

Verisimilitude in Transatlantic Reconstructions of the 20th Century:
A Cognitive Approach to Televised Series

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Abstract

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Verisimilitude in Transatlantic Reconstructions of the 20th Century identifies how transatlantic, audiovisual perspectives produced in the 21st-century attempt to reproduce a plausible version of the past by mimicking and activating the natural, long-term memory systems to create realism for the spectator. Specifically, this work as a whole showcases how seven 21st-century Argentine, Brazilian and/or Spanish television series use an array of different cinematic tools to activate these systems and thus, recreate a plausible version of the past. Dynamics of episodic memory and the associated mental time travel (MTT) enhance the veracity in the Argentine and Spanish co-production *Vientos de agua* (2006), directed by Juan José Campanella. Distinct from the episodic way in which memory is presented in the miniseries *Vientos de agua*, the four

telenovelas outlined in Chapter Three present a more holistic sense of time to slowly repaint the canvas of pre-dictatorship times in Restoration Spain, as well as late 1950s and Early 1960s Brazil via the activation of perceptual memory and priming. Slapstick and humor are splattered into two Spanish biopics which depict the Spanish dictatorship of General Francisco Franco from roughly 1947 to 1960: the RTVE series *Carta a Eva* (2013) as well as the Movistar+ production *Arde Madrid* (2018). Unlike in the long-term serial nature of the telenovelas discussed in chapter three, these briefer productions fictionalize with fact, common knowledge and (in)famous celebrities of the past to actuate a natural, semantic memory response from the spectator.

Verisimilitude in Transatlantic Reconstructions of the 20th Century examines how plausibility is necessary for audience engagement—to participate, relate to and create value in their own quotidian experiences. Ultimately, this dissertation offers a close examination of how engaging with the natural human experience, and particularly the processes of long-term memory, is an effective way to trigger narrative transportation and enhance verisimilitude in audiovisual productions—and perhaps in other artistic mediums of storytelling as well.

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*To my mother,
who taught me to write.*

*To my father,
who pushed me to finish.*

*To my big brother,
who will always be my rock.*

*And to my Grandma Wini,
who watches over me from above.*

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Chapter 1

Introduction

World Building in Artistic Narrative

“Mommy, will you read to me?” Those were the words I always uttered before drifting off into a deep slumber. As a little girl, I was fascinated by storytelling. Now, years later and in my big-girl shoes, I still find narrative captivating. *Why is that? What purpose does it serve?* Art is in many ways just another form of storytelling. We as humans look for stories sometimes for different reasons, but this always entails a mental escape from our present world and the temporary travel to a new one.

What for? In childhood, stories satisfy our search for imaginative play and teach us to stay away from Mr. McGregor’s Garden or the Big Bad Wolf. They let us know about life and its important lessons to determine right from wrong. In other chapters of life, they also answer our cries for cathartic relief. They provide us with hope to help remove us from the monotony of our own everyday lives via a new, fresh version. They offer the means to temporarily forget the stress of a day, or other troubles that haunt us. They serve to deliver inspiration or motivation as we identify and empathize with the characters and their personalities. They provide us a channel to subconsciously divert our energies yet simultaneously self-relate using our own past and present. They offer us direction; a bandage to a broken heart, a helpful hand in the process of mourning, or a means to cope when dealing with a sick loved one. They parcel out other examples of life's challenges to remind us we are not alone. Other times, they lend us an outlet to escape a frozen world, like in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic. In other moments of life, stories help us get

through the toughest of times, as prisoners behind bars, or as sick patients confined to the walls of a cold hospital room. Sometimes the television in the corner speaks to us as a means for escape: a space to travel, to put our own lives on pause and reflect...

As listeners, readers, viewers, spectators, audience members, etc., we are provided with an opportunity to absorb an external narrative. In many ways, stories are like conversations with the outside world because we are able to suddenly see from another perspective—beyond our own rigid cerebral walls. They provide us with meaning—allowing time to continue without feeling as if we are frivolously wasting it away. On occasions, we even fantasize about our futures based on what we see in narratives. Ultimately, stories as works of art, are so crucial to our human existence, and thus, so is their verisimilitude and ability to create narrative transportation¹.

Perhaps one might consider verisimilitude to be an important factor in storytelling as it can contribute to the overall success of a production. How does one specifically judge then the success of an artistic work and its verisimilitude?² It was once believed that beauty was the most critical component in this measurement. However, according to Rosalind Ragans in the text *Arttalk*, there are three theories that are utilized in the analysis of artworks: imitationalism, formalism, and emotionalism (31). Imitationalism refers to the ability of a piece of art to mimic its real-life counterpart.³ Formalism considers how and if the object of art is able to follow the principles of its medium, and the general elements of art (31). Lastly, emotionalism “[...] requires that a work of art must arouse a response of feelings, moods, or emotions in the viewer” (32). I

¹ According to Melanie C. Green in her book chapter, “Transportation into Narrative Worlds,” narrative transportation theory refers to the process that people undergo when they feel as though they are “lost in narrative worlds” (87). This can also prompt intense emotions and powerful mental images for the individual. “Narrative transportation has been defined as a combination of attention, imagery, and feelings, in which an individual becomes immersed in a narrative world (Green & Brock, 2000; Green & Brock, 2002)” (87).

² I define success here as the ability to cognitively engage with an audience, which may include the promotion of narrative transportation, self-referencing (as first described in chapter 2) and other processes.

³ Imitationalism can be considered synonymous to the term realism. This parallelism is not with regard to the art movement, but rather with the ability to mimic reality.

argue that the combination of these theories is important to determine the success of various expressions of art, and more precisely, properly engaging with each of the theories is what yields a veridical experience in televised productions.

The verbatim definition of realism is “the quality or fact of representing a person, thing, or situation accurately or in a way that is true to life.” This concept is so often considered a core objective in many forms of art, as it is synonymous to imitationalism. How are histories, cultures and other narratives translated in artistic productions? As we know, emotion is an inevitable component of life. These different theories are intrinsically connected, and thus the success of many works of art must incorporate and consider all three of these theoretical perspectives.⁴ Since verisimilitude is often directly connected to the success of a piece of art, I position it at the forefront of my analysis.⁵ Additionally, in order to evaluate realism, the viewer needs to have a point of comparison—a memory or a set of their own life experiences. As such, these theories must also consider the lens of our own recollections and view of life itself. Within the various modes of artistic expression, different narrative elements unfold that impact our own individual memories, as well as that of the collective. How does history and culture shape or impact these memories? More importantly, and at the forefront of my dissertation, how do cultural products that recreate a historical period cognitively align with our natural, long-term memory systems to speak to a collective audience?⁶

⁴ I refer to works of art with objectives to mirror reality, not other artistic productions that seek to portray the avant-garde, futuristic, surrealist elements—and which conversely aspire to create an alternate reality, one which does not hue to realism.

⁵ While my dissertation uses televised productions as my objects of study, I believe that achieving verisimilitude and audience engagement are also important in other forms of narrative art outside of the audiovisual world. Furthermore, the cognitive effect that these audiovisual stories have on the spectator could also be applied to other contexts and mediums of storytelling.

⁶ The five long-term memory systems which will be further detailed later include: procedural memory, episodic memory, perceptual memory, priming and semantic memory. I will discuss how different televised examples cognitively align with these natural processes throughout this dissertation.

Culture, Identity and Memory Construction in Televised Products

Culture in its audiovisual forms can often stimulate new perceptions and perspectives regarding national identities.⁷ In “Memoria mediática: la nostalgia en la cultura pop,” José Antonio Hernández-Gutiérrez notes how individual memory is something that depends on group experience, as feelings and thought processes produce the most intimate emotions, and oftentimes stem from moments that originated in a social context (3).⁸ Moreover, memory typically has a direct tie to the identity of an individual or a group (5). The study presented by Hernández-Gutiérrez also discusses how these memories convert themselves into a sub-product of identity. In addition, he mentions that the role of memory is not always one that ties to yesterday, but rather it also forms aspirations and hopes for change in the future (4).⁹ Similarly, in the chapter “A Cognitive Taxonomy of Collective Memories” from the book *Cultural Memory Studies*, David Manier and William Hirst highlight the motives behind memory in their definition of collective memory: a memory shared within a community, which also serves a specific function (253). How does the emergence of past memories displayed in audiovisual narratives contribute to current understandings? Do these discourses weave the past into the present?

Identity construction, according to Hernández-Gutiérrez, is also established via mediums of popular culture: “[...] el cine, la música popular (la radio), la televisión y el internet integran el sistema cultural a través del cual los sujetos comparten imágenes, sonidos y rituales que son disfrutados y apropiados por los miembros de la generación, construyendo una base emotiva y

⁷ Although national identity is not my main thematic focus in the chapters that follow, I believe it is important to offer my readers an overview of the terminology and literature that pertains to culture, identity and memory construction.

⁸ Memory as a social (or group) process is examined further in chapter two.

⁹ Hopes for change in the future are illuminated via a process of *social merchandising*, a concept which is defined later in this chapter and discussed more thoroughly in chapter three.

afectiva que es compartida por todos ellos, la cultura colectiva” (8). Above all, the narratives that result from these channels of popular culture continue to change national perspectives in order to imagine a new national, collective vision.

Apart from the role and categorization of distinct locations that appear in these televised sceneries, in the article “Recreando la sociedad del pasado: modernización y conflicto social en *La señora*,” María del Mar Chicharro Merayo argues that characters also have the capacity to aid in the formation and establishment of a collective, historical identity. She discusses one of the functions of the telenovela in this light: “El discurso de la telenovela tiene la capacidad de proveer al espectador de marcos interpretativos, que se construyen no sólo a través del propio texto televisivo, sino también de la interacción de éste con el contexto. Los espectadores pueden utilizar el relato en términos afectivos y cognitivos, ya sea para otorgar significado a sus experiencias [...]” (53). Also, she explains this function with respect to collective memory: “puede contribuir a conectar pasado y presente, construyendo y redefiniendo conceptos como ‘identidad’ o ‘comunidad’, o conectando emocionalmente al público en torno a la representación de sus orígenes comunes, o de los logros adquiridos históricamente” (54). According to Chicharro Merayo, through a virtual entrance into the world of the characters, spectators are able to relive these simulations of the past and experience the respective spaces they share.¹⁰

In the text “Narrativas televisivas y comunidades nacionales: el caso de la telenovela brasileña,” María Immacolata Vasallo de Lopes also describes how the telenovela constructs a dialogue between lived time and narrative time (90). She suggests that these fictional representations have transformed to form a national narrative, one which portrays both the real nation (lived time), but also an imagined nation (narrative time). In addition, she states how the

¹⁰ Chapter three examines how this experience unfolds for the spectator, particularly via understanding the sensorial impact and the effect that these productions have on perceptual memory.

imagined nation configures itself not only as an experience, but also as a cultural, aesthetic, and social product (90). I agree with Vasallo de Lopes, and as such, I utilize this framework in my discussion of the four telenovelas that I analyze in chapter three.

Similarly, in the article “The Nation as a Political Stage: A Theoretical Approach to Television Fiction and National Identities,” Enric Castelló offers his perspective on the miniseries and its global discourses around national identities.¹¹ Television was once historically identified as a product of cable, broadcast, and satellite television. However, in my opinion, the current and changing dynamic has resulted in a new understanding of this concept—and frequently it is now synonymous with the streaming world, and thus referred to as a web series. Castelló cites Todd Gitlin to describe how televised fiction impacts the consumer, particularly in terms of cultural perceptions. He highlights why fiction produced by television is an ideal tool for processes that involve the formation of the nation (307).

According to this analysis, television is a cultural product that is created as a routine, and as such, the medium offers a small element of “the nation” on a daily basis. Finally, Castelló also approaches Gitlin’s ideas when he describes television as a systemized, repetitive and standardized platform (307). Moreover, he also alludes to generalizations that are ingrained via the production of national series: “The stereotype is in some way unavoidable because television must squeeze ‘reality’, to present a kind of synthesized society easily recognizable by the public. But, it implies a simplification, sometimes an exaggeration and a distortion, of social groups and this bias has ideological roots” (309). In my analysis, the simplification as highlighted by Castelló is further propelled by the narrow focus of genres and themes that are featured across popular platforms, such as Netflix. In addition to squeezing reality into an audiovisual medium,

¹¹ In this dissertation, I will utilize the spelling “miniseries” in my analysis. However, since this term is often interchangeable with the hyphenated version, the spelling “mini-series” may be used in a number of citations as well.

media companies must also align their content to resonate with what is currently marketable for consumers.

While the following chapters do not focus on stereotypes and generalizations per se, I do examine the relationship between certain patterns that cognitively affect the spectator and their perceptions of reality. For example, in chapter four, I showcase examples of how national histories (and what may or may not be perceived as cultural generalizations) activate semantic memory for the spectator¹². These generalizations are coupled with biographically-based examples, as well as the incorporation of a historical flair (leveraging what one might presume to be “archival” footage, etc.) to encourage the spectator to blindly assume truth. Just like we learn to accept a chemical formula as is and without question, the spectator determines that that which is “historical” is, undoubtedly, also true. This historical, factually-based appeal thus activates the spectator’s semantic memory system.

While my focus is around the cognitive effect that these audiovisual productions have on the spectator, it is important to consider how these narratives shape the nation as well.¹³ Castelló, for example, discusses how television contributes to this representation of national identity. As stated, he characterizes the impact of this outlet: “Since nation building is a process of cultural and political construction in which the mass media have a central role, we believe that television, and serial fiction in particular, is a crucial site that defines types of nation” (306). In the text, “Authority, Resistance, and Representing National Values in the Brazilian Television Mini-Series,” Niall Brennan discusses a recurring dynamic where social discourses related to

¹² In Hans J. Markowitsch’s “Cultural Memory and the Neurosciences,” this long-term memory system is described in the following manner: “Semantic memory refers to general facts—world knowledge, school knowledge—, facts that are present on a conscious level so that the subject can conclude ‘this is true’ or ‘this is false’: Oslo is the capital of Norway, but Sydney is not the capital of Australia (278).”

¹³ I discuss the connection between individual and collective memory, and how some of our long-term memory processes, such as semantic memory, rely on the historical accounts of the collective in chapter four. By definition, the nation also represents part of the collective.

authority and resistance are consistently portrayed in a number of miniseries. He utilizes a variety of theoretical tools from audiovisual studies, such as those presented by Hagedorn (1995). Particularly, he mentions the idea of episodicity and how such a concept differentiates the miniseries from other genres. “For Hagedorn (1995), episodicity separates television serials and series from ‘classic narrative texts’ such as novels or film, meaning that episodicity puts ‘consumers at the whim’ of the presenting medium, whereas classic texts are ‘consumed however a reader wants’” (687). Potentially, this idea of reoccurrence pushes the consumer to be more dependent and forced to adhere to the time and rhythm that is proposed by the series. Even within the gamut of televised productions, there is a vast variety of episodicity and seriality. Ultimately, this dynamic is much more evident in longer productions, such as the telenovela—which typically include multiple seasons and a greater number of episodes.¹⁴

Brennan also explores how the nature of the miniseries functions to provide a futuristic panorama when he mentions the vision of Christine Gerarghty with regard to the characters in serials as “abandoned at the end of an episode’ to continue their ‘unrecorded existence’ until the next...” (687). He continues synthesizing this perspective by commenting on how the concept of the serial “provides a ‘sense of future’ through interlinked plots and the everyday passing of time, encouraging us ‘to believe that this is a narrative whose future is not yet written’...” (687). Apart from the virtualized concept of content that still cannot be portrayed or that is still a product of the future, consumers also become dependent on the act of watching the series as it becomes a routine activity. Naturally, the series seems to create an innerspace for its spectators: one which doesn't represent either the past, the present, or the future, but is perhaps a blend of

¹⁴ Although nonconventional, I primarily use my introductory chapter as a space to provide background information, such as an overview of the medium and its sub-genres. My analysis will be further fleshed out in the following chapters, as I explore how these dynamics take shape in specific television series. For example, chapter three examines how these functions of episodicity and seriality play out specifically in the telenovela.

the three. In particular, and as discussed in chapter three, this is most frequent in a number of productions that narrate the past in the language of today.

The serial and repetitive nature of the miniseries seems to create an illusion of real time for its audiences. Brennan mentions examples from Brazil, often historically viewed as the pioneer of the telenovela. For example, he mentions *O Bem-Amado*, a Brazilian telenovela from 1973 that traced the historical and political events from the period: "...the more evident the military's shortsighted visions became, the more telenovelas reflected the following: a 'critical view about the development model adopted by the military started to emerge... The previous emphasis on national integration... was not abandoned, but a more critical and pessimistic view of the process of modernization emerged'" (689). According to Brennan, historically television series have created a virtual reality that parallels the present time. However, to what point can one say that the themes that emerge from the national series are a true representation of reality? Should one consider series as cultural artifacts in the same way that literature can form a reflection of national identity?

It seems that the idea of homogeneity and purity in all narrative expression is nonexistent as communication in all of its forms represents a mixture of ideas, influences, positionalities and ever-evolving genres. Brennan cites Simões Borelli (2001) and this process of interlaced plots: "starting in the 70s, we can ... observe a decentralizing of the hegemony of melodrama evoked by the invasion of other 'territories' of fictionality, such as comedy, adventure, police narratives, the fantastic and erotic. These are plots which, parallel to the main melodramatic thread, insert themselves... and engage in a dialogue with the matrices of these other constitutive territories" (689). In the way that Brennan perceives these diverse territories that televised narratives seem to explore, perhaps one can reinterpret these productions as a mirror of reality.

While the anticipation of episodicity and its relationship to time is specific to traditional television series that are broadcasted in real time, it could also apply within the context of other providers of multimedia services, such as Netflix. The concept of time may perhaps be a different matter in our contemporary era, as viewers may binge watch an entire series in one sitting. However, each individual episode is still its own unique product with a beginning and an end, and the appropriate time to “pause” is still at the end of an episode for many. Also, the lengthy running time of a series creates an illusion of a never-ending product, and a “sense of future” through its interconnected plots between episodes. How does this futuristic feel of a series modify our ideas with regard to a historical or collective memory of the past?

Are series and telenovelas just another form of consumption, and are they not any lesser than any form of content whether that be in the form of the written word, or in an audiovisual medium? With the ability to transform text to speech, and incorporate subtitles on almost any televised production, is there truly a difference now between literature and audiovisual works? As every source of content has an author, and a specific agenda, how can a truthful perspective that speaks to impartiality be established? Unlike the narrow perspective of a literary work where there might be just one author, cinematic productions perhaps provide a collective, collaborative authorship by nature as more individuals tend to be involved in the process, such as screenwriters, directors, producers, editors, the cast, etc.

Similar to the aforementioned ideas brought forward by Brennan, Glen Creeber examines how writers of television and cinema visualize the function of the series in the article “Taking Our Personal Lives Seriously: Intimacy, Continuity and Memory in the Television Drama Serial.” He also describes the difference between series and the serialized telenovela. Finally, he dissects the advantages and disadvantages of the series in comparison with other genres. Creeber

claims that the series, as Sarah Kozloff describes it, is a work in which the characteristics and the environment are recycled and repeated in each chapter, however, each episode is unique in that it features its own, specific conclusion. Conversely, the serialized telenovela doesn't offer a conclusion at the end of each episode (442). Like Brennan, Creeber describes how each of the two genres have elements of continuity and intimacy, as the repeated episodes and running time allow the spectator to get to know and understand the characters in both an intimate realm and gradual manner. This process is particularly important, I argue, as it allows the narrative to cognitively affect the spectator as the lived and narrative are more closely united. Not only does this longer running time provide the spectator an opportunity to more intimately identify with the characters, it also attempts to parallel that of real time and the associated perceptions that accompany us in our own lived experiences.¹⁵

The nature of the work also offers an environment that portrays a multitude of narrations on a variety of levels, from both a micro, personal standpoint to a macro, social lens: "This is one of the enduring strengths of the television serial, the attraction of a finite narrative structure, which allows room for 'multi-narrative strands' and 'sub-plot digression'" (444). In comparison with other genres such as the movie, the series offers an opportunity to dramatize a narrative as it employs a longer running time overall. Furthermore, my analysis in the following chapters shows how increased duration elicits an experience that more closely aligns with the long-term nature of the human experience, allowing the production to cognitively engage and activate the spectators' long-term memory processes.

Even though quantity doesn't necessarily equate to quality, Creeber primarily uses two main examples to differentiate between these distinct advantages. For instance, he mentions how

¹⁵ I will explore these processes more thoroughly in chapter three.

the movie incorporates the sole vision of one character, such as Schindler in *Schindler's List*, and as such it fosters a limited framework. However, according to Creeber, the miniseries is able to utilize a variety of perspectives and environments to showcase the historical past, such as in *Holocaust*. In a similar manner, he comments on how critics are still not able to recognize the series as a valid, reliable medium for understanding history per se, but rather serve as a product of subconsciousness and experience (453). The added value of the series is that it provides a way for the spectator to understand in a gradual, identifiable, empathetic and discursive manner.

Creeber not only discusses the series as a product of glamour and glory, but he also emphasizes how nonfiction works that highlight oppression and racism of the past simply exaggerate an element of alterity. I argue that this inclusion can also raise awareness and provide motivation for change, such as in my analysis of the telenovelas described in chapter three. In Creeber's text, he discusses the example of how *Holocaust* produced a trivializing and commoditizing effect (especially with the inclusion of commercial breaks). This is no longer an issue for many contemporary viewers, however, as series are often consumed via streaming where commercials are not present.

In addition to Creeber's mentioning of pauses and commercials and the ability they can have to detract from the weight or significance of catastrophes such as the Holocaust, Creeber notes that many also believe that the series just isn't the ideal medium to relate the tragic, historical memories of oppressed groups altogether. Additionally, Creeber cites Wilsher, who understands the effect of the televised series as something that produces an aesthetic that parallels the assembly line, since it prioritizes the personal instead of the political, the sexual over the social, and the conventional in place of the experimental. His analysis seems to suggest that these products are not adequate examples of the collective, but rather that of isolated,

particular accounts. In my understanding, however, this could be applied to all forms of narrative. It is difficult to focus on the collective in any specific storyline itself, as it is limited by content length, and as such, must center itself around a consistent set of themes, characters, etc. to engage its audience. On the other hand, however, I believe that these productions can be identified as collective with regards to the strategies that are used to aggregately align with the human experience and maintain the attention of the spectator.

Considering the previously mentioned perspectives of Hernández-Gutiérrez around collective memory, it seems audiovisual productions and popular culture are able to capture historically truthful yet fictitious sceneries as a subconscious extension of a national identity, not only from a domestic perspective, but also from one that is transatlantic and global. In her article “La guerra civil en la TVE de los ochenta: de la palabra escrita a la imagen en movimiento,” Francisca López delivers a brief overview of some of the other related terms within this genre such as *memoria-patrimonio*, the concept coined by Pierre Nora that refers to the conversion of the past into a cultural category, that becomes the collective heritage of that particular nation (96). Simultaneously, she discusses the function of these period dramas, particularly televised series that pertain to the Spanish Civil War. She states that these series promote an emotional identification for citizens who have other assumptions or premises about the new democracy. These productions, she states, situate the Other in dialogue with a lack of political liberty, intolerance and premodern cultural traditions.

Audiovisual representation is thus fundamental to the recovery of memories from the Spanish Civil War both in the present and future contributions of cultural products (López 96). In “Representación histórica, crónica negra y legitimación de la democracia: la huella del crimen”, Luis Guadaño mentions the recurring pattern that this genre creates by focusing on the personal

(277). In addition, he evaluates the motives behind this genre and questions whether its purpose is to simply recover memories from the past, or to reinterpret that history. Moreover he suggests that the complexity of the genre creates a new process for spectators and consumers of this content: “Al presentar una narración abierta a la interpretación, la serie coloca al espectador en la tesitura de tener que analizar lo que está viendo, convirtiendo a los televidentes/ciudadanos en parte activa del proceso narrativo/democrático y no en simples sujetos/receptores del proceso de legitimación de la democracia” (281). As such, Guadaño suggests that this genre creates a role for its audience and establishes a multidimensional narrative of history, one which offers an array of scenes, characters and layers of positionality. He suggests that this broader context of cultural memory is perhaps one which shares a wider range of perspectives. Lastly, spectators have experienced changes not only with regard to this more active, participatory role that Guadaño mentions, but also in the viewing process itself.

