to male desire” has haunted western civilization for centuries. She cites Lillian Fadermann’s observation that “twentieth century fiction has played a significant role in keeping women down through associating feminism with lesbianism and lesbianism with everything horrible” (“Empowering” 169-170). Leonor Calvera also mentions how Argentine patriarchy discredited the Unión Feminista Argentina movement by attacking feminists as lesbians: “Como sucediera con nuestras precursoras, como sucede actualmente, se desencadenó una contraofensiva a nuestra labor casi silenciosa. [. . .] Se decía que [. . .] todas tenían *conductas lesbianas*” (Calvera 47; emphasis added). In the film, Padre Miranda’s statement that there is little hope for these “amorous disorders” in the real world confirms the dominant moral view of lesbianism as transgressive. Guilt is another tactic used to keep women in their place, one that Padre Miranda uses on Sor Juana in her final confession, blaming the floods, the plague and the riots in Mexico on Sor Juana’s transgressive behavior.

In her critique of Vieyra, Sor Juana crosses a line between theology and philosophy which incurs the Church’s wrath and the presence of the Archbishop, the Bishop and Miranda in the *locutorio*. However, Sor Juana transgresses further in this scene by questioning the misogyny of the Church. When the archbishop

ironically asks Miranda how he could have trusted “el buen juicio de una mujer,” Sor Juana’s emotional reaction is captured in a series of movements. As she moves in to face the bars, the camera captures her defiant stare behind the iron *grille* as she states: “Si no fuera mujer, nada importaría. Ni siquiera mis atrevimientos teológicos.” His answer, “Dios no ha creado a la mujer para filosofar” prompts Sor Juana to question this norm. Framed in extra close-up, the bars disappear to allow her face to symbolically cross them, as she challenges “¿Dónde está escrito eso? ¿Qué revelación particular habéis tenido, ilustrísima, para que os autorice a excluir a las mujeres del conocimiento?” The camera actually remains still, rendering her framing of the scene even more pronounced to underline the psychological and emotional weight of the exchange. Sor Juana then grabs hold of the Archbishop, turns him around, and holds him by the throat. The aggressive tactile action explodes into a haptic description of women: “Las mujeres somos distintas. Tenemos otro olor, otra forma” and, thrusting her hand in his face, orders “oled, oled.” Forcing him to smell her hand, she continues with “Somos el Diablo para vos verdad.” With this statement, she challenges a history of patriarchal configurations of women; in addition to that of the devil, one recalls that the priests in the archbishop’s inner circle had already cited San Bernardo with “Cuando oigo a una mujer, es como oír silbar a una víbora” and Solomon with “La mujer es más amarga que la muerte.”

Motivated by a desire to change women’s place and to advocate women’s equality with men, Sor Juana attempts another transgression on the last day of her class. Opting not to follow the day’s curriculum, she wants to give her students advice on what they learnt by stating, “Aquí se les ha enseñado a leer y escribir, a

bordar, cocinar, bailar,” to emphasize that they have been schooled in women’s minor arts. She then invites them to break with patriarchy and remember that God did not give women gifts of curiosity and perception in vain and incites them to question “normality.” She makes clear that:

Nada de eso es el coto privado de los hombres. La inteligencia no tiene sexo. Y si alguien lo dice — muchos lo dicen — mienten. Tampoco es el privilegio de los hombres de indagar sobre los secretos del universo.

She challenges them to question and doubt patriarchal norms that gender-box education as a male prerogative. But then a nun interrupts and orders her to resume her music lesson, emphasizing that this is an order from Mother Superior. This intervention recalls Helen Hills’ findings that constant surveillance was crucial to maintaining conventual authority internally and externally. Sor Juana’s attempt at transgression has been silenced, but before complying with Sor Ursula’s order, she defiantly finishes her message against patriarchal dictates by whispering “Recordad, los ojos abiertos, los oídos también para percibirlo todo,” underlining the sensory activities involved in learning.

As André so eloquently makes clear, “it is repression rather than expression that marks a woman’s life, and [...] it is only through transgression that her identity may change and evolve” (“Empowering” 169). In this section, I have shown that Sor Juana questions hegemonic norms through her transgressions in knowledge, intimacy, critical thought and disobedience. Moreover, Sor Juana’s transgressions transported her to sites of self-expression that embraced emotional journeys, as evidenced in her writings, in her poetry to the Vicereine and her attack on Vieyra. Through Sor Juana’s transgressions, Bemberg shows that an educated woman can

overcome the repressive patriarchal limits imposed on women and mark her life by expressions of self. Indeed, Sor Juana's transgressions are examples of how she constantly remakes herself and her worlds.

Historically, the reasons behind Sor Juana's withdrawal from a high profile intellectual life are shrouded in mystery and speculation. In the film, however, Sor Juana is brought under control and silenced by patriarchal forces that conspired against her, reiterating Bemberg's issue with the powerlessness of the individual against hegemonic institutions. Yet as Cresswell explains:

transgressions do not form their own orders. Boundaries are critiqued, not replaced. This observation is symptomatic of a bigger question. Resistance, deconstruction, criticism — all of these reactions — are hostages to wider events and topographies of power. [. . .] Transgression has limits. Constant transgression is permanent chaos. (*In/Out* 175)

Early in the film, the Bishop of Puebla and the Viceroy discuss Sor Juana's talent for avoiding conflicts with the Church hierarchy: "es muy lista. Lee a Lucrecio y Erasmus pero se cuida de no citarlos. Sabe trazar una prudente línea divisoria entre la teología y la filosofía." Indeed, when Sor Juana does cross that line with her critique of Vieyra, her transgressions reach the limit.

5.5 Subverting Distance and Proximity

In the previous sections I have demonstrated how Bemberg interplays light and shadow against architectural spaces to convey the gradual repression of

convent life. I explored how architectural spaces and emotional tensions between self and world are juxtaposed to reshape the internal landscape of the convent. The oppressive architecture of the convent was contrasted with Bemberg's creation of Sor Juana's cell as a vessel for her multiple intellectual and artistic journeys. In considering Sor Juana as a nomadic *voyageuse*, I analyzed the scenes in which her transgressions question "normality" and subvert set conventions.

