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THE CHILD IN CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA

DEBORAH MARTIN



Global Cinema

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The Child
in Contemporary
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For Patti

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

What is the child for Latin American cinema? This book aims to answer that question, tracing the common tendencies of the representation of the child in the cinema of Latin American countries, showing the place of the child in the movements, genres and styles that have defined that cinema and devoting sustained attention to representational trends and themes surrounding the child-figure characterising the period from the late 1990s to the 2010s, as well as to the experiments with film aesthetics precipitated by the child-figure, and the narrative and stylistic techniques at play in the creation of the child's perspective. Whilst the book's chapters look in detail at films from the recent and contemporary period, this Introduction aims to place those analyses in a historical context, by examining earlier representations, in particular those of the mid-century movements of melodrama and the New Latin American Cinema.

Recent years have seen an increased interest in the place and meanings of the child on screen within theoretical and critical discourse, and the publication of important contributions on the relationship between the child and cinema. Vicky Lebeau's *Childhood and Cinema* (2008) and Karen Lury's *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears and Fairytales* (2010) are landmark studies that give sustained, in-depth attention to the topic and examine films from a number of global traditions, yet neither of these important works deals with any Latin American film.^{1,2} Further, as is well documented, Latin American cinemas have undergone something of a renaissance—an increase in output, popular appeal and critical acclaim—during the period in question.³ A not inconsiderable number of recent

and contemporary films—including some very significant ones—feature child protagonists, many of which are dealt with in this volume; from Walter Salles' *Central do Brasil* (Brazil, 1998) to Lucrecia Martel's *La ciénaga* (Argentina, 2001), Andrés Wood's *Machuca* (Chile, 2004) and Mariana Rondón's *Pelo malo* (Venezuela, 2013), film portrayals of children comprise some of the most striking material of recent and contemporary Latin American cinema.

The conjunction of new theoretical insights with new film material has given rise to a number of publications which deal specifically with the topic of the child in Latin American film, with which this book is in dialogue, and which, together with it, form a new branch of Latin American film studies. Chief amongst the contributors are Carolina Rocha and Georgia Seminet, whose two edited volumes (2012a, 2014) and one special issue (2012b) on this topic constitute a marvellous resource for researchers. More recently, Rachel Randall's *Children on the Threshold in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2017) further defines the field, pinpointing a number of important theoretical concerns around nature, gender and agency, with specific reference to films from Brazil, Chile and Colombia. Rocha and Seminet point to an intensification of Latin American cinematic interest in children and young people, a 'boom' which they relate to 'society's increased preoccupation for the safety and well-being of children' (Rocha and Seminet 2012a, 12). As I will show in this Introduction, though, these groups have been prominent in Latin American film since the mid-twentieth century and have performed important roles congruent with the main ideological thrusts of the movements of melodrama and then militant filmmaking that defined cinema on the sub-continent during much of the twentieth century, the codes and tropes of which continue to inform contemporary filmmaking. This book shows how contemporary representations of the child are rooted in long-standing cultural imaginaries of childhood and Latin American cinematic traditions, whilst also showing how representations of the child are changing, especially in relation to their political meanings and aesthetic modes.

This book contains a particular focus on the pre-adolescent child, and this is partly due to the emergence of new theories and films as discussed above. It is also because, compared with the analysis of youth in Latin American film, the pre-adolescent child has received relatively little attention.⁴ Of course, the two categories are not easily separable, and whether one counts as a child may depend on behaviour and activity, and

in turn on class or ethnicity, as well as age. This is important in Latin America, where many lives do not conform to Western bourgeois familial models, and where, for example, many minors work. Sophie Dufays argues in a more philosophical vein that two criteria define the child on screen: the objective age category and the ‘relationship that the child [...] has with sexuality [...] and death, that is, the two limits of his or her existence’ (2014, 22). Some of the ‘child’ characters I discuss in this book are approaching or commencing puberty, but generally I focus on younger children, and this is because I am particularly interested in the cultural idea(l) of the child and with the connotations and associations of this figure in the cultural imaginary, including innocence, authenticity, neutrality, amongst a range of other meanings, as they translate into the cinematic signifier ‘Child’ in Latin American film. In his book *Centuries of Childhood*, historian Philippe Ariès claimed that childhood is historically contingent (1996 [1962]). This has led to an understanding within the discipline of Childhood Studies of childhood as a construct that can be investigated alongside categories of gender, race and class, and that is constituted by the adult view of it as ‘other’. In her book *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*, Jacqueline Rose examines the ideology of childhood from Rousseau to *Peter Pan*, arguing that the cultural meanings of the category ‘Child’ can be understood as a ‘portion of adult desire’ (1984, xii), since the child’s association with nature and truth—with instinct not the cerebral, with innocence not decay—‘carries the weight of one half of the contradictions which we experience in relation to ourselves’ (50). The meaning of the cinematic signifier ‘Child’, as it pertains to the Latin American screen, is part of what this book seeks to elucidate, and, because it focuses almost exclusively on the role of the child in films addressed to adult audiences,^{5,6} the question of the cinematic child’s meaning for and effect on the adult spectator underlies many of the analyses contained here.

THE CHILD AND CINEMA: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In theoretical discussions of the child in film, there is likewise a strong focus on the adult spectator’s desires, responses and feelings in relation to the on-screen child. In 1924, Béla Balázs wrote an early account of the appeal of the child in film, which speaks to many later developments in film theory including the medium’s indexical nature and questions of

visual pleasure and voyeurism. For Balázs, ‘the naturalness of [children’s] unconscious expressions and gestures’ (2011 [1924], 61) makes looking at children deeply compelling. It gives us the ‘sense of eavesdropping on nature’ (61), and ‘to watch children who imagine themselves unobserved is like a glimpse of Paradise lost’ (61). If, as later theorists would argue more comprehensively, the cinema produces and fulfils voyeuristic desires (Metz 1982 [1977]; Mulvey 1989 [1975]), then the presence of the child intensifies these, and it is especially, according to Balázs, the possibilities for close-ups that the medium affords, which are so effective at allowing the sense of ‘eavesdropping on nature’ as close-up shots ‘bring their facial expressions and gestures so close to us that we can delight in them as a natural phenomenon’ (62). Continuing this emphasis on spectator-desire, André Bazin’s devoted a 1949 review of *Germany, Year Zero* to an analysis of cinematic treatments of the child, contrasting Rossellini’s neorealist film with Géza Radványi’s *It Happened in Europe* (1947). Rossellini’s is one of many post-World War II Italian neorealist films in which children are prominent. Bazin writes:

Mystery continues to frighten us, and we want to be reassured against it by the faces of children; we thoughtlessly ask of these faces that they reflect feelings that we know very well because they are our own. We demand of them signs of complicity, and the audience quickly becomes enraptured and teary when children show feelings that are usually associated with grown-ups. We are thus seeking to contemplate ourselves in them: ourselves, plus the innocence, awkwardness and naiveté we lost. This kind of cinema moves us, but aren’t we in fact just feeling sorry for ourselves? [...] these films treat childhood precisely as if it were open to our understanding and empathy; they are made in the name of anthropomorphism. (1997, 121)

Bazin argues that, as an example of the conventional cinematic regimes against which he contrasts Rossellini’s innovative neorealist approach, *It Happened in Europe* anthropomorphises the child. In that film, in which the child dies, Bazin argues that his death ‘is so moving only because it confirms our adult conception of heroism’ (1997, 123). This kind of cinema emphasises the child’s vulnerability whilst constructing the child as mirror image of adult emotion in which the adult spectator can recognise themselves; both act as means of bolstering adult spectatorial subjectivity and mastery. As a contrast to this mode of child-representation, Bazin

posits *Germany, Year Zero*, which, rather than anthropomorphising the child, allows for the child's radical otherness by refusing to project adult motivations or emotions onto the child (1997, 122). Rather echoing Balázs's emphasis on the child's special indexicality, Bazin makes of the child an ideal figure of neorealism, since it is (in part) Rossellini's treatment of the child which for Bazin defines his neorealist style: 'isn't this, then, a sound definition of realism in art: to force the mind to draw its own conclusions about people and events, instead of manipulating it into accepting someone else's interpretation?' (124). Here, too, the question of the politics of the child's representation begins to be formulated in relation to film, since Bazin's discussion hinges on the question of the adult's colonisation of the child-figure, the mastery of the viewer-subject as opposed to the colonised object of the gaze, a relationship which, of course, reflects the social positioning of these groups.

In Carolyn Steedman's book *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780–1930*, she proposes that the child has come to stand in modern culture as a figure for human interiority, which she defines as 'a sense of the self *within*' (1995, 4). Steedman argues that 'much literary and psychological endeavour' in modernity has concerned itself with 'the search for the lost realm of the adult's past, for the far country of dreams and reverie' and that this search 'came to assume the shape of childhood from the end of the eighteenth century onwards' (1995, viii). The figuring of the cinematic child is part of this wider thrust of modern culture which Steedman posits. For both Bazin and Balázs, the act of watching the child on screen is a means of recapturing something: 'paradise lost' (Balázs) or 'the innocence, awkwardness and naiveté we lost' (Bazin). In this sense, both theorists hint that what the child fulfils for the adult spectator is also the desire to return to the child self, to re-inhabit that self, or to recapture the past. Indeed, as Christian Metz argued in *The Imaginary Signifier*, the power of the cinema-viewing scenario is that it makes of the spectator a child once again, it positions the spectator as child⁷; how much more powerful, then, must this effect be, when the chief identificatory figure on screen is also a child, or when images and close-ups of the child are to the fore. Recent work on the child in film has proposed that films with child protagonists, when viewed by adult audiences, tend to invite a 'conversation', between the adult viewer and her/his own childhood self, since the on-screen child evokes and calls forth that previous child self.⁸ These perspectives recall the psychoanalytic work of thinkers like Adam Phillips who stresses the

effects on adults of spending time with young children: they ‘take us back to’ or remind us of our child selves (1998, 47).

Contemporary theory of and commentary on the child-film echoes these perspectives. For Hemelryk Donald et al. in their book *Childhood and Nation in Contemporary World Cinema*, ‘Emotional impact and identification are [...] sharper on screen when there is a child protagonist in play, whether because we take responsibility for the child or because we project our own remembered childishness onto the protagonist. An intensity of recognition occurs [...]’ (2017, 3). These writers suggest that the cinema’s ability to repeat the structures and processes of the human mind is intensified by the fact of looking at a child on screen, since ‘Looking at a child and thinking about childhood, at least in the abstracted context of visual representation, the human mind loses an element of distance, or at least its span of judgement shifts’ (3). Perhaps this is because, as Ludmilla Jordanova argues, ‘Our capacity to sentimentalise, identify with, project onto, and reify children is almost infinite’ (1990, 79). Drawing on Carolyn Steedman’s work, Karen Lury in her book *The Child in Film* argues that ‘childhood, in its innocence, intensity of experience and its personal veracity, offers a compulsive route back to the past. [...] By making the child the figure that witnesses or participates in events there is what amounts to a form of prosopopeia: that is, a conversation between the living (the adult survivor) and the dead (the child self [...])’ (2010, 110–11). We might think also, in this regard, of contributions to film theory which emphasise the way film revivifies, the way it brings the dead back to life (Bazin 2005 [1967], 10).

If Bazin stresses the ways in which on-screen children function to affirm the adult spectator’s own feelings and shore up the adult subject in a position of mastery, the appeal of the child film may equally be about adult spectatorial *movement*: the possibility of a flexible or perhaps fractured spectatorial position—in space-time, between past and present, or self and other—the child’s view thus allowing for a defamiliarisation or a shifting between the familiar and the unfamiliar, a flexible, heterogeneous, or mobile spectatorship. This view supports Claudia Castañeda’s reading of the child in her book *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds* (2002), in which she argues that the child is constructed in modern culture as a figure of possibility and transformation, of potentiality and becoming. The child is a figure through which the adult subject experiences or imagines transformation, a figure which is always available

to be inhabited by adults and which permits the disruption of subjective and identitarian limits.

A second and related set of questions regarding the relationship of the child and the cinematic medium is centred on the affinities between the child's gaze, perception, or experience, and the cinema's particular capacities or specific tendencies. Béla Balázs was an early contributor to this strand of enquiry also, in his linking of the camera's gaze and its capacity for close-up to the perceptual tendencies of the child. For him, the cinematic medium itself is 'childlike', in the sense that:

The poetry of ordinary life that constitutes the substance of good films is more easily visible from the closer perspective of little people [...]. They know more about the little moments of life because they still have time to dwell on them. *Children see the world in close-up*. [...] Only children at play gaze pensively at minor details. (2011 [1924], 62, my emphasis)

This identification between the child's perspective or look and the camera's gaze arises again in Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, in which he sets out his theory of the shifts in cinema occurring after the Second World War. For Deleuze, the events of the European mid-twentieth century ushered in a new era of modern cinema beginning with Italian neorealism, 'a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent' (2005, 2), in which 'the character has become a kind of viewer' whose 'situation [...] outstrips his motor capacities on all sides' (3). Echoing Bazin's focus on the links between the child and neorealism, Deleuze writes:

What constitutes [the new image] is the purely optical and sound situation which takes the place of the faltering sensory-motor situations. The role of the child in neo-realism has been pointed out, notably in De Sica (and later in France with Truffaut); this is because, in the adult world, the child is affected by a certain motor helplessness, but one which makes him all the more capable of seeing and hearing. (3)

The child's limited ability to act or affect his situation means that he is largely limited to observing the world around him rather than effecting change in it, meaning that the child becomes a kind of protagonist of neorealism and bearer of the time-image *par excellence*. This shift in cinema and the associated shift in subjectivity, which for Deleuze is

encapsulated by the child's lack of motor ability, are expressive of a generalised sense of disempowerment brought on by the historical circumstances of war and its aftermath. Here, then, the child's perceptual and physical capacities are associated with a new kind of cinematic gaze.

The related question of how the medium emulates or expresses child perception or experience has also motivated some important recent contributions to theory of and criticism on the child in film. In her thought-provoking introduction to a *Screen* special issue on 'The Child in Film and Television', Lury refers to Gaston Bachelard's proposition that children tend to be engaged in 'seeing'—a 'timeless and ahistorical' form of looking (2005, 308) whilst adults tend to be engaged in 'showing'; Lury aligns seeing with the imaginary and showing with the symbolic and suggests that cinema shows whilst creating the impression that we are simply 'seeing' (308–9). Lury's comment returns us to the idea discussed above, that film returns us to a child's experience of looking, but also invites us to think about what and how child-films represent: what they look at and how they look at it, in order to emulate the child's gaze. Such things might include 'the absorbed but pointless gaze which follows ants and beetles as they labour in the grass, returns again and again to the scab on your knee, explores cloudy breath on a windowpane' (Lury 2005, 308). Ideas about the way that the presence of the child may inflect the film language increasingly motivate scholars. In her article 'Children, Emotion and Viewing in Contemporary European Film', Emma Wilson examines representations which convey an 'embodied experience of childhood' (2005, 329), which 'mould the medium to child perceptions' (332) or which 'open us up to the child's emotions' (340). Annette Kuhn has written about the way the organisation of a film's spaces can reflect the child's drama of individuation (2005, 2010). For Kuhn, 'film's capacity to evoke the spatial, liminal and kinesic qualities of transitional processes enables the medium uniquely to convey, as it were from the inside, the feeling-tone and the psychical investments of key processes and activities of childhood' (2010, 96). Both Wilson and Kuhn's analyses contain a focus on the adult spectator's experience; echoing Deleuze, Wilson argues that, through the aesthetics she details, the films she analyses 'seek to return the adult spectator to the child state of helplessness (motor, emotional or political)' (2005, 330), whilst Kuhn argues that 'films can invite viewers to re-enter, as adults, the world of childhood' (2010, 96). Both scholars, then, continue with the focus (which as I have mentioned has motivated much theoretical discussion of

the child in film) on the figure's effects on the adult spectator; however, both move away from the understanding of the child as object in the representation and discuss ways in which films convey children's worlds from the inside. In this sense, these analyses and the films they discuss challenge the politics of child-representation, and especially of the kinds of representations critiqued by Bazin, in which children appear as objects which serve to confirm adult spectatorial power and subjectivity. These questions, of the child's power and agency in the representation, and of how the representation disrupts or shores up traditional power relations and identitarian positions between children and adults, are returned to many times in this book, in particular because this book argues that, whilst children have traditionally been confined to the position of (suffering) objects in Latin American cinema, a new current of filmmaking is emerging which privileges the child's experience and agency.

THE CHILD IN LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA: HISTORY AND INTERPRETATIONS

Whilst this book devotes most of its in-depth analysis to the child protagonist in recent and contemporary Latin American cinema (late 1990s–2010s), an understanding of recent material has much to gain from a historical perspective, and in particular from an exploration of the presence of the child in the two defining currents of Latin American filmmaking in the twentieth century: melodrama and the New Latin American Cinema. This section argues that—despite the overt ideological differences between these two modes of filmmaking—there are important continuities surrounding the figuring of the child between the two. This section also attempts to understand the figure and the function of the child in these movements through recourse to the theoretical perspectives outlined above and through discussion of the dominant cultural myths, imaginaries and ideologies of the child, especially as these interface with Latin American cultural preoccupations. These myths include the dominant fantasy of childhood innocence, which has its roots in Romantic thought and in which the child as embodiment of natural goodness is opposed to the corruption of the adult and of society, and variously to sexuality, degeneracy and modernity. They include the related trope of the suffering or victim-child (which as we have seen via Bazin is a traditional cinematic figure), as well as the identification of the

child and the nation, and the particular positioning of the child-figure in relation to the political: as a figure which simultaneously exists beyond or outside politics (another aspect of the innocence myth), but whose very perceived neutrality makes of him/her a convenient cipher for any given political message, equally available to both conservative and progressive politics, even, as Edelman claims ‘the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention’ (2004, 3).