Memory and the Viewing Experience

Let's go to the movies... Let's go see the stars... I imagine you already have that soundtrack from *Annie* (1982) playing solo in your head. You can thank me. That was how motion pictures used to be. Cinematic productions were a ritual that was celebrated purely as part of a brick-and-mortar, theatrical experience. Nowadays, movies and other audiovisual products, such as series, are consumable in a much more quotidian manner as part of an established routine.

For many, the day begins with brewing a morning cup of coffee—a process that is so

ordinary and frequent that we are able to complete it with hardly any effort. In fact, we are still able to finish this task without a single droplet of caffeine to prepare us. Similarly, we as spectators have become domesticated to the viewing experience on our gadgets—whether that be a television set, handheld device, etc. By and large, spectatorship no longer requires extensive planning, dressing up on a Friday evening, or purchasing tickets in advance. It is an activity that we can simply enjoy at home. As such, we are able to fully surrender ourselves as spectators in a more intimate manner, in the security of our own homes. Furthermore, the spatiotemporal context has evolved to provide a different viewing experience. Streaming content has now become a common, ordinary procedure just like brewing a cup of morning joe. These types of activities that are so customary to the point that they do not require active, cognitive thinking can be associated with the natural long-term memory process known as procedural memory. Like brewing a cup of coffee, riding a bike, or tying our shoes, the act of spectatorship is one which does not require explicit cognition.

With the flip of a switch, we automatically and implicitly transform ourselves into active spectators. This process is so mundane that we already know we can sit back, relax and enjoy the show. We humans aren't the only mammals who have technologically evolved. This viewing experience is also part of the procedural memory for our canine friends. Do you think I am crazy? Think again. Russian physiologist Ivon Pavlov first taught us how dogs respond to routines in his famous, well-known discovery of classical conditioning which revealed how the familiar sound of a bell—the conditioned stimulus—would trigger salivation—or the dog's conditioned response.¹⁶ Dogs, like their human companions, are creatures who respond to patterns and routines.

¹⁶ Although this study is often considered common knowledge, I utilized Kendra Cherry's article "What Is Classical Conditioning? How It Works, Terms to Know, and Examples" to confirm the associated concepts of classical conditioning, which include but are not limited to the conditioned stimulus and the conditioned response (1).

Luna and her brother Bailey, two particularly intelligent golden retrievers have also followed suit. They have become so accustomed to the virtual world (especially after the pandemic) that they too instinctively seek out this experience. When the television sounds, their ears perk up desirously awaiting a background bark or cheerful squeak from a fellow digital animal. Their eyes remain glued in an effort to trace the animal-like shapes so that, with a quick jump, they are ready. *Attack! Charge the screen!*

In short, my two dogs have also joined me in my pandemic conquest, searching for an artistic escape from our physical world. They've become so enticed and hypnotized by the process that the on-screen appearance of animals often prompts the highest pitched whine of frustration for these trained pheasant hunters. Television as a tail-wagging routine is especially apparent with the sudden increase in programs available for canines, such as *Dog TV*—streamable content which offers a number of releases for dogs such as stimulation, relaxation and exposure. Dogs too seek artistic mediums for escape, a cathartic canine release. All in all, the scratches on my device's screen make my love-hate relationship with this program most evident.

I will say that in the pandemic-long process of writing this dissertation, I often had to turn on *Dog TV* to satisfy my dogs, their boredom, and to prevent interruptions to my train of thought which included: the wiggly nudge of a wet-nosed Bailey against my elbow and the long, drawn out, low-hummed sigh of his sister Luna. Ultimately, humans are not the only members of the animal kingdom who have incorporated the digital world implicitly, as part of an everyday routine. The home has redefined the viewing experience, and has converted it into an extension of our everyday lives—both for humans and their furry friends alike. With the simple click of a button, we are able to turn on our gadgets and surrender ourselves as responsive participants of this process—subconsciously entering our mirrored, narrative world. Furthermore, this act of

spectatorship has become part of our procedural memory, blending both our lived existence and the narrative experiences we perceive on the screen. Thus, these daily activities by nature are realistic as they are already ingrained in us as part of our quotidian procedures.

How does one achieve verisimilitude in audiovisual productions? More specifically, and for humans in particular, how does this occur for narratives that reconstruct versions of the past? The following content examines how series leverage the human experience as a hook, or a means to achieve realism for the spectator. The fact that the viewing experience has become an extension of procedural memory allows spectators to soak up content like a sponge, and this prompts the activation of other types of long-term memory: episodic memory, perceptual memory, priming and semantic memory¹⁷.

The following description of episodic memory is included in Hans J. Markowitsch's "Cultural Memory and the Neurosciences": "Episodic memory actually refers to mental time traveling both retrogradely (backwards) and anterogradely ('prospective memory' or 'proscopia'). Autobiographical memories are usually emotional (affect-related), implying that subjects evaluate the emotional significance of the events" (278). These autobiographical memories are also shaped by both time and place.

Apart from episodic memory, Markowitsch also defines perceptual memory as a noetic system. He describes this process as a presemantic memory system where object identification relies principally on familiarity judgments, such as in the example of the ability to differentiate an apple from a pear or a peach—regardless of whether the apple is red, green, half-eaten, etc. (278). Perceptual memory is thus a system that largely relies on the senses in order to perceive information.

Conversely, the long-term memory system known as priming functions in a subconscious

¹⁷ For a definition of semantic memory, please refer to footnote 12.

manner. Markowitsch discusses the example of priming in radio and TV advertisements and how a company might initially include a longer video clip the first time the advertisement is aired, followed by shorter versions in subsequent broadcasting. Ultimately, this process impacts the brain by first creating a prime for the audience. After the initial exposure, the recipient is later able to perceive the content in a conscious manner. Thus, the process of priming increases the likelihood for an individual to consciously recognize information after repeated exposure (277). This process is particularly important in the creation of long audiovisual productions, such as a television series since the spectator relies on the recycling and repetition of information from previous episodes.

The Stimulation of Long-Term Memory in Series

In order to better understand the relationship between narrative and cognition, I designed the following study to parallel the structure of a science experiment. The array of series that I analyze serve as the factors which change throughout my experiment—the independent variable.¹⁸ Through synthesizing a number of productions, I was able to isolate patterns—what we can identify as my dependent variable. After conducting this experiment, I argue that the tools that I have discovered to be consistently employed in these different productions are utilized with a common goal—one which attempts to cognitively hook its audience by mimicking the natural experience we undergo in our own long-term memory processes.

¹⁸ Seven different Spanish, Argentine and Brazilian series that are set either just prior to, during or after dictatorial landscapes, are examined to determine how cinematic verisimilitude is achieved via the activation of long-term memory systems.

The transatlantic variety of the series I utilize in this project contributes to strengthen my independent variable, as the heterogeneity of cultural influence allowed me to isolate factors that are not culturally dependent, but rather speak to a more collective, human experience. The above series not only differ with regard to nationality, but also in terms of product placement. Roughly 43 percent of my series are productions that are primarily only available via domestic Spanish platforms such as RTVE or Movistar+. The remaining 57 percent are streamable on more globally accessible platforms, such as Netflix. By cross-analyzing both the domestic and the global, I was able to more closely align my study to the human experience, and furthermore, my conclusions are centered around the cognitive effect of these narratives on the spectator as a whole.

Apart from cultural variety, the different subgenres of series that I've included such as the telenovela, the melodrama and the biopic establish a more diverse range of data to strengthen the validity of my findings. I would like to also point out that even though these series are available to stream on both domestic and global platforms, the majority of my series are Spanish.¹⁹ As I mentioned previously, I have included one Brazilian series since Brazil has traditionally been considered the pioneer of the telenovela. In addition, this Brazilian series I analyze thematically aligns with the other Spanish series discussed in chapter three, and most particularly, with regard to the sensorial experience and effect on perceptual memory for the spectator. All seven of the series correlate with one another as televised perspectives about the 20th century that were produced in the 21st century. In the following chapters, I invite my readers to “travel” through the 1900s as I examine the cinematographic tools that these seven contemporary Spanish, Argentine, and Brazilian television series utilize in order to create a reconstruction of the past.

¹⁹ *Vientos de agua* is also considered Argentine as it is an Argentine and Spanish co-production. While the vast majority of the selected series are Spanish, their plots, casts, etc. are often transatlantic in that they incorporate Argentina as well.

Utilizing learning theory and cognition as my framework in my second chapter, I consider the relationships between space, time and memory televised in the Argentinian and Spanish miniseries *Vientos de agua* (2006), directed by Juan José Campanella. I further analyze how their respective interactions activate episodic memory and encourage scenarios of mental time travel (MTT), to ultimately create a plausible replica of the human experience. In chapter three, I also highlight how the picturesque audiovisual landscape in televised perspectives of pre-dictatorship times in Restoration Spain and early 1960s Brazil awakens the perceptual memory processes of the spectator. Specifically, I also discuss how the incorporation of social merchandising, agenda setting, and gender performance ultimately function to enhance this sensorial experience.²⁰ I also examine how the long-term serial nature of telenovelas in particular provides opportunities for repetition and progressive recognition—and thus mimics the natural process of priming. Furthermore, I investigate how these tools are used to cognitively align with the spectator in the Spanish telenovelas *La señora* (2008), *El tiempo entre costuras* (2013), and *Las chicas del cable* (2017), as well as in the Brazilian series *Coisa Mais Linda* (2019).

Finally, in chapter four, my readers will continue to travel transatlantically through the 20th century and into periods of dictatorship with the emergence of two biopics with a twist. I examine how Director Agustí Villaronga leverages satire and exaggerated drama to provide a representation of 1947 Spain in the RTVE series, *Carta a Eva* (2013). Likewise, in the Movistar+ production *Arde Madrid* (2018), I explore how Paco León unexpectedly utilizes slapstick humor and ludic allegory to recreate an audiovisual depiction of 1960 Francoist Spain. Lastly, I also highlight how national histories are not only shared via the lens of memory and

²⁰ I am repurposing the term “social merchandising” used by a number of scholars, such as Vasallo de Lopes (2004), Nogueira and Júnior (2013) and Barcellos (2016). In essence, I describe it as similar to traditional merchandising. However, instead of referring to products in a store, I position the mise-en-scène on set as a sensorial experience used to attract an audience response—one which is also embedded with a subconscious message to inspire social change.

nostalgia, but also sometimes use comical elements, nation building²¹, sampling and narrative contrasting to establish verisimilitude for the spectator. Moreover, the biographical nature of these productions stimulates a natural process which assumes fact over fiction. For example, the insertion of historical fact cognitively awakens the semantic memory of the spectator—just like one might accept a mathematical formula or chemical equation without criticism. As such, the spectator is able to assume truth and thus absorb the content at face value without having to decipher its accuracy.

Upon greater reflection, I find that it is not only important to provide a seamless experience for the spectators of a series, but for the recipients in other forms of artistic expression as well. What constitutes an impactful narrative and how can one collectively reach a larger public via leveraging our own cognitive processes? If our lived experiences truly mirror narrative worlds, how can we unite the two to learn from our pasts and uncover these unsolved questions left behind as distant memories? Space, time and memory are intrinsically connected and begin to take shape at our earliest moment of recollection. For many, this episodic memory might include the evening you were first introduced to narrative—tucked in, starry-eyed by the twinkle of night, and awaiting the words of a magical bedtime story. I invite you to travel with me through these chapters as we examine contemporary televised productions of the 20th century, mentally merging both the lived and the narrative, in an effort to understand the human experience and the interconnected relationship between storytelling and cognition.

²¹I refer to nation building in this chapter as the insertion of elements pertaining to the nation and/or extensions of cultural identity that function to subtly shape and construct the backdrop of a national narrative. Examples include the frequent mentioning of national cuisines, famous historical figures, etc.

Chapter 2

The Dynamics of Space, Time and Memory in the Imagined Communities of Vientos de agua

(2006)

Introduction

“Where are we traveling to now, Mommy?” The word “storytelling” for many might trigger a mental journey back to the wondrous, early days—that evening we just described as a magical bedtime story. Our earliest memories stem from childhood and they are bound by a specific spatiotemporal context—one which seeks to evolve and shape itself throughout our lifetimes. A series of flashbacks or a moment of *déjà vu* are often stimulated by a spatial or temporal familiarity, which is ingrained and attached to our memories. Ultimately, we rely on episodic memory, a long-term memory system which is responsible for helping us remember certain events and the settings in which they occurred.

The following chapter considers the relationships between space, time and memory²² and how their respective interactions activate episodic memory and mental time travel (MTT)²³ episodes, to ultimately create a plausible replica of the human experience. These processes of MTT enhance the verisimilitude in the Argentinian and Spanish co-production *Vientos de agua*

²² In the article “Prisms to Travel in Time: Investigation of Time-Space Association through Prismatic Adaptation Effect on Mental Time Travel,” Filomena Anelli and other authors discuss the connection between time, space and memory, and how space and time are often interconnected when humans process memories (1).

²³ According to Thomas Suddendorf and Michael Corballis in the article “Mental Time Travel Across the Disciplines: The Future Looks Bright,” “mental time travel is a term we coined to refer to the faculty that allows humans to mentally project themselves backwards in time to re-live or forwards to pre-live events (Suddendorf & Corballis 1997)” (299). MTT can be either *bottom-up* when outside stimuli prompt an individual to travel or they can be *top-down* when they are caused by internal mechanisms such as declarative memory (300).

(2006), directed by Juan José Campanella. This television miniseries, which is available on a number of platforms including Netflix and Amazon, plays on the dynamics of space, time and memory to push both protagonists and spectators into a state of MTT.

As Julio Enrique Checa Puerta points out in his article “*Vientos de agua* (2006): melodrama, posmemoria y nostalgia en la representación de la experiencia migratoria hispano-argentina,” the narrative oscillates between two historical time periods: one that takes place between 1934 and 1959 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and another which occurs between 2001 and 2006 in Madrid, Spain. The opening scene takes place in Asturias in 1934, and the story returns to the same village in 2006 at the conclusion of the series (49). Specifically, the narratives alternate in the form of analepsis from the perspective of the Spanish immigrant in Argentina, José Olaya, to the primarily chronological point of view of his son, Ernesto who grows up in Argentina.²⁴ The extensive usage of time and space thus encourages the occurrence of MTT both for protagonists and spectators alike: “Since spatial attention can influence processing of physical aspect of time, it may also influence conceptual aspects of time, such as individuals’ ability to project themselves in the past or the future known as Mental Time Travel (MTT; Atance & O’Neill, 2001; Buckner & Carroll, 2007; Gilbert & Wilson, 2007; Levine, 2004; Schacter, Addis, & Buckner, 2007; Tulving 2002)” (Anelli 2).

The connection between time and space in memory recollection is also discussed by Daniel McDonald and other authors when they reference Tulving’s perspective in the article “A Role for the Self: Media Content as Triggers for Involuntary Autobiographical Memories”: “In Tulving’s words, we use autobiographical memories for both time-travel and space travel,

²⁴ In the beginning of the series “José” utilizes his birth name. However, he changes his name to Andrés when he is on board the ship that will transport him to Argentina. He does this in honor of his deceased brother, Andrés who had always dreamt of moving to Argentina. For the purposes of clarity, I will describe the main character as “José” and the deceased brother as “Andrés”. Also while the majority of the scenes featuring Ernesto use a chronological narrative, there are some exceptions where Ernesto also experiences flashbacks. One example will be detailed later in this chapter.

moving ourselves both backward and forward in time, and from our current location to a distant one. Based on our memories, we construct imaginings of what has happened and what is likely to happen in the future (see also Honeycutt, 2003)” (4). In *Vientos de agua*, the frequency of the temporal and spatial engages this human experience for the spectator, and thus may trigger related memories.

The multitude of memories for José and Ernesto and their strong connection to time and space resonate with this human experience, and thus create a plausible simulacrum of reality. After Andrés is killed in an accident in a dangerous Spanish mine, José attempts to put an end to these unjust conditions for the rest of the miners by bombing the mine. Subsequently, to avoid the punishment for his crime, he is left with no other choice but to flee the country, and create a new life in Argentina—which was coincidentally also the dream of Andrés. Ignacio Arellano-Torres provides a historical overview of the context for miners in Spain and the Revolution of 1934 in his article “El fracaso del diálogo migratorio transatlántico en *Vientos de agua*”: “Su salida del país se da en el contexto de las revueltas mineras que fueron una de las principales manifestaciones de la conocida como Revolución de 1934, brutalmente reprimida por las fuerzas militares que más tarde se alzarían con el poder en el país y que acabarían instaurando una dictadura militar que duró hasta 1975” (425). José flees from the tumultuous situation in Spain just before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Similarly, Ernesto also begins to experience a new life as an expatriate, when he flees from the challenges of the Argentine depression in 2001 during the *corralito*, and creates a new life in Spain.²⁵ Even though the two protagonists have distinct stories, both share a desire to escape from their individual traumas.

²⁵ In his article “What Can We Learn from the Current Crisis in Argentina?,” Timothy Kehoe discusses this economic depression in Argentina that lasted from 1998-2002. This term *corralito* is used to refer to when the Argentine administration restricted the public’s access to bank accounts and imposed high economic costs (Kehoe 2).

Particularly, the Argentine economic collapse provides hardship for Ernesto, while for José, his pain stems from abandoning his family life and homeland to begin a new one in Argentina.

For both José and Ernesto, distress and traumatic moments of life are the triggers that ultimately necessitate their migration. The displacement from their home countries pushes both José and Ernesto into an in-between place:

En esta nueva sociedad inmigrante, los valores hegemónicos del imaginario del espacio receptor (Argentina en el caso de José y España en el caso de Ernesto) quedan anulados. Esto permite la transformación y desbordamiento del sujeto diaspórico que está sometido a ese imaginario hegemónico, ‘El sujeto diaspórico, a diferencia del inmigrante, no se asimila a la sociedad anfitriona, resiste a la interpelación del imaginario hegemónico’ (Trigo 276). (Arellano-Torres 426)

Even though physical location is geographically objective, their surroundings allow them to mentally time travel to another hegemonic imaginary. Arellano-Torres uses the coined concept of the imagined community brought forward by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* as the basis of his analysis. He mentions how Anderson discusses the integral role of technological resources (such as the press) in creating such an imaginary space. Furthermore, Arellano-Torres specifies: “En *Vientos de agua*, el producto cinematográfico cumple una función análoga a la imprenta, ya que se caracteriza por facilitar el acceso al contenido simbólico que permite a los sujetos imaginar la comunidad” (426).

This imaginary space is intricately crafted with various metaphors and associations. For example, the movement that one can metaphorize as the “wind” in *Vientos de agua* (as indicated in the title) greets the spectator first in an abstract, indirect form via the brief mentioning of the wind of the water in the first episode. From the very first episode until the last, this miniseries

shares a fragmented story, one which simulates the previously described spatiotemporal connection of human memory. Moreover, this miniseries toggles between the perspectives and spaces of two transatlantic generations, both sequentially and chronologically, as well as in flashback form.

Apart from the transitory aspect of the gust between narrations, times and places, water is another metaphor that represents a way to regulate traumatic memories of the past. Water serves to both provoke and suppress memories, as well as their corresponding emotions. For example, throughout the miniseries, there are various scenes where the sadness and tears of the characters become the primary focus of the camera. Additionally, the miniseries depicts the Atlantic Ocean in the journey from Spain to Argentina for José, and again for Ernesto when he relocates to Spain. The act of crying occurs in various moments but serves as a way to revisit and reopen yesterday's wounds.

Conversely, the Atlantic Ocean marks itself as a divider between two "othered" identities (which are neither here nor there). For example, José and his brother Andrés are depicted in the first episode looking across the Atlantic Ocean when José learns about his brother's plans to move to Argentina. The conversation becomes emotional when they discuss how much they will miss each other. The views of the water, the tears, and the emotive orchestral background music serve as the prelude to a new transition. As such, this combination becomes a conditioned stimulus for the spectator. Learning theory has demonstrated how organisms are able to leverage associations to anticipate the near future (Suddendorf and Corballis 300). These patterns and functions of memory systems can be modulated by stimuli: "Non-declarative or implicit memory systems are so called because, in humans, their content cannot be declared or verbalized (Tulving 1985). They allow stimulus-driven prediction of regularities. For example, through association, a

conditioned stimulus (e.g. a sound) predicts the future arrival of an unconditioned stimulus (e.g. food) and triggers a future-directed response (e.g. salvation)” (300). In the scene of Andrés and José looking out onto the Atlantic Ocean, there is a brief mention by José of the water and its spatial function when he says: “No es mar, es una ventana.” Later, he says “Yo miro la ventana y veo Argentina. Y cuando esté allí, miraré lejos por la ventana y veré esta cala. Y te veré a ti. Y a padres. Y al abuelo. Y a Felisa. Y la casa. Y el pueblo. Os veré a todos. Siempre estaré con vosotros. Y siempre podré veros cuando mire lejos” (00:09:47- 01:12:27). In summary, this scene utilizes water to symbolize a pathway to change, an in-between space (much like a window which divides the physical interior from the exterior), a conduit to a new beginning. Furthermore, this combination is used as a tactic to subconsciously cue the spectator for what’s to follow. In this conversation between Andrés and José, the spectator is able to visualize the MTT of the brothers into the future, which also foreshadows the storyline for the audience as well. In this way, water and its various forms serve to create narrative transition and also to remind the characters of their homeland.

Similar to the concept coined by French anthropologist Marc Augé, water represents a nonplace in the series (as it symbolizes a space for crossing, or a mere accompaniment to a mental space, one without a clear or consistent function). Arellano-Torres comments on Andrés’s view of the Atlantic as a window, and further expands this idea, describing it as a space that offers a shared frame, or a collective perspective. Apart from the water representing this objective reference, he also notes that the ship symbolizes a different type of space, when he cites Michel Foucault in *Other Spaces*, and how Foucault identifies the ship as a “heterotopic” space (430). The ship does in fact represent a transformative space, a world within a world. For example, it is on the ship that José transforms into Andrés and also meets a close-knit group of

other immigrant friends who later become his new family away from Spain. On a similar note, Ernesto's apartment in Madrid represents another heterotopic space in that it represents the formation of a new region, which fuels a diasporic identity influenced by his diverse roommates who are also immigrants from different origins.

Spatial Opposition and the In-Between

Heterotopic spaces are just one of the many examples of territories that make up this audiovisual production. Additionally, the virtual versus the physical is also apparent throughout the series as Ernesto utilizes telephone communication to keep in touch with his family both while he is still living in Argentina, and subsequently, after his journey to Spain. As such, a number of scenes are filmed as close-up, single shots that picture one of the characters communicating in this virtual space from their respective physical, geographic locations. Time and space are condensed in this miniseries of just 13 one-hour episodes, where the perceived proximity between Argentina and Spain is exaggerated due to what seems to be minimal travel time, and the frequency of virtual conversations that seamlessly unite the characters. Ultimately, this balance of dynamics creates the illusion of a small, interconnected world in such a social space. Ernesto's communication with his family members in a virtual capacity remains as an in-between physical space and as a medium for intimacy regardless of his physical locality.

Lastly, other considerations of in-betweenness include the private versus the public, such as scenes in the home versus the street. In a different historical context, Verena Berger in "La búsqueda del pasado desde la ausencia: Argentina y la reconstrucción de la memoria de los desaparecidos en el cine de los hijos" reflects on the dynamics of space as depicted in a number

of communication mediums (such as Argentine cinema, theatrical works, literature and documentaries) produced as products of postmemory by the children of the disappeared (26). She discusses how the home didn't always equate to a space of refuge when she quotes Judith Filc's representation of the street and the home: "Bajo la dictadura militar que gobernó entre 1976 y 1983, la frontera entre los espacios público y privado se desdibujó. El doble discurso autoritario reprodujo la ilusión liberal del hogar como refugio cuando, de hecho, invadía los hogares argentinos con la justificación de la 'guerra' contra la 'subversión'" (27). The symbolism behind these spaces suggests a counterstory, one which does not always associate feelings of safety with the home.