In this final section, I show that the combination of distance and proximity in framing the scenes with Sor Juana and the Vicereine is designed to construct a space of female complicity and solidarity against the patriarchal order, in which proximity transcends the sense of oppression that dominates the film. More importantly, I claim that Bemberg, an avowed feminist, intentionally frames the two women together in close proximity in the same frame and exchanging a female gaze between them to achieve what Chris Straayer calls a "lesbian look of exchange and female bonding" (Straayer 344).

Chris Straayer posits her theory in "The Hypothetical Lesbian Heroine in Narrative Film" (1990), and while Bemberg may not have read the article, she may have been familiar with the two French films analysed by Straayer, *Voyage en douce* (1980) by Michel Deville which stars Dominique Sanda (who plays the Vicereine in *Yo, la peor de todas*) and *Entre nous* (1983) by female director Diane Kurys. Straayer claims that while the films do not depict lesbianism explicitly, they "provide sites for lesbian intervention" which rather than enforce opposite meanings "allow for multiple readings that overlap" (343). Whether or not Bemberg intended a lesbian portrayal, this framing employs a revolutionary filming strategy designed to subvert the traditional, male-*voyeur* gaze in order to

give pleasure to both lesbian and heterosexual women.¹¹⁵ This is not to say that Bemberg does not use the traditional male gaze, but rather that she combines traditional and novel approaches that allow for multiple interpretations.

In creating an environment of patriarchal oppression, Bemberg not only employs landscape and architecture, but in many scenes also brings into play the traditional male gaze. As Chris Straayer explains, the sexual gaze as elaborated in much feminist film theory is a male prerogative, a unidirectional gaze from male to female, pursuing a downward slant in relation to power (344). A very evident use of this gaze in the film is the high angle shot from a subjugated Sor Juana's point of view looking up at Miranda, as he looks down at her from a dominant position of power and control.

In contrast, the lesbian look, as Straayer describes, requires the exchange of a returning gaze. It refutes the "unidirectional" male to female look that privileges the male spectator, in favor of a two-dimensional one of exchange and female bonding (344). Bemberg's film has scenes in which other women appear in the same frame and exchange a female gaze with Sor Juana; for example, during the meetings between Sor Juana and Sor Leonor, as well as between Sor Ursula and Sor Juana on the landing after she has been denied access to her library, and between Sor Juana and the nun who interrupts her last class with Sor Ursula's orders. These exchanges, however, are not the same as those between Sor Juana

¹¹⁵ Of course, women had shared the same frame previously in Argentine film. Among many other examples, Bemberg was no doubt familiar with Enrique Arancibia's version of *Casa de muñecas* (1943) in which Nora and Christina are framed together in conversation. Moreover, women share the same frame in *Camila* and *Miss Mary*. However, I argue that Bemberg's framing of Sor Juana and the Vicereine, in contrast, is designed to capture feminine desire.

and the Vicereine, but rather are exchanges of power between women designed to instigate a reaction of defiance in Sor Juana.

Scholars have discussed whether the passionate relationship between the Vicereine and Sor Juana is lesbian or one of deep platonic love. André for example, explains that “any feminine identity beyond the limitations prescribed by patriarchal structures, feminine-feminist discourse has found ambiguity and multiplicity as two essential tools to explore and exploit transgression” (“Empowering” 170). Bemberg herself admits that the relationship between Sor Juana and the Vicereine is designed to be ambiguous in the film. André also claims that Bemberg’s use of sexuality marked by deviation and aberration to explore gender issues makes room “for new female imagery, while creating an eccentric space in which feminine desire might be allowed to manifest in a plurality of forms and remain free of ideological restrictions” (170). Chris Straayer for her part explains that:

feminist film theory based on sexual difference has much to gain from considering lesbian desire and sexuality. Women’s desire for women deconstructs male/female sexual dichotomies, sex/gender conflation and the universality of the oedipal narrative. (Straayer 343)

Furthermore, Straayer posits that the acknowledgement of the female-initiated sexualized activity has the potential to reopen a space in which heterosexual women as well as lesbians can exercise self-determined pleasure (343).

In critiquing one of the films in her article, Straayer posits that two women sharing the same film frame encourages a lesbian reading; that is, the women are consistently framed as a couple. In the absence of a shot/reverse-shot, reciprocal

point-of-view pattern the viewer is excluded from experiencing the looking. Thus the viewer's identification with the women's looking is necessarily more sympathetic than empathetic (349). As the film progresses Bemberg adopts this new female strategy by framing Sor Juana and the Vicereine together in the same frame. This framing differs if the two women are in a public or private space.

In their meeting in the *locutorio*, the camera begins with an establishing or distance shot of Sor Juana and the Vicereine together in the same frame, which serves to enforce the separation of the nun from the public in a cage-like structure. The camera then subverts the distance with proximity in a series of close-up shot/reverse-shots. The crosscutting in their first meeting following Sor Juana's play continues in this scene and constructs audience expectations and desire for the women to develop a friendship. In *Femme Fatales*, Doane explains that the shot/reverse-shot normally isolates two characters, each being defined at the exclusion of the other (110). *Yo, la peor de todas* is replete with these types of shot/reverse-shots; for example, the shot/counter-shot when Sor Juana states "no todas somos iguales" isolates their differences and creates distance. Moreover, in addition to the Feminist Movement's recognition in the late 1980s that social, racial and cultural diversities among women exist, I suggest that Bemberg includes a lesbian difference, in that not all women are heterosexual.