Melodrama has been a defining genre of Latin American cinema since the early twentieth century and made special use of children and in particular of the figure of the innocent child. Melodrama enjoyed a hegemonic position from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s with production concentrated in the main film-producing countries, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. Film melodrama usually combines domestic settings and family stories with intense emotion or sentimentality, meaning that the child has often had an important role to play therein. Indeed, as Sadlier notes, ‘the figure of the child is vital to the emotional trauma that is played out in melodrama’ (Sadlier 2009, 103), even if the figure does not always occupy a leading role. In addition, melodrama often features simplistic or Manichean plots, in which the notion of childhood innocence may be conveniently employed. Sadlier discusses prominent narrative tendencies of Latin American melodramas, including the ‘sanctity of the mother-child relationship’ as well as the ‘theme of the abandoned child who is found and raised by a surrogate mother’ which characterised several films from the mid-century, including the Bolivian *Hacia la gloria* (Camacho and Jiménez, 1932) and the Mexican *Víctimas del pecado* (Fernández, 1950) (Sadlier 2009, 11), and also resurfaces in more recent works including *Central do Brasil* which is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. In an illuminating essay, Julia Tuñón and Tzvi Tal discuss the function of the child-figure in Mexican melodramas including *El calvario de una esposa* (1936) and *El papelerito* (1950). They relate the ubiquity of the child in Mexican melodrama to the demographic growth of the period, and the State’s interest in fostering a concern for children (652). They also identify a number of dramatic, narrative and symbolic functions of the child-figure in this genre, finding that, in classical melodrama, the child-figure is always idealised and serves to ‘radicalizar el drama’ (‘intensify the drama’) and to ‘incrementar el nivel de la tragedia’ (‘heighten the tragedy’) (2007, 655). The child’s innocence, and at times, victim-status is crucial to these dramatic functions.

An emblematic film of the Mexican Golden Age, *Nosotros los pobres* (Ismael Rodríguez, 1948) has been described by Carlos Monsiváis as ‘la cúspide del melodrama’ (‘the melodrama *par excellence*’) (1994b, 144) and features the child-star Chachita (Evita Muñoz) in a leading role.⁹ For Monsiváis, *Nosotros los pobres* has a special place in Mexican culture:

Todos la han visto, es un recuerdo colectivo envuelto en una ironía protectora y es imprescindible en la construcción de un mito, ‘la cultura de la pobreza’ y su manejo de ternura, devociones familiares y solidaridad que no sólo compensa, también arriaga en el desamparo. (Everyone has seen it, it functions as a part of collective memory, and one bound up with a certain protective irony. It’s essential to the construction of a myth, that of the ‘culture of poverty’, and the way in which tenderness, familial devotion, and solidarity operate therein, not only as a means of compensating poverty, but also as born of it). (1994b, 144)

The film revolves around the reputation and location of the mother from the child’s perspective. Chachita’s innocence is emphasised—her ‘father’ Pepe el Toro (Pedro Infante) (actually her uncle) covers her eyes in one instance to protect her from the sexuality of neighbours; more importantly, she is unaware of the true identities of her parents. Her portrayal is not entirely without complexity; she takes in chores behind Pepe’s back to earn money even though he forbids this, but her principal function is to act as a shorthand for a sentimentalised virtue, encapsulated by the two-shots of Chachita and Pepe gazing wistfully into the distance (Fig. 1.1), images which emphasise the child’s vulnerability, dependency and tears, eliciting spectatorial responses of compassion and thereby reinforcing the adult spectator’s powerful position *vis-à-vis* the on-screen child. As Patricia Holland writes:

Pictures of sorrowing children reinforce the defining characteristics of childhood, dependence and powerlessness. [...] As they reveal their vulnerability, viewers long to protect them. The boundaries between childhood and adulthood are reinforced as the image gives rise to pleasurable emotions of tenderness and compassion, which satisfactorily confirm adult power. (2004, 143)

Chachita’s face in this image recalls the ‘soulful expression, with eyes uplifted to heaven [which was] a stock-in-trade of postcards and popular imagery of the second half of the nineteenth century’ (Holland



Fig. 1.1 Chachita's teary-eyed, uplifted gaze in *Nosotros los pobres*

2004, 144). The film ends with the death of two mothers—Pepe's and Chachita's—and the child's role here is to heighten the emotional pitch, to 'radicalizar el drama' and—as throughout—to facilitate the audience's tears. Chachita is the poor child who valiantly suffers poverty and misfortune, who weeps as Pepe el Toro is wrongfully imprisoned, and whose mother tragically dies just as Chachita discovers her identity, inducing many more tears. In *Pricing the Priceless Child*, Viviana Zelizer proposes that a 'profound transformation in the economic and sentimental value of children' (1985, 3) took place between the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries alongside processes of modernisation, producing, along with other cultural shifts of modernity, an 'economically "worthless" but emotionally "priceless" child' (1985, 3), a sacralisation of childhood, as child life became more ardently protected, and child labour more harshly judged. If, as Monsiváis writes, a key function of the Mexican melodrama was the mediation of secularisation and

the concomitant replacement of old ideals with new idealisations (1994a, 73–74), this use and portrayal of the child can be understood as one such idealisation, a repository for the feelings of (familial) devotion and tenderness which for Monsiváis acts as a representation of virtue in poverty. *Nosotros los pobres* establishes the (innocent) child as a new altar at which to worship, and in doing so incorporates Christian traditions of the innocent Christlike or angelic child into a secularising and modernising culture. The family becomes a new sacred entity in a secular society, and the—innocent, idealised—child is at its centre.

For David MacDougall, echoing Bazin,

In one sub-genre, children are typically seen as victims and are sought out for their victim status. The desires that this satisfies are complex, combining feelings of indignation, parentlike devotion, physical identification, rescue fantasies, morbid curiosity, and sentimentality. (2006, 74)

For Tuñón and Tal, this is an important feature of melodrama, in which abandoned, suffering and victim-children abound, and in which:

Los niños llevan a un nivel más grave lo que podría no ser más de una anécdota, porque la vive alguien a quien se considera sin defensas [...] pero además, de esta manera encarna el sacrificio y en una cultura católica el perdedor ganará el cielo (Children make that which could be a mere anecdote more serious, because it is experienced by someone we consider to be defenseless [...] and so the child also embodies the idea of sacrifice, and in a Catholic culture the person who loses goes to heaven). (2007, 655)

Echoing Bazin and MacDougall, Tuñón and Tal find that the tendency towards such representations can be attributed to the viewer's desire. The genre of melodrama intensifies the cinema's general capacity to position the spectator as a child: cinema during this period was characterised as 'la otra familia [...] el otro pueblo natal' ('one's other family [...] one's other birthplace') (Monsiváis 1994a, 60); seeing a film was akin to experiencing, in the words of one commentator of the period in Mexico 'una ilusión infantil' ('a childish illusion') (Urbiña, cit. Monsiváis 1994a, 50). Whilst in this childlike state, the representation of the child as innocent victim allows the adult spectator access to a purity and innocence which 'permite a los espectadores solucionar simbólicamente la contradicción entre creer ser "buenos", es decir, "inocentes", mientras

se saben pragmáticos, guiados por intereses, en la vida real' ('allows spectators to symbolically solve the contradiction between thinking of themselves as "good", that is to say, "innocent", whilst knowing themselves to be pragmatic, to be guided by interests, in real life') (Tuñón and Tal 2007, 661). In this sense the genre draws on the meanings of childhood posited by Jacqueline Rose which I mentioned earlier, in which childhood is understood as a 'portion of adult desire' (1984, xii), part of what she terms 'the ongoing sexual and political mystification of the child' (1984, 11).

A landmark moment in the representation of the child in Latin American cinema came in 1950, with Luis Buñuel's *Los olvidados*. I analyse this film in more detail in Chapter 2, positing it as a founding text for Latin American films about marginalised children. *Los olvidados* was innovative in its combination of neorealist and surrealist techniques with the genre of Mexican melodrama in which Buñuel had been working, and it twists the tropes and conventions of the melodrama in unexpected and disturbing ways. It takes from melodrama the centrality of the family, the child and the domestic, as well as the tendency to use children to 'incrementar el nivel de la tragedia'; it dialogues in particular with *Nosotros los pobres* which provides it with its 'point of departure for an attack on the sentimental treatment of delinquency' (Evans 1995, 75)—as well as that of children.¹⁰ Instead of idealising the child and emphasising innocence, Buñuel's film represented children in a more complex way, making manifest the harshness and hunger which defined the lives of many poor Mexicans and figuring its child characters as desiring, and hungry for love, and at times as violent, and full of hate. As Tuñón and Tal write, with *Los olvidados*: 'Buñuel sacó [a] los niños del terreno almibarado de la infancia para sumergirlos de golpe duro en la dureza de la vida social de México a mediados del siglo XX' ('Buñuel removed children from the sickly-sweet terrain of childhood, and thrust them into the harshness of Mexican social life of the mid-20th Century') (2007, 662). And whilst the children in *Los olvidados* are certainly victims—of a society which has failed them, of poverty, and of violence—their visual figuring emphasises agency rather than passive victimhood; they roar like monsters at the camera, or throw things at it (Fig. 1.2). In its gritty depiction of children in extreme poverty, *Los olvidados* can be seen to usher in elements of the child-representation which characterised the *cine de denuncia* of later decades.¹¹



Fig. 1.2 Pedro throws an egg at the camera in *Los olvidados*

Los olvidados was strongly influenced by Italian neorealism, in which, as previously mentioned, the child played a central role in portrayals of post-war devastation and poverty. In films such as *Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica, 1948) and Rossellini's trilogy *Rome, Open City* (1945), *Paisà* (1946) and *Germany, Year Zero* (1948) the child came to be associated with the defining characteristics of neorealist filmmaking, including a focus on the poor and working classes, a concern with social inequality, the use of natural actors and on-location shooting, as well as with a certain kind of gaze or point of view. In neorealism, the child's gaze not only functions to express cinema's shifting relationship to time and action as discussed by Deleuze, but also as witness to the ills of poverty and devastation. Where filmmakers wish to denounce injustice or wrong, the child's gaze is particularly useful, since cinema 'tends to project into the gaze of the child a certain ideal of visual neutrality' (Dufays 2011, 22), rendering images or events particularly affecting to the spectator, as it would go on to do frequently in Latin American cinema of a political

and social bent; in this sense, then, the child again serves to ‘radicalizar el drama’ (including that of documentary). Neorealism, which ‘offered models for constructing emotional appeals as a means to strengthen a film’s denunciation of socioeconomic ills and structural inequalities’ (Podalsky 2011, 34) was also influential in laying the foundations of what would become the New Latin American Cinema, the Marxist-influenced filmmaking movement which began in the late 1950s with films by Fernando Birri and Nelson Pereira dos Santos, and which gathered pace in the mid-1960s with theoretical manifestos in which some of its leading figures called for a militant aesthetic enactment of film’s political content (García Espinosa 1976 [1989]; Getino and Solanas 1969; Rocha 1982 [1965]). Important early films of the New Cinema such as dos Santos’s *Río 40 Graus* (1955) and Birri’s *Tiré dié* (1960), made the image of the child central to their political and social critique, drawing on an ‘archive of emotions’ found in the earlier works by Rossellini and De Sica (Podalsky 2011, 34), as did lesser-known films of the same period such as the Argentine *Shunko* (Murúa, 1960) which employs the (suffering) child in a protagonic role in a drama about rural education. The documentary *Tiré dié* was filmed in the Argentine city of Santa Fé. Much as *Los olvidados* does, the film begins with establishing shots and a voiceover which show the city as a place of wealth and progress, documenting its thriving economic, industrial and educational sectors, before settling, finally, on its outskirts and on the child inhabitants of a shanty town who run alongside the trains which pass through every day, calling up at the passengers to throw them ten pesos (‘tiré dié’). In arresting sequences, the camera’s position, filming the children from the moving train, evokes the modernity of cinema and train travel which rushes past the children whose lives have not caught up (Fig. 1.3).

Drawing on the legacies of melodrama and of neorealism, the New Latin American Cinema made ample use of the child-figure, and especially the suffering child, as a way of reinforcing its political messages, and of affecting viewers emotionally.¹² In canonical New Latin American Cinema documentaries such as *La hora de los hornos* (Getino and Solanas, 1964) and *Chircales* (Rodríguez and Silva, 1965) the figure of the suffering child is deployed for its shock value. In *La hora de los hornos* we see malnourished and diseased children in shanty towns, and some images from *Tiré dié* are also incorporated, and in *Chircales*, we see images of a child of perhaps 3 or 4 scrabbling in the dirt to find bugs to eat. As Podalsky—who bases her analysis on the films *Río 40 Graus*, *La hora de*



Fig. 1.3 Children run alongside a train, hoping to catch coins, in *Tiré dié*

los hornos, *El chacal de nhuelto* (Littín, 1969) and *El coraje del pueblo* (Sanjinés, 1971)—argues, ‘the use of children as symbols of the precarious state of the nation to provoke an emotional reaction on the part of spectators was a key device of numerous films of the NLAC’ (2011, 38). Children were used to elicit the emotional engagement which was required to produce the ‘sustainable cognitive transformation’ sought by the makers of this politically motivated cinema (Podalsky 2011, 45). A similar strategy is employed in dos Santos’ *Vidas secas* (1963), an emblematic film of the *Cinema Novo* adapted from the novel by Graciliano Ramos. In it, a migrant peasant family traverse the arid territory of the Brazilian Northeast, looking for work and struggling to survive. The family is composed of a mother, a father and their two children, and whilst the adults’ subjectivity is more developed, the children are quite prominent in the diegesis, with segments presented from their perspective, including a point-of-view shot that sees the world sideways on, as one of the children lays his ear to the ground. The children

function, in *Vidas secas*, to intensify the film's message about poverty. In one of the film's most compelling sequences, the older boy (Gilvan Lima) looks around him and repeats the word *inferno* over and over again, an expression of the family's situation. The presence of the children in this film, their vulnerability and the littleness and fragility of their bodies, dwelled upon by the camera, deepens the film's pathos. And yet at other points, they pose cutely for the camera, or are followed by it as they scamper about with their dog, Baleia, and could also be said to provide some light relief from the film's harshness. To the sound of the children's anguished howls, Baleia—who is possibly just more of a burden than the family can bear—is shot by the father near to the end of the film; like the suffering child, she is used to reinforce the denunciation of poverty.¹³

As Podalsky points out above, there is a symbolic resonance between the figure of the child and the nation in some New Latin American Cinema films. This is within the context of a Latin American cinema pre-occupied with the nation and involved in the production of 'nation-images' as Stephen Hart has claimed it was during the later decades of the twentieth century (2015, 65–104). There are, of course, many films in which adult characters or non-human situations act as synecdoches of national problems and situations.¹⁴ However, the child—its ideology and associated narrative conventions—has some characteristics which make it an especially apt vehicle for representations of nation. First, as Hemelryk Donald et al. state 'the figure of the child [...] often embod[ies] the idea of the nation under stress' (2017, 5), and, as in the films above, the oft-repeated figure of the suffering child tends to be deployed both to dramatise the ills afflicting a nation and to stand allegorically for the nation itself. Secondly, as Stanbridge argues, children serve as symbols of the nation in particular because they are 'becomings' rather than 'beings', their state of development rather than finishedness embodying the developing nation (2012, 47). In the case of Latin American countries, this equation of the nation with the child may echo infantilising colonial discourses, just as it also suggests the 'developing nation ripe with promise' (47). In the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of formation, the development of a young individual is expressive of the conflicted and transitory nature of societies undergoing modernisation, and elements of this literary form have been widely taken up in film. Several films studied in this book, including *Viva Cuba*, *José Martí: el ojo del canario*, and *Machuca* have elements of the *Bildungsroman*/film, 'a genre that treats

the experience of coming of age with a particular moral and historical urgency' (Prewitt Brown 2013, 660), and which does so, in these films, through an emphasis on national crises and turning points. More widely, the child and nation are intimately linked in everyday understanding and political rhetoric. As Sharon Stephens notes, 'the figure of the innocent and vulnerable child has strong political appeal and is [...] used to justify widely divergent political agendas' (1997, 8). It is this 'universal child' which is often used 'to short circuit more far-reaching political debates about fundamentally different visions of the nation' (8). Just as in political rhetoric, in films too, the (innocent and suffering) child is often used in place of debate, or more complex ways of convincing audiences of a political position, and especially as a means of circumventing difficult or polarising political situations, such as that of Cuba at the turn of the millennium, or that of post-dictatorship Chile, as will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, respectively. In this book, we will see how different films both identify the child with the nation or move beyond that identification, as well as how the child's image is overtly deployed for a range of political ends, a usage which has its roots in the New Latin American Cinema.