Correspondingly, in *Vientos de agua*, the home does not represent security as José is forced to vacate it; he hides on the roof while he waits for the Guardia Civil to interrogate his family, and finally flees to Argentina to create a new life for himself. In the end of the first episode, the sudden, emotive background music and torrential downpour signals an emotional moment for the spectator. José peers down through a crack on the roof and watches his family crowd around his brother before his last breath ("Episode 1" 00:50:55 - 00:51:53). In this scene the appearance of water once again signals a new transition, as the following scene shows José bombing the mine, and then embarking on his journey to Argentina. Checa Puerta describes this metaphor as one which uses *lo líquido* to represent our contemporary identities, and focuses on the use of water as a means to cleanse or erase evidence (58). While it is true that water signals an identity transition for the spectator or a new beginning, it also highlights the metaphor of the sea and the window, as a reminder of the homeland and the interconnection of transatlantic space.

Similar to the virtual time travel that is stimulated by media, the human mind often brings us to other physical locations via our own memories. In the miniseries, the spectator accompanies José when subtle cues, like the glimpse of a postcard of Asturias on a bookshelf, provoke a flashback, a virtual time travel to the layers of yesterday. The flashbacks are not always prompted by characters' own memories, but sometimes they are multigenerational as when Ernesto experiences MTT after viewing an old family photo from his father. His confusion and troubled state prompt him to complete the puzzle of his fragmented identity—which is interwoven with his father's past, like two interconnected chains of nucleotides that configure one DNA strand. In my analysis, I examine how these photos represent the inevitable, interlinked identity between father and son. While Checa Puerta also points out the flashbacks prompted by the various photo scenes, he instead highlights them as moments of general epiphany for the characters:

Parece evidente la tensión que se establece entre la reconstrucción nostálgica del pasado, la dificultad para encontrar la forma de contar la experiencia y, no menos importante, el diálogo con alguien interesado en conocer dicho relato. Las fotografías se ofrecen como un elemento catalizador para despertar la imaginación retrospectiva y pueden proporcionar auténticos momentos de epifanía (58)

In the second episode, moments of epiphany are prompted by the slow background music and Ernesto's sudden gaze towards an old family photo. The camera suddenly zooms in on the photo and magnifies the view as if the spectator is suddenly viewing the picture from Ernesto's perspective. The shot magnifies Juliusz (who is pictured in the photo) and then switches its focus back to Ernesto's gaze.²⁶ He then slowly and hesitantly mutters the name "Juliusz." The scene

²⁶ Juliusz is one of José's close friends who he meets on the ship from Spain to Argentina, and who becomes part of his family in Argentina.

then transitions to the 1930s where Juliusz is seen holding the family photo and explaining his story to José. The same photo is used as a means to transition and illustrate the story as if it were a memory from the perspective of Ernesto (“Episode 2” 01:08:00 - 01:10:33). This movement to other physical territories is accompanied by hidden, diverse layers of various memories, some subtle and others more vivid.

In her article “La representación de la identidad en la serie *Vientos de agua*,” Belén Moreno Garrido explores the elements of a changing national identity through diverse spaces and times, and from the perspective of the two principal characters from the series, José and his son Ernesto. Specifically, Moreno Garrido delves into the mutations of individual and group identities; how history shapes identity; the connection between dual, shared, conflictive, lost, or recovered identities; and the relationship they may have between the past and the present.

Moreno Garrido investigates the complicated theme of identity within the context of this television series. For example, the dual identity of both José and Ernesto (one of whom is simultaneously Argentine and Spanish) causes a crisis, as they do not feel purely a part of either of the two nationalities. The complexity and duality of identities also has a conflictive effect as distinct times and spaces bring new friendships and love for these protagonists—which also entangle them in a mental frenzy and mutate their senses of self-identity. The new spaces that form as byproducts of emigration (from Spain to Argentina for José, or from Argentina to Spain for Ernesto) not only change their individual constructions of self, but also cause them to lose certain aspects of their defining characteristics. In the end, it is a collaborative process for both father and son to recuperate their identities via traveling across spatial borders and times, as well as revisiting the memories of their pasts.

With the various physical and virtual territories that coexist in *Vientos de agua*, there is also a connective thread of the domestic versus the foreign space. This dynamic is similarly apparent for Ernesto both in his own domestic territory—the country where he was born, as well as when he is living in Spain. For example, in the first episode, Ernesto overhears his taxi driver muttering racist comments about protestors on the streets of Buenos Aires who he assumes are Bolivian simply because of their facial characteristics. To condemn this behavior, Ernesto pretends to be Bolivian and shuns the driver for his racist commentary. Similarly, he experiences this othering outside of his Argentinian homeland, at his workplace in Spain when he asks for help from his boss: “Estoy pasando una crisis familiar. Necesito ver a mi mujer y a mi hija” (“Episode 1” 00:15:35). The boss’s reply distances Ernesto via a discourse of othering: “Ubícate, esos son problemas de ciudadanos. No de migrantes, ¿vale?” (“Episode 1” 00:15:40). Ernesto enters a troubled state, considering that he left Argentina during the financial crisis in search of a new beginning, yet is treated as a secondary, inferior being on Spanish terrain (despite having Spanish citizenship from his father).

Memory in Motion and Episodicity

In his book *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age*, Gary Edgerton examines the importance that media companies play in incorporating a “usable past,” one which can provide clarity to the present and future. Edgerton discusses the contemporary ideas around collective memory and how there is less focus on “accuracy per se than using the past as a kind of communal, mythic response to current controversies, issues, and challenges. The proponents of memory studies, therefore, are most concerned with how and why a remembered version is being constructed at a particular time...” (92). He also discusses other

primary differences between television and the written text, such as with respect to the importance of style, an elliptical versus linear sense of time, and the fact that television often creates associations and metaphors to illustrate specific ideas or images. This is demonstrated via the aforementioned repetition and symbolism that is leveraged throughout *Vientos de agua*.

Edgerton describes memory as a process that is not personalized, but is social as well, and exists in conversations, cultural forms and other spaces (276). The social aspect of memory is most apparent in the conversations between José and the ghosts of his past. For example, in José's various MTT episodes, he is frequently reacquainted with deceased loved ones. In the conversations and interactions he has with them, he is able to rediscover his forgotten memories. Although these conversations are either purely imaginative (or repurposed in a contemporary lens), it is through them that José begins to recollect. He relies not only on his personal memory, but also on a social one that is directed by the ghosts. The movement of memory from the personal to the social is most evident in these scenes where José's long-lost loved ones return to greet him.

Additionally, Edgerton also references movement in his discussion of television as a multilayered, fluid medium. This is to say that, unlike photographs and written content, television has the ability to show memory in motion: "Thus, the process of understanding how the past is transformed into memory—whether individual or collective—is best described as an archaeology in which the goal is not simply to uncover something that has been buried, but to discover how and why additional layers have been built on top of it" (303). Ultimately, Edgerton pinpoints how television serves to grapple with yesterday's layers, and how these fluid segments are transformed in the present and toward the future.

As mentioned earlier in my introduction, Brennan also describes how this medium is able to show memory in movement. He discusses a recurring dynamic where social discourses related to authority and resistance are consistently portrayed in a number of miniseries. Particularly, he mentions the idea of episodicity and how such a concept differentiates the miniseries from other genres. “For Hagedorn (1995), episodicity separates television serials and series from ‘classic narrative texts’ such as novels or film, meaning that episodicity puts ‘consumers at the whim’ of the presenting medium, whereas classic texts are ‘consumed however a reader wants’” (687). Potentially this idea of reoccurrence pushes the consumer to be more dependent and forced to adhere to the time and rhythm that is proposed by the series. Additionally, Brennan examines how the nature of the miniseries functions to provide a futuristic panorama when he mentions the vision of Christine Gerarghty with regard to the characters in serials as “‘abandoned at the end of an episode’ to continue their ‘unrecorded existence’ until the next...” (687). He also comments on how the concept of the serial “‘provides a ‘sense of future’ through interlinked plots and the everyday passing of time, encouraging us ‘to believe that this is a narrative whose future is not yet written’...” (687). Naturally, *Vientos de agua* seems to also create an innerspace for its spectators: one which doesn't represent either the past, the present, or the future, but is perhaps a conduit to access the liminal.

The serial and repetitive nature of the miniseries seems to create an illusion of real time for its audiences. The aforementioned ideas presented by Brennan can also be applied to *Vientos de agua*, namely with regard to this idea of episodicity and its connection to time and memory. While the anticipation of episodicity and its relationship to time is specific to traditional television series that are broadcast in real time, it could also apply within the context of other providers of multimedia services, such as Netflix. Although time may perhaps be a different

matter in the contemporary world, as spectators may binge-watch an entire series in one sitting, each individual episode is still its own unique product with a beginning, middle and an end, and thus, the appropriate time to “pause” is still at the end of each episode for many. The false illusion of real time that these miniseries create also produces vulnerability for the spectator, as they join as participants in a lived process. I argue that these narratives which create an illusion of real time also establish a blank canvas for MTT to take to place. Furthermore, the false lived experience of real-time allows the spectator to delve into an incognito mode—which invites them onto a rollercoaster of MTT (and in this case one that takes place both on and off screen). Creating an illusion of real-time for the spectator closes the distance between the narrative world and the real world, which I believe also invites the spectator to internalize and personalize the plot.

Individual and Collective Memory

According to Hernández Gutiérrez, collective memory supports the understanding of identities that continue to construct themselves in current times, and are often exhibited in mediums of popular culture (2). He further describes how individual memory is something that depends on group experience, as feelings and thought processes produce the most intimate emotions, and oftentimes stem from moments that originated in a social context (3). Moreover, memory typically has a direct tie to the identity of an individual or of a group (5). This text also discusses how memories can convert themselves into a sub-product of identity. In addition, as discussed in my introduction, Hernández Gutiérrez mentions that the role of memory is not

always one that ties to yesterday, but rather it also forms aspirations and hopes for change in the future (4).

In “Representación histórica, crónica negra y legitimación de la democracia: la huella del crimen,” Luis Guadaño mentions the recurring pattern that this genre creates by focusing on the personal (277). In addition, he evaluates the motives behind this genre and questions whether its purpose is to simply recover memories from the past, or to reinterpret that history. Moreover he suggests that the complexity of the genre creates a new process for spectators and consumers of this content: “Al presentar una narración abierta a la interpretación, la serie coloca al espectador en la tesitura de tener que analizar lo que está viendo, convertido a los televidentes/ciudadanos en parte activa del proceso narrativo/democrático y no en simples sujetos/receptores del proceso de legitimación de la democracia” (281). As such, Guadaño suggests that this genre creates a role for its audience and establishes a multidimensional narrative of history, one of which offers multiple scenes, characters and layers of positionality.

Guadaño indicates that this broader context of cultural memory is perhaps one which shares a wider range of perspectives. In my analysis, these ideas are evident in *Vientos de agua* as the story is told from the viewpoint of different characters, and across a range of time periods and places. This structure of storytelling simultaneously offers the spectator both a magnified and landscape view, and what is seemingly both collective and individualized. I believe that the open narration does invite the spectator to play a more active role as suggested by Guadaño. While rainy pandemic days often invite us to binge watch an entire series from start to finish, many people simply do not have the free time to indulge in such an activity. The open narration at the end of an episode becomes intermixed and molded into the quotidian tasks of the spectator, and thus the interim events that take place off screen also begin to shape their interpretation. I

would agree with Guadaño that this genre invites the spectator to be an active participant in this narrative process.

Lastly, in “*Vientos de agua: la construcción de la memoria como narración histórica de las migraciones*,” Josetxo Cerdán and Laia Quílez discuss some of the filmic tools that the miniseries employs in order to demonstrate a fluid and multidirectional concept of time. Cerdán and Quílez also analyze how photographs aid the spectator in traveling between characters, settings, borders, perspectives and traumas. In addition to leveraging photos as a cinematographic tool, the miniseries also uses certain camera techniques as well as objects of the past, such as the rock that José’s little brother said he would take with him to Argentina. At the end of the first episode, Ernesto and José are talking to each other on the phone and José tells him he is his favorite son because he is dumb, naive and a dreamer (characteristics that the audience understands as a description of his long-lost brother). José cherishes the rock, holding it between his palms as these descriptors begin to flow freely. Subsequently, his nostalgic gaze produces another episode of MTT. The camera shifts between capturing each of their facial expressions during the phone conversation, but focuses in on the rock when José uses these adjectives to describe his son (01:07:40-01:08:22).

The melodramatic, family focus of this scene is an example of a personally relevant topic as discussed by McDonald. “Research in media entertainment suggests that content featuring personally relevant stories or topics will increase a viewer’s ability to comprehend the stories and the feelings of the media characters, as the viewers themselves or related others may have experienced the same feelings before (Nabi & Krcmar, 2004)” (8). Relatable content also encourages a process called self-referencing which allows the consumer to elaborate and compare their own memories to the incoming formation” (9). This type of content in turn

encourages the MTT of the spectator as well: “Empirical research has shown that narratives elicit self-referencing, and the self-referencing, in turn, promotes involvement or ‘transportation’ into the narrative content (Baumgartner, et al., 1992; Escalas, 2007; Fiske, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1991; Sujan et al., 1993)” (9). Checa Puerta describes how this use of symbolic objects positions

Vientos de agua as a production of postmemory:

El uso que hace Juan José Campanella de su propia experiencia personal y familiar, así como la utilización de objetos, fotografías y referentes culturales para indagar en el pasado, sitúan *Vientos de agua* como un ejemplo de posmemoria, según lo define Marianne Hirsch, entendida como una estructura de regreso inter e intrageneracional al conocimiento de un trauma que tuvo lugar en el pasado, pero cuyos efectos continúan en el presente. . . (59)

Ultimately, the melodramatic, family focus in *Vientos de agua* sets the stage for reliability and self-referencing to generate spectator transportation. Similar to José, as we age, we tend to forget or slowly let go of excessive information, and as such, the superfluous details of our clouded pasts begin to deteriorate within our cerebral walls. There are two definitions of virtuality according to Merriam-Webster: “existing or resulting in essence or effect though not in actual fact, form, or name: the virtual extinction of the buffalo” and “existing in the mind, especially as a product of the imagination.” Thought recollection seems to parallel the process of fossil recovery. Like memories, both individual and collective, the past events reside within the layers of the mind and the imagination. As the world evolves and new experiences arise, these layers fade in the distance. This is frequently associated with the aging process, such as in the case of dementia or Alzheimer’s Disease.

Similarly, the memory of our minds undergoes this process when the superfluous is subconsciously classified and these references of our past become buried layers, overburdened by excess and the recent. Set apart from the vivid, memories also transition from being vague, cloudy references to the forgotten. When there is no longer any recollection because a memory has disappeared, postmemory is a process which pieces together the memories of the past. According to Berger, postmemory is a term used by Marianne Hirsch in reference to the children of survivors of the Holocaust. This phenomenon is not a direct remembrance, but rather one that is reconstructed through time and the imagination (26).

Beyond the connection between places and their corresponding symbolism, the cinematographic works of postmemory also look for a way to represent a body that no longer exists. In the case of the *cine de los hijos*, Berger comments on the difficulty of portraying a disappeared figure as it merges between that which is graspable and that which is unfathomable (27). To support this framework, Berger shares the words of Elizabeth Jelin and Victoria Langland: “La representación del horror y del trauma no es lineal y sencilla. La representación supone la existencia de un ángulo anterior y externo (la ‘presentación inicial’) que será ‘re’-presentado. ¿Cómo representar entonces los huecos, lo indecible, lo que ya no está? ¿Cómo representar a los detenidos-desaparecidos?” (27). The residual withering of the body both physically and spiritually is difficult to portray. In her discussion of this delicate topic, Berger adequately addresses the question of how one can showcase a truthful representation of what still remains a mystery.

Apart from the questions of representation, Berger also comments on how even without the presence of the body, the identity of a disappeared person cannot be eliminated as it is something that pertains to the affected family members and friends. This is similarly the case for

Jose's deceased family members in *Vientos de agua*. As such, the traces and remains of their identity remain present. She shares examples proposed by Hannah Arendt: "...el asesino deja un cadáver tras de sí y no pretende que su víctima haya existido nunca; si borra todos los rastros son los de su propia identidad, y no los del recuerdo y del dolor de las personas que amaban a la víctima; destruye una vida, pero no destruye el hecho de la misma existencia" (33). The disappeared body results in a fragmented identity not only for the victim themselves, but for the close circles of that individual.

Similarly, in the previously mentioned example from *Vientos de agua*, Ernesto pieces together memories of his fragmented multigenerational identity when he catches sight of the photo of Juliusz. The camera techniques and music backdrop cue the subsequent MTT of Ernesto. McDonald mentions that music may trigger Involuntary Autobiographical Memories (IAMs) (8), thus the usage of music in *Vientos de agua* as a transition to a past memory resonates with the natural human experience. Furthermore, music is integrated to spark instances of MTT, seamlessly aligning with the spectators' own lived experiences. In general, IAMs are notably prompted by music, and as such, the spectator is able to subliminally relate to these events. McDonald also suggests that consumers often engage with music more repetitively compared to other media, and this repetition often evokes memories from past situations that occurred when listening to a specific song, etc. (8). Furthermore, the repetitive use of the emotive musical backdrop in *Vientos de agua* seemingly would trigger a similar response for the spectator.

Outside of the context of *Vientos de agua*, Berger examines how postmemory is interwoven into a number of Argentine films that deal with the Dirty War. Although the depiction of the disappeared has been confronted by a number of scholars within the medium of cinema, there has been little work on Argentine television series. In the examples provided by

Berger, echoes of the past dictatorship continue to reinsert themselves symbolically as postmemory in a number of Argentine productions. For instance, she discusses how voice-over is used as a tool to portray temporalities between past, present and the future for the children of the disappeared. This is illustrated in her example of the character, Albertina Carri (whose parents were kidnapped and had disappeared), in the movie *Los rubios*: “Mediante una voz en off, Albertina Carri, hija de Ana Caruso y Roberto Carri, ambos intelectuales secuestrados y desaparecidos en 1977, hace sentir al espectador el lazo que en ella misma se extiende entre pasado y presente, lejanía y cercanía del recuerdo, posibilidad de la reconstrucción de la memoria e imposibilidad de acercarse a la realidad de lo ocurrido...” (30). Filmic tools such as voice-over create a sensation of neither here nor there, a space which represents an “in-betweenness” of past temporality. Correspondingly, the spectator is able to accompany the children of the disappeared on this journey full of gaps and fragmented identities, which is the characteristic path of postmemory.

In *Vientos de agua*, we experience such a fragmented memory in the mind of Ernesto, as he constantly tries to piece together the stories of his father’s past. In the last episode when Ernesto and José travel to Asturias together, Ernesto finally confronts José:

JOSÉ. Aquí solo tengo recuerdos, hijo.

ERNESTO. ¿Qué recuerdos?

JOSÉ. Son míos.

ERNESTO. No son tuyos papá. Son nuestros. ¿Te los querés llevar con vos a la tumba?

Es que no tengo historia papá. Tus nietos no tienen historia. Pensá en ellos aunque sea.

¿Qué sabemos? . . . Si te llevás los recuerdos con vos, se mueren para siempre. (“Episode 13” 01:01:13- 01:01:59)

The story of José unfolds as a postmemory for Ernesto similar to the multigenerational yet fragmented memories that Berger discusses the children of the disappeared in Argentina. He seems to feel less lost when José finally shares the story of their past.

Outside of the context of the Dirty War and the examples provided by Berger, it seems that this tool is also employed in *Vientos de agua* to depict the ghosts of José's past. For example, shortly after Ernesto tells José why he is his favorite son in the aforementioned example, the voice-over of Andrés's words describing the ocean like a window begin to echo in the background. The camera then features a split screen where both the young and older José are pictured side by side. In her article "Mind the Gap: Between Movies and Mind, Affective Neuroscience, and the Philosophy of Film," Jane Stadler cites Smith when referring to Extended Mind Theory: "[W]hen we empathize with another person we extend our mind to couple with part of her mind' and thereby learn something about her subjective circumstances by 'co-opting' her perceptual and emotive capacities (188)" (92). On a similar note, Stadler discusses how cinematic styles with emotive close-ups and opportunities to empathize with characters establish an opportunity for intercorporeal simulation. The melodramatic nature of *Vientos de agua* and close-up shots make way for character empathy according to the principles of this theory. In the previously mentioned scene where José and Ernesto are conversing over the phone, the in-betweenness of José is visually apparent with the split screen of images (as the scene pictures both reality and the virtuality of his thoughts), and also due to the fact that he is "present" in a phone conversation with his son, but yet simultaneously engaging in MTT.

Voice-over is also used in the final episode when José and Ernesto travel to Asturias together to visit José's old mine. José suddenly hears his younger self conversing in the background with his brother without a corresponding image. This technique demonstrates the

MTT exhibited by José, as he enters this space of neither here nor there. He is not able to enjoy the tour of the museum due to his hallucinations which transport him to a traumatic historical space—the same mine where his brother was fatally injured. For José, this hallucination is spurred by the dynamic of space, as he is in the same physical space as before, which triggers him to travel to this memory back in time (“Episode 13” 00:09:40 - 00:11:15). After several minutes of voice-over, the spectator finally is able to see the spirits of his past with the corresponding images.

Checa Puerta provides a different example of this internal dialogue that José has with the ghosts of his early life. He discusses how José is forced to decipher between maintaining a nostalgic dialogue with the ghosts of his past or communicating the stories of his past to his loved ones in the present (52). José skates along the subliminal borders between a physical and supernatural space when he contemplates suicide in the last episode of the miniseries. The loved ones of his past enter through the window of his bedroom (as if to cross through a border between Earth and Heaven) and he toggles between whether to stay alive or end his life, to finally reunite with his past. His surreal mental state, one which is now bogged down by what seems to be either dementia or Alzheimer’s Disease, allows him to enter into this supernatural, multitemporal space (one between the past, the present and the future). However, the sudden cry of his grandson grounds him back to the present, and ultimately prevents him from choosing a suicidal route.

Conclusion

Ultimately, *Vientos de agua* offers a narration that connects the brain, its function, and memories that move in accordance with time and space. Oftentimes, in my own memories, a sudden gust of wind, or the crash of a heavy wave, triggers a moment of déjà vu that brings me back to the adventures of childhood play. These subconscious past-life experiences that José undergoes, whether blurred and subliminal, or vivid and emotional, align with the human experience, and thus create an added element of verisimilitude for the spectator.

Vientos de agua incorporates unique combinations of the interlaced dynamics of space, time and memory, while it also simultaneously conveys a number of linear and nonlinear mechanisms. For example, the linear processes include the series itself (as it offers an established beginning, middle, and end); the aging process of the body as illustrated in some of the characters, such as José; as well as the perceived cycle between generations (from parent to child to grandchild, etc.). On the contrary, the series also depicts other mechanisms that do not follow such a linear, sequential pattern such as the hallucinations and episodes of mental time travel. Checa Puerta notes a scramble of both linear and nonlinear processes in the random mixture of images and experiences, but yet also in the time-stamped media references within the series that draw the spectator back to a chronological order:

Por un lado, la evocación folklórica y sentimental sugerida por la música vertebró un *collage* de imágenes de diferente naturaleza que subrayan el carácter fragmentario de la experiencia, la yuxtaposición de los signos y las dificultades para diferenciar documento y ficción. Esas imágenes mezclan planos de la propia serie, sin orden temporal alguno, con titulares de prensa sobre los que destaca una fecha, esta sí, ordenada cronológicamente, según transcurren los capítulos. (57)

Apart from these various processes, the series also incorporates a “collage de imágenes” as described by Checa Puerta, and a series of metaphorical associations, such as the windows, wind and water, which primarily establish a conduit for MTT. Ultimately, after examining the relationships between time, space and memory and the various processes (both linear and nonlinear) that occur within these frameworks, it is evident how these combinations are leveraged to establish verisimilitude for the spectator—a simulation of both the bodily and the virtual in its diverse spatiotemporal in-betweenness; the episodic human experience.