The series of shot/reverse-shots between Sor Juana and the Vicereine also serve to mirror each other and complement the Vicereine's observation that they lead similar lives, following Doane's interpretation of the filming strategy that operates by putting into place a type of mirror structure by means of which one reflects the other (Doane 110). A close-up shot frames Sor Juana inside one of the

grille's rectangles from the Vicereine's point of view, while in the reverse-shot, the camera moves in closer to the Vicereine, from a mid-torso shot to a close-up of her face as she outlines the similarities between them to establish female bonding:

Vivimos vidas semejantes Sor Juana . . . Vos tenéis el velo, yo la corona. No os dejan salir del convento. ¿Crees que puedo escapar del palacio? Observáis la regla, yo el protocolo. A los veinte años entrasteis al convento, a mí a esa edad, me casaron. Me pregunto, ¿para cuál de las dos es más pequeño su mundo?

Palace and convent are female spaces within patriarchal order and both women are in their way oppressed and enclosed, lacking direct access to power. Sor Juana's freedoms are granted by Sor Leonor, while the Vicereine's political power comes through her husband's position. After creating the bond, the Vicereine suggests "Me gustaría que nos hiciéramos amigas," extending the bond to friendship. The possibility of female friendship between the Vicereine and Sor Juana proposes a "breathing space" from patriarchy, as a form of resistance that transcends the relationships between women defined by male/female, paternal/maternal, heterosexual/homosexual binaries. In defining the erotic, Audre Lorde attributes it with:

a power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference. (Lorde)

Sor Juana and the Vicereine's power comes from taking their friendship and female bonding to a deeper level as together they share interests, readings and emotions which subvert the patriarchal system that seeks to suppress their intellectual development (André, "Empowering" 164).

As Chris Straayer explains, female bonding and the independent exchange of glances between women in film threaten heterosexual and patriarchal structures (347). The ultimate threat of eye contact between women, inherent in all scenes of female bonding, is the elimination of the male (347). Any erotic exchange of glances between women requires counter efforts to disempower and de-eroticize them. The lesbian potential, an "unfortunate" by-product of the female bonding configuration, must be checked (Straayer 350). One way to interfere with female bonding is to insert references to men and heterosexuality between female characters. Male interference needs to be visual in order to physically separate women's bodies and interrupt their glances (Straayer 351). Bemberg understands this requirement: in the public scenes in which the Vicereine and Sor Juana are framed together, Bemberg is careful to interrupt the intimacy with the presence of a male. In the initial public meeting following Sor Juana's play, for example, the escalating emotional exchange in shot/reverse shot between the Vicereine and Sor Juana is neutralized by the Viceroy's voyeuristic and fetish appraisal of the nun with "bella, apasionada, irónica."

Another example is evidenced in the scene in which the Vicereine interrupts a gathering of visitors in the *locutorio* to present Sor Juana with the headdress of quetzal feathers. A rustle of movement in the hallway causes Sor Juana to get up quickly, excitement on her face; framed inside one of the bars of the *locutorio*, she

looks towards the hallway, where the Vicereine is approaching. In presenting Sor Juana with the headdress, the Vicereine and Juana move toward the *locutorio* bars, and into the same camera frame. In a side-by-side close-up shot, the Vicereine looks erotically at Sor Juana's reaction of pleasure as the latter looks at the headdress off-screen. As a gift of recognition, it signals a further bonding. Captured in the same frame, Sor Juana looks lovingly at the Vicereine who returns the look and smiles erotically at her. Sor Juana dons the headdress and moves off to the back of the *locutorio* in a mock surrender of Moctezuma to the conquistador. Thundering male laughter off-screen neutralizes the erotic exchange of the look. Sigüenza's mention of the quetzal as the sacred bird of Mexico maps it into the landscape of New Spain. In donning the headdress Sor Juana embodies the rare bird, and is similarly inscribed in its cultural geography.

Straayer acknowledges the feminist film theorists' considerable work on the issue of the female viewer, especially Mulvey and Doane. For Mulvey, the patriarchal unconscious has structured classical cinema with visual and narrative pleasure around the gratification of the heterosexual male viewer's narcissistic ego. Through a surrogate male character that relays the viewer's look at the woman character and provides him voyeuristic pleasure, the woman is reduced to an image. However, as Straayer explains, Mulvey's article does not account for other sexual forces and experiences within society, stressing that in lieu of cinema's dominant ideology, psychological diversity must be examined in order to deconstruct the alignment of male with activity and female with passivity (345). For Doane, the female viewer is unable to achieve distance from the film's textual body that allows the male a process of voyeurism because there is an over-presence

of image. Given the closeness of the image, women over-identify with cinema's female victims, experiencing a pleasurable reconnection that is necessarily masochistic. Doane's proposed strategy for women to overcome proximity and mimic a distance "from the(ir) image is the masquerade of femininity, the potential to manufacture a distance and generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible and readable to woman" (Doane, *Femmes Fatales* 22). As Straayer concludes, Mulvey and Doane have theorized on a kind of oscillation whereby the gaze remains "male" but is assumed by the female spectator as a disguise, whether in the form of transvestism or masquerade (346).

Bemberg subverts the issues of distance and proximity introduced by these feminist theories and presents a new female imagery by framing Sor Juana and the Vicereine together. As I have shown in the previous examples, Bemberg keeps the idea of lesbianism ambiguous in the scenes in which Sor Juana and the Vicereine are framed together in public by disempowering and de-eroticizing their look with the interjection of a male character gaze. Yet, although lesbianism is never made explicit in the film, an erotic subtext is present that allows the female spectator to experience pleasure in the physical closeness of Sor Juana and the Vicereine. This is even more evident when this framing occurs in the privacy of Sor Juana's room.

The first scene in which this framing occurs is accompanied by an act of transgression, the Vicereine's breach of protocol by entering the nun's private dormitory. To Sor Juana's surprised "Señora" off-screen, the Vicereine moves right toward Sor Juana's desk at which point Sor Juana enters the frame and they exchange unmediated glances as they are framed in mid-close up. The two-person shot of the couple gains an erotic energy from the women's physical proximity and

subtle body contact, and the shy exchange of the gaze that excludes any male view. The intimacy is further enforced by the informal “tú” and reference to “Juana” when she pleads “Te lo ruego Juana, no desafíes a la Iglesia”; by eliminating “Sor” Bemberg does away with relations of power and patriarchal defined roles and presents them as women first.