Later decades saw a continued prominence in Latin American cinemas of poor and marginalised children, usually as part of a socially and politically committed cinema, a prominence that can be seen in part as the legacy of the dominant mid-century modes. Delinquency and reformatories—a theme of *Los olvidados* as well as of the later French New Wave classic *Les Quatre Cents Coups* (Truffaut, 1959)—were present in important films such as the Argentine *Crónica de un niño solo* (Favio, 1965), and *La Raulito* (Murúa, 1974),¹⁵ as well as the Brazilian *Pixote, a lei do mais fraco* (Babenco, 1981). The frequency of representation of marginal and street children has led a number of commentators to claim this as a sub-genre of Latin American cinema (Del Pozo 2003; Dufays 2011), 'el género del niño de la calle' ('the street-child genre') (De Pozo 2003, 85). In 'Los hijos de los olvidados' (2004), Rafael Aviña surveys the theme of child poverty and delinquency in Mexican cinema, tracing the melodramas with similar themes, as well as the many films in subsequent decades in Mexico and Latin America which repeat *Los olvidados'* focus, including *La vendedora de rosas* (Gaviria, Colombia, 1998, analysed in Chapter 2 of this book), *De la Calle* (Tort, Mexico, 2001) and *Cidade de Deus* (Meirelles, Brazil, 2002). To the above-mentioned films, Diego del Pozo in his article 'Olvidados y re-creados: la invariable y paradójica

presencia del niño de la calle en el cine latinoamericano' adds *Juliana* (Espinoza and Legaspi, Peru, 1988), and *Rodrigo D: no futuro* (Gaviria, Colombia, 1994) and Sophie Dufays *Soy un delincuente* (Clemente de la Cerda, 1976), *Gamín* (Ciro Durán, 1978), *Buenos Aires viceversa* (Agresti, Argentina, 1996, also analysed in Chapter 2), and *Johnny Cien Pesos* (Gustavo Graef-Merino, 1993).¹⁶

Many of these films use non-professional child actors and incorporate neorealist styles and techniques. As a corpus, they tend towards the gritty, the realist and/or the violent, and they are frequently characterised by episodic narratives in which errant child characters wander the city streets. In these films, 'the energy is in the episodic, ever-moving nature of the narrative' (Hart 2015, 72), and in this sense, they are inflected by the picaresque genre of fiction (Hart 2015, 72; Brémard 2016, 91). In his analysis, Diego del Pozo emphasises the way the forms of representation taken by these films may reinforce the violence governing the lives of socially excluded or marginalised child subjects, whilst in her article 'El niño de la calle y la ciudad fragmentada' Sophie Dufays draws attention to the way the child's gaze is conjoined with a view of the large modern city in both Italian neorealism and Latin American cinema (Dufays 2011). For Dufays, the presence of the street child in Latin American cinema can be attributed not only to social critique, but also—and here she draws on Deleuze's work discussed above—to the child's greater ability to see rather than act, which means she or he functions both as ideal witness to the events occurring around him/her and as ideal representative of the disempowered position occupied by the subject of urban modernity. Chapter 2 of this book acknowledges the importance of this sub-genre of Latin American cinema by tracing similarities between *Los olvidados*, *Buenos Aires viceversa* and *La vendedora de rosas*, analysing the tendency of some films of this kind to end with the death of their child protagonists, and asking whether these representations serve to confirm the power and subjectivity of the adult spectator, as Bazin argues.

Crónica de un niño solo and *Pixote* are emblematic examples of the 'género del niño de la calle'. In *Crónica*, the eleven-year-old Polín (Diego Puente) escapes from a harsh reformatory and returns to his former village, before finally being arrested by the police. The film was a critique of the conditions in state reformatories (and more broadly of the Argentine government) and was banned in Argentina for 30 years. Sergio Wolf underlines its nomadic, restless gaze, which communicates

‘el no lugar, sea físico, espiritual, o social’ (‘the non-place, whether physical, spiritual or social’) through ‘el peregrinaje, la errabundia, los itinerarios abiertos’ (‘to-ing and fro-ing, wandering and openness of routes’) (Wolf 1992, 107) a mode which, again, strongly recalls the qualities of the (child’s) gaze in neorealism, and of the time-image. Although he does not classify *Crónica* as neorealist, Farina argues that ‘Buñuel y Favio coinciden en esa visión del humilde que no es una entronización o idealización del proletariado o de los marginales’ (‘Buñuel and Favio share a vision of the poor which neither exalts nor idealises the proletariat and those on the margins’) (1993, 14), just as Polín ‘no es el niño inmaculado que está pervertido por el medio, sino que Favio lo hace formar parte de él’ (‘is not an immaculate child who is corrupted by his environment, rather, Favio makes him part of it’) (1993, 15).¹⁷ In *Pixote* (which means ‘little child’) the eponymous protagonist—also aged eleven—escapes from a reformatory institution where boys are violently treated by state representatives, and, together with his friends, takes up a life of drug dealing, pickpocketing and later murder on the streets of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The film can be argued to be a wider critique of society’s treatment of its less privileged and even a critique of the terror tactics used by the military government in Brazil in the period preceding its making (Gutiérrez-Albilla 2011, 195). Like several other films of its type, *Pixote* raises ethical questions about its non-professional child actors, and especially about what happens to them after the film is finished. Its protagonist was played by thirteen-year-old Fernando Ramos, a non-professional actor with a background similar to that of the character he played. As is often the case with child-films, Ramos was reportedly picked from a huge number (over 1000 in this case) of children trying out for the part.¹⁸ After the film’s completion, Ramos attempted to continue an acting career, working on *telenovelas* for the Brazilian network TV Globo, but found it difficult to separate his image from that of *Pixote*, and indeed to escape from the crime and poverty of his background. He was eventually killed by the police at the age of 19. Like Víctor Gaviria for his film *La vendedora de rosas* (Jáuregui, 2003, 94–95) *Pixote*’s director Héctor Babenco was criticised for not taking responsibility for the situation of socially disadvantaged or excluded child actors (Tuñón and Tal 2007, 664). Invariably, the lives (and, sometimes, the deaths) of the non-professional child actors of the kind that star in this genre of Latin American cinema are a topic of great public interest; in

the case of Ramos, his life after *Pixote* and his death were the subject of a further film, *Quem Matou Pixote?* (Joffily, 1996).

Depictions of female children are rarer in this sub-genre, but there have nevertheless been some striking examples, including *La vendedora de rosas*, as well as the Peruvian *Juliana* and the Venezuelan *Maroa, una niña de la calle* (Hoogesteijn, 2005). Interestingly, both *Juliana* and *Maroa* (though not *La vendedora*, in which the protagonist dies) buck the genre's tendency to pessimism, emphasising not the victim-status and suffering of their young female protagonists, but instead their agency. *Juliana* was an early example of a film of this genre with a female protagonist; the only previous example being the above-mentioned *La Raulito*. In both *La Raulito* and *Juliana*, the female protagonists dress up as boys, with the associated increase in social power and greater possibility of survival on the streets that this implies. *Juliana* is the only example of the genre analysed by Del Pozo in which he finds that the representation of the street child affords the figure dignity, 'deconstruyendo la narración negativa de estas vidas que se lleva a cabo por la prensa o por películas como *Pixote*' ('deconstructing the negative way of narrating these lives which we see in the press and in films like *Pixote*') (2003, 96). *Juliana* emphasises the agency of the female street child when she takes on the exploitative male adult who controls the children in a way that the male children are not able to. This film does not romanticise the lives of street children, but nor does it make them a subject for cinematic pity; they are presented as having a certain amount of (circumscribed) power over their own lives; they feature as agents in the representation. Similarly, *Maroa*, in which a young girl living on the streets goes into hiding with her music teacher and ends up becoming a successful musician, reinforces its protagonist's agency and attempts to deliver a 'positive message' (Hoogesteijn, cit. Burucúa 2017, 185).

Because children are so frequently employed in Latin American cinema as a vehicle for protesting and highlighting injustice, there are also several important examples of child protagonists in films about war, as has also been the case in global cinemas. For Lebeau, there is a 'turn to the child as a figure through which to explore the legacy of war and genocide during the twentieth century' (2008, 141). Analysing one such example, the film *Come and See* (Klimov, 1985) Lebeau argues that 'the child [is] the very symbol of the human right, at once individual and collective, to exist, to *be*. [...] Kill the child and you kill the future' (2008, 146–49). In her contribution to an understanding of this

cinematic phenomenon, Lury posits that the presence of the child—a ‘perfect victim’, ‘blameless’—‘make[s] the wrongs of war seem all the more wrong’ (2010, 105). A stand-out Latin American film representation in this regard is Miguel Littín’s *Alsino y en Cóndor* (1982), in which the child’s suffering body again represents the painful national reality—here, of Nicaragua during the Revolution. *Alsino* is a peasant boy of around eleven years old who becomes crippled through his belief that he can learn to fly by jumping from a tree. Imagination and play—that is to say, childhood—are not compatible with the context of war. Childhood is a romanticised, idealised domain, incompatible with the harsh national reality, but which the film suggests the nation could potentially regain through the revolution that *Alsino* eventually joins. Other films with comparable themes include *Voces inocentes* (Mandoki, 2004), in which the baby-faced Chava approaches his twelfth birthday and tries to evade the army recruiters in El Salvador’s civil war, and whose coming-of-age represents the national journey. Thornton discusses how the film plays with the notion of childhood innocence evoked by its title: ‘it is this very innocence, which is the strength of having a young child protagonist, that must be both underscored and eroded, in ways that are intended to both draw the audience in and cause heartbreak at its loss in order to reach an understanding of the complex political circumstances’ (Thornton 2013, 267). A further example here is *Los colores de la montaña* (Arbeláez, 2009), in which a group of children attempt to rescue their ball from a field which contains landmines in a Colombian region beset by civil conflict.¹⁹ In Chapter 5, this book devotes special attention to a related area of filmmaking, in which children serve as focalisers through which past periods of conflict and dictatorship are viewed. As Bénédicte Brémard discusses, the child is often conceptualised cinematically as the bearer of a critical gaze on the world of adults—ultimately a Romantic version of childhood as a pure space opposed to the corruption of the adult world—and in this guise the child has been a common element of many films about dictatorship, even an ‘ideal figure of resistance to fascism’ (Brémard 2008, 8).²⁰ Although I pay particular attention in Chapter 5 to Southern Cone films—including *Machuca* (Wood, 2004) and *Cordero de Dios* (Cedron, 2009)—this phenomenon is more widespread, and can be seen in films about other regions of Latin America set during periods of political conflict including the Venezuelan *Postales de Leningrado* (Rondón, 2007), the Peruvian *Las malas*

intenciones (García-Montero, 2011), and *Princesas rojas* (Astorga, 2013), in which the point of view is that of children of Sandinista militants.²¹

The above overview, as well as the chapters that follow, attempt to highlight what have emerged as some of the major themes and associations of the child-figure in Latin American cinema in the course of my research. The field of study is large and would be difficult to survey comprehensively, and the main focus of this book is on developing in-depth analyses and establishing comparisons and regional trends in relation to films produced since the late 1990s. Nevertheless, I hope that the brief survey above will be of use to future researchers as well as serving to contextualise the chapters that follow. Works by Rocha and Seminet (2012a, b, 2014), and by Randall (2017) published recently prioritise different, sometimes related areas, including the relationship of the onscreen child to questions of memory and trauma, gender identity (Rocha and Seminet 2012a), the access of minors to subjectivity onscreen (Rocha and Seminet 2014; Randall 2017), and issues of violence and migration (Rocha and Seminet 2014). In this book, also, the question of the child's agency and subjectivity is to the fore. Although it is impossible to trace a single trajectory for the child in Latin American film, I argue that the child is, broadly, emerging in recent years from its status as object, and being afforded greater subjectivity and agency in cinematic representations. Children have come to be understood, during the period I investigate in this book, less as 'empty vessels, waiting to be filled with adult values, but rather [as] active, creative participants in society' (Stephens 1995, 23). As children have increasingly been seen as subjects of legal and human rights (in discourse if not in practice), and as the sociology and studies of childhood have increasingly defined the child as agent, documenting 'the transition from "the child" as an instance of a category to the recognition of children as particular persons [...] embedded in and related to a much wider process through which the individual voices and presence of children is now being accounted for' (James et al. 1998, 6), certain films have begun to move away from the portrayal of children as (suffering) victims, producing more agentic representations. This has occurred alongside shifts in film language which—within the broader spectrum of experimentation with time and embodiment which characterises contemporary art cinema—have begun to attempt to translate the child's sensorium and gaze into the filmic medium. This we see, in particular, in the films *Cochochi* (analysed in Chapter 3), *El último verano de la boyita* and *La rabia* (analysed in

Chapter 6), and *Alamar* (analysed in Chapter 7). This breaking away from established representational paradigms has happened in conjunction with a wider shift in Latin American cinema which has occurred since the 1990s, ‘the gradual transition away from a type of cinema in which the main character acts as a synecdoche of his or her country’s problems (common in the 1980s and 1990s, and even earlier) to a more nuanced expression of national identity in films released in the first two decades of the twenty-first century’ (Delgado et al. 2017, 12). Whilst, as seen earlier, the child has traditionally functioned as a ‘perfect’ vehicle for the nation, and whilst there are still strong arguments for identifying child protagonists with the nation in a number of recent films including ones studied in this book (see the analysis of *Central do Brasil*, and for a more recent example, that of *Viva Cuba*, both in Chapter 3, as well as Chapter 4’s analysis of *José Martí: el ojo del canario*),²² again there are now a number of films which go beyond this once dominant paradigm, or in which the nation is still a prominent reference point but in which the symbolic relationship of the child with the nation is looser or more nuanced. See, for example, the analyses of *El último verano de la boyita*, *Pelo malo*, *La rabia* (in Chapter 6) and *Alamar* (in Chapter 7). Alongside these changes, films are less likely to exploit the child for its status as victim, or to dwell on child suffering and more likely to privilege the child’s experience, perspective or agency. The child, in contemporary Latin American film, is emerging from its status as object.²³

An interesting example in this regard is Mexican Eugenio Polgovsky’s 2009 documentary *Los herederos*. In many ways, this film draws on classic modes of child-representation favoured by Latin American cinema. Even its title recalls Buñuel’s classic *Los olvidados*, whilst its political position and subject matter—contemporary child labour in the Mexican countryside—recall classics of the New Latin American Cinema such as *Chircales*; both films contain a sustained focus on work being carried out by very young children, and more generally *Los herederos* follows in a long tradition of Latin American filmmaking which uses the child to critique official rhetoric. In addition, as the director notes, the portrayal of the children is, in a sense, the metaphoric exploration of ‘el germen que nos hace ser quienes somos como país’ (‘the kernel which makes us who we are as a country’) (cit. in Martin, forthcoming). Yet *Los herederos* stands out from many Latin American films which have made their socio-economic critique through the child-figure in its refusal to depict children as victims or as objects of spectatorial pity. Their work is shown

to be hard, repetitive, boring and at times clearly damaging, but also at times as fun, or as indistinguishable from play. In addition, Polgovsky's use of sensorial and tactile film language moves away from a predominantly visual paradigm which would render the child as sentimental object of pity. Instead, the child's embodied experience of labour is transmitted to the viewer by a tactile and sensorial aesthetic: child labour is apprehended through the body. *Los herederos*' intimate, oblique and sensorial approach runs counter to traditional visual positionings of the poor/third world child such as can be seen in the New Latin American Cinema classics, even if the film's subject matter echoes many such texts.

If this book argues that new film representations of the child are shifting, like *Los herederos*, away from the child as vulnerable object of pity and object of the gaze, whilst retaining important aspects of the child's political representational potential, it also devotes a good deal of its attention to understanding the more conventional modes of child-representation. Chapter 2 contains a particular focus on the child as victim since it interrogates the representational tendencies surrounding the death of marginalised children, a common trope of social protest filmmaking which clearly echoes aspects of the New Latin American Cinema's use of the child-(victim) discussed above, as a means of mobilising the spectator emotionally for political ends. It argues that the figuring of child death in *Buenos Aires viceversa* and *La vendedora de rosas* largely does not escape from an objectifying and disempowering mode of representation, and contrasts this with the mode of *La mujer sin cabeza* (Martel, 2008), which avoids this trap by circling around the death of a child which is not explicitly figured in visual terms. Chapter 3, for its part, looks at how the Romantic and conservative myths of 'universal' childhood are intertwined in commercially successful road movies (*Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba*) with romanticised visions of the nation, as a means of circumventing more complex political debates. In these films, 'coming-of-age' is associated with journeying across the national territory, and with discovering the rural space, the past and history, all of which are representative of authentic nationhood. The chapter argues that these commercially successful films romanticise the child, 'fixing' the figure as symbol of nation, and contrasts this with *Cochochi* (Cárdenas and Guzmán, 2007) which avoids the romanticisation of the child and focuses instead on the child's experience and agency, tending to refuse the child's symbolic value. In this way, Chapters 2 and 3 both contrast what we could term traditional modes of

child-representation—suffering and victim children, universal and symbolic children—with alternative modes of representation which, whilst retaining important thematic aspects of the child’s presence in film, act to counter some of the problematic aspects of the traditional modes. Chapter 4 looks at *José Martí: el ojo del canario* (Pérez, 2010), which calls on the long-standing association of the child with acts of witness to injustice and oppression, as well as combining the moments of learning intrinsic to the *bildungsfilm* with the oft-repeated themes of the child in the countryside identified with the nation and with learning about the nation seen in the Chapter 3 films, yet with a clear element of political debate which is missing in them.