Chapter 3

Perceptual Memory and Priming in the Telenovela:

Televised Perspectives of Restoration Spain and Brazil of the 50s and 60s

Introduction

Our memories first begin in childhood and they are bound by a specific spatiotemporal context. It is also during these years that we learn how to perceive the world and we begin to recognize patterns—skills which are critical as participants in narrative. In the creation of a storyline, content duration is often another critical component of audience engagement. In the context of television series, longer serials, which are often multi-season, provide an increased opportunity for the spectator to respond to the stimuli and ultimately understand the characters and associated plots. From the perspective of perception and psychophysics, it has been determined that there is a positive relationship between exposure time and perceptual memory.²⁷ In this chapter, I position both the Spanish productions, *La señora* (2008), *El tiempo entre costuras* (2013), and *Las chicas del cable* (2017), as well as the Brazilian series *Coisa Mais Linda* (2019), as telenovelas that engage with the spectator via perceptual memory and priming.²⁸

²⁷ In the study, “Stimulus Exposure Time and Perceptual Memory,” William Von Hippel and Chris Hopkins confirm that greater exposure time yields an increase in human perceptual memory: “Thus, to the extent that perceptual memory is sensitive to differences in exposure time, any cognitive process that leads to more rapid encoding of information has the potential to decrease perceptual memory for that information” (534).

²⁸ I characterize these productions as telenovelas not only because of their lengthy, episodic nature, but also due to their consistent cast and dramatic narrative.

As discussed by Hans J. Markowitsch in the chapter “Cultural Memory and the Neurosciences” from the book *Cultural Memory Studies*, “perceptual memory refers to the recognition of stimuli and is related to familiarity” and “priming means a higher probability of recognizing previously perceived information” (277). Long-term serial consumption activates the spectator’s sensory systems. In the above-mentioned series, a number of factors are integrated as part of the perceptual experience, such as real-life friendships; visual spaces that complement the viewing experience, including landscapes, emblematic buildings, and other physical territories; as well as the vibrant hues of *los felices veinte* or the iconic Brazilian samba and bossa nova of the 50s and 60s. This experience activates the perceptual memory of the spectator, and this sensory experience becomes one of familiarity—not only because it aligns with the natural human experience as the spectator relies upon their sensorial recognition to maintain attention and draw meaning from the series, but there is an increased opportunity for repetition and scaffolding due to the long-term, serial nature of these programs. Furthermore, by pushing a sensorial viewing experience in conjunction with a longer overall running time of a serial, these productions are able to further hook the spectator.

In the chapter, “From shots to storyworlds: The cognitive processes supporting the comprehension of serialized television,” Jeffrey Saers-Foy and Joseph Magliano offer an overview of surface cues (the subtle cinematic clues, such as movement or dress) that direct the viewer’s attention to what’s most significant, and the situational features (such as setting, characters, and their behaviors). Other examples provided include character appearance (consistent hair style, etc.), recurrent shot structures, and the employment of familiar settings (109). The lengthened viewing experience provides additional opportunities to expound upon these pertinent elements. Ultimately, the spectator is able to follow the storyline due to the

recycling of surface cues; a process similar to priming in human memory—when a memory becomes more and more ingrained in the mind via frequency, scaffolding and repetition. In my analysis, the long-term serials that I study in this chapter resonate with this human sensory system via the recycling of visual and auditory cues over time to activate the long-term memory systems of perceptual memory and priming. These series extensively utilize sensorial cues to create meaning and adhere to our natural perceptions. Additionally, by gradually and repetitively incorporating this content (comparable to the process of priming), the spectator is able to comprehend and digest the plot more seamlessly. In this process of aligning with the collective human experience, these series are able to create narratives that are more impactful for a wider audience. In his book *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading*, Richard Gerrig examines the function of narrative and how it intertwines with the lived experience:

On the whole, therefore, I believe that many criterial properties of narrative worlds emerge directly from the ordinary and obligatory operation of basic cognitive processes. I offer this conclusion partially as an antidote to theories that have treated narrative experiences in isolation. In some sense, all a reader must do to be transported to a narrative world is to have in place the repertory of cognitive processes that is otherwise required for everyday experience. (239)

Similar to Gerrig's perspective, I believe that narrative worlds do in fact mirror our lived experiences. Consequently, by mimicking the natural human processes that we associate with our long-term memory systems, the following series are able to recreate a veridical experience for spectators specifically in their alignment with both our natural processes of perceptual memory and priming.

Televised Perspectives of Pre-dictatorship Times: Restoration Spain and Early 1960s Brazil

During the last part of the Restoration Period in Spain and during the late 1950s and early 60s in Brazil, new roles and ideals began to surface as is depicted in these televised reconstructions of the past. This is illustrated in my analysis of the aforementioned 21st-century telenovelas: *La señora* (2008), *El tiempo entre costuras* (2013), *Las chicas del cable* (2017) and *Coisa Mais Linda* (2019). For example, in three seasons and a total of 39 episodes, Director Lluís Maria Güell presents the RTVE series, *La señora*, a 1920s tale of two young lovers in Northern Spain, Victoria Márquez de la Vega and Ángel González, who both battle inequality between genders and social class—a theme which becomes a driving thread of the cinematographic narrative. Similarly, Norberto Amado et al. direct the Netflix series, *El tiempo entre costuras*, which includes a similar storyline of gender disparity in a single season of 17 episodes. Carlos Sedes et al. televise the feminine injustices of the Restoration Period once more in another Netflix production, *Las chicas del cable*, which features five seasons and 42 episodes. Finally, in a different spatiotemporal context, Caito Ortiz et al. direct another Netflix production, *Coisa Mais Linda*, where impossible romances and gender inequality continue to unfold for the protagonist, Maria Luiza, who seeks independence as she searches to create her own bossa nova music club in Rio de Janeiro during the late 50s and early 60s.

In all four of these productions, one can observe an audiovisual performance of feminine tensions illustrated within both public and hidden spaces. In private spaces, the women portrayed in these series participate in acts that pertain to their hidden world: they engage in inconceivable romances, while also succumbing to the oppressive pressures of society. On the other hand, in an

open, uncovered territory, these women begin to take their first breath of modernity, skating along the outskirts of society: in the dazzling spheres of metropolitan leisure, in the corners of a wild countryside, and in the male-dominated bounds of the workplace.

In these Spanish and Brazilian telenovelas, social merchandising is used as a tool to not only replicate a plausible version of the past, but also to influence spectator behavior in an attempt to improve societal morale and virtue.²⁹ The intricate costume design, the masquerade of bold lip shades, the playful clink of champagne toasts, the swirled silhouettes of cigarette smoke, or the vibrant, colorful dancing in the foothills of Rio, are all examples of this magical social merchandising that dramatizes gender and racial differences to narrate the past in the language of the present—all in effort to resonate effectively with the spectator. Thus by activating the sensory processes via social merchandising, these productions are able to create audience relatability.

The dramatized selection of *mise-en-scène* enables these productions to establish multidimensional meaning for the spectator via engaging with a more collective, sensorial experience. Similarly, outside of the televised world, sensory experiences produce a ripple effect. Consider, for example, a scenario of traditional merchandising. A young window shopper who is enticed by a seemingly ordinary shoe as it suddenly transforms into extravagance: positioned on a platform with ostentatious pieces, bold colors and flickering lights that emit a fairytale-like sparkle against the window pane. With just the bat of an eye, the little girl glistening in the window, imagines the accompanying narrative. It's suddenly not just a shoe, but its fabric becomes interwoven as part of a greater memory—of the twist and shout at the father-daughter social, or of an upside-down image set against bright blue skies and monkey bars. Ultimately, this single, motionless product is capable of creating a plethora of images and narratives in the mind of the consumer. Likewise, the strategic combination of sensorial *mise-en-scène* in a

²⁹ Please refer back to my introduction (p. 20) for a description of the term “social merchandising.”

repetitive, serial televised production, also contributes to establish a mental landscape for the spectator.

A similar effect takes place in the social merchandising of these televised productions, but with a goal of inspiring societal change. Rather than serving as clutter, the complex *mise-en-scène* silently delivers this message into the mind of the spectator, making the dramatized spatial divides of gender and race-based restrictions more apparent in these telenovelas. In order to project subconscious ideas that stem from collective memories, hegemonies, and depictions of a modern imaginary, these formats of audiovisual merchandising appear throughout the Spanish series, *La señora*, *El tiempo entre costuras*, and *Las chicas del cable*, as well as in the Brazilian series, *Coisa Mais Linda*.

Apart from social merchandising, agenda setting is another powerful tool that is employed by the directors of these various productions, to critically decide which angle or specific snapshot of the past will be selected and reproduced.³⁰ In the article, “Narrativas televisivas y comunidades nacionales: el caso de la telenovela brasileña,” Vasallo de Lopes explains how the Brazilian telenovela employs agenda setting to tackle questions around corruption, racism and other issues (87). In this way, the producers of telenovelas generate a sense of authority and control over the public environment as they direct the “agenda” in the language of the present. On a similar note, in his article “Imagining the Nation Through Television Fiction: Memory, Proximity and Daily Life,” Àlvar Peris Blanes mentions another concept of memory known as media memory (first described by Rueda Laffond and Coronado Ruiz) and illuminates how the present is often intermingled in any reconstruction of the past, and thus is contingent upon a contemporary political and ideological influence (36). Furthermore, utilizing the language of the present, these producers are given the autonomy to shape the focus

³⁰ This analysis recycles the terminology originally used by Vasallo de Lopes (2004).

of the storyline, the positioning of themes, and other narrative elements to positively influence spectator behavior for the greater good of society.

Apart from agenda setting, these series also use the medium of space (both private and public) as a means to emphasize historical associations and taxonomies. Specifically, the combination of these tactics and tools are applied to recreate a plausible version of the past. These apparatuses ultimately highlight gender and/or racial inequalities that are depicted in both the Brazilian production, which outlines the country's landscape a few years before the 1964 coup d'état and the Spanish series that televises Restoration Spain.³¹

In essence, the end of the Restoration Period in Spain represents a pivotal period for gender roles, and particularly can be identified as a transitional era for women across a number of spaces. In *Coisa Mais Linda*, this dynamic reoccurs and not only showcases gender disparities, but also highlights racial inequalities as well. Furthermore, these series demonstrate, both literally and figuratively, how hidden, private spaces (such as the home and inner thoughts) as well as unconcealed, public spaces (metropolitan life and the outward expression of ideas) are in conflict with one another and ignite an internal crisis for women during these periods.

The glamorous years of the 20s were an era of flashy wardrobes full of sequins and accessories that led to the creation of a new, edgy look. In "Dresses, Cassocks, and Coats: Costuming Restoration Gender Fantasies in *La Señora*," Nicholas Wolters describes this new way of being: "hairstyles became shorter, and dresses flattened and narrowed the female body, thus epitomizing the *estilo garçon*: a waifish aesthetic that deemphasized curves and championed boyish hairstyles and svelte figures, all of which coincide with new freedoms for women in both public and private spheres" (125). This masculinized, edgy clothing begins to be the new

³¹ The coup d'état refers to March 31-April 1, 1964 when President João Goulart was overthrown and the military dictatorship seized power.

medium in which women express themselves and obtain control in the public sphere of metropolitan locales.

The intricate presentation of appearances, beauty and costume are apparent in the televised productions set in this time period. María Del Mar Chicharro Meraya describes this phenomenon further in her article, “Recreando la sociedad del pasado: modernización y conflicto social en *La señora*”: “El hedonismo, el glamour, la diversión y el entretenimiento despuntan como valores que se vinculan de manera intuitiva con una etapa calificada convencionalmente como ‘los felices veinte’” (66). The auditory backdrop of jazz heightens the spectator's senses and translates the perceived sounds of the era. In addition, the usage of first-person plural in a number of these productions, such as in *El tiempo entre costuras* and *Las chicas del cable* invites the spectator to engage as part of this “we” dialogue. Furthermore, the narrator’s employment of “we” welcomes the spectator into an embedded world.³² As such, the audience enters into this simulated perception of reality. Sears-Foy and Magliano also cite van Krieken (2018) in their analysis of perceptual verbs (see, hear, etc.) and cognition verbs (think, etc.) that signal the audience to assume a character’s frame of reference. These surface features enable a more prominent understanding of character perspective via a process of knowledge activation (107). Kietrys draws attention to the grammatical person in “The Female Façade and the Façade of the Female in the Mini-Series *El tiempo entre costuras*.” Specifically, she highlights how the use of “we” functions to create a collective experience, “a collective ‘nosotros’” (326). Similar to Kietrys, I believe the usage of the second person plural does effectively invite the spectator to participate in this embedded world. Not only can this “we” be seen via the usage of subtitles, but

³²Jeffrey Saers-Foy and Joseph Magliano discuss this term and state that the embedded world “ [...] can take many forms, such as a dream sequence, characters telling stories, and interwoven narratives” (101).

it is auditorily engrained even further via this verbal dialogue. The spectator is thus able to seamlessly enter into this embedded, narrative world via a direct invitation by the characters. Furthermore, this inclusive language encourages a cohesive blend between the narrative and lived experience, which in turn blurs the borderlines between our natural, human existence and what is perceived to be fictitious.

Weaving Past into Present: Perceptual Memory, Social Merchandising and Agenda Setting

How does the emergence of past memories displayed in audiovisual narratives contribute to current understandings? Do these discourses weave the past into the present? In “Consumo midiático, localismos e cosmopolitismos: a série brasileira *Coisa Mais Linda*,” Clarice Greco et al. cites Borges (2008) to confirm that television presents itself as a mirror of society; society sees itself through the medium of television, which provides a representation of itself (162). In the example of *Coisa Mais Linda*, there is a dialectical relationship between past and present, where the characters are in the past but their conversations and discourse connect to the present (168). In the article “Imaginary Engagement, Real-World Effects: Fiction, Emotion, and Social Cognition,” Jennifer Barnes defines fiction in relation to the human experience: “Fiction has been characterized as a simulation of the social world (Mar & Oatley, 2008) that focuses on the minds of others, as well as the ins and outs of human relationships and interactions, thereby allowing the reader to practice untangling the complicated web of social processes that converge in a given situation (Mar, Oatley, Djikic, & Mullin, 2011)” (125). Furthermore, the multitude of characters, situations and relationships that unfold in the lengthy serials outlined in this chapter, align with and simulate the spectators’ perceptions of the social world.

In “The Translation of Memory Through Television: *El tiempo entre costuras* and the Spanish Civil War,” Kietrys explores how national narratives become global via the accessibility of national content through platforms such as Netflix. Furthermore, when a national memory receives foreign recognition, it may be considered a “trans-cultural memory,” or “[...] the carrying over of one culture’s collective memory into that of another culture” (164). This ideology can be applied to the select series which are available for streaming on Netflix: *El tiempo entre costuras*, *Las chicas del cable*, and *Coisa Mais Linda*. While *La señora* was initially only accessible on the Spanish platform, RTVE (Radio Televisión Española), it is now offered also on international platforms, such as Amazon and Apple TV. Thus, *El tiempo entre costuras*, *Las chicas del cable*, *Coisa Mais Linda* and *La señora* could be considered products of trans-cultural memory.³³ As these global productions are able to digitally travel through national territories, they must also be receptive to a multicultural audience—which by nature requires less of a focus on cultural norms, and more on the collective, human experience.

In the embedded story world of a narrative, a focus on the collective sometimes shifts into the subjective character point of view. Kietrys also highlights how this is made evident by the protagonist herself at the end of *El tiempo entre costuras*: “In the closing scene, Sira looks back on her life and says, ‘That was my story, or at least the way I remember it’. Sira’s conclusion leaves room for discrepancy between the past and how we *remember* the past. A stand-in for the viewer at this point, Sira recognizes that memories of the past may differ from the past itself” (“The Translation of Memory” 167). On a similar note, Peris Blanes briefly discusses the reconstruction of the past via the imagined community conceptualized by Benedict Anderson. He examines Anderson’s intellectual construct and how it determined that nations are

³³ While the concept of a trans-cultural memory per se is not the focus of my project, it is important to understand some of the diverse and abundant terminologies associated with memory.

a product of “[...] cultural, discursive and representational materials used in national management” (29). Through these virtual mediums, new constructions and notions of the past are able to surface.

Vasallo de Lopes explains how differences of opinion and class perspectives emerge, and thus how the telenovela (such as in the following Brazilian example) provides a domain for a national, imagined community that engages, expresses and constantly updates itself: “En el caso brasileño se trata, como veremos más adelante, del hecho paradójico de que la telenovela, una narrativa ficcional, se haya convertido en Brasil en un espacio público de debate nacional” (73). Thus, the television series serves as a powerful tool to inspire the formation of identity as it distributes a public message and situates the consumer (74). The new, imagined nation is one which continuously evolves and is reinterpreted by the spectators: “...y porque salen al aire en cuanto están siendo escritas, las novelas fueron definidas como *obras abiertas* (en el sentido de Umberto Eco). Éstas son capaces de poner en *sintonía* a los telespectadores con la interpretación y la reinterpretación de los temas tratados” (84). As the telenovelas project themselves as open works, they have the opportunity to reform and reshape society, its collective memories and hegemonies, in order to modify the opinions of spectators, and initiate a new, imagined nation.

In my reading of these interminable productions, I identify them as open works for the following reasons. Firstly, the seriality of the telenovela provides an illusion of openness on one hand as a new episode or season could always surface in the future. In addition, the multiplicity of protagonists provides a more open feel as the spectator toggles between perspectives and has the opportunity to slowly empathize and understand each of the characters. More specifically, in my analysis, I highlight how the following series particularly leverage the sensorial—which is an experience that by nature alludes to openness, as we perceive and utilize our own senses in

accordance to our individualized experiences, cultures and memories. Thus, the openness of the telenovela allows for a lateral exploration of the past in the language of the present.

Similarly, Greco et al. discusses how stories of the 50s in Brazil are used to approach the present in the series *Coisa Mais Linda*: “É o caso da série *Coisa Mais Linda*, que intercala elementos da cultura brasileira, como a bossa nova, o eixo Rio-São Paulo e Iemanjá, e temas universalizáveis, como a desigualdade social e o papel da mulher na sociedade. Com esse fim, ela faz uso do cenário dos anos 1950 para tratar de temas atuais, recorrendo ao passado para se referir ao presente” (158). The narrative of the past is told visually with vibrant landscapes and sceneries of both Rio and São Paulo, but also engages the spectator auditorily through the insertion of Brazilian music of the past. The construction of yesterday is recreated using themes that connect with the present moment. This is not only evident in *Coisa Mais Linda*, but social inequality and female oppression are also contemporary themes that are depicted in the narratives of *La señora*, *El tiempo entre costuras*, and *Las chicas del cable*.

Additionally, Vassallo de Lopes describes the panorama of the Brazilian telenovela. She contends that the plots of the productions bring about a series of contrasts: “La trama de las novelas es producida generalmente por oposiciones entre hombres y mujeres; entre generaciones; entre clases sociales; entre localidades rurales y urbanas, ‘arcaicas y modernas’, representadas como tendencias intrínsecas y simultáneas de la contemporaneidad brasileña” (83). As a result of the tragic reality of the 50s and 60s, public spaces fall into a vicious trap of labeling in accordance with ethnicity and gender. Additionally, Vassallo de Lopes notes that the telenovelas also shine light on specific themes of this modern, imagined nation such as, “la movilidad social, la nueva familia, la diversidad sexual, étnica, racial, la afirmación femenina, la renovación ética”

(94). Not only do they offer important reminders about the historic inequalities of the past, but they also promote a liberal turn toward change, one which is more open to a new world.³⁴

The fluid recollection of yesterday is not only present in the historical narrative but also is particularly connected to spatial identities. Peris Blanes cites Edensor (2015) in the analysis of spatial and symbolic ties to feelings of national belonging. For example, such familiarity is established in a number of televised spaces, such as quotidian places like streets, shopping malls, buildings, etc., and these spatial associations are also in movement, in conjunction with culture, and the evolving world (37). The individual landscapes that are audiovisually depicted may be described as a “geography of memory” according to Rueda Laffond. Spatial locations can also create stereotypes “[...] based on proximity strategies and materials recognised by viewers” (38).

The incorporation of the present into a fading footprint of the past often enables the creation of a modified version—one with a specific objective in mind. Vassallo de Lopes describes this general phenomenon as a specialty of social merchandising: “La novela también aparece [...] en todo un circuito de *merchandising* que va desde las ropas y joyas usadas por los actores, hasta los objetos de decoración, bebidas, carros, tiendas y bancos que aparecen en las historias; en los comerciales con los actores de las novelas que están al aire” (92). It is through this finite marketing of meticulous details and subtle backgrounds that new constructions and characterizations for the consumer (or spectator) are subconsciously recreated. In the article, “Merchandising social na telenovela brasileira,” Lisandro Nogueira and Lourival Belém Júnior discuss the prevalence and function of social merchandising in a number of Brazilian telenovelas.

O merchandising foi sendo aprimorado e começou a transbordar alcançando leitões de outros rios. A incorporação de temáticas urbanas pelos autores foi diluída no novo tipo de

³⁴ A number of these examples are also portrayed in *Coisa Mais Linda* and will be later mentioned on page 74.

merchandising surgido no final dos anos oitenta, pois de tanto abordar temáticas da realidade brasileira as emissoras descobriram o "merchandising social". Num primeiro momento, devido às imensas carências e dívidas sociais, a inserção de campanhas de saúde nas novelas foi saudada e louvada. Aproveitando o descaso das elites que dominam o Estado e seus aparelhos, as telenovelas, com ampla penetração na sociedade brasileira, ocuparam o espaço e, através dos "merchandisings sociais", substituíram em alguns casos o papel do poder público. (31)

The interwoven narratives of social merchandising began to frequent Brazilian telenovelas in an effort to produce social change. While many of these examples in the discussion brought forward by Nogueira and Belém Júnior are situated around aspects of public health, this concept can be applied to a number of messages which are audiovisually communicated to inspire change via the careful selection of narrative and elaborate mise-en-scène.³⁵

Seriality, Continuity and Priming

Peris Blanes draws attention to the concept of time in the television serial: “On the other hand, the serial, repetitive nature of television content turns viewing into a ritual, a habit that creates a sense of security, trust and proximity — one might almost say familiarity between the viewer and the TV broadcaster” (33). This is especially true in longer viewing experiences, as with multi-seasoned series like *La señora*, *El tiempo entre costuras*, and *Las chicas del cable*, as well as in the Brazilian series *Coisa Mais Linda*.³⁶ The spectator develops a more intimate relationship with the storyline, characters, etc. due to the lengthy duration of a serial. Saers-Foy

³⁵ In the context of *Coisa Mais Linda*, I will provide specific examples, such as those mentioned on pages 73-74.

³⁶ While *El tiempo entre costuras* only has one season, it is much longer than other multi-seasoned series since it has a total of 17 episodes.

and Magliano also describe how the insertion of selected clips from previous episodes enhances comprehension for the viewer (109). This mimics the natural human process of priming as the spectator receives the content from the previous episode for a second time; to create a deeper understanding—a memory that becomes more complete.

In the chapter “A Sense of Moment: Appreciating Television Serials from Aesthetic and Cognitive Perspectives,” from the book *Cognition, Emotion, and Aesthetics in Contemporary Serial Television*, Sarah Cardwell discusses the cognitive effect of a number of viewing experiences, such as the “startle effect” of horror or the association between long-term serial consumption and friendships in real-life. Furthermore, Saers-Foy and Magliano discuss how continuity throughout episodes offers spectators an illusion of a lived relationship in real-time with fictional characters when they cite Porter et al. (2002) (106). According to Renata do Amaral Barcellos in “Decodificando mensagens: Os significados do merchandising social na novela *Páginas da Vida*,” the audience oftentimes goes as far as to compare their own life experiences with that of the telenovela narrative: “Os espectadores leem a novela fazendo comparações com as suas vidas pessoais, tanto no momento em que se encontram como com referências a fatos passados. Este processo de comparação gera nos espectadores uma reflexão e uma constante revisão de suas posições, de suas escolhas de vida” (201). Thus, the continuity and lengthy running time of a serial provides the viewer an enhanced perception of the televised reality, enabling them to identify intimately with the characters and draw comparisons with their own personal lives.