As the scene continues, Bemberg not only subverts the relations of power associated with the dominant male gaze but inverts it to obliterate the viewer by framing Sor Juana and the Vicereine in profile as they exchange a gaze. Overwhelmed by the emotional recollection of an execution in Madrid, the Vicereine appears ready to faint. After ordering “Ábrame el corpiño” Sor Juana moves towards the Vicereine from off-screen and again the women are framed together; a close-up profile of the Vicereine at first looks up at Sor Juana as she approaches to unfasten the bodice. Then they look into each other’s eyes at mid-level, and as Sor Juana unfastens the laces, the tactile movement of her hands accompanies her descent to a kneeling position, and still in close-up profile, now has reversed her position and is looking up at the Vicereine while the latter is gazing down at her in an erotic exchange.

A deepening of female bonding is evidenced in the scene in which the new Mother Superior, Sor Ursula, asks Sor Juana if she would like to contribute one of her prized objects in solidarity with her sisters. Sor Ursula’s first reform is to collect the nuns’ possessions for the poor. Sor Juana, oblivious to the changes around her, is writing at her desk, the open window at her back, when Sor Ursula crosses the threshold into Juana’s room with the proposal that introduces a change in convent life. Hidden in Sor Juana’s room, the Vicereine crosses a threshold from

behind a curtain and stands beside her in another same-framed shot of the two women, united in female solidarity. Bemberg plays Sor Ursula's proposed shallow and false solidarity against the demonstrated strong female solidarity of women in complicity against patriarchal authority, as the Vicereine challenges Sor Ursula with "¿Nos dejáis solas Madre Abadesa?" After she leaves, Sor Juana and the Vicereine, framed together, exchange a look and burst out laughing in a further female bonding. Then, in a close-up shot, the Vicereine looks erotically at Sor Juana and says "Tengo algo para ti" as she gives Sor Juana her miniature portrait. In a close-up, shot/reverse-shot, the Vicereine again looks at Sor Juana admiring the gift as the latter takes it and tactilely encloses it in her hands.

As Straayer makes clear, female bonding is built on an involvement in specific personal environments. Furthermore, the relationship acquires a physical quality from the presence of personal items that, when exchanged, suggest intimacy; for example, women frequently wear each other's clothes or use each other's body lotion (351). Sor Juana and the Vicereine also exchange personal items; while the Vicereine gives her the miniature portrait, Sor Juana gives the Vicereine her poems to publish in Spain. In this way, each carries a part of the other with them, accessible at all times. They also continue exchanging the intimacy of letters for years as we learn during Sigüenza's visit to the Vicereine in Spain. Such examples of bonding activities between women suggest an alternate use for the feminine masquerade. Straayer explains that the mutual appreciation of one another's feminine appearance, which achieves intimacy via the attention to personal effects, "demonstrates the masquerade's potential to draw women closer together and to function as nonverbal homoerotic expression that connects image to

body” (351). Straayer points out that although this “deviant” employment of the feminine masquerade is counter to Doane’s elaboration of it as a distancing device for women (351), it is not meant to replace or compromise the heterosexual film text and events analyzed in previous film theory, but rather offer additions and alternative accounts for homosexual viewership and desire (354).

As Monique Wittig puts it, homosexuality is more than a desire for one’s own sex, “it is also the desire for something else that is not connoted. This desire is resistance to the norm” (Wittig 122). Sor Juana and the Vicereine’s perceived transgressions into the realm of the taboo could be perceived as another questioning of patriarchal norms and gender-boxing. In the film, transgression moves into the emotive terrain of the erotic in the scene in which the Vicereine gives Sor Juana a kiss on the lips. Bruno describes movement through this terrain as a form of “transport” and extends its meaning to include the carrying away of emotion, as in transports of joy that encompasses the attraction of human beings, a movement that thus incorporates emotion into the concept of journey (Bruno 7). The climactic scene that leads to the kiss begins with an establishing distant shot of the Vicereine and Sor Juana framed below the open arch of the window in the latter’s room. It follows the scene in which the archbishop has sealed Sor Juana’s library and here Sor Juana confesses to the Vicereine “Sin mis libros no existo señora.” Then the camera closes in on the Vicereine as she looks admiringly at Sor Juana and declares that she has never met a woman like her, more poet than nun, and more nun than woman. She admits, “Hace años que me lo pregunto. ¿Cómo es Juana con ella misma?” As the camera switches to a surprised Sor Juana, the Vicereine continues off screen “¿Cuando está sola? ¿Cuando nadie la mira?” The

sound of a bell tolls in the background. Uncomfortable, Sor Juana gets up and moves to her desk. Again the Vicereine enters the frame to stand behind her. Now framed as a couple, she orders "Quítate el velo"; as Sor Juana turns slightly left with a questioning look, the Vicereine states: "Es una orden."

Sor Juana's transgression is to obey the Vicereine's order and remove her veil. Sor Juana hesitates and appears to question herself before she starts to undo her veil while the Vicereine watches. Still with her back to the Vicereine, denying her the gaze, Sor Juana takes off her black veil up to the white wimple and appears submissive as she turns slightly towards the Vicereine. Sor Juana's discomfort continues as she is ordered to remove her wimple and coif. As Miller observes, taking off her veil has been the greatest exposure for Sor Juana and the intimacy lies in the power of the Vicereine (152). While I agree that this has been the moment of greatest exposure for Sor Juana, I would add that her evident discomfort may be related to self-doubt of her physical appearance since it has been years since anyone has seen her head denuded. In the unveiling of Sor Juana, the nun's disguise falls away and she is transformed from nun to woman. The Vicereine then holds her hands to Sor Juana's head and turns her around to face her. The Vicereine's erotic gaze is complemented by the tactile as she caresses Sor Juana's head and face twice while stating assertively: "Esta Juana es mía, solamente mía." The Vicereine then looks into Sor Juana's eyes and kisses her on the lips in an erotic gesture. Miller posits that eroticism is uncomfortable when enabled in the context of unequal power relations; through the staging the Vicereine's point-of-view shots and her domination in the frame, the audience watching from the perspective of the Vicereine are empowered voyeurs (152). Yet I argue that there

are no point-of-view shots from the Vicereine in this scene, but rather the viewer is excluded from the exchange of the gaze between the two women and only observes the embrace from the invited vantage point of the camera.