As Chapters 5–7 show, there are new political associations of the child in Latin America cinema. No longer solely associated with critiques of poverty and marginalisation, the child-figure is increasingly associated with memory politics (discussed in Chapter 5) with gender and queer politics (discussed in Chapter 6), and with eco-politics (discussed in Chapter 7); the figure’s political efficacy and resonance is being channelled towards new ends. Chapter 5 gives an overview of one of the most common uses of the child in recent Latin American cinema, which is to revisit turbulent periods of a country’s recent past. As those who experienced Southern Cone dictatorships as children have reached adulthood, there has been a spate of semi-autobiographical films which look back at these periods of dictatorship through the eyes of a child. Children’s pain at losing parents disappeared by repressive regimes functions as a way of expressing society’s wider loss, and children function as easy identification-figures for wider societies which may find it hard to identify with, for example, militant adult characters. In Chapter 6, I examine the tendency, common in global arts cinemas, to use child characters to challenge gender and sexual ideologies, focusing in particular on two rural Argentine narratives, *La rabia* (Carri, 2008) and *El último verano de la boyita* (Solomonoff, 2009). *La rabia*, especially, works to undermine the Romantic associations of the child in the countryside invoked by certain films discussed in Chapter 3, as well as to challenge both norms of femininity and cinematic conventions surrounding the child including the figure’s anthropomorphisation proposed by Bazin and discussed earlier in this Introduction. *El último verano* focuses on intersexuality as perceived through the poetic and playful gaze of a child in order to disrupt gender and sexual ideology, as well as containing an emphasis on childhood desire, sexuality, and queerness. Last of all, Chapter 7 discusses

Alamar (González Rubio, 2009), in which the child can be seen as enabling a kind of spectatorial mobility which allows for the mediation of divergent cultures and transnational migrations. In this film, which acts to raise awareness about an endangered reef off the Mexican coast, the Banco Chinchorro, the figures of child and childhood, with their associations of the fleeting and the impermanent, and the concomitant concern for what threatens to be lost, are employed for eco-political ends. Like *Alamar*, many of the films in this book draw on the legacy of the New Latin American Cinema in their use of children to engage the spectator emotionally with politics or more broadly with social or environmental ills; as this Introduction has begun to argue, and as the chapters of this book will continue to show, the particular conjunction of the child and the moving image makes the figure an apposite vehicle for eliciting this engagement. As the book also contends, however, the politics of child-representation are themselves changing in favour of the privileging of the child's experience and agency, meaning that, in films such as *El último verano*, *La rabia* and *Alamar*, the child is emerging from its status as empty signifier, eternally receptive to the ideological needs of its context.

NOTES

1. This question beginning my opening paragraph is an adaptation of Vicky Lebeau's 'But what is the child *for* cinema?' (2008, 12, emphasis in original).
2. Also emerging around the same time is a body of work published in French on the relationship between the child and cinema, and on depictions of the child in film (Barillet 2008; Paigneau 2010; Brémard 2016). Within this French corpus, there are a number of analyses of Latin American films. See Brémard (2016), Mullaly (2008).
3. On the boom in and conditions of contemporary Latin American filmmaking, see Shaw (2007), Podalsky (2011, 1–3), Delgado et al. (2017). The increase in production is partly linked to the diversification of funding models, including the shift from state to private finance and the increasing tendency towards transnational co-production, which often combines European and Latin American funding sources. On the funding arrangements behind what she calls a 'new canon of Latin American film for the 21st Century', see Shaw (forthcoming).
4. Scholars focusing on adolescents in Latin American film include Kantaris (2003), Podalsky (2008, 2011, 101–24) and Maguire and Randall (2018). Rocha and Seminet (2012a) explicitly focus on children and teenagers.

5. The one exception here is Juan Carlos Cremata's *Viva Cuba* (2005) which is aimed at both children and adults, and which is analysed in Chapter 3.
6. This book focuses exclusively on films made by adults. For a film made by children, see *Marangmotzingo Mirang/From the Ikpeng Children to the World* (Brazil, 2001) a video made by four children of the Amazonian Ikpeng tribe (Brazil) in response to a video-letter from children in the Cuban Sierra Maestra.
7. Comparing the act of film viewing to the position of the infant during the mirror-stage, Metz writes of the cinema that it is 'A very strange mirror, then, very like that of childhood, and very different. Very like [...], because during the showing we are, like the child, in a sub-motor and hyper-perceptive state; because, like the child again, we are prey to the imaginary, the double, and are so paradoxically through a real perception. Very different, because this mirror returns us everything but ourselves, because we are wholly outside it, whereas the child is both in it and in front of it' (1982, 49).
8. A related body of work looks at childhood memories of the cinema. Annette Kuhn analyses the 1930s generation's memories of cinemagoing as children: 'So uncommonly vivid and detailed are these stories that it sometimes seems as if, in the process of narrating them, informants are accessing the "child's voice" within themselves' (2002, 66–67). Alain Bergala and Nathalie Bourgeois also discuss how memories of cinemagoing as a child affect adult viewing (1993).
9. Chachita was a prominent star of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, starring in many films by the Rodríguez brothers (to whom she was exclusively signed) in her childhood and adolescence. On Chachita, see Various Authors (2002).
10. The plot of *Los olvidados* contains echoes of *Nosotros los pobres*, including the theft from the workshop, whilst in both films, a principal villain is (as in many Mexican films of the period) played by the actor Miguel Inclán.
11. Cinema which is overtly critical of the social and political status quo.
12. This supports the wider view that the emotional responses sought by the melodramatic and militant models of filmmaking were quite similar, as discussed by Sadlier (2009, 12).
13. As Podalsky discusses, this is a common use of animals in the New Latin American Cinema (2011, 45).
14. For example, some of Hart's main examples, including *Camila* (Bemberg, 1984) and *Fresa y chocolate* (Alea, 1993).
15. *La Raulito* is strongly reminiscent of Truffaut's *Les quatre cent coups*. Beyond their shared theme of juvenile delinquency, both films contain sequences in which the protagonist attempts to explain his or her actions

- to an authority figure, and both protagonists end the film on a beach, trapped between the sea, and the land on which the forces of law await them. For more on *La Raulito*, see Chapter 6, p. 165.
16. For a catalogue of Latin American films made between 1950 and 2000 which treat marginal childhood and youth, see Spotorno (2001).
 17. On childhood in *Crónica de un niño solo*, see Mullaly (2008).
 18. See Chapter 3, p. 71, where this is discussed in relation to *Central do Brasil*.
 19. On *Los colores de la montaña*, see Randall (2017, 67–99).
 20. Brémard bases this argument on Spanish screen culture including *El florido pensil* (Porto, 2002).
 21. On *Princesas rojas* and *Postales de Leningrado*, see p. 134. On *Las malas intenciones*, see p. 144.
 22. Hart argues that *Central do Brasil* ‘was the most successful of the nation-image dramas of the 1990s in Latin America even if, in cinematic terms, it was in effect the end of the line for this particular genre’ (2015, 104).
 23. A director who should be mentioned in this regard is Lucrecia Martel, whose films she conceives as emanating from the perspective of the pre-adolescent child (Martin 2011). I have written extensively about the child’s presence, perspective and sensorial world in Martel’s films in my book *The Cinema of Lucrecia Martel* (2016) and for this reason have included only a brief section on Martel in Chapter 2 of this book, on child death in *La mujer sin cabeza* (37–70), as well as noting Martel’s relevance to the films and themes discussed in Chapter 6, with a brief discussion of *La ciénaga* (165–191). It is clear that Martel’s approach to the child is being taken up in subsequent films from other regions of the sub-continent. The Peruvian *Las malas intenciones* (García-Montero, 2001), for example, contains strong echoes of the figuring of female childhood in Martel’s *La niña santa*, and the Costa Rican *Agua fría de mar* (Fábrega, 2010) also combines a portrayal of childhood with Martelian aesthetic and thematic elements.

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CHAPTER 2

Child Death in *Buenos Aires viceversa*, *La vendedora de rosas* and *La mujer sin cabeza*

Under cover of darkness, a young girl and her father lead a donkey towards a Mexico City rubbish tip, to dispose of its brutal cargo: the body of the boy Pedro (Alfonso Mejía), a paradigmatic victim of Latin American cinema's war on the marginalised child. In the next sequence, his enemy Jaibo's (Roberto Coba) face is seen—also in the throes of death—and transposed over the image of a dog running down the street, as he calls out pathetically to his mother. The image is uncanny, ethereal, but also loving: it is at this moment that the villain Jaibo's own orphanhood and lack of love resound most poignantly. Luis Buñuel's classic *Los olvidados* (1950) establishes many of the representational norms associated with the depiction of children in Latin American cinema; 'los hijos de los olvidados' (the children of *Los olvidados*), to use Rafael Aviña's formulation, are found in films spanning the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries from throughout the subcontinent.¹ As in *Los olvidados*, children have often been associated with social critique and protest in Latin American films, and there has been an overt tendency to portray children in situations of urban poverty as a means of effecting this critique. Indeed, the 'street-child' film has become a kind of sub-genre (Del Pozo 2003, 85; Dufays 2011, 616), a collection of films which share with *Los olvidados* an emphasis on orphanhood, abandonment and violence and a realist or neorealist approach. The final sequences of Buñuel's film also establish a representational tendency echoed by the 1990s films discussed in this chapter to end with the death of their (street)-child protagonists.

Street children are a reality of Latin American urban life. They are the very public, perhaps the most extreme manifestation of these societies' failure of their poorest and most vulnerable inhabitants. Since the early twentieth-century Latin American cities have grown rapidly without developing an adequate social infrastructure. Street children are often runaways from situations of domestic violence and deprivation which may make the streets appear, or may even make them, a preferable option to staying at home. Most 'street children' have not lost all contact with their families and may either spend some nights at home or visit their families from time to time. Many children spend their days working or begging on the streets, and split their nights between the streets, shelters and their family homes; a far smaller number sleep permanently on the streets. Estimates of numbers of street children around the world and in Latin America vary greatly; counting them is extremely difficult, partly for the reasons given above, and partly because they are mobile and elusive (Thomas de Benitez 2011, 6). Rizzini and Lusk estimate that the number of street children in Latin America 'runs into the millions' (1995, 391).²

In his book *Hidden Lives: Voices of Children in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Duncan Green explains how street children loom large in the imaginaries of the developed world. He writes:

During the course of writing this book, the author would regularly tell friends and colleagues that he was writing a book on children in Latin America and the Caribbean and invariably found that people would hear him saying he was writing a book on *street* children. In the eyes of the North, all Third World children are somehow equated with street children. (Green 1998, 62)

This is a pattern which is to some extent replicated in Latin American discourse around the child: in an *Agenda latinoamericana* article on 'Los niños en América latina', more than half of the article is devoted to the discussion of street children. Street children—rather than children living at home but in poverty, of which there are many more—are the focus of disproportionate attention. Green asks: 'What can explain the extraordinary resonance of the issue?' proposing the answer that 'Street children strike at the heart of public perceptions of childhood, evoking powerful emotions, particularly among middle class adults, because they see them as an aberration' (1998, 62). Street children occupy, Green goes on to point out, a similar position to that occupied by dirt in Mary Douglas's

conceptualisation: they are ‘matter out of place’ (2002, 50). Children, according to common conceptualisations of childhood, are not *supposed* to be in the street, unaccompanied in urban centres, and as such they are a source of anxiety, even fear (Stephens 1995, 12).

Perhaps precipitated by the 1989 UN Declaration on the rights of the child, during the 1990s there was an intensification of debate on and study of street children³; in Latin American studies in particular several studies relating to street children were carried out in this decade (Pedrazzini and Sánchez 1992; Green 1998; Hecht 1998), and they coincided with a renewed cinematic interest in the theme, which included the two films to which this chapter devotes much of its attention: the Argentine *Buenos Aires viceversa* (Agresti, 1996) and the Colombian *La vendedora de rosas* (Gaviria, 1998). Other films of the period which treat the same topic include the Venezuelan *Huelepega* (Shneider, 1999) and the Mexican *De la calle* (Tort, 2001); all these films, like *Los olvidados*, end with the death of their child protagonists. This is not the case with the earlier, post-*Los olvidados* wave of films—which included *Crónica de un niño solo* (Favio, 1964), *La Raulito* (Murúa, 1974) and *Pixote* (Babenco, 1981)—which tended to have more ambiguous endings, and focused on children and young people who were in and out of reformatories and institutions. In all these films, though, the representation of street children or severely marginalised children has served Latin American filmmakers as a vehicle for the indictment of society’s worst failings and to call attention to its most vulnerable. As Dufays puts it, ‘la asociación entre infancia y espacio urbano se ha vuelto un tópico en el cine latinoamericano’ (‘the association between the child and urban space has become a cliché of Latin American cinema’) (Dufays 2011, 616). The fact that children are physically and intellectually disadvantaged vis-à-vis adults makes the street child ‘una figura marginal por excelencia’ (‘a marginal figure *par excellence*’) and explains Latin American cinema’s frequent recourse to this figure as a means of denouncing social injustice (616). The street child film has its roots in both the melodramas and the militant filmmaking that defined the mid-twentieth century in Latin America, both of which, as Podalsky shows, and as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 1, used the child for political-emotional ends.⁴ Podalsky argues that the New Latin American Cinema was influenced by Italian neorealism’s ‘situat[ing of] suffering as a morally redemptive feeling for both characters and spectators’ (2011, 35). In the films discussed in this chapter, the street child’s suffering and

death has notably political overtones, and most obviously features as an indictment of society. In the two films from the 1990s, *Buenos Aires vice-versa* and *La vendedora de rosas*, child death is figured in melodramatic terms and employs mythological and religious imagery. More subtle are the associations of redemption, of constitution of community and of reconciliation which accompany this most difficult of cinematic subjects.

REPRESENTATIONS OF CHILD DEATH

In her discussion of the cinematic representation of child death, Vicky Lebeau writes that ‘The child’s body—in pain, in death—[is] a type of limit to an aesthetic committed to acts of social transformation’ (2008, 136). In fact though, as Avery and Reynolds point out in their introduction to *Representations of Childhood Death*, cinematic representations of child death have become rare in the cinemas of the developed world: ‘because cinema is a medium which developed as it was becoming exceptional for children to die, and because as a medium it is associated with popular culture, the depressing nature of the subject has pushed it from mainstream filmmaking’ (2000, 8). They note that when child death does occur, it ‘generally requires extreme treatment, with the otherness of children (in relation to adults) being exaggerated in order to make it acceptable’ (2000, 8). They write that ‘[even in horror] young people’s deaths take place off the page, as they do in many other media, presumably because the dead child is too disturbing an image for it to be used as entertainment. The image is disturbing in a variety of ways, but foremost among these must be accusatory’ (9). In his essay in the same volume, John O. Thompson suggests that ‘It is worth pausing over the fact that vigorous national cinemas have developed in countries where infant and child mortality was or is still high, yet [...] these deaths have not been the “stuff of cinema” there either’ (2000, 211). In fact these perspectives need to be interrogated in the light of Latin American filmmaking, where—especially in the independent and political filmmaking spheres, but also in the commercial—there is a stronger tendency to portray child death, and to make that death visible, rather than consigning it to the off-screen, thus exploiting its accusatory power to the full. François Truffaut wrote that ‘Making a child die in a picture [...] is a rather ticklish matter; it comes close to the abuse of cinematic power’ (cit. Lebeau 2008, 154–55). If Truffaut considered the subject too extreme to include, for example, in his *Les Quatre Cent Coups* (1959), Latin

American filmmakers have not shared this view. Whilst the New Latin American Cinema often showed (in many cases documentary) images of children suffering or dying of disease or starvation caused by poverty, more recently children dying violent deaths have become fairly common images in Latin American fiction films; in both *Buenos Aires viceversa* and in *La vendedora de rosas*, the child protagonist is murdered, and this is also the case in other late 1990s/early 2000s productions including the aforementioned *Huelepega* as well as more commercial projects such as *De la calle* (Tort, 2001), and in *Amar te duele* (Sariñana, 2002). In *Elisa antes del fin del mundo* (de la Riva, 1997), a middle-class child of 10 years old whose feuding parents are in financial difficulties attempts an armed bank robbery and is killed in the process; the film borrows the well-worn theme of the death of the marginalised child to point to other deficiencies in society regarding children, for example, middle-class neglect. In the more recent *La mujer sin cabeza* (2008), the plot revolves around a young boy who may have been killed in a hit-and-run accident, although in this case we do not see the act taking place explicitly, and we do not see the child's dying or dead body.

In his book on the child in Western literature, Reinhard Kuhn discusses various interpretations of representations of child death, also drawing attention to its redemptive, or conciliatory power in some narratives (1982, 173–95). As Kuhn puts it, 'the association between childhood and paradise after death is a well-established one and deeply rooted in Christianity' (110). Observing that 'the mortality rate among fictional children is exceedingly high' (173), this author discusses famous examples including Hugo's *Les Misérables* and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, arguing that representations of child death are likely to fulfil one of the three objectives: 'To register a social protest [...], to express a metaphysical revolt [...]; or to make a comment on the precarious condition of childhood itself' (193). Whilst narratives of child death can clearly be interpreted as dealing with unfulfilled promise, the negation of the future or with failure, Kuhn draws attention to instances in which the death of a child serves to consolidate social bonds, including *The Brothers Karamazov* and Camus' *The Plague*. Regarding *The Plague*, Kuhn writes that the death of the child 'serves as a vehicle of expression for outrage and for a defiance of divinity, but it also cements an alliance between men and creates the human solidarity that Camus celebrates in his novel' (185).⁵

Such social and communitarian considerations can be usefully supplemented by psychoanalytic perspectives on the fantasy of child death. In *A Child is Being Killed*, Serge Leclaire, drawing on Freud's work on narcissism, argues that everyone is compelled to destroy the child within, or what he terms the primary narcissistic representation ('primary narcissism' in Freud) (1998, 13). It is necessary for us to eradicate 'the wonderful (or terrifying) child who, from generation to generation bears witness to parents' dreams and desires' (1). As he puts it: 'There can be no life without killing that strange, original image in which everyone's birth is inscribed' (1). For Leclaire, the common reading of Oedipus—the psychic necessity of destroying one's parents—neglects the potential killing of the child. He writes: 'No account is taken of the attempt to kill Oedipus the child, although the failure of that attempt is what settles the hero's tragic fate' (6). Running through Leclaire's discussion is an acknowledgement of the ways in which the idea of the 'wonderful child', 'his majesty the Baby' (4), exists within and through the story of the Christ-child. He sees, for example, 'the glory of the infant King' (1) as a model for the image of child in parents' eyes, and for the primary narcissistic representation, which co-exists psychically with the 'sorrow of the Pieta' (1).