Peris Blanes also comments on the personal meaning that television is capable of creating, especially as it integrates into spaces of the spectator’s home; typically, it can be identified as a treasured object in a leisure space (34). While the traditional television set was

typically placed in a living room, nowadays people often have television sets in other more vulnerable places, such as the bedroom; those who do not own a television set might consume a web series from their laptop or handheld device, directly from their bed. In the contemporary viewing experience, audiovisual productions often form a bridge between an awake state and the perceptions that are then surfaced in a dream-like condition. Barnes also discusses processes such as narrative transportation, which is “defined as the act of becoming cognitively, emotionally and imaginatively immersed in a story” (127). One might compare this vulnerable state of immersion to that which is experienced during dreaming. Narrative transportation is similar to dreaming in that it sometimes feels inevitable and outside of the viewer’s control. The simulation of the social world becomes even more complex, intricate and parallel to real-world circumstances when seriality is involved to establish an illusion of months, years and a general sense of the long-term.

La señora (2008)

Behind closed doors, *La señora* depicts the recurring dilemma between an acceptable societal identity versus one that is prohibited and rejected. For example, tension builds because of a series of secrets that the protagonist Victoria Márquez de la Vega holds and that begin to be revealed. From the start, the aristocratic Victoria has to hide her childhood romance, a shunned love story where she fell for a poor man from the working class, Ángel González Ruiz. The main character begins to enter into conflict between the social norms of this time period and her own emotional desires, a situation which only worsens when her beloved Ángel decides to become a priest. Her emotions begin to unravel in private spaces, such as in her bedroom (a space that

Chicharro Mereya identifies as “emotive and romantic” [my translation]). Throughout this series, these emotional encounters take place in a variety of interior spaces that are beyond public view. In the dominating interior thoughts of her mind and throughout the secret corners of the city, Victoria constantly contemplates what could have been in another life, if her impossible romance had been possible.

Going forward, Victoria’s life fails to truly align with society’s demands. Furthermore, social gaps continue being a barrier for Victoria throughout the series, especially after marrying her husband, Gonzalo López, who doesn’t accept Victoria’s participation in business matters. Victoria resists this marginalized role in support of feminine rights, as is demonstrated by her resistant personality and her intense desire to involve herself with the matters of her family business. When her father passes away, she transforms herself into a critical businesswoman, co-inheriting the family establishment together with her brother. Determined to fight for her cause and improve local labor conditions, Victoria has direct, face-to-face contact with the mine workers to show them her stance and the tenacity she has to make improvements in their situation. Conversely, she falls into a crisis when she discovers that her husband is actually an imposter, whose *nouveau riche* status is based on a fraudulent account.

The spectator consistently perceives status as an important matter, even with regards to visual appearances and the associated glamorous apparel of the roaring 20s. Furthermore, this is apparent even in the way that Victoria dresses. She presents herself as a fashion icon and is always trying to expand the feminine limits in public spaces, such as in the street or the living room of her house during social gatherings. Ultimately, frequent social merchandising is subtly embedded as part of the *mise-en-scène* of this series. In Susana Rodríguez’s analysis of spectator perception on a web forum, “Foros en páginas web: un instrumento de análisis de la

recepción de series de ficción históricas. El caso de *La señora*,” the sporadic insertion of historical elements is what allowed *La señora* to establish a sense of verisimilitude for the spectator:

El valor histórico de la serie preocupa poco. Lo que realmente despierta interés es la apariencia del pasado: el vestuario, los decorados, los objetos, las localizaciones o las costumbres de ese momento dotan de realismo a la narración. No se ofrece veracidad sino verosimilitud: mientras la ambientación resulte creíble, los personajes y sus acciones—que son realmente portadores de significado—pueden ser incoherentes con la realidad histórica (Rosenstone, 1997). (31)

Beyond these metropolitan scenes, the women in these television series also display their modern advances in the wild, uncontrolled terrain of nature. In *La señora*, from the beginning nature begins to take on a critical role. For example, when the protagonist and her brother are flying a kite in the countryside next to a series of seaside cliffs, out of nowhere, Victoria falls off of the edge of the cliffs. Ángel, who is the heroic passerby, suddenly arrives to rescue the damsel in distress.

Spaces of nature continue to carry out a symbolic function, as in this case where Victoria has her first encounter with the love of her life. This scene embodies a cross section of a feminine longing for freedom and adventure, while it also encapsulates a masculine need to save and protect. This symbolism recurs when Gonzalo saves her in a wooded forest. Lastly, the greenhouse of the Márquez residence exemplifies an intermediate space, one that combines wild nature and the civilized coexistence of different people in their social meetings. Given that it forms part of the house, Chicharro Merayo defines it as an “escenario intrahogar” and a space that offers a connecting point between nature and society (63). This intermediate territory as well

as the other aforementioned taxonomies of space, all of which are categorized by both gender and social class, are prevalent throughout *La señora*.

El tiempo entre costuras (2013)

The tension between societal expectations and individual desires appear again in the series *El tiempo entre costuras*. In this production, Sira Quiroga plays a young, sought out seamstress who assumes the undercover, false name of Aris Agoriu. She starts a troublesome first love affair when she meets Ramiro Arribasen, a character whose virtue is merely characterized by good looks. Because of differences in social class, Ramiro abandons her, leaving her with nothing and robbing her of her family fortune and some precious heirlooms.

After this heartbroken tragedy, her problematic romances continue to unfold. Specifically, she enters into a conflict of interest with her profession as a spy for the British intelligence in Spain when she falls in love with the journalist, Marcus Logan. The female protagonist of this story has to live a double life in order to satisfy her professional demands, while also that of her personal life. In similar circumstances to those of Victoria from *La señora*, Sira is also not able to pursue her own romantic path, as it seems to be highly influenced by the expectations and pressures of society. Her position as a spy interferes with her personal motives, and as such, she can't maintain a public relationship with Marcus.

Similar to Victoria's entrepreneurial spirit in *La señora*, in *El tiempo entre costuras* Sira also establishes herself in the fashion world as a distinguished seamstress, one who uses her way of dressing as a powerful tool against public opinion. In her article, "The Re-Construction of 'La Costurera': a Feminist Re-Interpretation of the Role of the Seamstress in *El tiempo entre*

costuras/The Time Between the Seams (2013),” Laura Kemp analyzes the function of a dress code in the series. She states how dress serves not only to complement the rejection of hegemonic gender roles, but also as a tool for protest (160). Moreover, fashion serves as a silent performance that also expresses a body language of resistance for the spectator.

What is the role of dress, and what other underlying audiovisual elements create a “silent language” to support the unifying thread of the narration? Kemp quotes the words of Sira: “...en esta vida no importa lo que eres sino lo que pareces, os lo digo por experiencia...” (164). As illustrated by Kemp, the protagonist of the telenovela utilizes beauty as a means to recenter herself again, as well as to gain control. In moments of stress, she presents herself in powder rooms to touch up her lipstick, which one can visually understand as another layer of masking herself, and this is described and defined by Kemp as “a final fictitious façade” (165). On the other hand, Sira experiences freedom outside the doors of her own home and the borders of her country when she flees with Ramiro from her family in Madrid.

Her mischief brings her to Tangiers, a vibrant, exotic city. According to Kietrys, the spatial representations in this series are particularly prominent as they function as protagonists. “It is through Sira Quiroga’s interaction with the literal space, in and beyond the cities in which she lives, that her metaphorical space in the world unfolds” (“The Female Façade” 318). Sira and Ramiro settle in a dazzling life of diamonds and leisure, where excessive abundance both confronts and consumes her. Kemp also emphasizes various cases of Sira’s luxurious taste outside private realms. For instance, Sira goes on risky adventures when she visits the wild nightclubs of Casablanca or the lavish garden parties of Tetuán, events that never lacked an abundance of cigarettes, champagne glasses and bottomless cocktails (165). Additionally, Kietrys highlights this visual and aromatic spectacle: “The day she opens the shop in her home

she gets dressed as if she were going on stage: she takes delight in donning a new dress, having her hair curled, applying lipstick, smoking with an emblematic cocktail length cigarette holder, and sporting new high-heeled shoes” (“The Female Façade” 333). Sira’s prestigious life is also evident when she becomes the most valued dressmaker of Tangiers, and is responsible for designing the dresses of very prominent women of high social stature, such as the wives of the Nazis.

This role gets complicated when she becomes a spy for the British intelligence in Spain. Furthermore, the seemingly frivolous task of designing dresses transforms into a pivotal role when she becomes a source of information for the government. Lastly, Kemp discusses how the series offers a feminist reinterpretation of the role of the dressmaker and rejects the ancient, derogatory view of this profession (160). Ultimately, Sira weaves through an abundance of spaces and places, while she silently partakes in a visual, vibrant show that allows the spectator to perceive the unwritten gender norms of the era, and the feminine struggle for power that is consistently evident throughout the series.

Las chicas del cable (2017)

In addition to the gendered oppression and paradoxical romance scenarios that occur within private spaces both in *La señora* and *El tiempo entre costuras*, *Las chicas del cable* also situates itself around social inequalities and a romance that reappears from the past. Lidia Aguilar Dávila (born as Alba Romera Méndez) is separated from her significant other, Francisco Gómez, when they lose each other after departing from a train in Madrid during their adolescent years. Alone and in desperate circumstances, Lidia doesn’t have many options and ends up living

in a brothel. Coincidentally, at a later point in her life, she crosses paths again with Francisco, but as an older, wiser version of herself.

Lidia's conflicting, unjust love story becomes even more complex when she later meets another socially "intangible" love interest, Carlos Cifuentes, who is the director of Telefónica, the national telephone cable company of Spain. The visual backdrop of the historical period is enhanced by the incorporation of iconic historical buildings to create verisimilitude for the spectator. Since Lidia and Carlos are situated on polar opposite sides of the social spectrum, their relationship becomes the object of public ridicule. Due to the combination of Lidia's lower socioeconomic class, her dark past at the brothel, and the fact that Carlos is one of Francisco's best friends, she finds herself in an untenable love affair within a very public forum.

In this series, Lidia isn't the only oppressed female figure. In other locations besides the brothel and the telephone cable company, other female characters reappear as oppressed figures, exploited and forced behind barred spaces. In particular, this occurs with Carlota Rodríguez de Senillosa, who is a marginalized character in society due to the fact that she is a lesbian. Her controversial sexual orientation outrages officials. As a result, they send her to prison in an effort to humiliate her. Lastly, Ángeles Vidal, another one of the main characters, becomes a victim of constant domestic abuse as her husband hits her behind closed doors at home, simply because she will not quit her job.

Outside of these closed, violent spaces, there is a performative, theatrical embellishment established by the series. For example, when the cable girls go out for drinks after work, they are always depicted in edgy attire and the boldest shades of lipstick, as dress and visual appeal become a core component of their daily success. Moreover, all of the cable girls begin to engage in this ostentatious parade of physical expression. However, this "show" isn't one that offers

them much agency. Lidia's words support this scenario further when she describes the inequalities of the women during this decade: "En 1928, las mujeres éramos algo así como adornos que se llevaban a las fiestas para presumir de ellos. Objetos de poder sin opinión ni decisión" ("Los sueños" 00:00:00-00:00:27). Conforming to the words of Lidia, the women were not much more than a spectacle of "decorations."

In essence, the end of the Restoration Period in Spain represents a pivotal period for gender roles, and particularly can be identified as a transitional era for women across a number of spaces. This series demonstrates, both literally and figuratively, how hidden, private spaces (such as the home and inner thoughts) as well as unconcealed, public spaces (metropolitan life and the outward expression of ideas) are in conflict with one another and ignite an internal crisis for women during this period.

Apart from the growing tension created by problematic love interests, these series also prove how women during this era are perceived as oppressed figures in various private spaces. In "Felices Años veinte?: *Las Chicas del Cable* and the Iconicity of 1920s Madrid,"³⁷ Leslie Harkema offers an overview of what the situation was like during the roaring twenties: "it embraces the notions of 1920s Madrid as a place and time of intense presentness... an era as uncertain, as riddled with injustices and deception as any, including our own. It does this principally through its focus on working women who struggle for autonomy in a misogynistic society..." (223). Apart from a focus on the unjust environment for females in the workplace, these series also prove how women during this time appear as oppressed figures within various private spaces. In this contemporary reading of this historical moment, the intersection of contradictory spaces, public and private, depicts a misogynistic society that faces the progressive

³⁷ This is a chapter from the book *Televising Restoration Spain: History and Fiction in Twenty-First-Century Costume Dramas*, edited by David R George Jr. and Sonya Wan Tang.

advances of a subtly feminist show. Moreover, Harkema's piece further supports my theory that these series fixate on female physical appeal as a driving force for success, as well as on the notion of physical spaces (the private, the public and what lies between) as a gender marking boundary. Ultimately, this series is able to prime spectators via a slow, progressive, multi-seasoned seriality in order to audiovisually demonstrate the gendered, spatial restrictions of the time.

Coisa Mais Linda (2019)

The previous examples of spatial territories and social merchandising that occur in the context of Restoration Spain are also apparent in the miniseries *Coisa Mais Linda*, another pre-dictatorship context, one which occurs a few years later and across the Atlantic. The scenery of this production, its wardrobe choices, and the unique forms of communication and interaction that it depicts create a reconstruction of the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil of the 1950s and 1960s. More specifically, the series begins in 1959, during a crucial time period for Brazil, both musically and politically. In the following year, President Juscelino Kubitschek relocated the capital of the country from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília. In addition, bossa nova music also started to become widely popular and gained international recognition (Greco et al. 165).

Coisa Mais Linda is able to encompass a number of themes that exemplify the ideals of collective memory and social hierarchies in Brazilian society during this historical era. One of the principal protagonists, Maria Luiza Carone, is thrown into a chaotic state when both her husband and financial resources suddenly disappear. Contrary to the wishes of her father, Maria Luiza doesn't return to her family home in São Paulo, but instead stays by herself in Rio de

Janeiro with the hope of opening her own bossa nova music club (a very liberal and innovative concept in Rio during the 50s). After Maria Luiza hires Adélia Araújo, her black, ex-maid as her business partner, a scandal surfaces and she begins to face public criticism. Similarly, when Maria Luiza's best friend Lígia wants to explore her love for singing in a public realm, she is violently scolded and beaten by her husband.

In “A Netflix como ferramenta digital e audiovisual na abordagem de gênero, raça e racismo nas séries *Hollywood* e *Coisa Mais Linda*,” Marques et al. draw attention to the recurring dynamic of femicide: “Os autores destacam que o feminicídio é o reflexo de um processo social que tem no corpo feminino a construção de uma propriedade privada para uso do homem. Essas violências múltiplas (física, psicológica e simbólica) nada mais são do que o reflexo do que acontece no espaço privado que tem o homem como protagonista” (4). The spatial taxonomies of this series and different gender roles it presents are essential to audience perception. Furthermore, the progressively violent encounters depicted in the series mimic the priming process of human memory since the audience slowly understands the severity of the abuse via repetition and the inclusion of different examples. Violence becomes a conditioned stimulus, a familiar act for the spectator as it is depicted as a quotidian occurrence in this televised perspective.

Additionally, priming is also incorporated in a particular sensorial manner by the inclusion of panoramic scenes and emotive music. For example, during moments of oppression, the spectator relives the liberating memories of Maria Luiza, such as in the first episode when a brief sight of a man carrying a guitar prompts her on a MTT journey, where she remembers the exhilarating splash when she dove into the water, or her day spent dancing accompanied by the bang of drums and wild samba in the foothills of Rio. Additionally, the repetitive incorporation

of Lemanja, a goddess of the sea and a protector of women, functions not only to symbolically represent the ocean, but also to serve as a reminder for oppressed women to push forward and fight for their freedoms. By paralleling the natural process of priming and our own sensorial experiences in this narrative reconstruction, this production is able to fluidly engrain its messages into the mind of the spectator.

Not only are gender inequalities present throughout *Coisa Mais Linda*, but a number of racial disparities are also evident. Thematically, this is frequented in other Brazilian series as well. A similar dynamic is analyzed in the article, “A racialização presente em telenovelas sob a perspectiva do topos,” where Silva and Paulinelli explore how racialization plays out in the Brazilian telenovelas *O Profeta* and *Dois Caras*. Silva and Paulinelli use the theory of *topos* as the backbone of their analysis in which various properties such as universality, generality and gradual nature are depicted (190). This representation could be conceptually compared to Jacob Lurie’s explanation in *Higher Topos Theory* with regard to topology, as there is a categorical and mathematical interpretation (similar to if X is X, then Y will occur) (684). Moreover, Silva and Paulinelli emphasize that universality represents concepts that are generally accepted from an objective perspective, while generality exemplifies a fact or experience that is widely acknowledged. Lastly, the gradual nature concept signifies that terms with related properties will be directly affected in the event that one of the terms changes (190). In my opinion, this could be applied to the algebraic configuration associated with Higher Topos Theory; being a mathematical equation it is a) widely accepted, and b) there is an assumption of how certain variables and categories will be affected based on the numerical equation. As reiterated by Silva and Paulinelli, the Brazilian telenovela incorporates the *topos* theory and all of its elements in order to reiterate a collective, national identity concept—one which, in the process of assumption,

loses sight of the difference between fact and fiction, through its subtle use of universality, generality and gradual nature in accordance with the societal norms of the time period.

Furthermore, in the multi-seasoned production, *Coisa Mais Linda*, its seriality allows a basis for graduality, and perceived universality and generality. Just as a larger range of numerical data aids to establish a more precise best-fit line, the abundance of content or increased running time of a multi-seasoned serial allows for a closer look at patterns and televised perceptions of the past.

These patterns are particularly apparent in the analysis brought forward by Silva and Paulinelli with regard to racial differences in *O Profeta* and *Duas Caras*. For example, in *O Profeta*, there are various scenes where a black woman works as a domestic servant and her daughter, a *mulata*, no longer wants to be connected to the ethnic background of her mother (188). According to Silva and Paulinelli, the interethnic conflict begins with the preconceived notion that the color of one's skin has a direct relationship with money and possessions. As such, ethnicity serves as the basis of exclusion within the context of this Brazilian society (210).

Similarly, in my analysis, the desire to be perceived as or to pass for a white woman is also expressed in *Coisa Mais Linda*. The dialogue refers to the female characters' collective desire to be distinguished as women of wealth and white skin. This dynamic is exemplified in various conversations throughout the series. For example, when Adélia dresses up elegantly for the opening night of their music club, her sister comments to her that she seems rich and beautiful, just like a white woman (“Os Sonhadores” [00:32:50-00:32:58]). Throughout the scenes mentioned in the other Brazilian telenovelas presented by Silva and Paulinelli, as well as in the series *Coisa Mais Linda*, there is a positioning of the white race as the highest status symbol in Brazilian society.

Likewise, this distinction is also indicated spatially in *Coisa Mais Linda*. For example, in this series, the cheery, aristocratic country club restaurant only welcomes guests with white skin, and features high-end china and exotic delicacies, while the black characters are pictured in the somber, dark environment of their home kitchen, with nothing to enjoy but a depressing and unappetizing bowl of everyday soup. Borrowing from Silva and Paulinelli's interpretation of the kitchen being a metaphorical space for female characters of African descent in *O Profeta*, this is also evident in *Coisa Mais Linda*. Moreover, the underlying attitudes that work in combination with spaces of classification reinforce a society with racist forms of being.

Not only does this production leverage space in the context of food-related scenes to represent the societal distinction of the black characters, it also emphasizes these differences across Brazilian cities. For example, there is a dramatic difference between the wild hills and the relaxed life of Rio de Janeiro, versus the city and the organized civilization of São Paulo. Along with food and drink establishments, the different neighborhoods of the cities and villages are marked by exclusivity, as ethnicity, skin color and gender are depicted as the basis of belonging in these different spaces. Furthermore, I believe the frequent insertion of inequalities in *Coisa Mais Linda*, such as racism, is used as a means to draw attention and subtly push the public toward a positive transformation. By reminding the spectators of the problems of the past in the language of the present, these productions are able to indirectly inspire change for tomorrow. In *Coisa Mais Linda* this dynamic is evident as the telenovela also introduces new perspectives that support friendships without barriers and relationships without preconceived notions around race. Even though there are various instances in the plot that do prioritize whiteness, certain characters like Maria Luiza protest against these inequalities. In this sense, the marginalized characters who

push for equality (like Maria Luiza) serve as the driving thread behind the boundary breaking and a basis for this imagined, new future.

In addition, the telenovela can also function as a platform for societal change since it often recognizes the scars of a rigid, racist past, yet it also opens new, more inclusive frameworks for the future. For example, Maria Luiza fights to remove these boundaries by audaciously opening her own bossa nova music club—and inviting Adélia, a black woman to join her as her business partner. Even though she receives enormous resistance, she drives forward in an effort to reshape the ideals of the Brazilian society of 1960. In addition, despite her abusive and controlling husband, Lígia pushes to have a role in public space when she visits Maria Luiza's club as a guest singer. In these public locales, the women use ruffles and frills, vibrant colors and bold attire in their ostentatious attempt to rebel against both the gendered and racialized norms of the time.³⁸ The vivid visual representation and Brazilian musical backdrop of the traditional samba or bossa nova function to exaggerate this message and sensorially align with the spectator. This loaded *mise-en-scène* is presented as a form of social merchandising and appears throughout the series not only to project subconscious ideas of a modern imaginary, but also to establish an “open production,” one that attracts a level of reflected identity—portraying the past in the lens of the present. In *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur's questions seem to strongly suggest this inevitable cohesion between past and present: “As readers of history are we not ourselves made contemporaries of past events by a vibrant reconstruction of their intertwining? In short, is the past intelligible any other way than as persisting in the present?” (144). By narrating a story of the past that still holds its footprint today with regard to many of the gender and racial inequalities, the four aforementioned telenovelas are able to subtly parallel

³⁸ The gender inequality is purposively highlighted as it is showcased in the title of the second episode of the first season: “Garotas não são bem-vindas.”

the present in an effort to remind the public of lingering issues, as well as to prompt new social change.

Conclusion

Beyond the limited roles prescribed to them, the women in these Spanish and Brazilian series begin to explore a new world of freedom in an open space. The glamorous years of the Spanish 20s invite flashy wardrobes full of sequins and accessories to create a new, edgy look. Similarly, in the Brazilian context, the women in the series begin to explore a new world of freedom in an open locale—such as in the corners of a female-owned business or on a public stage. According to the events portrayed in these series, it wasn't a very socially acceptable practice to have women in the workforce. As such, the women depicted in both these Spanish and Brazilian series received a considerable amount of criticism for positioning themselves outside of these traditional roles and spaces, thereby establishing a new standard and rejecting the archetype of the Spanish *ángel del hogar*—or the *anjo do lar* in a Brazilian context.

All in all, the end of the Spanish Restoration Period marked a changing point for gender roles, and specifically a time of feminine transition within various spaces. Moreover, the intersection point between hidden spaces and the uncovered, visible, open territories represented in these series produces opposition, and as such, bolsters an internal crisis for the women in these audiovisual programs. Within these confined spaces, between barred places, these women become oppressed victims. On the other hand, between cerebral walls, they dare to ponder unattainable love interests. Lastly, in public spaces, the female protagonists of the series begin to take on new roles by pushing societal boundaries and social expectations in metropolitan locales,

territories of nature, and the workplace environment. Ultimately, the televised perspectives of the women in *La señora*, *El tiempo entre costuras*, *Las chicas del cable*, and *Coisa Mais Linda* illustrate a process of spatial transition away from the distinct feminine and/or racial roles set during both the end of the Spanish Restoration Period, as well as in the pre-dictatorship Brazil of the 50s and 60s.

Chicharro Merayo notes that the new bars and cafes depicted in *La señora* provide a fresh perspective around leisure that invite women to express themselves in new terms, rejecting the suffocating norms of society (66). To capture the essence of *los felices veinte*, Chicharro Merayo comments on a number of cinematic tools (folklore, customs and traditions, culinary culture, dress codes, music, etc.) that are used to establish such a simulated, televised interpretation of the past. I argue that the above observations mentioned by Chicharro Merayo not only apply to *La señora* but to *Las chicas del cable*, *El tiempo entre costuras* and *Coisa Mais Linda* as well. Ultimately, these tools collectively contribute to the social merchandising and agenda setting employed in both the Spanish and Brazilian examples.