Upon meeting the Vicereine, Sor Juana confessed that her life of solitude was “un camino áspero sin dulzuras”; by transporting Juana into the realm of the taboo, the Vicereine’s caresses offer a tactile moment of loving tenderness. As the Vicereine leaves, Sor Juana gazes after her with passionate eyes; there is nothing uncomfortable in Sor Juana’s look now. Although she does not appear to have returned the kiss, Juana’s repressed emotions surface in her facial expression, betraying a sensual reawakening. There is no power relationship here but rather an awakening of desire as a woman in an embodiment of ambivalence. In an example of a landscape in tension between self and world, Sor Juana’s internal landscape is reshaped by the event, as evidenced in her retrieval of the Vicereine’s miniature portrait. After recovering the portrait from its hiding place, Sor Juana in a close-up profile shot admires it lovingly for a long moment, smiles as she caresses it, clasps it again between her hands, and then looks at it again before burying the locket inside her undershirt. A secret hidden in another “in-between” space, the miniature stays in constant “touch” with her body under her habit. The proximity of the miniature to her body symbolically distances her from the norms of convent life and keeps the Vicereine close. Through the years that follow, the miniature, together with the letters that they exchange, keep the women close even in absence and dissolve the geographical distance between them. However, at the end, when Sor Juana is forced to remove the locket and give up her memories, she no longer

writes to the Vicereine as the latter mentions to Sigüenza that she had not heard from Sor Juana in some time.

Straayer states that the focus on two women together threatens to establish asexuality and homosexuality, both of which are outside the heterosexual desire that drives mainstream film and narrative. As I have demonstrated, Bemberg creates simultaneous actions in the film to eroticise women's interactions and to abort the resulting homoeroticism. As Straayer explains, it is these very contradictions and opposing intentions that cause the gaps and ambiguous figurations that allow lesbian readings. The erotic exchange of glances contrasts with the unidirectional, hierarchical male gaze articulated by Mulvey. Eroticized female bonding which utilizes the feminine masquerade to achieve closeness rather than distance, contrasts with the use and purpose of the masquerade described by Doane. However, these structures neither replace nor compromise the heterosexual film text and events recognized and analyzed in previous film theory but rather offer additions and alternative accounts for homosexual viewership and desire (Straayer 354).

I maintain further that Bemberg's goal was to reach out to all women viewers, and while she is careful to use traditional techniques with the unidirectional, hierarchical male gaze, she does so to emphasize patriarchal repression. While she de-eroticises same-sex framing that threatens, she introduces lesbian exchanges of the look, so that viewers of all sexual orientations can experience viewing pleasure, and more importantly refutes the all-encompassing "natural" power of the male/female opposition as defining principle. As Straayer concludes, lesbianism demands a new operation of subjectivity in which active

desires, pleasures and other specific declarations of identity construct a field of multiple entry points (356).

The last scene in which Sor Juana and the Vicereine are framed together is when Sor Juana is packing her manuscripts in the trunk destined for Spain. To the right, the library is in deep focus as the figure of the Vicereine paces back and forth in the recess, appearing distraught as she holds a handkerchief to her lips. Wringing her hands she then hides it inside her bodice as Sor Juana clutches a cross. As the novitiates lift away the trunk, Sor Juana stands still against the wall while the Vicereine remains in the recess of the library. While her emotions are externalized in her gestures, Sor Juana's are projected in the voiceover of her poem. In contrast to the previous scenes in which they share the frame, here there is no movement toward proximity; the emotion of the moment is too much to bear. While the long shot frames them together, the distance between them in the frame symbolizes the geographical distance that will separate them.

Concluding this chapter, I have shown that Bemberg correlates architectural spaces with patriarchal regression as the daily practices of convent life and eventually Sor Juana's own are reshaped in a gradual transition from limited freedoms to oppressive reforms. Characters, architectural spaces and internal landscapes become linked with themes of repression. Additionally, architectural spaces are used to reflect tensions between self and world.

The tension between self and world is also captured in Bemberg's portrayal of women's place in the Catholic Church. In *Camila*, Bemberg implicated the responsibility of the Catholic Church for the repression of women by framing them seated or kneeling in church or around the confessional, and excluding them from

any active role. In *Miss Mary*, Bemberg presents religion as a patriarchal tool to control women and keep them out of trouble. In *Yo, la peor de todas*, the Church's misogyny becomes a historical phenomenon that transcends time and space to Sor Juana's colonial Mexico. Misogyny is evidenced in its efforts to exclude Sor Juana's subjectivity through betrayal, entrapment and manipulation of other women. For this reason, *Yo, la peor de todas* can be read as a metaphor for patriarchal society's marginalization of the Argentine feminist movement. If Sor Juana represents the feminist's desire for equality and intellectual emancipation, the convent is a microcosm of society, in which a faction of nuns represent the majority of women who subscribe and enforce patriarchal rule. Bemberg equates Church and State as partners in oppression, especially in the repression of women. Sor Juana's last confession to Father Miranda reminds viewers that forced confessions and subsequent injustices committed against individuals by these institutions are a historical and ongoing global phenomenon, recalling the most recent performed by the Argentine military during *El Proceso*.

The spaces of tension between self and world dissipate in Bemberg's perception of Sor Juana's room. By framing Sor Juana's room as a voyage, movement correlates to a voyage of the self. Sor Juana embodies a nomadic *voyageuse* who subverts conventions and crosses boundaries without permission to delve into the intellectual, creative and emotional dimensions of her self. Haptic, architectural elements are again used as passages, specifically to signal changes or transitions in Sor Juana's subjectivity. Captured as movements, dislocations and performances in the film, Sor Juana's transgressive crossings are usually framed through a doorway, a hallway or a threshold. Bemberg's most important

contribution to a female cinematographic perspective is the framing of Sor Juana and the Vicereine together exchanging a female gaze, creating a space of female solidarity against the patriarchal order.