If 'killing the child' is psychically necessary for the constitution of the adult subject (even if, as Leclaire argues, it is an imperative which is never entirely possible [13]), if 'For everyone there is always a child to be assassinated, to be mourned, and to be resurrected' (Kuhn 1982, 178–79), then the social and communitarian narratives which call on the death and/or killing of children as a means of catalysing the enhancement of social bonds seem to find an echo in individual psychology: the child's death becomes a (longed for yet unachievable) moment of constitution and consolidation of subject and of nation or community. How does the cinematic representation of child death affect the constitution of the viewing subject? Does it enact a similar shoring up of spectatorial subjectivity? A central argument of this book concerns the relationship between the on-screen child and the adult spectator, and the extent to which traditional regimes of spectatorial subjectivity may be confirmed or undermined by the presence of the child. If, as Leclaire argues, the 'killing' of the child is necessary for the constitution of the adult subject, then its onscreen representation functions as a means of shoring up—rather than of disrupting—adult spectatorial subjectivity.

Such ‘against the grain’ readings of child death—as something which is somehow desirable—have an important precursor in Hispanic culture in Spanish *cine religioso*, in particular the various versions of *Marcelino, pan y vino*, a 1954 Spanish film directed by Ladislao Vajda, based on the novel of the same name by José María Sánchez Silva, and which has undergone several film and television remakes, including a Mexican film version in 2010. It is a pious Catholic story, in which the orphan Marcelino is left at a monastery to be brought up by monks, and eventually dies in order to be reunited with his mother. This event is the result of the miraculous communication he has established with a statue of Christ in the attic of the monastery and is a fulfilment of the child’s wishes. As Harvey details in her article ‘Death and the Adorable Orphan: *Marcelino, pan y vino* 1954; 1991; 2000’ (Harvey 2004), in mid-century Spain, the representation of child death in children’s literature was frequent and, rather than being a tragic element of the story, was framed as a positive event, a ‘triumphant experience for the individual and an affirmation for the community’ (Avery and Reynolds, cit. Harvey 2004, 63). In the various remakes of the film, she argues, it is the motif of reunion and the Catholic imagery which continues to make the child’s death representable today: ‘the representation of a child’s corpse is no longer appropriate or even palatable entertainment’ yet remakes of *Marcelino* ‘[prove] that a child’s death is still moving when it is narrated as a reunion, in this case the return to a maternal embrace and original plenitude’ (Harvey 2004, 74). In her book *The Child in Spanish Cinema*, Sarah Wright discusses the original 1954 version, identifying a series of aesthetic tendencies around the representation of the child in *cine religioso* (religious cinema), including close-ups and ‘cuteness’—roundness of form, flatness of face—which all establish the (male) child as ‘spectacle to be adored’ (Wright 2013, 34). In *Marcelino* and other examples of the genre, Wright argues, the male orphaned child is often searching or yearning for the lost mother, and these narrative details alongside the cute aesthetics construct the spectator as maternal and nurturing. Wright argues that the on-screen rendering of child death, and in particular, the use of close-up and the bathing of the child in light draws the spectator into a ‘celestial embrace’, at once creating and responding to spectatorial desire for the child (36). In the 2010 Mexican remake, directed by José Luis Gutiérrez Arias, the action is transposed to the era of the Mexican Revolution, with battles raging in the background and conflict between revolutionary *campesinos* (peasants) (who are befriended by the

young Marcelino, here played by Mark Hernández) and the monks. The Spanish and the Mexican versions, despite being made in different places and historical moments, frame the child's death in similar ways, heightening the emotion through loud choral music and using reaction shots of the awed faces of the monks bathed in bright light to communicate the miracle of the child's death as it is performed by the Christ statue. As Harvey argues it is in the Spanish version, in the Mexican version, too, this is a moment of 'National-Catholic reconciliation' (2004, 68); in the latter, it serves to reconcile the monks with the *campesinos* in their shared love of Marcelino, and their religious awe. The consolidation of community is of course underlined by the mythic backdrop of national foundation signified by the revolutionary setting.

The narrative and visual strategies of the *Marcelino* films surface in the depictions of children dying found in the more socially critical and/or realist films discussed later in this chapter, *Buenos Aires vice versa* and *La vendedora de rosas*.⁶ These, too—rather unexpectedly, perhaps—follow a quasi-Catholic model with its emphasis on the symbolism of the innocent child figure, and its equation of child death with reconciliation, reunion with the mother and the promise of paradise for the child who dies (in *La vendedora*) or with a catalyst for change, social healing and redemption (in *Buenos Aires viceversa*). Both films use a heightened melodramatic mode and overpowering music to frame the moment of the child's death. In order to effect the ultimate accusation and indictment of society, then, the films draw on Catholic tradition and imagery in the representation of this most 'ticklish' or problematic subject matter. In these ways, the films both hark back not just to *cine religioso*, but also to the aforementioned classic *Los olvidados*, especially through their blend of melodrama with sociopolitical critique, but also through their religious imagery. *Los olvidados* has been seen as a response to the sentimentalised treatment of the child in classic Mexican melodramas such as *Nosotros los pobres* (Evans 1995, 75) and employs many of the plot devices common to melodrama.⁷ Like the *Marcelino* narratives, *Los olvidados* also revolves around the son's yearning for the lost-mother figure, and, as mentioned earlier, hints (through Jaibo) at a longed-for reunification with the mother at the point of death. In the representation of Pedro's death, as Evans has convincingly argued, the Christian imagery is no less redolent for being twisted: the sequence mentioned at the beginning of this chapter can be read as a sinister version of the flight of the holy family into Egypt, in which, as he puts it: 'Pedro becomes a

darkly ironic evocation of the sacrificial Holy Child and Meche the normally recognisable and familiar, or *heimlich* ('canny') Virgin-surrogate, her complicity in an act not of maternal care, but precisely its opposite [...] (82–83). These tendencies—to mix social realism and critique with melodrama and to frame representation of the child's death through religious images or aesthetics—are central to *Buenos Aires viceversa* and *La vendedora*. *Los olvidados* also institutes a self-reflexive tendency, especially around the viewing of the suffering or poor child. As many critics have noted, the film pays particular attention to acts of viewing and voyeurism and is filled with eye-related imagery. Especially important from our perspective is the sequence where the young Pedro, recently taken to the reformatory, throws an egg at the camera, drawing attention to the filming apparatus, blurring our vision and violently rejecting the (middle class, adult) gaze (see Fig. 1.2).⁸ In this way, Buñuel forces the spectator to consider critically the power relations inherent in the viewing of marginalised children. During the same period, Bazin analyses 'the death of the ten-year-old boy, who is shot down whilst playing the "Marseillaise" on his harmonica' in *It Happened in Europe* (1947) asking whether it 'is so moving only because it confirms our adult conception of heroism' (1997, 122–23). These concerns about the ethical and political implications of viewing the poor, suffering or dying child, and the relationship of such images to any visual pleasures afforded the spectator, are also relevant to the readings that follow.

CHILD DEATH AS RECONCILIATION: *BUENOS AIRES VICEVERSA*

Alejandro Agresti's Argentine-Dutch coproduction *Buenos Aires viceversa* is dedicated to the children of parents disappeared in the 'dirty war' during Argentina's dictatorship of 1976–1982. In the film, a young woman named Daniela (Vera Fogwill), who is herself a child of disappeared parents, tries to capture on film the beauty of Buenos Aires, for an old couple who have not left their comfortable apartment since the death of their daughter, it is implied at the hands of the military regime. The first film Daniela makes for them documents the life of the streets, and especially their poorer and more marginalised inhabitants, including people of indigenous descent and the child dwellers of shanty towns. This first film of Daniela's—a film within a film that we see as she shoots it and later as the couple watches it—contrasts strikingly with *Buenos Aires viceversa* itself, in which the principal characters are largely of

European descent and middle class: *Buenos Aires viceversa* is made up of a series of seemingly unconnected narrative strands and characters which only converge at the end of the film, including a middle-aged woman who absurdly enacts a romance with a television newsreader by speaking to her TV screen (Mirta Busnelli), a blind woman who breaks up with her blind boyfriend in a bar (Laura Melillo), and who is then lured by an elderly man (Harry Haviño) into a motel where he proceeds to torment her in scenes with echoes of the torture perpetrated by the regime, and the motel's receptionist, also the old man's nephew, Damián (Nicolás Pauls).

Whilst Daniela is shooting the first film she makes for the old couple, we see shots of her filming interspersed with her footage. She films a group of ragged children who follow her through houses made of corrugated iron. Eventually, they stand in a group (Fig. 2.1), as she trains the camera on them, zooming in on the face of a little boy, before suddenly their mother or caretaker bursts out of the humble dwelling in the background of the shot and angrily chases Daniela away. The sequence seems to reflect on the tendency of Latin American cinema to seek out the poor and marginalised, and especially poor and marginalised children, yet



Fig. 2.1 Shanty town children pose cutely for Daniela's camera in *Buenos Aires viceversa*

the possibility that the children—who laugh uproariously when Daniela is chased down the street—may have lured her into this trap by posing cutely for the camera and encouraging her also brings up the question of the child’s agency in the visual representation. The fact that the woman reacts so angrily also suggests the violence or imposition associated with the filming of these children, just as Pedro’s egg thrown at the camera does in *Los olvidados*. For Gundermann, Daniela’s images—the shaky, roaming camera, the kinds of subjects sought out, the close-up used as an ‘affection-image’ to engage the viewer—‘remiten a la estética revolucionaria de *Tiré Dié* o *La hora de los hornos*’ (‘are a reference to the revolutionary aesthetics of *Tiré Dié* or *La hora de los hornos*’) and recall theoretical writings on *cine imperfecto* (2004, 95). Though he does not mention the presence of children specifically, both the cited films contain images of poor and marginalised children, and in *Tiré dié* in particular, these subjects are central. The film thus self-reflexively meditates on the kinds of images which have been central to Latin American political and realist filmmaking, images of poor and marginalised children on the streets of the metropolis. As Dufays argues, the heterogeneous pastiche of images—not only Daniela’s films, but the various televisual images which pervade *Buenos Aires viceversa*—and the frequent act of watching TV, CCTV and video undertaken by characters in the film invite the viewer to reflect upon the filming of urban space, the cinematic tradition and commercial images (2011, 626). The images I have drawn attention to in particular invite reflection upon Latin American political cinema’s traditional positioning of the child.

When Daniela shows the film to the old couple they react angrily, telling her they do not wish to see such images, which do not correspond with their memory or imaginary of Buenos Aires, and which have greatly upset them. Daniela needs the money they have promised her for the film; her situation mimics that of the impoverished Latin American filmmaker who may wish to film the reality of her country but who is forced to sanitise it in order to finance her films. The couple give her another chance, a chance to depict ‘la calle’ as they wish to see it, that is to say, without its less privileged inhabitants. In the process of making the second film—which is completely devoid of human beings—Daniela is attempting to film a beautifully formed tree, when a small homeless child, Bocha, appears from behind it. She repeatedly asks him to move, so that she can film the tree on its own, thus trying to ‘cleanse’ the landscape of the little boy. However, the pair end up making friends, and

wandering the city streets together in the pursuit of beauty. They pass the exterior of the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA) with its imposing neo-classical façade, perhaps conforming to the couple's standards of beauty, but which housed a detention centre during the recent dictatorship, and was the site of torture and murder of its opponents. At the end of the film, Bocha (Nazareno Casero) and Daniela go to a shopping mall. Daniela is in a music store trying to locate a piece of music which reminds her of her parents, and which turns out to be Gluck's 'Orpheus and Eurydice'. As she puts on the earphones the music takes over the soundtrack, and we watch, as Bocha wanders off through the shopping centre, and his eye is caught by a video camera in the window of an electronics store. He reaches in to take the camera and runs off through the shopping centre. The scene, and the film, reaches a tragic climax as he is spotted by a security guard—who we have met off-duty in previous scenes as the tormenter of the blind woman—who points a gun at Bocha from an upstairs balcony. For a heart-wrenching moment, the child turns to face the guard and the camera, pleading wordlessly with him not to shoot in a brief close-up (Fig. 2.2). But the guard shoots, and we see the bullet enter his chest in slow motion, and the little body falls



Fig. 2.2 Bocha beseeches the security guard not to shoot, in *Buenos Aires viceversa*

to the floor, accompanied by the loud choral music to which Daniela, oblivious, is still listening.

The child, and more particularly his death, is at the heart of this film. In narrative terms, it constitutes the climax of the film and unites disparate narrative elements, becoming a focal point for a fragmented narrative and bringing together characters who were not previously connected. In a film haunted by the past, it is the death of the child which violently brings past and present together. Daniela's quest to be reminded of her parents through music seems to be answered, in a sense, by Bocha's death, which suddenly and violently brings the past into the present, as images of the grief-stricken Daniela bent-double, crying in the street, and eventually taking refuge in a public toilet, are intercut with images of her mother being pursued down the same street and bludgeoned in the same public toilet by a plain-clothes agent of the regime. The grief-stricken Daniela screams 'Bocha! Donde está Bocha... mi papá, mi mamá!' ('Bocha! Where is Bocha...my dad, my mum!') as the past and the present merge. As Sorbille argues, the structure of *Buenos Aires viceversa* draws attention to the suffering of children of the disappeared but also denounces the poverty caused by Menem's economic policies (2008, 95). If Daniela represents the former, Bocha represents the latter. Indeed, by having Bocha—a victim of the poverty exacerbated by the neoliberal economic policies of the Menem government—die by the hands of a security guard who resembles (who may, in fact, be) one of the state's former torturers, the film demonstrates how echoes of past violence resonate within and are continued by, not just neoliberal economic structures (which marginalise and disempower) but also by the persistence of social structures: those torturers who have not been brought to justice and who have been recuperated within the current neoliberal consumer culture in positions such as shopping centre security guard. As Gundermann argues, it is the film's temporality—it's linking of past and present—which forms the basis of its politics (2004, 93). It creates a parallel between the violence used to uphold the military regime through torture and murder and the violence used to uphold the new democratic regime of free-market capitalism and consumerism—underlined by the fact that the boxes Bocha runs into just before he is killed are labelled 'Made in China', and of course by the setting/the theft itself. The image which brings together past and present, dictatorship and democracy, is the child's death.

The child's death is also a catalyst for a series of unions or reconciliations which happen in the film's closing moments. The various unconnected stories and characters which have comprised the film thus far converge on the shopping centre immediately prior to the shooting, such that several of these characters witness the death of Bocha. After the event, Daniela is found in the public toilets by Damián, also the child of disappeared parents. The two have not met before, and Daniela is comforted by Damián in her grief. Cristina, the woman who has previously lived enthralled by a television newsreader with whom she conducts a one-sided relationship through the TV screen, now has her eyes opened when she witnesses the murder of Bocha and sees the newsreader report it, incorrectly, as an accident. She is 'cured' of her previous enthrallment by television, and able to find love in the real world, in this case with a TV repairman who visited her during the course of the film. The happy heterosexual union, as well as the potential pairing in friendship, support or love between Daniela and Damián provide an ending of reconciliation and communion, catalysed by the child's death. Far from being a wholly lamentable occurrence, then, in the narrative and symbolic world of *Buenos Aires viceversa*, the death of the child serves a strong constitutive and consolidatory purpose. This contrasts strongly with earlier episodes in the film, which tend to focus on the breakdown of heterosexual romance—the blind couple who break up in a bar, Daniela's break-up with her boyfriend Mario—as well as on images of blindness, and the failure or lack of communication evoked by a minor plotline involving faulty speakers and Cristina's alternate wooing and haranguing of her TV set. As one of the TV repairmen puts it, as he contemplates his loneliness, the film conveys a sense of 'naufragio personal, naufragio colectivo' ('personal failure, collective failure'). These themes are underscored throughout by the film's fragmented style, the sudden cuts between sequences, the multiple strands which seem to bear no relation to one another, the starting of scenes *in medias res* and the dialogues interrupted by traffic noise. If the main body of the film has been characterised by a sense of social and romantic fragmentation and solitude, as well as of deception and betrayal in human relations, then the killing of Bocha institutes an expiatory pain and grief, it is, to echo Kuhn discussing Camus' *The Plague*, both 'allegorical' and 'conciliatory' (185). It is 'a vehicle of expression for outrage [...], but it also cements an alliance between men and creates [...] human solidarity [...]' (1982, 185). The film's last images are ones of heterosexual embrace and union: first that

of Damián and Daniela, as he comforts her following Bocha's murder, and finally of Cristina and the TV repairman, who form the film's final visual image, frozen in a snapshot as they laughingly embrace, and the credits begin to roll.