By recreating a replica of an unjust past in their respective historical frameworks, *La señora*, *El tiempo entre costuras*, *Las chicas del cable* and *Coisa Mais Linda* also identify the hegemony of time in order to re-establish social norms towards a more ideal, just future. Ultimately, in a slow and serialized manner, the spectator swallows a performative pill, one that is composed of musical backdrops, flashy wardrobes, bold hues, and artful, feminine resistance. To carve its mental imprint, the slow, long-term recycling of this perceptual experience leverages the human process of priming. In addition, the intricate selection of mise-en-scène paves the way for social merchandising, which incorporates agenda setting to reconstruct the past in the narrative of today. Consequently, these televised narratives are able to slowly and repetitively

activate a sensory understanding for the spectator in order to align with the natural, long-term memory processes of perceptual memory and priming.

In “Applying Paul Ricoeur’s Spiral of Mimesis for Authenticity as a Moral Standard,” Kathryn Smoot Egan discusses how narrative authenticity is achieved via the three stages of the Aristotelian process of mimesis (or imitation):

[...] *mimesis* is prefiguration, ordinary daily existence, from which *mimesis* is abstracted and configured into stories by the writer–producer; the narration is completed in *mimesis* by the viewer, who ruminates and tests the narrative (i.e., ‘Is this true for me, too?’) in refiguration. The narration is then passed into prefiguration–the quotidian–and becomes fodder for new configuration in the never-ending spiral. (160)

As such, establishing mimesis—a plausible experience for the spectator creates value (or authenticity).³⁹ If the spectator decides that the narrative is also true for them in their own life, this in turn creates intrinsic meaning via the process of self-association. Not only is establishing narrative plausibility important to garner audience relatability, but it also provides us with case studies—toolkits we can use to understand both the past and present to more effectively prepare for the future. By closely connecting narrative and lived experiences, artistic forms of expression can be used as a guide to answer our questions about the past, present and future. For example, observing characters and their means for conflict resolution functions as a practice exercise—offering us real-life scenarios in order to better navigate our own interpersonal relationships. Ultimately, narratives function to provide us answers, and to solve many of the unknowns that accompany our own existence. These telenovelas are able to produce a reconstruction of the past and a plausible experience for the spectator through the mimicking of

³⁹ Not only does this process of mimesis contribute to authenticity in narrative, but it is synonymous with imitationalism—one of the three key theories utilized to judge the success of an artistic expression (as described on page 3 of the introduction).

natural cognitive function, and more specifically, the mental processes we leverage for perceptual memory and priming.

Chapter 4

Slapstick or Dictatorship? A Look at Two Biopics with a Twist: Carta a Eva (2013) and Arde Madrid (2018)

Introduction

National histories are not only shared via the lens of memory and nostalgia, but also sometimes use comical elements to further hook an audience. For example, Director Agustí Villaronga leverages satire and exaggerated drama to provide a depiction of 1947 Spain in the RTVE series, *Carta a Eva* (2013). Similarly, in the Movistar+ production *Arde Madrid* (2018), Paco León incorporates slapstick humor and ludic allegory to repaint the audiovisual canvas of 1960s Spain. Both *Carta a Eva* and *Arde Madrid* are considered miniseries since each production only includes a limited number of episodes; genre-wise they both incorporate a unique twist on the traditional biopic, and as such I've coined this subgenre a *biopic without borders*⁴⁰. In the article "Memoria, justicia y 'feminismo sexy': de las *Trece Rosas* (2007) a *Carta a Eva* (2013)," Cristina Sánchez-Conejero quotes Deveny when she examines the meaning behind the biopic: "Thomas Deveny reconoce la veracidad histórica de los hechos narrados en la película, a la que denomina 'bio-pic', tomando prestado el vocablo de Tabea Alexa Linhard, dada su 'myriad narratives of their story, including historical narratives, poems, testimonial documents, a novel, a

⁴⁰ The *biopic without borders* is one which lacks specific margins, confinements and barriers in its depiction of biographies, cultures and national frontiers. Furthermore, in the following analysis, both *Carta a Eva* and *Arde Madrid* incorporate either transatlantic plots and/or cultures, and also feature biographical perspectives not only from famous individuals, but also from the marginalized figures of their respective historical contexts.

documentary, and various historical accounts (40) (277).” These biographies may be audiovisually described as a biopic when there is a direct, visual construal of a famous individual of the past. María Toscano-Alonso provides a number of definitions in “La representación cinematográfica de Eva Perón en los biopics: *Evita*, *Eva Perón* y *Juan y Eva*.” Most notable is her discussion influenced by Moral (based on ideas from Metz and Barthes) in which she describes this type of biographical narration as a closed story in conjunction with the character’s lifetime; a piece which typically includes the beginning scenes *in media res* without a narrator; and also as a medium which claims to project objectivity. Nevertheless, she believes that a number of biopics fail to incorporate these aspects, and thus it may be risky to identify the aforementioned aspects as defining characteristics of the genre (38).

Semantic Memory to Simulate the Human Experience

While *Carta a Eva* and *Arde Madrid* do fall under the category of biopic according to this definition, the complicated question becomes: How does one measure objectivity? Also worthy of mention is the fact that both of these series are primarily featured on Spanish platforms—providing the grounds for a plausible reconstruction, as many of the true stories and events that occur could be taxonomized as semantic memories for a Spanish audience (who may have at least a basic historical understanding of the 20th century). In Hans J. Markowitsch’s “Cultural Memory and the Neurosciences,” long-term memory systems are described in the following manner: “Semantic memory refers to general facts—world knowledge, school knowledge—, facts that are present on a conscious level so that the subject can conclude ‘this is true’ or ‘this is false’: Oslo is the capital of Norway, but Sydney is not the capital of Australia

(278).” Perhaps it could be said that the incorporation of historical fact in these biopics mimics the human experience that accompanies the processing of semantic memory. According to David Manier and William Hirst in “A Cognitive Taxonomy of Collective Memories,” facts are often void of a spatiotemporal connection:

[...] semantic memories, do not possess this temporal or spatial specificity. Many people know that Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, but they no longer remember where they learned this fact. At one time, they presumably possessed a memory of the experience of learning about this battle. Many semantic memories begin as episodic memories. But the episodic memory often fades, leaving behind only the semantic memory of what was learned. (Manier and Hirst 256)

In this way, a semantic memory may sometimes be accompanied by an episodic memory of the learning experience; however, this is often not significant enough to be stored in the brain. Apart from the general concept of semantic memories with regards to individual thought processing, these systems can also be identified as “collective semantic memories” which include both “lived semantic memories” and “collective distant semantic memories” (258). While lived semantic memories require the attachment of a lived experience, collective distant semantic memories sometimes are housed in the brain—yet lack the ability to trace their origin: “As with the Viet Nam War, we learned about Washington’s military maneuver indirectly, through school, books, and an iconic painting. But unlike our lived memories about the Viet Nam War, our distant semantic memories about Washington’s maneuver lack the vital impact of the former” (258). This subdivided perspective of collective memory is clearly written for an American audience who lived during the time period of the Vietnam War, and as such was indirectly and/or directly exposed to its events and occurrences. Manier and Hirst state that lived semantic memories have

of course a different type of effect (258). I would describe them as memories that are strapped by a weighted anchor, woven by complicated and intricate layers of yesterday, and thus immune to the tempestuous waves of trauma that sweep away the forgotten and withered.

This regurgitation of biographical, world knowledge thus parallels the mechanisms of the semantic. As noted by Elena de la Cuadra de Colmenares when Buonanno is quoted in the article “Use of Archival Images in Miniseries ‘Based on Real Events’: Spanish Drama Productions Between 1990 and 2010,” the miniseries is an adequate medium to televise a biographical narrative as it is described as: “[...] the perfect format with which to recount historical events or the lives of deceased public figures, since, ‘it tells a story with a beginning, a development and an end; a story that concludes after a few episodes,’ and both literary adaptations and real events meet the criterion of complete stories” (138). Although my principal focus in this chapter concerns how these biopics activate semantic memory systems in particular, I believe that this genre is effective in televising a number of public figures from the past. The lengthy, serial nature of a television series more proportionately aligns narrative time with the lived time of the historical celebrities in question. In addition, a plethora of characters and mini plots is assumed when watching a series, and as such, introducing the historical past of a number of historical figures at once is fitting and would not be received as unexpected for the spectator. Lastly, shifting the spotlight to and from characters (or celebrity figures of the past) also creates the illusion of collectivity and provides the spectator with what seems to be a bird’s-eye view or a 360-degree snapshot of the past.

Historical Overview

Both *Carta a Eva* and *Arde Madrid* attempt to uncover a brief moment in time, and specifically, one which applies to a finite number of characters. After the culmination of the Spanish Civil War and the appointment of Francisco Franco on October 1, 1939 as Head of State and Generalísimo of the military, the 40s essentially mark the beginnings of *el primer franquismo*. This decade is one of hardships, national hunger, autarky and limited international relations. For example, Argentina was one of the only countries to maintain an embassy on Spanish terrain during this time period. Although Spain didn't totally emerge from international isolation and autarky until the 1960s, the country began to reopen its borders and became a desirable destination for some expatriates a few years prior. For example, according to Charo Lacalle Zalduendo in "Ava Gardner en la España del desarrollismo: la reconstrucción cinéfila de la memoria social en la ficción televisiva española," the former Argentine President, Juan Perón moved to Spain during his years of exile (not surprisingly, considering the fascist nature of both regimes), and the American actress, Ava Gardner also relocated to the country in 1955 in pursuit of work with Hollywood runaway productions (556).

The growth of international influence in Spain is further detailed in both *Carta a Eva* and *Arde Madrid*, and as such, the driving thread of nation building is inserted via narrative contrasting, which constantly reappears throughout both of these audiovisual productions. Furthermore, these stories use *sampling* and other international references to create historical credibility and allegory⁴¹. The linear time frame found in these two miniseries facilitates a seamless virtual time travel experience for the viewer and consequently mirrors biographical

⁴¹ Zalduendo borrows the terminology used by María Emilia Greco and Rubén López-Cano in musical genres, such as the electric tango to describe this phenomenon. According to López-Cano and Greco in the article "Evita, el Che, Gardel y el gol de Victorino," this term shines light on the insertion of sampling in political discourse, soccer news, familiar urban sounds, film dialogues, radio programs, as well as both old and contemporary styles of tango. This technique is often used with other resources to decipher between and question new identities, as well as to politically direct or construct a public message (1). Sampling can be described as the insertion of external, cultural and/or historical references.

written texts of the past. Additionally, the strong contrasts between characters generates dimension in the storyline. Just like a painting, the subliminal shading and contouring between subjects add depth to the artistic creation. Both series stylistically align themselves with the elements of yesteryear via the insertion of random archival footage in *Carta a Eva*, or the purposeful black and white film which is used throughout in *Arde Madrid*. Lastly, apart from leveraging long-term memory systems of semantic memory, both productions engage the spectator via both the illusion of collectivity and the use of narrative juxtaposition to establish characterization via difference.

Carta a Eva (2013)

In the *TVE* miniseries *Carta a Eva*, viewers are invited on a brief, yet multifaceted teletravel journey to understand a complex story, one of multiple perspectives within national borders. This Spanish miniseries consists of just two episodes that discuss the history of Eva Perón's visit to Spain in 1947. Amparo Guerra Gómez goes as far to refer to *Carta a Eva* as *un tele-movie* in "La imagen privada de Franco del cine a la televisión de memoria, biopics y otras representaciones" (115). In the first episode of this series, the spectator is introduced separately to the three main characters, Eva Perón, the First Lady of Argentina, Carmen Polo, the wife of General Francisco Franco, as well as Juana Doña, a resistance fighter who consistently pushes for her ideals in support of the PCE (Partido Comunista de España). As previously mentioned, unlike the traditional biopic, this series doesn't hone in solely on figures of fame and fortune, but also provides the perspective of Juana, who apart from her radical opposition to the Francoist regime, is simply an ordinary person with a family to watch over. Sánchez-Conejero highlights

her mission to keep her husband's memory alive when she insists on telling her son the story of how his father was killed by the Franco regime soldiers while fighting for the resistance (278). Moreover, Juana's presence in this televised narrative functions to offset the power dynamics brought forward by the Spanish and Argentine First Ladies.

Although Juana's personality at times is perceived as extremist and aggressive, she also embodies a character the spectators can trust, as she doesn't have money, power or a reputation to safeguard. Moreover, the scenes in which she appears carry a different impact for the audience—as if they were a behind-the-scenes peek at what life was really like for everyday citizens. Sánchez-Conejero exemplifies how Juana and her family are victims of violence and oppression in a number of scenes. For instance, she mentions when the Francoist soldiers torture her mother Paca and sexually abuse her sister Valia. Furthermore, she borrows the postcolonial term from Homi Bahba to describe these women as “subaltern,” but also “doubly invisible” in the sense of Bell Hooks and Tony Morrison, as they are not only women but also communists (280). The inclusion of marginalized individuals, such as Juana and her family in this *biopic without borders* creates space for other biographical perspectives, and thus enhances the perceived objectivity of the series. Furthermore, this insertion of other historically marginalized voices breaks the barriers of a censored past. If objectivity signifies “a lack of favoritism toward one side or another” or “freedom from bias,” shouldn't both sides of the coin be exposed regardless of their popularity?⁴² Often, our lived, quotidian experiences include difference by default, so showing diverse ideologies and polar perspectives within the same production (such as those of Carmen Polo and Juana) provides the spectator more of an aerial view of the past. Consequently, this increases veracity as the personal biases and positionality of the producer are

⁴² These definitions of the word “objectivity” were generated from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary.

then blurred just like when an academic succeeds at providing an informative and thorough literature review.

How does this production recreate a plausible version of the past? In terms of structure, organization, time and duration, the series follows a linear time frame, as if we are accompanying Evita on her journey. Similar to the concepts presented by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, this piece focuses on the time period as that what classifies such a collective experience. Although the camera rotates to tell the unique stories of the three women featured, it does so using the same linear date and time reference. In the first episode, we are introduced to the different characters, while Evita begins to prepare for her 18-day journey to Spain⁴³. In the second and final episode, we accompany Evita on her travels to Spain.

Subtle symbolism and metaphors are inserted throughout this miniseries to establish and differentiate between Spanish and Argentine cultures. For example, in preparation for the arrival of Evita, Franco and Carmen have conversations about surprising her with delights of dulce de leche. While Evita is enthusiastic about exploring the terrains of Spanish culture, her tastes also seek out the familiarity of her homeland. For example, she frequently requests mate in social situations, and gawks in disapproval when she accompanies Franco and his wife to tour a Spanish bullfighting show. The dramatic, overly exaggerated cultural clash represents Evita in a comedic, slapstick manner. While news articles of the time period focus on the glory of Evita's visit, the series reads between the lines to showcase the interior thoughts, the negative sentiment and frustration that Franco and his wife have with their guest.⁴⁴ Their intense frustration and horrified response to Evita's behavior is comedic for the spectator. However, Morant's analysis suggests that this was the not the case: "El objetivo de este artículo es dar cuenta de la fervorosa

⁴³ In the article "El viaje de Eva Perón a España," Guadalupe Gómez Ferrer Morant specifies that her visit was "del ocho al veintiséis de junio de 1947".

⁴⁴ The observation that the media focused on celebratory and positive aspects of her travels is noted by Morant (15).

acogida y el entusiasmo que tanto el pueblo español como sus autoridades, desplegaron hacia Eva Duarte, la esposa del General Perón durante su estancia en nuestro país...” (15). Clearly, the comedic, snarky comments that are audiovisually portrayed in the series do not coincide with the other written sources that describe her welcome as an “enthusiastic” one. However, perhaps the series digs deeper than what was portrayed publicly in the censored headlines of the time. Furthermore, this miniseries provides the spectator another “behind the scenes” perspective. Not only is the welcome of Evita underestimated, but Juan Perón is not depicted as the trusted ally that he was deemed to be. The relationship between Perón and Franco is frequently described as one of alliance, such as by Guerra Gómez: “Juan Domingo Perón (Hector Colomé) aparece como su alter ego del justicialismo. Recién elegido Presidente de la República Argentina y ferviente anticomunista es uno de los pocos aliados que le quedan a Franco junto al portugués Antonio Oliveira Salazar” (123). However, in contrast to this common belief, Perón is frequently pictured having intimate conversations with Evita where it seems one could question his faithful camaraderie with Franco.

As part of a comedic viewing experience, the dramatic differences and exaggerated responses with regard to cultural differences create subliminal spatial taxonomies between the different geographical territories, which further contribute to an underlying thread of both Spanish and Argentine nation building. The multiplicity of settings and character viewpoints create a backdrop of polyperspectivity in this *biopic without borders*. Additionally, even though the series has clear transitions concerning the geographical setting, there are also places of in-betweenness such as the Argentine embassy of Madrid: an Argentine territory physically located in Spain, but symbolically fluid with regard to its borders and cultures.

Ultimately, this series utilizes juxtaposition with respect to nationalities and diverse ideologies to carve a narrative pathway of concreteness for the spectator. Specifically, it paints Argentina as less religious and lacking conservative ideals, while it also emphasizes the diverse frameworks of Spanish citizens, and highlights the extremist perspective of the resistance fighter. In addition, transatlantic ties are clearly evident as the series features scenes in both Argentina and Spain, and utilizes key figures and historical events from both countries. Lastly, the series metaphorically introduces a transatlantic symbol of ownership when it showcases how the explosion occurred on the floor of the Argentine Embassy (and thus marks an in-between space, one which belongs to Argentina, yet is geographically located within the borders of Spain). The union between Argentina and Spain was not only symbolically presented via the establishment of an embassy on Spanish soil, but also because Argentina was one of the few countries that supported Franco's regime: "En 1939, el Gobierno argentino, reconoció oficialmente al 'nuevo' estado español, y en junio de 1945, Argentina era uno de los pocos países que votaba en contra de la exclusión de España en los foros internacionales. Es decir, el régimen franquista fue reconocido y aceptado por el gobierno argentino" (Morant 16). Within the storyline of the series, the mutually beneficial relationship is evident and is discussed in a number of intimate conversations both between Evita and Juan Perón, as well as in the dialogue between Carmen and Francisco Franco.

Not only do differences arise with regard to the distinct national identities and political ideologies of both the Argentine and Spanish leaders, but also other dissimilarities between the characters enhance the narrative contrasting incorporated throughout this production. This variety and lack of monotony contributes to the storyline's veracity as it parallels the heterogenous ideologies we as spectators see in our quotidian lives. The fact that not all of the

characters agree with one another and this overall abundance of difference actually establishes plausibility as it more closely resembles reality. Furthermore, the unique ideals of each of the three main characters are evident from the very start of the series. The pronounced distinction between Evita and Carmen Polo is captured even in costume and physical appearance. For instance, Evita is pictured in flashy, ostentatious cuts with glamorous details such as statement pieces, feathers and frills. However, Carmen Polo is distinguished in dark, subtle colors, and consistently wears a classic strand or two of pearls. In various scenes, Carmen Polo is caught flabbergasted when her jaw drops and eyes roll in disapproval of the sight of Evita's extravagant, over-the-top apparel. Ultimately, Evita is humorously presented as frivolous, and lacking a conservative appeal, according to the standards of Carmen Polo.

Not only are these differences outlined with regard to physical appearance, but the contrasts are also portrayed in the relationship that Evita has with her husband. For example, they are included in a number of intimate shots, where there is a lack of religious restraint. However, Franco and Carmen Polo are never pictured in sexual scenes, and even in their bedroom each of them has their own twin bed. Their relationship is constructed in an exaggerated manner—a union depicted as solely based on political and religious frameworks, and almost asexual. Rather than being portrayed in passionate love scenes, they are amusingly represented conversing while Franco paints a portrait, for instance. The representation of Franco engaging in trivial, mundane tasks rather than focusing on the political affairs of his country creates a pictorial backdrop of mockery and satire. Furthermore, instead of using direct dialogue, these messages are communicated through this visual *mise-en-scène*.

Apart from the scenes of Franco painting, the image of the dictator is visualized subordinately—as one without much purpose. He fiddles around with humdrum tasks rather than

focusing on the nation. Similarly, Guerra Gómez describes how he is exemplified both from a televised and cinematic standpoint: “...proyectan una imagen difusa y deficiente sobre la vida y las relaciones con familiares y allegados [...]” (117). Not only does Guerra Gómez mention his presence as deficient but Carlota Coronado Ruiz also comments on him in a negative light in her piece “Desmontando a Franco. El ocaso de Franco en la ficción televisiva española actual,” as she states that the intention is often to “desacralizar” or “desmitificar” the figure of Franco: “Desde la muerte de Franco hasta la actualidad, las representaciones cinematográficas del dictador han supuesto el inicio de un proceso de desacralización pública del mismo” (103). This demystification is particularly evident in *Carta a Eva* as Franco is repeatedly televised as almost irresponsible with regard to his political role. For example, he seems more interested in hobbies, such as bullfighting shows and painting than his duties as the ruler of Spain. This comedic take on the biopic creates an additional distraction for the spectator. Coronado Ruiz considers ideas presented by Nancy Berthier that outline the thematic contrast of Franco in audiovisual productions created during and after his regime, such as in the film *Raza* (1942). Furthermore, she comments on how democracy brought a swift change in his cinematic representation (104). “El resultado fue un desdoblamiento ‘de-constructor’ de Franco, basado en la dicotomía entre el Franco como figura pública construida por la propaganda oficial y el Franco más íntimo. De esta manera se desmitifica su imagen, a través de la comedia como género predilecto en distintas versiones estético-narrativas” (104). The intimate snapshot of Franco in *Carta a Eva* is directly detailed in a perhaps exaggerated, but definitely comedic light, such as in the aforementioned scenes in the bedroom, where he awkwardly interacts with his wife in an asexual manner. Coronado Ruiz highlights other examples where Franco is depicted in such a perplexing fashion.

For example, she mentions the miniseries, *Alfonso, el príncipe maldito* (2010) since Franco once again appears in silly scenes, where he fiddles around on the job:

Pero, incluso en las secuencias de despacho, se le presenta en un tono más relajado: por ejemplo, mientras discute sobre el tema de la sucesión sentado frente a su escritorio, el dictador se está comiendo un yogurt, y hasta le ofrece a su interlocutor. Es un modo de desmitificar a esta figura al mezclar un acto cotidiano y más característico de la esfera privada, con una escena más oficial. (Coronado Ruiz 107)

Without even viewing the above series, the description of the scene with Franco and his yogurt is somehow entertaining. The sneaky insertion of surprising, subtle slapstick humor in many of these representations of the dictator functions to cloud the spectator's perception between fact and fiction. Humor thus serves as a distraction, so that the spectator swallows the content as is, forgetting to question whether this is an objective and verifiable historical reality.

What is the purpose of showing Franco eating a yogurt? What could be the function of comedy in the biopic? Does it enhance the historical perspective of an (in)famous individual? Or does it simply create an added layer of dramatic distraction, to plant an underlying narrative that is subconsciously but cognitively registered—and seamlessly accepted as factual by the spectator? Ultimately, the audience receives this information, and is able to synthesize it with a basic background of historical and general knowledge, just as non-lived experiences are registered in everyday memories. Furthermore, disguised factual threading becomes woven and embedded into the space of semantic memory. For example, in the official trailer of *Carta a Eva*, the spectator's focus is on the factual by default—as the clip primarily stresses the historical events that took place and leaves out the artistic exaggerations that are part of the full viewing experience. I believe this is intentional to increase the fact-to-fiction ratio. This is to say that fact

must exceed fiction and this ratio must be proportionate to total viewing time in order to activate the semantic memory of the viewer. With more viewing time in the full production, there is also more space to include embellished, artistic interpretations (or loose inspirations of the past) and yet still simulate this semantic experience. However, in such a short clip, the production must center on what we know is true—the facts on paper—and leave out any readings or interpretations that exist between the lines. For example, there is specific dialogue about the letter that Evita received during her trip to Spain and the decision about whether or not Juana should receive the death penalty—all events that have been previously recorded and confirmed as historical.⁴⁵ The insertion of historical fact coupled with the *mise-en-scène* of iconic costuming (such as the feathered hats worn by Evita or the typical uniform that was used by Franco) and the auditory sampling (such as that of a traditional tango beat in the background) suggestively create an authentic, historical appeal.