Bemberg subverts the traditional image of women in film by creating a model of an intellectual, thinking woman who dares to venture into traditionally male academic, literary and scientific domains. By basing her character on the accomplishments of the sixteenth-century Sor Juana, Bemberg underscores that women must recognize and question the patriarchal institutions that oppress them, listen to their own internal voices and explore their potential outside the traditional gendered roles.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have demonstrated that Bemberg's cinematographic gaze in *Camila*, *Miss Mary* and *Yo, la peor de todas* carefully frames her protagonists' spatial movements to correlate with their desire for independence. Each in their own way, Bemberg's subversive protagonists expose the political, social and cultural problems of patriarchy that have historically repressed women and continue to do so in the 1970s and 1980s. As can be gleaned from Bemberg's interviews, women in film (and in the real world) were deficient in three areas: they were represented as complacent and passive, financially dependent on their husbands, and intellectually and creatively stifled by a patriarchal society that opposed their academic development. Bemberg laments her own experience of being raised in a socially repressed upper class, denied a formal education and not having had the courage to challenge the status quo earlier in her life. With each protagonist, Bemberg's female perspective breaks with the stereotypical male images of "sweet, corrupt and complacent" women in film to create three models of a "new" woman, grounded in her feminist ideals. *Camila* promotes the courage, daring and rebelliousness required to attain personal freedom, *Miss Mary* endorses financial independence and self sufficiency, while *Sor Juana* advocates women's creativity and intellectual potential.

Bemberg's lack of formal training in filmmaking may have served to her advantage. According to Mulvey, a filmmaker cannot simply detach from the history of cinematic language that defines the meaning of shots within it (qtd. in G

M. Smith 41). A conventional shot that travels up from a character's ankles to the head, for example, is meant to soften and feminize a character as a passive object of desire; this is what this type of shot *means* in cinematic language regardless of whether it is applied to a female or male character,¹¹⁶ or whether the director is male or female. Male and female filmmakers both have to use the inherited cinematic language and one cannot reinvent the long-term pattern of the language without years of effort (G.M. Smith 41-42). As a filmmaker Bemberg did rely on traditional elements of melodrama¹¹⁷ and used conventional techniques and spatial attachment¹¹⁸ to create stronger alignments with her major protagonists. With each historical biography, however, Bemberg's female perspective evolved, juxtaposing conventional cinematic techniques with novel feminist approaches that allow for multiple interpretations, as I have shown by applying elements of Bruno's feminist film theory to Bemberg's spatial framing of women in these films.

Although Bemberg lacked formal training in filmmaking, she did perceive at an early stage as a scriptwriter for De la Torre's *Crónica de una señora* that her character Fina's emotional anguish required a different framing from the one used by the male director. This astute observation, combined with her motivation to change the lamentable image of women in film, focused Bemberg's attention on framing from a female perspective.

¹¹⁶ Bemberg's framing of Ladislao's naked body on the bed is an example of feminizing and objectivizing the male body.

¹¹⁷ I mentioned some of these with reference to *Camila*.

¹¹⁸ Defined in Chapter One, spatial attachment refers to the strategies used to create a stronger alignment/*approchement* between major protagonists and the audience: for example, framing them in more close-ups, following the major characters more than the others, to emphasize their importance (G. M. Smith 44).

While Bemberg avowed to use film to communicate her feminist ideals, she was careful to not use film as feminist propaganda. From its beginnings in the 1900s to its renaissance in the 1970s, the Argentine feminist movement was perceived as marginal and radical. One need only recall that in 1905 Elvira Rawson had to rename her *Centro Feminista* because the radical image associated with the word *feminista* kept people away (Carlson 103). Bemberg's first short feature film, *El mundo de la mujer*, appealed to feminists; *Momentos* and *Señora de nadie*'s issues of upper class women's discontent would have had limited interest. For Bemberg's feminist message to have a consciousness-raising effect, her films had to have a mass appeal that would reach a wider audience of Argentine women — the historical biographies would provide the necessary backdrop from which her novel images of women could project her ideals.

In order to project Camila as a passionate, rebellious and independent woman, Bemberg accomplishes a different framing to distinguish her protagonist from the other women in the film. Critical of Argentine patriarchal society's strategy to keep women in their allotted place, Bemberg evokes women's social repression by framing their restrained movements within cropped urban and architectural spaces. These clipped framings also correlate the political climate of oppression and the limited circulation of the Buenos Aires' citizenry during Rosas' regime to a more recent oppression — the curfews, fear and violence against citizens — recently experienced under the *Proceso* military regime.

In contrast, Camila transgresses from women's allotted places into forbidden ones to challenge the moral, social and cultural conventions of her time. Bemberg fashions Camila as a nomadic subject not afraid to travel through the daunting

patriarchal environment in order to discover her female subjectivity. Camila's questioning of norms and limits correlates with the questioning of conventions and subsequent rebellions against authority figures of Family, Church and State initiated by the 1970s movement for individual, and especially women's, rights and freedoms. Bemberg recognizes that women are not emancipated and the film serves to raise consciousness of women's passive acceptance of their subjected role. Her film *Camila* becomes itself a site of *transito*, a passage through which the female spectator, moved by Camila's courage and subjectivity, ponders her own female condition and the road to its emancipation.

In *Miss Mary*, Bemberg demonstrates that the root causes of women's repression in her generation stem from patriarchal institutions prevalent not only in Argentina but in all societies. Her concern extends beyond the sexual repression of women in the Argentine aristocratic family of the 1930s and 1940s to include their emotional, intellectual and creative repression by being denied a formal education. Bemberg criticizes women for accepting and transmitting repressive patriarchal values from one generation to the next.