The figuring of the child's death in *Buenos Aires viceversa* also draws heavily on Christian imagery. Daniela and Bocha enter the shopping mall and she goes to a music shop in search of the Gluck piece, whilst he wanders off into the mall. As the assistant hands Daniela some ear-phones, the soundtrack fills with the soaring voices and lush strings of the music which is the only soundtrack to the rest of the sequence. The music strongly intensifies the emotional impact of this sequence, and carries meanings of the Orpheus myth with its emphasis on the death of the loved one, on mourning and grief. The image cuts between Bocha's progress through the mall, and Daniela, visibly overcome with emotion as she listens to the music. The next frame shows Bocha, riding diagonally upwards on an escalator, his body balancing on the side: he ascends from the bottom left corner of the frame to the top right corner. The frame is dominated by the side flank of the escalator which is a bright white, against a backdrop of white fittings and lights in the mall. The music at this point reaches a high point of emotional intensity, with soaring soprano voices. The aesthetics here are clearly redolent of Christian imagery and recall images of the child's ascent to heaven and the bright white lighting which characterise the representation of the child's death in the Marcelino films. The music continues as Bocha opens one of the glass-fronted shop windows to remove the camera, and runs through the mall with it, as the various disparate characters converge on the mall, as the security guard sees Bocha, as the child turns to face the guard, and implores him not to shoot, and as the guard shoots him in the chest. Reinhard Kuhn has argued that 'the demise of the child seems more suited to soap opera than high art' (1982, 177), and the sequence of Bocha's murder is wrought for maximum emotional effect, in particular due to the music, but also to the close-up of Bocha's face as he turns to face the guard followed by the long shot of the little body as it is hit by the bullet, crumples and falls into a pile of cardboard boxes. Although very different in terms of aesthetics and genre, there are hints in Agresti's treatment of Bocha of his later film, the TV-esque *Valentín* (2002), a more commercial project with none of *Buenos Aires viceversa*'s experimentalism or self-reflexivity, which makes very conventional, somewhat cloying use of its child protagonist, an eight-year-old boy who dreams

of becoming an astronaut and spends his time match-making the adults around him. *Valentín*'s success with North American audiences paved the way for the director's Hollywood debut, *The Lake House* (2006) (Sorbille 2008, 119).

In *Buenos Aires viceversa*, the intense focus on Bocha's face in close-up just before the moment of death recalls Washington Araújo's 'Estatuto de los niños de la calle', in which he imagines a series of semi-fanciful ways in which society could honour and protect street children: 'El ser humano rescatará su condición humana cuando contemple el rostro de un Niño de la Calle y le pida perdón por lo mucho que dejó de socorrerle'. ('Human beings will recover their humanity when they can look at a Street Child in the face and ask forgiveness for having so utterly abandoned them') (Araújo 1997, 213). The street child's face is mentioned several times in Araújo's short text. In films about street children, close-ups on the child's face are an inevitable element of the emotional architecture. Early film theorists recognised the close-up as amongst cinema's most powerful tools. As Balász wrote 'Good close-ups are lyrical; it is the heart, not the eye, that has perceived them' (1999, 305), whilst more recently Deleuze wrote that '[T]he close-up does *not* tear away its object from a set of which it would form part, of which it would be a part, but on the contrary, *it abstracts it from all spatio-temporal co-ordinates*, that is to say it raises it to the state of Entity' (2005a, 98, emphasis in original). In *Buenos Aires viceversa*, and in *La vendedora de rosas*, as we shall see shortly, the close-up on the child's face before the moment of death figures as an important part of the film's melodramatic mode of representation. If, as I have argued in this chapter, the child's death may be associated with a subsequent redemption or conciliation, an association ultimately rooted in Christianity, then it is via the child's face in close-up that the spectator is incited to experience this mixture of emotions: guilt, sadness and anguish, but perhaps also, as in Araújo's formulation, the anticipation of forgiveness, the possibility of redemption and the confirmation of her/his own subjectivity. Just as, in *Buenos Aires viceversa*, the child's death leads, on a narrative level, to the consolidation of the community via heterosexual bonds and to the personal self-realisation of various characters, the close-up on the vulnerable child's face can be understood, to use Bazin's words, to be 'so moving only because it confirms our adult conception of heroism' (1997, 123), thus leading to a shoring up of spectator subjectivity which echoes the narrative developments.

ECHOES OF THE *CINE RELIGIOSO*: *LA VENDEDORA DE ROSAS*

If films about street children constitute a Latin American sub-genre, Víctor Gaviria's *La vendedora de rosas* is amongst the most notable of its constituents, an innovative contribution which stands out for its experimental methodology. Gaviria's films have been seen as successors to the New Latin American Cinema (Duno-Gottberg 2003, 8), and as forms of collective cinema of (rather than about) the people, due especially to their employment of improvisation techniques with natural actors who have more input than is customary into the film. *La vendedora* was the second in a trilogy dealing with life in Medellín, Colombia's second city, succeeding *Rodrigo D: no futuro*, which dealt with male youth in Medellín, and preceding *Sumas y restas* which looked at cocaine production and trafficking in the city during the 1980s.

La vendedora focuses on a group of children living on the streets of Medellín, in particular fourteen-year-old Mónica, played by Leidy Tabares. The director and crew spent a long pre-production period working with street children in Medellín, listening to their stories and improvising the script using the children's own language, and these children went on to act in the film, meaning that Tabares and the other actors portrayed lives similar to their own. A long shoot meant that there was time for further improvisation. The methodology is particularly apparent in the dialogues which are delivered in a sometimes impenetrable street slang local to the city. The director has spoken at length about the experience of working with these children—who often rebelled against him, at times changing the course of the film (1998, 40)—and has thus been seen, rather than solely as an author, as a facilitator of the discourse of those who lack a voice in the current social order, of the most marginalised in society, the *desechables* (disposable people) as they are sometimes called by the better-off strata of Colombian society. His work has been read as having 'un compromiso ético con la producción de un espacio donde sujetos subalternos articulan su propio discurso' ('an ethical commitment to the production of a space where subaltern subjects articulate their own discourse') (Duno-Gottberg 2003, 9), as a 'pronunciamento desde lo subalterno' (pronouncement from the subaltern) (8), an 'enunciación colectiva' ('collective enunciation') (Jáuregui 2003, 72).

For María Helena Rueda, the difference between Gaviria's work and other Latin American films about street children lies in the relationship

the director establishes with his cinematic subjects. Rueda contrasts *La vendedora* with works such as Elia Shneider's *Huelepega*, which she argues ultimately participate in the exclusion they condemn, because they depict the world of the street child from without, whilst 'Gaviria opta por dejar que sus sujetos hablen por sí mismos [...] ('Gaviria chooses to allow his subjects to speak for themselves') (2003, 55).⁹ Rueda continues:

Los 'niños de la calle'—que en la imaginación occidental representan la otredad extrema, el vacío total de discurso, un campo totalmente abierto a la interpretación y la elaboración de fantasías de renovación social—adquieren un espacio y una voz para expresar sus fantasmas, sus vivencias y deseos, algunos insospechados por los espectadores. Por eso es posible concluir que el público que asiste a las películas de Víctor Gaviria no va simplemente a comprobar lo que ya sabe acerca de esos niños y niñas, sino a aprender de ellas y de ellos (Street children—who in the Western imagination represent extreme otherness, a discursive void and an area which is totally open to interpretation and the elaboration of fantasies of social renewal—acquire the space and a voice with which to express that which haunts them, their experiences and desires, some of which the spectator does not suspect. So it is possible to conclude that the audiences of Víctor Gaviria's films don't attend simply to confirm what they already know about these children, but rather to learn from them). (61)

Questions of agency in films about children have recently been brought to our attention by commentators such as Karen Lury. She discusses how the child's frequent reduction to symbol or allegory in film tends to lead to 'the child, the actual body, agency and living-ness' (2010, 6) being eliminated from the representation. In various ways, the methods employed in the making of *La vendedora* afford the children agency. For Lury 'The disruptive, impossible, unintelligible aspects of the child' (2005, 308) are usually left out of filmic representations, but such aspects are prominent in Gaviria's film. For Gaviria, the street children's 'rebeldía, tan combatida en una sociedad de consumistas conformes, es lo único que los preserva de la desintegración absoluta, y los salva de ser [...] objetos y cosas inservibles' ('rebelliousness, so embattled in a society of conformist consumers, is the only thing that saves them from falling apart completely, and keeps them from becoming [...] useless and objects') (1998, 40), and this is what is allowed to remain in the film. Gaviria notes that sometimes the children refused to carry out his plans,

thus changing the course of the film. More generally, their improvisation and the creation of the dialogues in their own language, replete with swearing and slang, as well as ‘mistakes’ led to a film deeply inflected with the child’s ‘agency and living-ness’. Gaviria gives the example of a sequence in which a young runaway, Andrea (Mileider Gil), tries to talk to Mónica as she experiences a drug-induced vision of her grandmother. Gil’s line was ‘son ilusiones’ (‘they are illusions’), but when shooting the scene the 11-year-old actress instead said the words ‘son desilusiones’ (‘they are disillusion(ment)s’), and this is the version which appears in the final cut (Gaviria, cit. in Jáuregui 2003, 94). The childish error inflects the scene differently, and as such a more polyphonic text is created, one in which the child’s ‘body, agency and living-ness’ is not entirely colonised by adults.¹⁰

Gaviria’s attempts to create a film language which approximates the street child’s vision and movement further support this view of the text. On the most basic level, the camera films from the position of a child, and low angles accentuate the tall buildings of the city, thus denying any masterful gaze which would induce spectatorial feelings of complacency or power. The children frequently inhale glue and the film develops an aesthetic language to represent the altered perceptual states this induces, including saturation of colours and dreamlike music. Gaviria notes that in his discussions with street children, he learned that a primary reason for their drug use is that it permits ‘un viaje a los afectos’ (‘a trip into affection’ (cit. Jáuregui 2003, 97), and that visions are frequently concerned with returning to the comfort of home and family, to lost family members, especially mothers, an aspect the film is faithful to when creating Mónica’s visions, which are all concerned with the figure of her dead grandmother. The street children’s ways of inhabiting the city space are also evoked narratively and filmically. Their lives are haphazard and do not have purpose or meaning as these are understood by dominant social groups. They travel back and forth across the city continually, and their journeys are haphazard, circular, and incoherent. Deleuze defines neo-realism as an ‘Art of encounter – of fragmentary, ephemeral, piecemeal, missed encounters’ (2005b, 2), which recalls the plot of *Los olvidados* as well as being an apt description of *La vendedora*. Mónica’s journeys and her purpose are frequently cut short or change course unexpectedly, and these modes of movement reveal the incoherent and truncated nature of the lives of the street children, which challenge notions of progress and teleological understandings of history. The previously mentioned

Andrea, an important supporting character, recalls more traditional filmic representations of children, which tend to reflect processes of individuation by representing the child's leaving and rejoining the security of, for example, a mother and a home-space.¹¹ This accurately describes the movement of Andrea, with whose running away from home the film commences, and with whose return home and to her mother, it ends. The story of Andrea provides an important counterpoint to the film's general pessimism.

This general stance is, however, underscored by the film's lack of political programme or of solution to the problems it represents, and by the fact that the film ends with the protagonist's death. John Beverley contrasts *La vendedora* with Fernando Meirelles' blockbuster *Cidade de Deus* (2002), which deals with the young inhabitants of the Rio *favela* of that name (2003, 17–21). Like many of the films discussed in this book, *Cidade de Deus* can be categorised as a *bildungsfilm*, a dominant mode generally of child films, essentially a narrative of progress, with a focus on learning and maturation. The young protagonist of *Cidade de Deus* overcomes his violent slum background and becomes a photographer, whilst the protagonist of *La vendedora* is killed by the film's villain, Zarco (Giovanni Quiroz), over a wristwatch. There are striking parallels between Mónica's fate and that of *Los olvidados'* Pedro, also killed by the film's older male villain, Jaibo, who, like Zarco, is a menacing presence continually lurking around the corner. For Beverley, *Cidade de Deus* constitutes a bourgeois form which views the poor from the outside, and places its faith in art's potential for social redemption, whereas *Rodrigo D* and *La vendedora*—very much in the mode of *Los olvidados*, I would add—are 'anti-bildungsromans' which 'no ofrecen la posibilidad de crecimiento y transformación personal' ('do not offer the possibility of growth or personal transformation') (Beverley 2003, 19), and which therefore speak with the voice of the poor.

La vendedora's protagonist Mónica has run away from the home she shared with her older sister, it is implied to escape sexual abuse by the sister's boyfriend, following the death of her grandmother and destruction of her grandmother's home by state forces in the slum *barrio* Miramar on the outskirts of Medellín. Mónica and her female friends sell roses to survive, inhale glue and often sleep in a homeless shelter. The film's narrative spans the frenetic 24 hours leading up to midnight on Christmas Eve, hours in which emotions run high, and in which desires for family and affection, as well as for consumer goods to own or give as Christmas

presents, are at their peak. At the end of this period, Andrea, who has run away after being beaten by her mother for selling her sister's roller-boots, returns home to, forgives, and is forgiven by her ultimately loving mother, a 'happy ending' which does imply some growth and personal transformation, thus offsetting the totally pessimistic reading offered by Beverley. The dominant storyline, however, is that of Mónica, who, at the end of the film, whilst seeking refuge and simulated affection from a glue high in her grandmother's former home (now a pile of rubble) is killed by Zarco as he attempts to recover a stolen watch. *La vendedora*'s plot is based on Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Little Match Girl', (Jáuregui 2003, 96), *La vendedora de rosas*, and echoes the tale in many details; here roses, rather than matches, are sold, both end with the death of their child protagonists, and just before she dies, Mónica burns a sparkler—fireworks are much used on Christmas Eve, and some of the narratives is taken up with the children's procuring of them—echoing the match girl's burning of all her wares to keep warm.

When she dies Mónica is entering the third of her visions of her grandmother, and the moment of death is paralleled in the fantasy with the moment of being embraced, finally, by the elderly woman. How are we to interpret the death of the child in the film and what related questions does it raise in terms of emotion, ethics and the spectator? As Lebeau puts it: 'The child's body—in pain, in death—[is] a type of limit to an aesthetic committed to acts of social transformation' (2008, 136). After she is shot, the camera lingers on her motionless body for several seconds until the credits begin to roll and the image remains on the screen as they do, providing the visual counterpart to the music accompanying them. The lyrics are pertinent and worthy of interpretation: 'Rosas/que sembraste allá en el huerto/en el jardín de tu casa' ('Roses which you sowed there in the orchard/in the garden of your house'). The rose/garden image coincides with Romantic notions of childhood as close to nature, yet roses also facilitate the girls' own crude insertion into capitalist mechanisms of exchange in the film and are the subject of several disputes amongst those who sell them. The insistent use of the second person singular becomes accusatory in its implication of the viewer in the sowing of the seeds that germinate outside the house (society) and its institutions, in the production, flowering, and dying, of the roses on the periphery.

The closing sequences of *La vendedora* strongly echo the Catholic tradition of representing child death as a moment of reconciliation.

Throughout the film, Mónica has dreamt of reconciliation with her dead grandmother, in a manner which recalls classics of the Catholic canon such as *Marcelino, pan y vino*.¹² As Wright points out: ‘in these films boys (for they were always boys) were often longing for their absent or dead mothers’ (Wright 2013, 24). In *La vendedora*, we see strong echoes of the tropes identified by Wright in the *cine religioso*: although the child in question is a girl, her story, too, is one of loss of/yearning for the mother figure, and the moment of death is figured as one of reunion with the dead grandmother. During the final sequences, the action cuts between Mónica’s story and that of Andrea. As Mónica inhales glue in the rubble of her grandmother’s destroyed home, she hallucinates a warm, welcoming family party into which she moves, beckoned by her grandmother to partake of the copious food on offer. Food, drink, family, warmth, and protection: the vision represents all that Mónica’s life on the streets lacks. As Mónica hallucinates this reconciliation, Andrea experiences a real reconciliation with her own mother, who welcomes her back home, forgiving Andrea her misdemeanours and declaring her love for her daughter, in contrast to her behaviour earlier in the film. Both little girls are embraced by their (grand)mothers, one in her imagination, the other in the diegetic reality. When returning to Mónica, the film juxtaposes her hallucination with the reality of what is happening to her and around her, in particular the approaching Zarco, on the run from his former gangmates, who sees Mónica and attacks her for the watch, followed shortly by his gangmates taking aim at him. Because the film cuts back and forth between Mónica’s vision and diegetic reality, we do not see Mónica being murdered by Zarco (or perhaps by a stray bullet from the gang). Instead, we see her being gathered up into the arms of the smiling grandmother, whereupon her own, intensely joyful, smiling face falls back into lifelessness (Fig. 2.3). There is a long close-up on this still face, and a subjective shot of the night sky filling with fireworks. It is midnight on Christmas Eve. The sounds of fireworks mingle with gunshots as the gang, including a small boy, fire at Zarco. Then we see Mónica’s face in extreme close-up, as her eyes close (Fig. 2.4). It seems we see her face at the moment of death, rather than seeing the act of killing.