How else does fiction position itself as fact in *Carta a Eva*? Are the contrasts between the characters exaggerated, such as how the two first ladies are depicted? Evita and Carmen Polo not only differ with regard to their interaction with their spouses, but also on the basis of political ideologies. For instance, the interaction and desire that Evita has to work with the public and the *obreros* practically disgusts Carmen Polo. If it's not disgust, perhaps she is jealous of her ability to resonate with the desires and needs of the *pueblo*. Sánchez-Conejero describes Carmen's reactions as ones of envy:

En *Carta a Eva* Carmen Polo es la personificación de esta mujer insegura que necesita someter a otras mujeres para sentirse poderosa y con valor a nivel personal. Se da cuenta de que Evita no sólo es mucho más bella y sofisticada que ella, sino que también es bastante más inteligente, humana y querida por su gente. Todo esto desequilibra a

⁴⁵ A number of these events are discussed in other sources, such as those I've discussed earlier in this chapter (p. 86).

Carmen, quien reacciona con comentarios como ‘la mujer de Perón tiene una forma de vestir que me desconcierta’ y ‘pero, ¿cómo puede hablar esta mujer así? ¡Es peor que la Pasionaria!’ (Sánchez-Conejero 282)

One might conclude that the televised construction of Carmen Polo and Evita is like a comparison of apples and oranges. Firstly, it’s important to note the age difference between the two characters; Carmen Polo was born in 1900 but Evita was born in 1926 (nearly three decades later). In my opinion, the age difference between the two actresses who play these roles is not physically apparent. Could one assume that the use of the diminutive in Evita’s name shows the age difference or is this just culturally more common in Argentina than in Spain? Evita embraces her youthful edge in this series, however, Carmen Polo scolds Franco on numerous occasions when he alters her name and refers to her as Carmina in front of his administration.⁴⁶ For Carmen Polo, it seems this diminutive form is far too intimate, and she fears losing her professional, elite appeal.

Similar to Franco, Perón also has an interesting choice of nicknames when he refers to his wife as “la gorda.” Guerra Gómez draws attention to this peculiar nickname as well: “Sin olvidar el sobrenombre dado a su esposa, bien conocido entre su extenso séquito -‘Andad y calmad a la gorda’, ordena frecuentemente a una sufrida Lillian de Guardo que actúa de apagafuegos en las largas esperas previas a los actos” (126). Evita welcomes these nicknames almost as a loving act, while Carmen Polo finds them insulting. Neither of the two *señoras* are in fact *señoritas*, but why is there such a stark difference in a desire to be perceived as an *ita*? Guerra Gómez also comments on the strong character that Carmen Polo has as she demands to be referred to as either “Doña Carmen,” “La Señora” or “La Collares,” to emphasize her attraction to pearls and gems (124). Guerra Gómez similarly draws attention to the bizarre obsession that Carmen Polo

⁴⁶ One might find it surprising that Franco chose a nickname with Hebrew origins.

has to be treated with dignity and the utmost respect, even with family members when she insists that her cousin Pacón must refer to her using “usted” but that he may address Paco in the manner of his choosing (123). This scene, highlighted by Guerra Gómez, is particularly unexpected since Carmen is consistently portrayed as subordinate to Franco, or “subaltern” as Sánchez-Conejero describes the female characters in this production.

Apart from nicknames and generational differences, culturally Evita is not only from another continent, but she originally comes from much more humble beginnings and a lower socioeconomic status. Physically, as these women have different styles and due to the age difference, I believe it is difficult to compare their physical beauty. In addition, the term “sophisticated” might also vary depending on generational and cultural differences. While many might view Carmen Polo’s pearls as a symbol of sophistication and the feathers of Evita as frivolous, this perspective is contingent upon one’s positionality. If cultural and geographical differences are taken into account, beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. Physical appearances aside, it is evident that Carmen Polo seeks to gain the same support of Spanish citizens, by her envious reaction to Evita’s involvement with the *pueblo*.

Apart from their views on the *pueblo*, Evita and Perón are shown to also differ with their ideologies around the death penalty; in contrast to Carmen Polo and Franco, they prefer to sentence criminals to prison. As such, tension arises when Evita interferes to change Juana Doña’s sentence from the death penalty to thirty years in prison. Evita is not the only one who empathizes with Juana’s situation. Even though Juana is truly guilty of lighting off a bomb at the entrance of the Argentine Embassy in Madrid, spectators are still able to develop compassion for her as they identify with her intimate family life. Her love for and devotion to her son, and the general well-being of all people make her appear almost heroic, similar to the revolutionary,

hero-like image she symbolizes for the resistance. Simultaneously, however, she is also a terrorist in the eyes of the oppressive regime—one who is constantly portrayed merely planning revolts until finally, she sets off a bomb at the front door of the Argentine Embassy.

Overall, this production demonstrates a three-pronged perspective of these female characters who come from different national and ideological backgrounds. For example, Juana is portrayed as a loving and devoted mother within the walls of her own home, yet she is a fanatic, extremist and terrorist on the streets. In addition, Carmen Polo is portrayed as religious, structured and stable in the public eye, but in the private domain she is seen as jealous, judgmental, and lacking Christian values. For instance, she proves to be *poco cristiana*, and thus a bit hypocritical, when she supports Franco's decision to torture all of the suspects who could possibly be involved in the terrorist attack. Lastly, Evita is depicted as a woman of the *pueblo* in the public eye, yet privately she is self-centered and vain. For example, she doesn't seem to be so worried about the wellbeing of the Argentine people when she leaves her country, as her main priority is to find the edgiest, wildest dress just to meet the First Lady of Spain. What is more, she treats Lilian, the Argentine businesswoman who travels with her to Spain, poorly as she persuades her to accompany her on the journey even though Lilian is worried about leaving her newborn child. When they arrive in Spain, Evita forces her to sleep on a chair in the same room as her, instead of sleeping in her own bed in the adjacent room.

Although Evita is comedically depicted as a bit rough around the edges in many scenes, she is also filmed as a woman who stands up for her ideals. Toscano-Alonso explores some of the ways that spectators become absorbed by the characters as exemplified by Laura Mulvey. She recalls Mulvey's analysis of Sigmund Freud's term "scopophilia," one which describes the aesthetic pleasure of looking at others, but applies it to the cinematic screen. On the other hand,

she asserts how this character identification is rooted in narcissism and the construction of the ego, since cinema is capable of stimulating a sense of fascination which simultaneously generates a temporary loss and reinforcement of the ego (37). This spectator vulnerability is a cycle, which I believe may even be further spurred by the insertion of historical fact, as it adds a sense of security to the truth. The spectator is able to temporarily surrender without fear of being subjected to falsehood, as they realize that even if they are consumed by the narrative, it is one of “fact,” and not some silly tale. Furthermore, I believe this sets the stage for “scopophilia” in the sense of character empathy.

The spectator not only sees Evita fighting for the rights of the *pueblo*, but she is also positively portrayed as a warm-hearted, compassionate soul. For example, she is greeted by Juana’s son and mother, and immediately responds to their cries for help. In this scene, the close-up shot of Evita captures her eyes watering in sadness, as she genuinely feels sorry for the young boy and his grandmother. Immediately, the spectator is able to see another side of Evita, who is not only there for the show and fame, but is one who truly seeks to assist others. Her mission to help is evident when she changes Juana’s sentence from the death penalty to thirty years in prison.

Lastly, Juana is also featured in a close-up shot when she is reading a letter from her mother during her final days awaiting the death penalty. While she reads the letter silently, the voice-over of her mother reading begins, to further establish compassion on the part of the spectator. Even after committing an atrocious crime (with luckily no casualties), the audience still pities Juana as they are able to intimately identify with her virtuous behavior that she exhibits via caring so deeply for her son and family members.

Furthermore, to foster credibility and trust with the spectator, the characters' authentic intentions and motives are portrayed in private spaces. For example, Franco is featured nodding in agreement, as if bowing down to God, while watching a televised speech prepared by Hitler. Similarly, in a comedic manner, Carmen Polo repeatedly vents to Franco about her frustrations with Evita behind the closed doors of their bedroom. The exaggerated scoffs and resentment are frequently portrayed after listening to Evita talk to the Spanish public from their bedroom radio. Ultimately, audience empathy is generated most in these intimate scenes where the characters make decisions that don't involve groupthink or external pressure, but simply are provided with an opportunity to demonstrate their true colors and genuine motives.

Arde Madrid (2018)

In just one season of eight short episodes, this series combines truthful and historical events with comical elements to express a number of moral messages for the viewer. Specifically, the series begins in 1960 Madrid, discusses a number of key historical events and figures, and utilizes a linear time format to depict the storyline. The comedic, feminist backdrop is evident from the very first episode when the spectator is introduced to the setting and the main characters, and meets Ana Mari, a woman who works for *la Sección Femenina* and goes undercover as a maid for the actress Ava Gardner while she is residing in Madrid.⁴⁷ In this assignment, she also feigns a marriage with Manolo, a Spaniard who works as a manservant for Ava Gardner as well. A repetitive, intentionally inserted filmic transition similarly disrupts the beginning scenes of every episode, as it features Ana Mari, and other main characters, such as Ava Gardner and her neighbors, Juan Perón and his third wife, Isabel Martínez de Perón,

⁴⁷ According to Zalduendo, Ava Gardner was a resident in Spain from 1955 to 1968 (556).

“off-screen” in intimate shots, while dressed in undergarments and bathrobes. Thus, it creates a sudden, dual disruption, of the narrative as well as of the oppression brought by the dictatorship. As such, the series is constructed in a satirical, irrational fashion, one which challenges the principles of oppression and conservatism. In addition, the continuous display of an iconic iron burning men’s underwear with a pink font hints at a feminist rejection of the stifling gender norms of the time, and also reminds the viewer of the double meaning behind the title of the series, *Arde Madrid*.

Similar to *Carta a Eva*, this series lures the spectator back in time, for a brief, temporary period—and for the same purpose. Rather than creating a biographical sketch or documentary-like production, this series is a biopic with a twist—providing a polyperspective snapshot of what life was like during the period. Zalduendo quotes the director, Paco León, in her article:

Partimos de algo real, el hecho de que Ava Gardner fue vecina del general Perón, pero nosotros tuvimos claro desde el principio que no queríamos hacer un biopic y contar la historia directamente, sino que queríamos contar el punto de vista de los criados, porque nos hacía más interesante el retrato y la radiografía de España de la época. (Zalduendo 559)

As is also established in *Carta a Eva*, by creating a *radiografía* de España, this series is able to ultimately introduce its audience to a number of characters, and thus provide a more “collective” point of view. Similar to Sánchez-Conejero’s analysis of *Carta a Eva*, it seems that the female servants in *Arde Madrid*, such as Ana Mari could also be described as subaltern and doubly invisible. Perhaps they too could be described as more communist in comparison to the grandiose, capitalist appeal of Ava Gardner.

In addition, this series is similar to *Carta a Eva* in that it also invites the spectator to understand a foreign perspective of Spanishness. For example, the audience recognizes the Argentine referential standpoint of Evita in *Carta a Eva*, and both the American and Argentine perspectives of Ava Gardner and Juan Perón. Approximately thirteen years after Evita's visit, Juan Perón returns to Spain as a remarried widower in *Arde Madrid*. Unlike in *Carta a Eva*, the Perón family are featured as relatively conservative, and well-to-do *gente decente*, whereas Ava Gardner is featured as loose, boundless, and *poco católica* (as is noted, verbatim in the title of the very first episode).

The invisible thread of nation building is incorporated throughout this production in the subtle reference to historical figures and the numerous cultural references—such as those pertaining to traditional cuisines and dance styles. In the very first episode, the employees of Ava Gardner are instructed to appeal to her unique tastes: “En cuanto a la comida, a la señora le gusta la comida de aquí, la española, su cocido madrileño, las croquetas pero también le gusta la comida americana, la macaroni and cheese, fried chicken, hot dogs, hamburgers” (“Poco católica” 00:05:00-00:05:14). Even with regard to her appetite, she is depicted as *ni de aquí, ni de allá*. In addition, Spanish culinary, musical and other cultural traditions are frequently illustrated in the lavish, extravagant party scenes, such as with the appearance of *jamón, mojama, flamenco* and *toreros*.⁴⁸ These additional details, which can be identified as *la carne de la historia* are similar to what Miguel de Unamuno defines as *la intrahistoria*, “para definir la historia de la cotidianidad y enfatizar los valores del ‘pueblo hondo, el que vive bajo la Historia’ (Unamuno, 1958 [1895]: 300), nos permite situar en relación al pasado la mirada casi documental de la serie” (Zalduendo 562). Furthermore, Zalduendo also discusses interpretations

⁴⁸ Ava Gardner's exaggerated obsession is even made more apparent by including it in the title of the second chapter: “I love mojama”.

presented by Domínguez Hermida to emphasize that the *intrahistoria* skates between biography and fiction to ultimately restrict the popular consciousness that is created via the relationship between characters and their surroundings (562).

Another component of the *intrahistoria* that by default resurfaces ideas of nation building is the subtle recycling of historical and cultural references that occur throughout the production. For example, Ava Gardner repeatedly and enthusiastically comments on how much she loves the Madrilenian nights. Zalduendo calls attention to this tactic in her article and describes this as a technique of *sampling*: “El sampleo consiste, en este caso, en la integración en la serie de fragmentos extraídos de otras fuentes con el fin de promover la ubicuidad histórica de los mismos mediante la recontextualización y la resignificación de la vida de Ava Gardner en el Madrid del desarrollismo” (563). The intangible souvenirs of Spanishness are introduced to the spectator throughout the production, and serve as subliminal instruments of nation building to resonate with the semantic memory of the audience. For example, Ava Gardner’s swanky parties are always full of Spanish delicacies, such as *jamón*, *mojama*, *gamba blanca de Huelva* and wines. The other cultural elements that surface at her parties include flamenco shows and bull fighters. On one hand, Spanishness is depicted as a vibrant, social culture—full of entertainment, delicious cuisines and people who seek to live in the present, enjoying each moment of a *noche que no acaba*. However, the opposite is also intertwined in this televised interpretation. There is a constant echo of the oppressive dictatorship, the curfews and the rigid expectations with regard to what constitutes as *decencia*. Ava Gardner frequently contemplates her individual identity and how her own footprints align on Spanish soil. It seems that she is not happy with the aftermath of her long nights of partying and sexual encounters, as she eventually describes them as defects in the final episode. Ava’s behavior impacts the other characters’ and their own perception of

americanidad. The intermixing of *americanidad* with Hollywood surfaces once again when the death of Ernest Hemingway (on July 2, 1961) is mentioned, and subsequently there is a celebration in memory of him during the final episode.

Outside the doors of the Gardner residence, the series incorporates contrasting images of the “boring” General Perón, who is frequently depicted glued to the couch next to his wife, taking his daily medication, or playing with his dog. Gone are the youthful days when Perón would be dressed in satin pajamas, giggling with Evita, and sliding down the handrail of the stairs in *La Casa Rosada* (as is featured in *Carta a Eva*). As an exiled expatriate, he lacks the vivacious, enthusiastic energy he displayed 13 years prior in *Carta a Eva*. In *Arde Madrid* he is depicted adversely, as an empty man, yet full of patriotic nostalgia.

Additionally, this series leverages other elements of contrast in order to establish characterization and create meaning for the spectator. For example, spatially, public and private spaces are cast in an ironic manner as private spaces expose a wild, bohemian lifestyle (since celebrations and private congregations were prohibited by Franco) and interior spaces symbolize the uncontrollable and the unthinkable (such as goats wandering in living rooms, naked partygoers, sexual encounters, hangovers and bottomless champagne). Yet ironically, the street delineates a guarded space, as it is vigilantly controlled by the military. Unlike in *Carta a Eva*, the image of Franco is not presented directly; Franco’s appearance is indirect as he is simply referenced in conversation or by extension (such as in the scene where his police arrive). Coronado Ruiz recounts similar depictions, such as in the series *Cuéntame cómo pasó*, where Franco is only mentioned in a few scenes, but the majority of the storyline is told from the voice-off perspective of the adult-version of Carlitos (108). The post-dictatorship televised simulations of Franco thus offer another filmic angle, one which is ultimately not dictated by his

own agency. Thus, some televised, democratic representations of the dictatorship lack screen space for Franco, perhaps in an effort to finally bring oppressed perspectives into light. How does one address the elephant in the room without even including the elephant? His lack of presence and voice cinematically provides the dictator with a taste of his own oppressive medicine in *Arde Madrid*.

Similar to the Argentine embassy in *Carta a Eva*, spatially, the series also incorporates a transatlantic, third space. For instance, the home of Ava Gardner symbolizes in-betweenness, one which is neither Spain nor the United States. Likewise, the flat occupied by the Perón family also takes on a role of nostalgic in-betweenness, as neither Spanish nor Argentine, but a quasi *no lugar*, one with lost purpose, which screams with expatriate confusion and a deep longing to return to homeland soil and rule. Equivalently, Zalduendo comments on the obvious spatial differences and symbolic connotations that surface:

El matrimonio Perón de *Arde Madrid* se encuentra confinado en una especie de territorio simbólico, cuyas únicas referencias topográficas son el allá del paraíso perdido (la ex presidencia argentina) y el acá del piso de arriba donde reside su estruendosa vecina. No pertenecen pues ni a los de arriba, con quienes comparten un estatus de clase dominante suspendido temporalmente por el exilio, ni a los de abajo, insomnes como ellos por las juergas de la actriz; pero servidores, al fin y al cabo. A diferencia de Ava Gardner, que se había trasladado desde la Moraleja buscando una zona exclusiva más próxima al Madrid nocturno que frecuentaba, Perón había encontrado en Dr. Arce la proximidad figurada con su país en una calle dedicada a su exministro en las Naciones Unidas José Arce (quien se había opuesto radicalmente a la exclusión de España en 1946), que estaba ubicada en las inmediaciones de la Avenida República Argentina (Zalduendo 564).

Zalduendo draws attention to the proximity of la Avenida República Argentina as an obvious search for a home away from home. Also, the lack of belongingness that Zalduendo highlights in Perón's character is evident throughout the series in the bitterness he exhibits in his interactions. Perón is portrayed as a lost soul who is forced to abandon his country. He nostalgically reminisces on his time as president and discusses this with Ava Gardner: "Cuándo uno se tiene que ir de su tierra por razones de fuerza mayor, no se está bien en ninguna parte. Hago falta en mi país" ("What's autorización?" 00:03:58-00:04:08). While Gardner also symbolically embodies the character who seeks home away from home as she welcomes burgers and fried chicken, she also immerses herself and obsesses over Spanish culture. Although Perón is confronted with the obstacle of exile, Gardner doesn't let her very own obstacle—the language barrier—interfere with her utopian exploration abroad. Apart from a depiction of what it means to be Spanish, this series also touches upon the overlap of national identities, beyond domestic soils. Both Ava Gardner and Juan Perón are portrayed as characters *ni de aquí ni de allá* as they navigate Spain with a personalized footprint—Ava, the starry-eyed Hollywood celebrity who just can't get enough of the Spanish nightlife scene, and conversely Juan Perón, who is not as excited to be stuck in Spain as an exiled ex-president. As such, both of these international characters live abroad leaving a footprint with their own flare. Ava Gardner's excitement and curiosity for immersing herself in Spanish culture is made evident by her extravagant parties where she invites a number of Spaniards. In contrast, Juan Perón is presented as a bitter *aguafiestas* who wants nothing more than to return home and be President of Argentina once again. During his rehearsal of a political speech, it is evident how disappointed he is by Spain and the lack of support he has received from Franco:

Yo, que tantos barcos mandé a este país cuando más lo necesitaba... Nuestra patria que

se puso al servicio del pueblo español cuando sus lágrimas derramaban. Sentimos hoy, un gran dolor afligidos por la falta de respaldo ahora que las tornas han cambiado...Mi alma... Mi alma está allá. Pero mi voz está acá para recordarles...que quien no lucha contra el enemigo ni por la causa del pueblo, es un traidor. Quien lucha contra el enemigo y por el pueblo, es un compañero. Y quien lucha contra un compañero es un enemigo...y un traidor. (“Dios es Dios y yo soy yo” 00:11:18-00:12:20)

Unlike Ava Gardner, Juan Perón’s exiled status coupled with the sudden betrayal and lack of support from Franco transform him into a disgruntled, almost spiteful character. Both individuals, however, are similar in that they acknowledge their othered identity. Ava Gardner admits that she is very American and Juan Perón also distances himself from a Spanish association by indirectly defining the country (and Franco in particular) as a traitor.

Even though both characters similarly experience Spain from foreign perspectives, they are not able to get along well in this production. Zalduendo points out that Gardner did in fact have a tumultuous relationship with Perón in real life. She quotes some of the terminology Gardner used to describe him in her biographies: “‘Hasta el punto de que la actriz no escatima epítetos negativos para definir al general argentino, a quien califica de ‘perturbador’, ‘afeminado’ o ‘dictador de pacotilla’, y considera que los discursos que ensayaba en su balcón, además de molestarla, ‘rebajaban el tono de la vecindad’ (Gardner, 1991: 351-352).” Gardner’s ostentatious yet playful character as is exhibited in *Arde Madrid* (and which very much parallels Perón’s beloved Evita as televised in *Carta a Eva*) surprisingly did not agree with Perón, as his weakness for the actresses seems to be one of the past.

Perón and Gardner argue uncompromisingly with regard to his complaints about her late night, loud parties that frequently occur “above” him. She is his superior not only spatially, but

also in terms of power. The culminating episode portrays una *fiesta de homenaje para Papá Hemingway*, and Perón finally calls the police with noise complaints. When the police arrive, they are not able to arrest the attendees for their lack of *autorización* as a general of the United States Army is also present. Zaldueño underlines this dialogue in her analysis as an extension and affirmation of *americanidad* and quotes the exact language of the General in the series: “Cabo, soy general del ejército de Estados Unidos. Si ustedes tienen un problema con la señorita Gardner, tienen un problema conmigo. Y si ustedes tienen un problema conmigo, tienen un problema con el ejército de Estados Unidos” (570). It seems that her *americanidad* provides her with an added edge of power, as it frees her from abiding by the repressive laws imposed by the Francoist regime. Furthermore, this scene depicts another example of polar extremes and how the series creates contrast via the differentiation of characters. From a contemporary, televised perspective, Zaldueño’s analysis symbolically sheds light on the national power hierarchies that existed in Spain during the dictatorship. Ava exists in her own fairytale world as she is exempt from the rules imposed by the dictatorship. In this way, she exists in a space within a space—flying high in Spanish territory while she enjoys sexual liberties, *jamón*, *mojama* and the Spanish nightlife—all with the straps of her own parachute still in place. She does not have to actually do as the Spaniards do. The exaggerated differentiation between national identities further builds on this driving thread of narrative contrasting. This is evident not only for the spectator but also for a number of the protagonists. For example, Pilar, a teenager who helps Ana Mari and Manolo to maintain the Gardner residence, questions Ava’s behavior (referring to her as “la señora”).

Ana Mari: Las mujeres debemos reservarnos. Es una cuestión de decencia. Tú solo entiendes o no lo entiendes aunque ya sea tarde.

Pilar: ¿Y la señora?

Ana Mari: La señora es una extranjera.

Pilar: ¿Y qué pasa? ¿Qué dios no está en el extranjero o qué?

Ana Maria: Dios sí, pero Franco no. (“I love mojama” 00:00:46-00:01:05)

In this conversation Ana Mari is scolding Pilar for having had sex before marriage, but in doing so, she labels Ava Gardner as an other—*una extranjera*. Even though Ana Mari claims to base her argument on Catholic values, she admits that these rigid boundaries are dictated by Franco. Ava Gardner is not Spanish, and as such, does not need to abide by these requirements.