Bemberg juxtaposes movement, iteration and stasis in the film: women framed in stasis and repetition correlates to their repression, while women framed in movement reflects rebellion or change. Mecha's passivity symbolizes Bemberg's concern that Argentine women are submissive recipients of patriarchal repression, while Miss Mary discreetly begins to challenge the rules and to subtly rebel against them. Miss Mary is not the rebellious, courageous and free-spirited Camila, but she nevertheless represents a viable alternative model of a new woman. Rather than a composite of all her governesses, Bemberg's Miss Mary is unique

and embodies a paradigm shift, encompassing the characteristics of another feminist model for women, a skilled, educated and resourceful woman with the courage to travel abroad, earn a living, and secure, through her personal and financial independence, a space of her own. *Miss Mary* challenges women to embrace the changing times of the 1980s by breaking the mould of passive complacency and achieving personal freedom and self-sufficiency through education, skills and employment.

In *Yo, la peor de todas*, Bemberg's correlates architectural spaces with patriarchal repression as the daily practices of convent life and eventually Sor Juana's own gradually degenerate from limited freedoms to oppressive reforms. Characters, architectural spaces and internal landscapes become linked with themes of repression and the ensuing tensions between self and world. Bemberg's *Yo, la peor de todas* can be read as a metaphor for patriarchal society's marginalization of the Argentine feminist movement; the convent represents a microcosm of society in which the majority of nuns represent the women who subscribe and enforce patriarchal rule, while Sor Juana represents the feminist's desire for equality and intellectual emancipation. Bemberg suggests that both in solitude and in solidarity, women can overcome the limits imposed by gender constraints, but that ultimately women, as individuals, are powerless if they stand alone. For Bemberg, Church and State are equal partners in oppression, especially that of women. Sor Juana's final capitulation reminds viewers that forced confessions and subsequent injustices committed against individuals by these institutions are a historical and ongoing global phenomenon, while recalling those recently performed by the *Proceso* regime.

Tensions between self and world dissipate in Bemberg's framing of Sor Juana's room as a voyage, correlating camera movement with a voyage of the self. As a nomadic *voyageuse*, Sor Juana subverts conventions and crosses boundaries without permission to delve into her intellectual, creative and emotional dimensions. Architectural elements are again used as passages, specifically to signal changes or transitions to Sor Juana's subjectivity. Bemberg creates a new model of a woman as an intellectual equal to man in academic, literary and scientific subjects and encourages women to explore their potential outside traditional gendered roles.

Bemberg's most important contribution to a female cinematographic perspective in this film is the creation of a space of female solidarity against the patriarchal order. The framing of Sor Juana and the Vicereine together exchanging a female gaze represents a novel approach that subverts the traditional male gaze and gives pleasure to both the lesbian and heterosexual female spectator. Bemberg's female and feminist perspective in the spatial framing of women in these historical biographies reaches out to all women viewers, offering a passage to multiple sites of subjectivity and assertions of identity.

A unique female perspective grounded in her feminist ideals distinguished Bemberg not only from her predecessors but also from her contemporaries: Pino Solanas, Luis Puenzo and Eliseo Subiela among others. In Argentine film history, Bemberg is the first feminist film director. She is also the only female director to produce films before the *Proceso* dictatorship (*El mundo de la mujer*), during (*Juguetes*, *Momentos*, *Señora de nadie*) and after the dictatorship (*Camila*, *Miss Mary*, *Yo la peor de todas*, *De eso no se habla*) (Acosta). She was at the forefront

of women's issues and social injustices regarding female identity and gender difference stemming from the feminist movement of the 1970s (Acosta). Her films advocate feminism, but as I have mentioned, the scenes of violence, censorship, and repression in Bemberg's historical biographies also serve to denounce the recent political injustices and to underscore the individual's vulnerability during Argentina's *Proceso* regime.

After Argentina's return to democracy in 1983, nineteen films were produced in the year leading up to President Raúl Alfonsín election (King, *Magical Reels* 91). As King explains, "[the] late 1980s did not coincide with the 1960s rhetoric of Latin American cinema as a 'third cinema' or 'an imperfect cinema' [promoted by Solanas and Gettino]" (King, *Magical Reels* 95-96). After years of persecution, censorship, blacklists and exiles, Argentine filmmakers enthusiastically explored their new freedom and sought to capture the marketplace. Many of the films produced openly or implicitly contemplated the traumas of recent history. The reputations of Bemberg, Solanas and Puenzo, the most visible directors of the period, assured a continuity of their work, despite marked differences in their approach (95-96). Bemberg, Solanas, Puenzo and Subiela identified themselves with, and found a purpose in, the return to democracy (Aguilar 22). Although their stories are constructed in different ways, the films expressed a need for transparency, "to make things clear," by questioning the violence in Argentine identity (Aguilar 18). While Bemberg's historical biographies offer revisionist readings of the repressive past from a feminist position, Solanas' *Sur* (1988) and Subiela's *Hombre mirando al sudeste* (1986) use

personal projections, and Puenzo's *La historia oficial* (1985) employs pedagogy to present the morally correct position to denounce the recent past (18).

In her short impressive career, Bemberg kept her commitment to her gender and broke with the stereotypical images of women in Argentine cinema to leave a legacy of female protagonists that embody a new model of "woman." She has also left a foundation on which future (female) directors can build, starting from the importance of the film script: "Es como la *planta arquitectónica* de una casa: ¿de qué sirve poner mármoles de Carrara si la planta es mala? Lo importante, y eso sólo puede hacerlo el director, es tener toda la película en la cabeza. Como un mapa" (Pauls, "Rojo" 6).