The image of reunion and the Catholic imagery can here be understood as making possible the representation of an almost unrepresentable subject, the violent death of a child. As Harvey argues ‘the representation of a child’s corpse is no longer appropriate or even palatable entertainment’ yet remakes of *Marcelino, pan y vino* ‘[prove] that a child’s



Fig. 2.3 Mónica dies in her grandmother's embrace, in *La vendedora de rosas*

death is still moving when it is narrated as a reunion, in this case the return to a maternal embrace and original plenitude' (Harvey 2004, 74), which is exactly the path Víctor Gaviria chooses when depicting Mónica's death. Whilst the motivations for showing child death in *La vendedora* differ greatly from those of the *cine religioso*—and can be characterised as strongly political and social rather than as merely as concerned with entertainment—many of the thematic and aesthetic framings of the event remain the same. As in the versions of *Marcelino* discussed, as well as in *Los olvidados* and *Buenos Aires viceversa*, the moment of the child's death in *La vendedora* represents a climax for the film. It happens at midnight on 24 December which has been flagged throughout the film as a special moment which all the children are excited about. In the closing moments of the film, there are several close-ups on the joyful, expectant face of Mónica as she inhales glue and experiences the hallucination/memory of her grandmother and the grandmother's home full of people and food. As in *Buenos Aires viceversa*, close-ups of the child



Fig. 2.4 Mónica's face in close-up as she dies, in *La vendedora de rosas*

function to heighten the emotional impact of the sequence, and the melodramatic charge of the ending. At the moment of death, Mónica's face is filmed in extreme close-up, and bathed in light, such that the edges of her form become softened or disappear, drawing the spectator into the image. The intense focus on the face of the street child—a convention of the sub-genre—invites the contemplation of and even a merging with, social subjects whom the majority of society is disinclined to see and discouraged from seeing. The shot of Monica's upper body as it falls back, lifeless, echoes the sequence concluding Jaibo's death in *Los olvidados*. Both bodies are filmed, and lit, from above in the closing moments of the film; Mónica's body is held by her longed-for grandmother, whereas Jaibo hears his lost mother's words 'duérmase mi'jito' ('sleep, my son') as he agonises (Fig. 2.5).

The aesthetic rendering of Mónica's death draws on the *cine religioso* tradition, recalling the image of celestial embrace discussed earlier, as she is embraced by her grandmother and the spectator is drawn into an



Fig. 2.5 Jaibo's death, in *Los olvidados*

'embrace' with the child on-screen. An ethereal choral music accompanies the sequence, casting death as a religious experience and providing a sonic bridge from this night-time shot to the next shot, which shows the early morning sky, and against it, a statue of the Virgin Mary. Day is dawning, and we pass from Mónica's face in the joy of reconciliation and throes of death, to the Virgin Mary who visually recalls Mónica's grandmother. The continuing music which features soft strings and female vocals (though not identifiable words) reinforces the sense of reunion with the (grand)mother/Virgin, recalling Kristeva's theory of the mother's voice as a site of pleasure, 'the image of the child wrapped in the sonorous envelope of the maternal voice [...which is] a fantasy about pre-Oedipal existence, the entry into language and the inauguration of subjectivity; [...] about biological "beginnings", intrauterine life' (Silverman 1988, 101). Through the joy with which Mónica embraces her grandmother, the light bathing her face, the use of sound and the cut to the Virgin, the film hints at what Reinhard Kuhn calls the 'deeply

rooted' Christian association 'between childhood and paradise after death' (1982, 110).

A VISUALLY ELUSIVE DEATH: *LA MUJER SIN CABEZA*

Made in 2008 in the wake of the experimental wave of films labelled 'New Argentine Cinema', Lucrecia Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza* constitutes a very different cinematic project to those discussed earlier in this chapter. In this film, a poor child from the slums in Salta, Northwest Argentina, dies, but unlike the intensely visual deaths we witness in *Buenos Aires viceversa* and in *La vendedora de rosas*, this death does not take place on screen. Child death is something of a theme in Martel's work, having previously surfaced in her début feature, *La ciénaga*, which ends with the death of little Luchi (Sebastián Montagna) when he falls from a ladder. This ending has been argued to signify the 'cancelación de la idea de futuro' ('cancellation of the idea of the future') (Amado 2006, 55), as well as the denial of a kind of openness to otherness present in Luchi's way of apprehending the world (Martin 2016, 47–48). However, as the child of one of the middle-class families around which the film centres, Luchi cannot be seen in the tradition this chapter is mainly concerned with, that of street children and marginalised children, those 'hijos de los olvidados' so frequently represented in films from the subcontinent. It is in Martel's later film *La mujer sin cabeza* that such figures are recalled, although the film does not fit within the tradition of urban realism in which we usually find them.

In *La mujer sin cabeza*, the upper middle-class, middle-aged Vero (María Onetto) is involved in a hit-and-run, although it is never made entirely clear whether she has hit and killed just a dog, or in addition, a young boy from the slums. After the accident, there seem to be little handprints on the car window. Vero reads in the newspaper that a young boy has been killed on the road. She is traumatised by the sight of young boys everywhere, boys playing football or the young sons of servants as they hide under beds. The figure of the young boy that has died haunts Vero—and haunts the film—but her family conspire to ensure that her potential guilt remains uninvestigated. As with the films previously discussed in this chapter, *La mujer sin cabeza* employs the idea of the killing of a poor child—not a street child, but a child severely economically and socially disadvantaged in relation to the ruling class to which Vero belongs—as a means of indicting society, even if it is never fully

confirmed that the child has died as a result of Vero's car accident. The crime or potential crime comes to stand for the contemporary situation of social injustice in Argentina, as well as for historical crimes including, but not limited to, those perpetrated by the Argentine military regime in the 1970s.¹³ What is interesting about the portrayal of this death, however, is that the film does not really portray it. It is unclear whether the young boy who has died locally was indeed hit by Vero. Vero's collision takes place off-screen, and all we see is a dead dog in the rear-view mirror. Young boys of the dead boy's social class proliferate in the film, contributing to the sense that the film is haunted by his ghost, a sense augmented by various ghostly occurrences. A little boy creeps out from under a bed and stares back at Vero, whilst her aunt Lala talks about the house being full of ghosts. The dead boy's brother walks along the road-side next to where Vero is driving—an echo of the accident—and wordlessly stares at her. The film is punctuated by the sense that the dead boy is looking accusingly at Vero through the gazes of others.

This treatment of child death is in stark contrast to the intensely visual deaths we see in films like those of Agresti and Gaviria, in which, as discussed, the child's face in close-up just before the moment of death, and lingering or slow-motion shots of the dying child are featured. In *Buenos Aires viceversa* we see the bullet enter Bocha's body, whilst in *La vendedora* we are shielded from this moment, but still witness the kicking of Mónica's body by Zarco, cutting between reality and her hallucination. In *La mujer sin cabeza* there is, rather, an invisibilising of the death of the child which better bespeaks his social marginalisation and invisibility. Furthermore, *La mujer sin cabeza* avoids the objectification and sentimentalisation of the dying child through this avoidance of visualisation, thus avoiding the 'abuse of cinematic power' to which Truffaut refers. The spectator is not permitted a gaze upon the dying child that might afford feelings of pity, emotional catharsis or identification. Instead of providing the spectator with opportunities for potential forgiveness or redemption through its aesthetic strategies as I have argued do the films analysed earlier, *La mujer sin cabeza* figures the marginalised child who dies as absent presence, as dead yet alive, reflecting his social positioning, his liminality with regard to politics and the law, in a representation which is far more unsettling to the spectator. Whilst the narrative use of child death in this film shares some motivations with the film's 1990s counterparts, *La mujer sin cabeza*'s aesthetic strategies instead figure the child who dies as a disruptive excess to, and thus as uncontainable by,

systems of visual representation. As argued, both *Buenos Aires viceversa* and *La vendedora de rosas* attend to the depiction of the child's gaze and are conscious of the child's agency in looking/representation. But both end with intensely visual and melodramatic spectacles of child death, complete with sentimental uses of music and close-up. In *La mujer sin cabeza*, the dead child is explicitly not the object of our gaze. Rather, the film creates moments in which the dead child's own gaze seems to be privileged, in which he seems to peer—often through the gaze of another—at us and at Vero.¹⁴

The first such instance happens in the film's opening moments, before the accident. A group of boys is playing on the road. One of them is separated from the group and we see him, in close-up, as he peers through the leaves of a tree he is hiding behind. His face is partially obscured, and his own act of viewing is privileged. He is more seeing than seen. It is not confirmed, but we can surmise, that this is the boy who is killed. Later, the boys who recall the dead boy remain blurry and indistinct, in the background of shots, but they look out at us, or their gaze is trained on Vero, and seem to suggest a knowledge, and a silent resistance to the power she and her relatives possess. The crucial difference between the treatment of child death in *La mujer sin cabeza* compared to the versions of the theme presented in *Buenos Aires viceversa* and *La vendedora* concerns the extent to which the child in question becomes objectified in the representation. It seems that, despite their best efforts at representing the child's agency in life, Agresti's and Gaviria's films do not entirely avoid this trap when representing the child's death. Whilst these films change our gaze, re-directing it towards the street child, their approaches to representing the street child's death may result in a shoring up of adult spectator subjectivity due to the aesthetic strategies chosen including, especially, the intense visual focus on the dying and dead child. At the same time, they offer possibilities for emotional identification which also confirms viewing subjectivity. By contrast, *La mujer sin cabeza's* ghost-child is an uncanny presence which disrupts regimes of visibility in the sense that he and his death hover on the borders of visibility. This unsettling presence overturns the convention that the dead/dying child of filmic works of political and social protest should be hypervisual and objectified, with the spectator safely occupying the role of bearer of the gaze. *La mujer sin cabeza* thus shifts viewing dynamics and performs an unsettling of adult spectatorial subjectivity, locating the gaze in the dead child and leaving the viewer with little to grasp or focus on. Questions

around whether a particular group tends to occupy the position of looker/subject or looked-at/object in cinematic representation have been amply explored, of course, in relation to gender (e.g. Mulvey 1975; De Lauretis 1984; Silverman 1992), and these are questions which are being developed in relation to the child's role in cinema, and with which I engage through discussions of how film emulates child perception, which I argue is the case in several films analysed in this book.

The dual tradition of melodrama and social critique in Latin American cinema—alongside the continuing political and social motivation of directors from a region characterised by extreme poverty and inequality—has meant that representations of the death of children, especially socially marginalised children, are fairly frequent and continue to be present in contemporary filmmaking. In *Buenos Aires viceversa* and *La vendedora de rosas* the representation of child death is framed, perhaps unsurprisingly, in a religious language, and draws on tropes from the *cine religioso*. In *Buenos Aires* this means that the event of child death is framed as not wholly negative, due to the narrative and symbolic progress and consolidation it allows, especially with regard to the community. In *La vendedora*, the positive aspects of the event are limited to the child's own experience and the suggestion of reunion and paradise after death. As well as their religious imagery, both films fall back on sentimental and melodramatic modes in their representation of child death, and these result in a cinematic language which—despite the difficulty of the subject matter—does not work to unsettle spectatorial subjectivity. In *La mujer sin cabeza*, a very different treatment of child death is seen: here, the child and his death are far more unsettling due to the fundamental impossibility of seeing them or possessing them—as well as the suggestion of the child as bearer of the gaze which continues after his death—leaving the spectator in a less masterful position vis-à-vis the child. The extent to which representations of childhood may result in either a shoring up, or a disruption of adult spectatorial subjectivity, and to which aesthetic shifts may attempt to mould the medium to child perception or shift the dynamics of the gaze in relation to the child, are questions which underlie the analysis of several of the films discussed in this book.

NOTES

1. Rafael Aviña's article 'Los hijos de los olvidados' (2004) discusses the many later Latin American films which have echoes of Buñuel's.
2. A report published by the Consortium for Street Children points out that whilst for many years, numbers of street children worldwide were estimated to be at 100 million, a figure that was widely reported and quoted, such numbers may have little validity, and the report suggests that numbers are probably smaller than this (Thomas de Benítez 2011). For information on Latin American street children, see Green (1998, 58–88), Hollingsworth (2008) and Drybread (2013).
3. As Sharon Stephens notes, this is within the context of a 'growing concern' during the 1980s and 1990s 'with assaults on the space of childhood' (1995, 8). Stephens cites a wide array of books published during that period on the theme of endangered children and disappearing childhood (8–9). In much research happening around this time, Stephens argues 'the dominant theme is of children as innocent and vulnerable victims of adult mistreatment, greed and neglect' (9).
4. Earlier roots, of course, lie in Victorian and Romantic representations of childhood in European literature. As Metz explains: 'As an abandoned child at the mercy of rapidly changing social and economic systems, the orphan became an important literary and political figure as contemporary politicians and public reformers struggled to care for these children left without support' (2012). In Latin American literature, as Richard Browning discusses, the child has been identified with social marginalisation in works by writers such as Salarrué (2001, 83–111).
5. A variation on this theme can be seen, for example, in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, in which 'a substitution takes place, and it seems as if the child were dying in order to allow someone else to live' (Cockshut, 144).
6. In his chapter 'La mort et l'enfant dans le cinéma espagnol et hispano-américain contemporain' (2008), Bénédicte Brémard also notes this theme, linking some of the films dealt with in this chapter, including *Marcelino, pan y vino*, *Los olvidados* and *La vendedora de rosas*.
7. See Víctor Fuentes for a discussion of these traits (2000, 76).
8. On this sequence, see Evans (1995, 85) and Gutiérrez-Albilla (2007, 354–55).
9. Films about street children which she places in the former category are *Gamín* (Ciro Durán, 1978), *Soy un delincuente* (Clemente de la Cerda, 1976), *Pixote* (Héctor Babenco, 1981), *Juliana* (Fernando Espinoza and Alejandro Legaspi, 1988) and *Johnny Cien Pesos* (Gustavo Graef-Merino, 1993).

10. In this sense Gaviria's methodology resembles that used by Héctor Babenco on *Pixote* (1981). As Hart notes, this film also blends fiction with documentary in the portrayal of the lives of street children and the nonprofessional child actors 'were allowed to extemporise and change the script' (2015, 72).
11. On this topic, see Annette Kuhn (2005).
12. As Jessamy Harvey argues, *Marcelino, pan y vino* 'has become part of an international Catholic cinematic canon' (2004, 69).
13. For a full discussion of the film's historical references and the multiple interpretations of the central crime, see Martin (2016, 80–88).
14. I have made this argument in more detail elsewhere. See Martin (2016, 91–92).

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CHAPTER 3

Children's Journeys: *Central Do Brasil*, *Viva Cuba* and *Cochochi*

As Jacqueline Rose writes: 'the child is, if you like, something of a pioneer who restores [...] lost worlds to us' (1984, 9). The travelling child on a physical journey, venturing into unknown—often sparsely populated—territory is the subject of the films discussed in this chapter. For the two main subjects of discussion in this chapter, *Central do Brasil* (Salles, 1998) and *Viva Cuba* (Cremata, 2005), these journeys are physical displacements which restore what is lost—in personal, emotional, or cultural terms—to adults both diegetic and extra-diegetic. Near the turn of the millennium, these two well-known and commercially successful Latin American road movies emerged in which child protagonists undertake epic journeys across the national territory in search of the father. If the many street child films in Latin American cinematic production present urban landscapes in which the harsh environment, the lack of family, love and protection always threaten to impinge on the child's 'child-like-ness', often turning children into mini-adults, then commercially-oriented films like *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba* emphasise precisely the child's exalted *difference* from the adult, constructing the two along binary lines.

In these films, the child is associated with a desired or projected nation and is linked with cultural authenticity, tradition and the rural, all of which are contrasted with corrupt or otherwise problematic adult-aligned urban settings which in various ways are shown to be detrimental to the nation/the child. In both *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba*, the child-figure, as repository of innocence, authenticity and unmediated

experience, assumes a central position as a means of negotiating and overcoming cultural, geographic and political divides. The child stands at the intersection, in these films, of the past, memory and tradition, on the one hand, and of the future on the other; symbolically the child represents both and does so for nations at critical historical junctures, and in films which, as their titles suggest, are ultimately concerned with the representation, and direction, of the nation. The final film discussed in this chapter, Israel Cárdenas and Laura Amelia Guzmán's *Cochochi* (Mexico, 2007), is the tale of a journey undertaken in the Sierra Tarahumara, Northwest Mexico by two Rarámuri brothers to deliver a package of tablets to a sick relative on the other side of the valley. Like *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba*, *Cochochi* uses the trope of childhood journeying to represent rites of passage. However, in its choice of a small (but all-encompassing) journey, it avoids the totalising sweep of the journeys across the nation undertaken in these films. It also differs from them in its avoidance of making the landscape a pleasurable object of mobile vision, instead emphasising the experiential aspects of childhood mobility and its dangers and pleasures.