While national divisions seem to be highlighted, there is in fact a blurring of territories portrayed in the series’s cinematographic choices. Metaphorically speaking, the censorship-like filter of black and white images limits the spectator’s freedoms and their ability to fully experience the production. Additionally, these vintage black and white tones are often accompanied by a dirty shot where the background subjects are fuzzy. Furthermore, the cinematographic techniques leveraged throughout this production are visually stifling, and as such, I thematically align them to the oppressive nature of the dictatorship. De la Cuadra de Colmenares concludes that these types of images create an illusion of a different genre for the spectator and the need to “decode” the meaning behind such archival material, which ultimately blurs the lines between fact and fiction. She asserts that the blend of both real and fake content could have an additional “ideological function” (137). Perhaps this vintage appeal and push towards non-fiction enhances the biopic experience, as this subconsciously alerts the spectator to think that we are indeed viewing the past, that these are events that historically took place, and that we can simply do without the critical grain of salt. Furthermore, the usage of black and white potentially establishes a documentary-like illusion.

Documentaries are often depicted as genres which to some degree portray a real, non-fictional account of a story. De la Cuadra cites Weinrichter when she communicates the psychological effect that this type of genre may have on an audience and how the use of archival material provides context to the plot and plausibility for the viewer to decipher between “legitimate historical fiction or non-fiction” (139). Furthermore, the historic, sepia-like visuals align with the human experience of semantic memory—an account that took place in the past, that we take for granted, but unlike the mental time travel that is accompanied by episodic memories, this type of memory does not necessarily require a lived component.

Additionally, the absence of a narrator also creates a nebulous feel for the spectator, and the illusion of a lived experience, one which is dynamic and unpredictable. The spectator is thus able to accompany Gardner in a “real” or rather linear sense of time, to the everlasting parties and the wildness of a *noche que no acaba*. The seamless blend of archival footage with fiction also blurs this barrier between fact and fiction. De la Cuadra de Colmenares quotes herself from a previous article she co-authored with López de Solís: “[...The technique of] mixing archival footage with fictional material warrants a profound reflection on how digital technologies can be used to manipulate the audience” (140). Furthermore, this secret recipe of blending make believe with history subconsciously persuades the viewer to accept the whole package as is—as a truth of the past; an occurrence that undeniably took place; and common knowledge that needs no further questioning. Similar to the way the brain simply understands and accepts a semantic memory as is, the spectator subliminally boxes together both fact and fiction to cognitively create a new established truth.

Likewise, there is an additional obscuring of perspectives with regards to this recurrent decoupage of fact and fiction. In my analysis, the balance between verity and dramatic

exaggerations hidden within the comedic genre allow for a plausible storyline. In order to activate the semantic memory of the spectator, there needs to be a basis of fact and historical context built into the plot. While Zalduendo does not analyze the series from a purely cognitive perspective, it seems Zalduendo would at least agree that the intricate combination of real and fictitious allows for a veridical plotline: “La verosimilitud de la serie tampoco se ha visto afectada por las distorsiones inherentes al encaje en la narrativa en una doble temporalidad destinada a conciliar lo real con lo ficticio, que comprime el tiempo narrado en un tiempo de la narración (re)construido a medida de las historias inventadas” (561). The equal insertion of historic detail and the exaggerated *intrahistoria* establish a means to truly hook the audience in this play of fact versus fiction. Furthermore, the comedic details reposition the audience’s focus as an anticipatory one—searching between the lines of crude humor and sarcasm—and accepting the rest at face value.

Additionally, *Arde Madrid* provides a counter-perspective to the extreme social ideals that existed during this time period via a series of dualities and a compulsion to categorize: to be Spanish or a foreigner; to be a woman or a man; to be ultra-conservative or liberal. In a Peninsular context, this biopic also highlights the underlying pressure to be a conservative Catholic in Francoist Spain. The focus of the series shifts between two social extremes as the characters are portrayed as either ultra-liberal (such as Ava Gardner who is constantly partying, drinking or flirting with men) or extremely conservative (such as the straight-edged Ana Mari, who is a supporter of Franco—an instructor in *la Sección Femenina*). By showing the spectator two exaggerated opposites, one of which also features a comedic touch, the series depicts a cultural obsession to characterize different behaviors:

El personaje de Ava Gardner constituye el conector de un relato a zigzag entre el Madrid de las gentes del espectáculo y de la alta sociedad, con quienes comparte fiestas, flamenco y jamón de jabugo, y el Madrid popular que irradia en torno a Anamari. La actriz menos convencional del star system representa la modernidad frente al conservadurismo y la libertad sexual frente la represión, en una comedia tan distante del costumbrismo y de la nostalgia que impregnan otros dramas televisivos españoles ambientados en ese mismo período, como *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (TVE-1, 2001-) o *Amar es para siempre* (Antena3, 2013). (Zalduendo 558)⁴⁹

This miniseries focuses on the importance of Spanishness from the very first episode. The filmic discourse suggests that being Spanish doesn't mean you speak the same language, but rather is determined by birthplace and nationality. For example, Argentines and Americans are depicted as marginalized entities. The Argentine President Juan Perón and his wife Isabel are not central or principal figures in society, but are portrayed negatively as foreigners. Additionally, the main character, Ava Gardner, who is an incredibly famous Hollywood actress of the era, embodies a transitory place in society, as it is assumed her stay in Spain will not be permanent. For example, when she organizes a party in her house, the Spanish military officials respond to a noise complaint and are ready to prosecute her for having the party; however, they pardon her when they discover she is not Spanish, and her visit will be temporary. The actress also symbolizes the stereotyped image of Americans during this period, as uncivilized and promiscuous beings. Zalduendo summarizes these subliminal national narratives: "Ava Gardner constituye el eje vertebrador de la mirada al pasado donde confluyen el imaginario español sobre la americanidad, encarnado por su libertad sexual, y el imaginario americano sobre la

⁴⁹ This source utilizes the spelling "Anamari," but I have chosen to denote her name as "Ana Mari" as is referenced on IMDb.com, Inc.

españolidad, constelado de flamenco y fiesta en una larga noche que no acaba” (571). Ultimately, this *biopic without borders* resurfaces these narratives of the past in a production of the present. The spectator’s semantic memory is simply activated by the reference to these historical events and figures, subconsciously allowing any added fictitious details to become blended into what is perceived as a purely historical narrative.

Ultimately, *Arde Madrid* calls attention to the taxonomies and extreme ideals within the contextualized, televised history of 1960s Spain. First and foremost, in a comedic light, the connecting thread of this series raises a number of questions about what Spanishness truly implies and what it means to be a man or a woman. The polyperspectivity of the characters adds credibility to the viewing experience, as *Arde Madrid* is not a typical biopic, but one that is both collective and transatlantic—a *biopic without borders*. The depictions of what it means to be Spanish, American or even Argentine transforms in accordance to the perspective of each character. For example, in the second episode, Ava Gardner is surprised when Ana Mari picks up her diaphragm off of the floor and has no idea what it could be. She was just about to toss it in the trash when Ava Gardner proceeds to question Ana Maria’s values around sex and religion:

AVA GARDNER: ¿Con cuántas hombres te has acostado, Ana Mari?

ANA MARI: ¿Yo?

AVA GARDNER: Sí

ANA MARI: Con ninguno. Bueno, quiero decir, con mi marido.

AVA GARDNER: Oh, wow... ¿Solo un hombre en toda tu vida?

ANA MARI: Claro. Yo soy una mujer decente.

AVA GARDNER: And me no decente?

ANA MARI: Bueno, usted es americana

AVA GARDNER: Yeah...muy americana. ¿Verdad? (“Muy americana”

00:06:15-00:06:50)

Even though Ava Gardner doesn't directly admit shame, it is evident after Ana Mari leaves the bathroom that she was insulted by her comments about her sexual behavior. Ultimately, it seems that Ava Gardner on some level feels guilty about her nights of excess drinking and sexual encounters.

In the final episode of the series, Ava Gardner has a conversation with Pilar that seems to shed light on her feelings of shame. They both rock back and forth on a rooftop swing, chatting and toasting with their drinks as they wait for the arrival of dawn:

AVA GARDNER: No hay lugar con el cielo tan jodidamente bonito como Madrid. ¡Por Madrid!

PILAR: ¡Por Madrid!

AVA GARDNER: ¿Sabes por qué me gusta tanto España?

PILAR: ¿Por qué?

AVA GARDNER: Tiene los mismos defectives que yo. But I think...Yeah, it is demasiado para mí.⁵⁰ (“What's autorización?” 00:27:18-00:27:45)

In this moment, the spectator finally comes to understand that Ava Gardner considers herself just as “defective.” She recognizes the dictatorship and its restraints on the Spanish people are equally as “defective” as her unhealthy, wild lifestyle—and that neither of the two extremes are ideal.

At the very end of the series, the brief image that shows a pair of male underwear being ironed and then smoking in flames serves to denote a strong, final message: one does not have to abide by society's ideals and a woman does not have to be a man's servant. This is also

⁵⁰In a number of scenes such as this one, Ava Gardner communicates in Spanglish.

exemplified by Ana Mari at the end of the series as she learns to appreciate a life with less rigidity and refuses to fall victim to oppression. She explains to Manolo why marriage is not appealing to her:

Pues créeme, Manolo. No, no quiero. Que no quiero que mi vida consista en tener que cumplir con la obligación de un hombre. Ni quiero que me racione el dinero para las compras, ni quiero su firma para abrirme una cuenta en el banco. No. No quiero. Ni quiero desperdiciar mi vida y mi tiempo pensando dónde estará y con quién. Aguantar su mal humor y su silencio. Y no quiero que un hombre me diga, esto sí, esto no...aquí sí, y aquí no. Y estar agradecida porque no me pega. Yo no quiero nada de eso. Porque todo eso sería como vivir a la sombra de otra vida... y eso no pienso consentir. De ninguna manera. (“What's autorización?” 00:29:43-00:30:25)

Similar to Ava Gardner, Ana Mari also transforms her ideology by the end of the series. She becomes less supportive of Franco's ideals around *el ángel del hogar*. She too realizes that she must decide what type of life she wants for herself regardless of national pressures.

Perhaps this production aims to suggest that despite a number of social constructions that define what it means to be Spanish versus foreign, to be male or female, or to be conservative versus liberal, these notions must be questioned and rejected, as every individual should create their own space and identity within society. This series “desacralizes” the memory of Franco by openly ridiculing the unjust past in the language of today⁵¹. Vengeance is thus sought via a narrative rejection of his ideals. Similar to *Carta a Eva*, the historical slapstick depicted in *Arde Madrid* provides a counter-story of an oppressed past— one which is armed, loaded and ready for retaliation.

⁵¹ I am borrowing the terminology utilized by Coronado Ruiz.

Conclusion

All in all, how are these television series able to reproduce a plausible version of yesterday? The national narratives depicted in both *Carta a Eva* and *Arde Madrid* are intermixed with a number of tools to create this conceivable version of the past. In doing so, both of these series successfully create space for new subgenres of historical storytelling in the world of heritage television: *the biopic without borders*.

Nation building is a continuous, dynamic process that reinserts itself throughout these two televised productions via a process of narrative contrasting. Additionally, both series follow a linear timeline and employ hidden *sampling* in order to resonate with the associated historical references of the past. Differentiation between characters and perspectives are highlighted via an array of contrasts within the filmic decoupage. Both series also attempt to align with the historical timeline, thereby incorporating archived images in a number of scenes as well as black and white film to provide a vintage appeal. The blurring of perspectives via the integration of voiceover also creates polyperspectivity with regards to social memory. Counterpoints thus establish a pathway to eliminate the shades of gray, establish character identity, and create verisimilitude in the storyline. These opposing forces appear in both series, and thus expose a number of binaries including: to be Spanish or a foreigner; to be a woman or a man; to be ultra-conservative or liberal. It seems the exaggeration and manipulation of these identity constructs is purposefully brought forward as a progressive response to the cries of yesterday.

Ultimately, this reconstruction of the past offers marginalized voices who would have been censored during Franco's rule to finally be heard. Just like different news outlets use the power of language to spin a story to their own ideological liking, there are also many different

versions of the past and we as recipients of content must expose ourselves to a variety of perspectives in order to remove biases and maximize our understanding. The slapstick and comedic touch in both series serve as a tool to openly ridicule the social paradigms of the past. In this process, these productions are able to devalue the historical image of Franco—subliminally reaching vengeance and stripping him of any remaining glory. In summary, through the incorporation of humor, narrative contrasting, and the strategic selection of the *biopic without borders* as the subgenre, both *Carta a Eva* and *Arde Madrid* subliminally mimic the human processes of semantic memory—to ultimately create a veridical human experience for the spectator.

There's always room for a story that can transport people to another place.

J.K. Rowling

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Summary of Analysis

Oftentimes, the consumption of media becomes such a mundane, ritualistic practice that it transforms into a systematic experience. Spectators draw on procedural memory, a long-term memory system which is utilized to complete everyday tasks, which are intrinsic to the individual and thus do not need to be relearned. The process of viewing a film or series is a similar, often quotidian action. How do story creators interrupt this process and create distinction from the prosaic? Different subgenres of series, for example, employ an array of unique tools and tactics to awaken the spectator from this monotonous process. By interrupting this continuity and designing a narrative that mimics other natural long-term memory systems, storylines are able to engage the spectator and create verisimilitude. The question then becomes, how does one audiovisually reconstruct a plausible version of the past?

Dynamics of episodic memory and the associated mental time travel (MTT) enhance the veracity in the Argentine and Spanish co-production *Vientos de agua* (2006), directed by Juan

José Campanella. *Vientos de agua* incorporates unique and interlaced combinations of space, time and memory, while it also simultaneously conveys a number of linear and nonlinear mechanisms of time. For example, the linear processes include the series itself (as it offers an established beginning, middle, and end); the aging process of the body as illustrated in some of the characters, such as José; as well as the perceived cycle between generations (from parent to child to grandchild, etc.). On the contrary, the series also depicts other processes that do not follow such a linear, sequential pattern such as the hallucinations often prompted by voice-over, which produce episodes of MTT. As this production's set shifts between Spain and Argentina in the early 20th century and concludes at the start of the 21st century, it encapsulates and sets the tone for transatlantic, 20th-century time travel.

Distinct from the episodic way in which memory is presented in the miniseries *Vientos de agua*, the four telenovelas I study in Chapter three present a more holistic sense of time to slowly repaint the canvas of pre-dictatorship times in Restoration Spain, as well as late 1950s and Early 1960s Brazil. These longer series provide a slow, sensorial and repetitive experience to align with and activate the spectators' perceptual memory and priming systems. Moreover, social merchandising and agenda setting are embedded using a present-day discourse to enhance plausibility and inspire spectator behavior in the Spanish series *La señora* (2008), *El tiempo entre costuras* (2013), and *Las chicas del cable* (2017), as well as in the Brazilian series *Coisa Mais Linda* (2019). The long duration of the telenovelas and the subsequent increased opportunity for audience cues and pattern recognition also carve a path for spectator priming. Furthermore, this composite package of social merchandising including the emphasis on visual appeal, the performance factor of costume and bold color, and the diverse landscapes—both in the feathers and frills of the roaring 20s, as well as the vivid, alluring landscapes of Brazil—create a

sensory experience, one which emulates the human process of perceptual memory.

Apart from the examples of episodic memory and MTT seen in the melodramatic miniseries *Vientos de agua*, and the perceptual memory and priming that become audiovisually ignited in the above picturesque Spanish and Brazilian telenovelas, a focus on fact and biographical references also stimulates another system—that of semantic memory. Not only do national histories incorporate collective memory and nostalgia, but they also sometimes weave in comical elements, nation building, sampling and narrative contrasting to reconstruct a simulacrum of the past. Slapstick and humor are splattered into two Spanish *biopics without borders* which depict the Spanish dictatorship of General Francisco Franco from roughly 1947 to 1960: the RTVE series *Carta a Eva* (2013) as well as the Movistar+ production *Arde Madrid* (2018). Unlike in the long-term serial nature of the previously described telenovelas, these briefer productions fictionalize with fact, common knowledge and (in)famous celebrities of the past to piggyback on a natural, semantic memory response. The incorporation of archival footage in *Carta a Eva*, or the purposeful choice of black and white film consistently used throughout *Arde Madrid* transform the spectator's viewing experience. Such a vintage appeal creates the false illusion of fact, and thus this formatting signals the recollection of common knowledge to the spectator. The narrative unfolds not as a product of an imaginary reaction, but instead, as one which pulls from the “truth”—just like our own retrospections when we search for facts, data and other intrinsic-like knowledge. Rather than sift through and distinguish between fact and fiction, the viewer calls upon their natural capacity to cognitively recollect, and thus is more likely to accept the “biographical” storyline at face value, without roadblocks of hesitation.

In addition to the influx of international (in)famous influence, the driving thread of nation building constantly reappears throughout both storylines. For example, the intangible souvenirs

of Spanishness are introduced to the spectator throughout the productions, and serve as subliminal instruments to construct a national narrative. Furthermore, these productions use audiovisual sampling and international references to create historical credibility and allegory. Some specific examples of this sampling include the insertion or mentioning of national cuisines; traditional music in the background, such as tango; or the repetitive references to iconic cultural symbols, such as bullfighters and flamenco. With minimal running time, the linear time frame coupled with this subtle sampling facilitates a short and sweet time travel experience, which coincidentally mirrors the time structure of biographical written texts of the past.

Additionally, both productions use narrative contrasting to establish characterization via difference. The multiperspectivity and polar differences between characters reduce narrative blandness to complexify the storyline. Differences provide the necessary shades and contours, the incorporation of other perspectives, and thereby blur the focus on one sole character in order to produce an illusion of the objective and collective. This in turn aligns with the real-world, our general knowledge which is based not on our individual experience alone, but on a multitude of perspectives. Lastly, humor and slapstick are incorporated to not only invigorate and add dimension to the storyline, but also as a way to ridicule the dictators of the past and seek retaliation against the oppression of yesterday.

Upon reflection, it is clear that different mediums utilize different tools to create realism and narrative transportation for the viewer. Ultimately, as literature is often described as a mirror of society, so are other cultural artifacts, including series. While many productions leverage diverse strategies to hook an audience and figuratively transport them to another place, the series in this study all commonly align with the natural human experience in different ways. In this dissertation, I've invited my readers to transatlantically travel through the 20th-century to

discover how seven 21st-century Argentine, Brazilian and/or Spanish television series use an array of different cinematic tools to recreate a plausible version of the past.

With regard to collective and/or historical memory, verisimilitude is important in this narrative reconstruction as it allows us to grapple with the layers of yesterday and understand these events have been reconfigured like pieces to a puzzle. On a personal level, this plausibility creates opportunities for self-referencing. This oftentimes provides us answers to the unsolved mysteries of our own pasts or tools to navigate similar situations in the future. Finally, verisimilitude (or imitationalism) is not only considered a key element of artistic expression, but it is also the driving factor needed to initiate narrative transportation and thereby activate our own long-term memory systems. The power of a story can never be underestimated, especially one which effectively aligns with our lived experiences. Plausibility is thus necessary for audience engagement—to participate, relate to and create value in their own quotidian experiences. Ultimately, these productions both mimic and activate the natural processes of long-term memory systems to create realism for the spectator.

As we have seen, stories that transport us can truly be captivating. Aesthetic theories of art utilize a combination of imitationalism, formalism and emotionalism to judge the success of a particular work, and the intricate balance of these theories is what prompts narrative immersion and veridical-like audience experiences. Ultimately, this dissertation offers a close examination of how engaging with the natural human experience, and particularly the processes of long-term memory, is an effective way to trigger narrative transportation and enhance verisimilitude in audiovisual productions—and perhaps in other artistic mediums of storytelling as well.

Me as Spectator: A Personal Close

Whether individual, collective, or long-term, memory is something that is relatable to all individuals and at various stages of their life. The concept of episodic memory and MTT was something I wanted to explore more during the lonely days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, I found myself “traveling” to other spaces and places, revisiting old memories of my time spent with family and friends or living abroad in Argentina and Spain. The spatiotemporal connection of memory became most apparent to me when it seemed my space and time were frozen in quarantine. *Vientos de agua* was particularly engaging to me as it reminded me of my experiences when I lived in Madrid in a flat with a number of other international roommates, similar to Ernesto. I found myself self-referencing throughout this production and equating many of the events to my own adventures abroad. For example, the shared recipes and international concoctions in the kitchen brought me back to my own magical days in Chamberí. I had to persuade my fellow roommates that burnt broccoli left in the oven for hours was not a typical American dish. I made my Colombian roommates laugh when I tried to copy their *arepa* recipes, as the color and aroma that came about in my version were quite different from their original take—to the point that it was just simply unidentifiable. Quite frankly, I had my own funny moments as well where my words were misinterpreted or I said something in a silly way. Laura from Asturias laughed when I demanded a *cáscara* for my head instead of a *casco* on our bike trip. I giggled when she was sick and told me she was *constipada*. Like Ava Gardner, this journey of obstacles brought me many moments of smiles and laughter. We shared a common obsession with *jamón* and *croquetas*, but most notably—I too was a wanderer on cloud nine, over thrilled to be exploring such a fabulous place that I will forever treasure.

My relationship with the language evolved. It was a source of humor for

many—something that I happily accepted in exchange for a laugh or two. When I met Juan from Argentina, it later became my language of love, which ultimately transformed my understanding of it and its associations—the time, the space and the memories. My first time being in love was in Spanish, but heartbreak somehow snuck its way in too... molding itself to me as an extension of my linguistic repertoire. I brought home an intangible souvenir from Madrid, the city that directed me to love, but later guided me on a route to healing. Naturally, these dynamics complicated my spatiotemporal connection to my treasured memories, just like Andrés from *Vientos de agua* who also experienced an existential crisis when he left his home in Spain to begin a new journey in Argentina.

When Andrés' Alzheimer's Disease begins to provoke his mental time travels to the past, I also was drawn to this dynamic for personal reasons. A few months before the pandemic began, I was helping my grandmother who was suffering from dementia. There were times when I would come in the morning to visit her and she would already be in another time and place. In many ways, these memories were so vivid for her at this last chapter of her life. She told me stories that I had never heard before, similar to the experience that Ernesto had with his father at the end of the series. Ernesto wanted to fill in the gaps of his father's past, the gaps that became more frequent with hallucinations and MTT. I always felt my grandma and I truly understood each other, so in the final moments of her disease, I wanted to travel with her and fill in the gaps which I could no longer understand. She too, like Andrés, was in the borderline space. In the series, the cry of a grandchild brought him back to the present, physical world—just as it did with my grandma. By accompanying Andrés on these mental journeys, I felt as though I was able to relive my own experience and possibly understand her perspective, to come to grips with the unknowns and feel a sense of closure after we were forced into a frozen lockdown and a cold,

pandemic goodbye. Furthermore, this act of self-referencing was most evident for me in *Vientos de agua*. Like memories, the process of goodbye is one to which we can all relate. Ultimately, this realism resonated with me personally as a spectator, stimulating my own episodic memory and inviting me along on a cathartic mental journey.

Future Considerations

In the field of psychocinematics, there is still opportunity for additional research with regards to series and spectator effect. Moreover, further studies must be implemented to connect psychology and neuroscience research to the artistic domain of audiovisual production. More specifically, there is limited data on the study of cinematic or televised works and their relationship to long-term memory systems. Many of the studies in psychocinematics only pertain to traditional film, and as such do not consider the long-term seriality and continuity of other productions, such as longer series, as in the case of the Spanish and Brazilian telenovelas. The analysis of how these televised products enhance realism for the spectator can be applied across a range of mediums and types of narrative.

Although times and territories are often spatiotemporally divided, virtual networks are aligning these cultural products more and more. The accessibility of the webseries makes these types of interdisciplinary and transatlantic studies more feasible and relevant. How can we continue to analyze patterns of narrative across mediums, centuries, countries and cultures? Are there common elements of verisimilitude in a storyline regardless of context? It would be compelling to understand if and how other mediums of storytelling mimic the natural human

processes of long-term memory systems as a means to enhance veracity as well. How can we further explore the connection between natural human memory and audience engagement in the artistic realm?

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