Bemberg's female perspective in the spatial framing of women is achieved through her creative strategies. In *Camila*, the framing length of the female protagonist's movements noticeably extends to correlate with the increasing magnitude of her transgressions, as evidenced in the distance covered by Camila from her grandmother's funeral service and across the courtyard to Ladislao's room and in the ultimate transgression against Family, Church and State: the lovers' escape. In *Miss Mary*, Bemberg associates the framing of women on the estancia in stasis and iteration to their repression, while women captured in movement correlate to their attempts at rebellion or change. Women on the *estancia* are framed seated, engaged in some repetitive activity, and their circulation is limited to the home and its surrounding territory. In the instances in which Miss Mary and Mecha are framed in action, the former's movements are usually linked to almost imperceptible transgressions that show a subtle evolution of self-awakening, while the latter's reflect her attempts at rebellion or reaffirmation of self. Perhaps

Bemberg's alternative representation of feminine desire in *Yo, la peor de todas* is her most important contribution to a female director's perspective. In the scenes in which Sor Juana and the Vicereine are framed together, Bemberg interplays distance and proximity to construct a space of female solidarity against the patriarchal order, in which proximity transcends the sense of oppression which dominates the film. Whether or not Bemberg intended a "lesbian look of exchange and female bonding" (Straayer 344) by framing the two women together exchanging a female gaze, it represents a novel approach that subverts the traditional male gaze in order to give pleasure to both the lesbian and heterosexual female spectator. This framing inaugurates a female filmic perspective that reaches out to all women viewers, as passages to multiple sites of subjectivity and assertions of identity. Bemberg has come a long way since recognizing in *Crónica de una señora* that Fina's emotional anguish required a special framing.

Filmography

Camila: Guión. Libro cinematográfico de María Luisa Bemberg, Beda Docampo Feijoó, Juan Bautista Stagnaro en base a una investigación de Leonor Calvera. Argentina: febrero 1983. Print.

Camila. Screenplay by María Luisa Bemberg. Dir. María Luisa Bemberg. GEA Cinematográfica and Impala Producciones, 1984. Film.

De eso no se habla. Screenplay: María Luisa Bemberg, Jorge Goldenberg. Basado en un relato homónimo de Julio Llinás. Dir. María Luisa Bemberg. 1993. Film.

El mundo de la mujer. Screenplay by María Luisa Bemberg. Dir. María Luisa Bemberg. 1972. Film.

Juguetes. Screenplay by María Luisa Bemberg. Dir. María Luisa Bemberg. 1978. Film.

Miss Maggie.¹¹⁹ Libro cinematográfico de Jorge Goldenberg y María Luisa Bemberg. *María Luisa Bemberg Filmmaker*. 1986. Web. 21 Sep.2011. <<http://www.marialuisabemberg.com/descargas/guiones/miss-mary.pdf>>.

Miss Mary. Screenplay by María Luisa Bemberg. Dir. María Luisa Bemberg. GEA Cinematográfica and Impala Producciones, 1987. Film.

Momentos. Screenplay by María Luisa Bemberg with the collaboration of Marcelo Pichon Rivière. Dir. María Luisa Bemberg. 1981. Film.

Señora de nadie. Screenplay by María Luisa Bemberg. Dir. María Luisa Bemberg. 1982. Film.

Yo la peor de todas. Libro cinematográfico de Jorge Goldenberg y María Luisa Bemberg. *María Luisa Bemberg Filmmaker*. 1986. Web. 21 Sep. 2011. <<http://www.marialuisabemberg.com/descargas/guiones/miss-mary.pdf>>.

Yo la peor de todas. Screenplay by María Luisa Bemberg. Dir. María Luisa Bemberg. GEA Cinematográfica and Impala Producciones, 1990. Film.

¹¹⁹ *Miss Mary* was originally planned as *Miss Maggie*, hence the difference between the screenplay's title and the film.

Secondary filmography

Así es la vida. Screenplay Francisco Oyarzábal, Francisco Mugica, Luis Marquina.
Director Francisco Mugica. Lumilton, 1939. Film.

Besos brujos. Screenplay José A. Ferreyra based on a short story by E. García Velloso. Director José A. Ferreyra. Sociedad Impresora de Discos Eletrofónicos (SIDE), 1937. Film.

Casa de muñecas. Screenplay Alejandro Casona, based on Henrik Ibsen's play.
Director Ernesto Arancibia. Estudio San Miguel, 1943. Film.

Cosas de mujer. Ariel Cortazzo and Carlos Schlieper based on Louis Verneuil's
"El abogado Bolbec y su marido." Director Carlos Schlieper. 1951. Film.

El grito sagrado. Screenplay Pedro Miguel Obligado, Luis César Amadori.
Director Luis César Amadori. Artistas Argentinos Asociados, 1954. Film.

Hombre mirando al sudeste. Screenplay Eliseo Subiela. Director Eliseo Subiela.
Cinequanon, 1986. Film.

Joven, viuda y estanciera. Screenplay L. Bayón Herrera. Director Luis Bayón
Herrera. Estudio San Miguel, 1941. Film.

La historia oficial. Screenplay Aída Bortnik, Luis Puenzo. Director Luis Puenzo.
Historias Cinematograficas Cinemania, 1985. Film.

La picara soñadora. Screenplay Abel Santacruz. Director: Ernesto Arancibia.
Artistas Argentinos Asociados, 1956. Film.

Las tres ratas. Screenplay Samuel Eichelbaum, Jorge Jantus y Ariel Cortazzo.
Director Carlos Schlieper. 1946. Film.

Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina. Screenplay Manuel Romero and
Mario. Bernard Director Manuel Romero. Lumilton, 1937. Film.

Mujeres que trabajan. Screenplay Manuel Romero. Director Manuel Romero.
Lumilton, 1938. Film.

Nacha Regules. Screenplay Luis César Amadori based on Manuel Gálvez's novel.
Director Luis César Amadori. 1950. Film.

Sur. Screenplay Fernando E. Solanas. Director Fernando E. Solanas. Cinesur,
1988. Film.

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¹²⁰ This text, entitled "Des Espace Autres," and published by the French journal *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* in October, 1984, was the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967. Although not reviewed for publication by the author and thus not part of the official corpus of his work, the manuscript was released into the public domain for an exhibition in Berlin shortly before Michel Foucault's death.

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