A precursor to these three films is Marcela Fernández Violante's *En el país de los piés ligeros/Niño rarámuri* (Mexico, 1983). Like *Viva Cuba* and *Cochochi*, it focuses on the travels of a pair of children who, as in *Viva Cuba*, represent different parts of a divided populace. In Fernández Violante's early Latin American childhood 'buddy movie'—as in *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba*—a journey takes place from the urban to the rural, allegorising national cultural identitarian concerns. It tells the story of Manuelito, a white, middle-class boy who travels with his father from the city of Chihuahua to the Sierra Tarahumara, and who makes friends with Jesús, a Rarámuri boy. The two boys then undertake a further journey together through the countryside, and Manuelito learns about indigenous culture and politics, and about the natural world. As in many child-centred films, the child's (in this case Manuelito's) education is a vehicle through which to educate the spectator; the film's implied audience is clearly a white, modern and urban Mexico which, the film suggests, urgently needs to reconnect with its rural and indigenous heritage. The aim is also to 'seduce' the urban spectator through picturesque images of indigenous dress and customs: all the Rarámuri characters are impeccably turned out in brightly coloured traditional dress at all times. The film stresses the conflict between white people—called *chabochi* by the Rarámuri—and the indigenous, depicting the appropriation

of indigenous territory and the infantilisation of and lack of respect for the indigenous themselves in modern Mexico. As Manuelito's father puts it: 'Al indio sólo le quedan dos cosas: lo que la naturaleza le ofrece para comer, para vivir, y su odio' ('the Indian only has two things left: what nature offers him to eat, and his hate'); yet the film models the overcoming of these divisions through the friendship of Manuelito and Jesús, the earnest respect with which Manuelito, as a child, approaches indigenous culture, language, and medicine, and the openness with which Jesús, as a child, accepts him. Manuelito has not yet learned to assume a natural superiority over the indigenous, whilst Jesús has not yet learned to mistrust whites. Their similarity *as children*—highlighted by their giggling delight in many sequences—despite their vast cultural differences, enables a connection which overcomes divisions present in the adult world, which are centred around the defence of an Rarámuri *egido* from illegal loggers. The film—and Manuelito's journey—ends with his enrolment at Jesús's school in the Sierra Tarahumara rather than his planned return to the city; the little white boy's journey of learning and maturation models the film's projected solution: white Mexico's 'integration' with or movement towards indigenous culture rather than the forced 'integration'—for which read cultural destruction—of the indigenous which the film's villains callously advocate.

Subsequent developments in Latin American filmmaking have led, since the mid-1990s, to a boom in road movies being made in and about the region, leading to a number of important publications on the topic (Brandellero 2013; Pinazza 2014; Garibotto and Pérez 2016; Lie 2017). Scholars have disputed the tendency to associate the genre exclusively with North America (Brandellero 2013, x; Garibotto and Pérez 2016, 4–7) and have debated its meanings on the subcontinent. Road movies are traditionally associated with questions of modernity: their journeys tend to rely on modern means of transport and may satisfy modern desires for movement and mobility. Yet, in Latin America, road movies by definition stage journeys between social formations exhibiting different levels of modernity or modernisation, thus bringing into sharp focus the unevenness of Latin American modernity and dramatic differences between urban and rural locations. In his *Cinematic Journeys*, Dimitris Eleftheriotis discusses the road movie Walter Salles made after *Central do Brasil*, *Diários de motocicleta* (2004), in which he identifies 'coming close to the land' as a central concern (2010, 113); the phrase is a line from the film delivered by Gael García Bernal who

plays Ernesto Guevara, who remarks, just before they crash their motor-bike into a muddy ditch, ‘me alegra haber dejado atrás lo que llaman la civilización, y estar un poco más cerca de la tierra’ (‘I am pleased to have left behind what they call civilisation, and to be a little closer to the land’). This movement into the rural space also characterises *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba*, as well as *En el país de los pies ligeros* and in all these cases it is associated with both those common components of the road movie and the journey narrative: the personal transformation and a simultaneous movement towards the truth, or authentic character of the nation (or in the case of *Diarios*, of Latin America). The journey in film and literature is quintessentially bound up with identity and these films are no exception. In them, in Giuliana Bruno’s words: ‘the exterior world conveys an interior landscape. Emotion materialises as a moving topography. To traverse [the] land is to visit the ebb and flow of a personal and yet social psychogeography’ (2007, 2). The characters learn about the nation as they learn about themselves; the road movie crosses over with the *bildungsfilm* as children learn what it means to be Brazilian, Cuban or Mexican alongside their process of self-discovery.¹ In *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba*, there is a sense that moments of national unease or crisis—the failures of neoliberalism in Brazil and the demise of socialism in Cuba—propel the filmic quest to define, redefine or discover the nation’s truth, its past or its soul, in order to re-project the desired nation. In this sense the road movie format is an apt one, since, as Eleftheriotis argues, road movies ‘tap into a discourse of radical and oppositional rhetoric [...], emancipatory character [...] and [...] are profoundly informed by romantic notions of the authentic, the real and the genuine’ (2010, 103). *Central do Brasil*, *Viva Cuba* and *Cochochi* all adhere to the ‘buddy’ format common to many road movie narratives, and—although *Cochochi* can’t be considered a road movie, for reasons I will discuss later—all of these films revolve around the relationship between the two travellers, which evolves over the course of the journey; in all three, as well, the travellers are in some sense fugitive or operating outside the ‘law’.

Karen Stanbridge proposes that ideas of authentic nationhood are closely related to imaginaries of childhood since ‘the “authenticity” that [...] forms the romantic core of modern nationalisms, that which defines a culture as “true and original”, “our own and nobody else’s,” is found, at least in part, in the celebration of our deep-seated memories and experiences of the *homeland*, the place where we, like our ancestors before

us, *were raised*' (Stanbridge 2012, 42).² It is within this context that our understanding of the child within the modern cultural imagination helps illuminate the processes of national signification taking place in these road movies. In both *Central do Brasil* and in *Viva Cuba*, the child leads the journey into the heart of the nation, its rural and provincial spaces, identified with its past, memory and cultural traditions. These places are in turn figured as authentic and desirable and in opposition to the—adult-aligned, corrupt(ed), undesirable—spaces of the city. The romantic associations of the child with innocence, authenticity, the rural and the natural world which have traditionally functioned in modern culture as antidotes to anxieties about modernity, and degeneracy (Rose *passim*), are thus in distinct evidence in these films. When Latin American cinematic imaginaries attempt to negotiate divides between rural and urban, traditional and modern, or return to questions of cultural infancy, alterity and memory, the child-figure—as repository of innocence, authenticity or unmediated experience—often plays an important role. These negotiations, and the representational tendencies associated with the child therein, are crucial to *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba*. In both these films, there is a sense in which the figure of the innocent child enables an avoidance of politics, or is positioned beyond the political, and yet stands in for a desired—national—future. In *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba*, the child acts in a highly symbolic way whereas *Cochochi* is more concerned with communicating the child's experience of the journey and the landscape, than in stitching the child into a symbolic framework.

Central do Brasil and *Viva Cuba* aim to produce totalising pictures of the nation. They juxtapose contrasting geographical spaces, levels of modernisation, and different generations in order to deliver this comprehensive view. Their characters traverse vast tracts of national territory and the films depict many national icons, customs and salient geographical features. As many theorists have argued, travel genres in film often tend towards the exotic and produce a colonialist gaze of discovery and mapping (Eleftheriotis 2010, 76–77; Ruoff 2006, 2); in the modern world these modes of viewing have informed the production of a touristic gaze which is in evidence in both *Central do Brasil* and in *Viva Cuba*, both of which were very successful with foreign audiences. These films speak to the 'growing desire to grasp the world itself as a picture' (Ruoff 2006, 15) which Jeffrey Ruoff identifies as the impulse behind early and later travelogue films. Indeed, both these films retain elements of that form. And in both these films, there is a collapsing of spatial movement and time travel,

as the journeys undertaken by the characters seem to deliver them into the (nation's) past. If 'the motion picture medium as a whole responds to the desire for time travel' (Ruoff 2006, 18), then films with child protagonists could certainly be argued to add an extra dimension to this, in the sense that the adult spectator (as well as diegetic adults such as *Central do Brasil's* Dora) may also be transported to the(ir) past by their contact with the child protagonist, following both Rose's formulation above, but also the ideas of Béla Balázs and André Bazin, discussed in the first chapter, regarding the cinematic child's capacity to return the adult spectator to a lost or past state (0).

EPIC JOURNEYS (I): *CENTRAL DO BRASIL*

Central do Brasil is the most famous and commercially successful of all Latin American child films.³ A prominent film in the 1990s revival of Brazilian filmmaking known as the *retomada*, *Central do Brasil* enjoyed success at home and abroad, being seen by more than 1.5 million viewers in Brazil, and winning the Golden Bear as well as Best Actress (for Fernanda Montenegro) at the Berlin Film Festival in 1998.⁴ The narrative, which is loosely based on Wim Wenders' *Alice in the Cities* (1974) commences in Rio, where a little boy, Josué (Vinícius de Oliveira), loses his mother to a traffic accident outside the city's Central (train) Station, and is reluctantly taken in by Dora (played by Montenegro), a middle-aged woman who works there. In fact, she initially sells him to dealers in child organs but then regrets this and eventually accompanies him on a journey from Rio to the *Sertão*, the arid backlands of the Brazilian north-east, to search for his father. Readings of the film have convincingly argued that the film creates a dichotomy between the urban and the rural, in which the former is demonised and the latter idealised, as well as highlighting the aestheticisation of the poverty of the rural north-eastern locations. The film's politics have been a source of critical debate, since the location of the *Sertão* recalls the militant filmmaking of *Cinema Novo*, and is associated in Brazilian culture with social critique and rebellion, yet the film avoids any political analysis of the problems it depicts.⁵ These include the poverty and crime of Rio, and especially Josué's position after his mother is killed, when he forced to sleep in the station rather than being looked after by the state. Instead, as has been argued, the film tends to sentimentalise and individualise; it lacks any attention to the structural realities which might be behind these

problems, and Brazil's ruling class is completely absent from the film (see Nagib 2007, 41). The film is romantic rather than realist in mode, and, although Josué experiences a night on the streets of Rio at the beginning of the film (and is nearly sold to organ dealers), *Central do Brasil* is very different from the 'street child' films examined in the last chapter, not least because of its happy ending. As this chapter argues, the presence and the ideology of the child in *Central do Brasil* is central to the film's imaginary of the rural and the urban, as well as to its politics (or lack of them).

Numerous commentators have associated the road movie genre with periods of change, dislocation or anxiety (Cohan and Hark 1997, 2; Brandellero 2013, xxii). In their book *The Latin American Road Movie*, Garibotto and Pérez discuss the late twentieth-century boom in Latin American road movie production as both a product of and a reaction to the neoliberal context: on the one hand, new funding and distribution arrangements were responsible for the production and success of many of these road movies, on the other, many of them were engaged in a critique of, or suggested an escape from, this economic model. Garibotto and Pérez state that 'Whether celebrating, resisting, or conforming to neoliberal values, [these films] have staged a regional landscape that contrasts with the neoliberal discourse of progress, wealth, and success. As opposed to the officially fantasised super-modern, hyper-technological present, filmic journeys have unveiled the emptiness behind the promise of progress and modernisation. Contrary to the optimistic rhetoric of most administrations, they have revealed a Latin America that, instead of advancing toward global capitalism, remains at a standstill' (2016, 10). Nagib makes similar points regarding filmmaking in Brazil which neoliberalism 'seemed to make [...] more attractive to filmmakers', who undertook projects like *Central Station* which demonstrated 'geographical and anthropological concerns' but which soon began to display 'a wave of disillusionment with the neo-liberal project, when filmmakers travelled round the country to diagnose the persistence of its old problems' (2006, 27). Salles himself points, in interview, to Brazil's economic policies, the exploitative development politics pursued during the dictatorship years (1964–1985) and the neoliberal policies of the Collor and Cardoso eras, as giving rise to unease and disillusionment, and as necessitating the search for an alternative, which precipitates the flight from the urban to the rural which the film depicts (Salles, cit. James 1999, 14). The film's alignment of the child with the rural location, and the adult

with urban modernity and Brazil's recent (economic and political) past can be understood as a way in which the child, as symbolic of innocence and virtue, comes to stand for the antidote to anxieties about modernity and capitalism, as is suggested by Jacqueline Rose, who proposes 'nostalgia about childhood as corporate capitalism's last saving grace' (1984, xiv).

In *Central do Brasil*, Dora and Josué travel from the corrupt, dystopian setting of Rio de Janeiro to the *Sertão*, or backlands of the Brazilian north-east, Josué in a search for family, and Dora in an (unplanned, unexpected) process of self-transformation and recovery of humanity and affection. Along the way, the quests of the characters 'become blurred with the quest for a lost nation' (Oricchio 2003, 152). The division between the urban and the rural is produced by both aesthetics and narrative and is central to the film's meaning-construction (Xavier 2003, 59; Bentes 2003, 125; Nagib 2007, 44). Rio is constructed as malign through a use of dark and claustrophobic interiors, and a grey and muted palette. The *Sertão*, by contrast, for all its poverty, is aestheticised through light-filled and wide open shots, filled with colour and visual spectacle, and is constructed as repository of truth, beauty and virtue. The cinematographic treatment of the *Sertão* in *Central do Brasil* is a principal element of Bentes' argument that Brazilian cinema of the *retomada* was engaged in the creation of what she terms a 'Cosmetics of Hunger' (2003, 125–26).⁶ Rio's Central Station, where Dora and Josué meet, encapsulates the nefarious associations of the urban. Here, the illiterate dictate their letters to Dora, who transcribes them and pockets the money, but fails to send them. The station is patrolled by Don Pedrão (Otávio Augusto), an evil security guard who shoots dead a young boy for stealing. It is in the station that Josué spends a dangerous night alone after his mother is killed 'by' the city. High angle shots prevail in the station, along with dehumanising shots of the feet of commuters as they hurry on and off the trains. Travel and mobility in the city are crowded, confusing, and potentially fatal; once the characters leave the city, travel becomes—if not always entirely straightforward—more enjoyable, and much more beautiful.

As with many Latin American road movies, Dora and Josué use a number of different modes of transport, including buses, trucks and the back of pick-up trucks. They run out of money and have to hitch rides. All this reflects the realities and difficulties of travel in countries where the private car is less common and the levels of poverty are high.

The experience of mobility, though, is figured as often exhilarating and pleasurable, and as visually spectacular, as the closed lenses used by cinematographer Walter Carvalho for the Rio sequences gradually open out into stunning widescreen panoramas which construct the north-east as a sublime, mythic landscape (Shaw 2003, 170). The region, which is most famously associated in Brazilian cinema with classics of the *Cinema Novo* such as *Vidas secas*, and was integral to the aesthetics of hunger called for by Glauber Rocha,⁷ is transformed from its traditional parched and arid depictions to a place both majestic and picturesque. The film emphasises the yellows and oranges of the sun-kissed land against blue skies in the classic palette of a tourist brochure. As Nagib has commented, due to the film's 'detached stance', '[t]he drought and poverty of the northeastern homeland are shown as picturesque details that have no consequences for the lives of its inhabitants' (2007, 42). Poverty is not tangible in the film, and the same can be said of the landscape, which is always held at a distance; the landscape is often doubly framed, through first the camera, and then the window of the bus, producing the landscape as visual spectacle to be appreciated as scenery.

These aesthetic decisions reinforce the film's moral coding of spaces: if the city is associated with dehumanisation, alienation, modernity and consumption, the countryside in this film is its binary opposite, a place of cultural tradition, family, humanity, and spirituality, where human relationships are more positive. Here, the relationship between Dora and Josué evolves into one of kindness and love, Dora becomes a more caring and spiritual person, and Josué is reunited with his family. This urban/rural binary, along with its Manichean associations, maps onto a further pairing, that of adult and child. Rio, through Dora and her actions there, is associated with the older generation and its failures, and the *Sertão* with Josué, with the promise of the young but also with cultural infancy (the past). Whilst, at the end of the film, Dora travels alone back to Rio (and out of the film) cementing her association with the urban, Josué remains in the *Sertão*, not with his father (who is never found), but instead with his adolescent brothers Isaías (Matheus Nachtergaele) and Moisés (Caio Junqueira), and the action ends with this youthful trio. As Shaw argues, the failure to find a father figure suggests the failure of the Brazilian state to provide for Josué (2004, 91); instead, both the father and ultimately Dora are displaced in the narrative economy by the younger generation, as is Rio by the *Sertão*. The brothers, who are depicted sympathetically, seem a

promising family for Josué, whilst their trade, carpentry and building, suggests reconstruction and a positive move into the future. Josué is identified strongly with the *Sertão* in terms of his moral virtue and innocence: it is his ideal space. As Owain Jones writes, ‘the specialness, purity and naturalness of childhood merit(s) a special, pure and natural space to be in—the countryside’ (Jones 2007, 178). Discussing the overlaps between literary pastoral and imaginaries of childhood, Roni Natov writes:

[T]he child can actually serve as the green world itself. In such an allegory, where childhood is the green world, the retreat from the worldly world is the child himself, the figure of escape, renewal and possibility. The child may lead us into the garden, but also may become the garden [...]. The landscape of childhood, like the best of literary pastoral, is integrative, rather than escapist. It involves a quest for something undegraded, something that resists the pollution, both moral and physical, of the world. It also involves a quest for something larger than the self, but complementary and congruent with it, a place of harmony and grace. (2003, 92)

The *Sertão* is neither ‘green world’ nor garden, yet both the undeveloped Brazilian space of the *Sertão* and the child in *Central do Brasil* do represent that which is undegraded, that which resists pollution, the place of harmony and grace, and thus the film’s symbolic system contains strong echoes of that proposed by Natov.

The association between the *Sertão* and childhood is noted by Luiz Oricchio in his discussion of *retomada* films, specifically *Sertão das memórias* (*Landscapes of Memory*, José Araujo, 1997), in which, again, the *Sertão* is presented nostalgically and here associated with the director’s ‘capturing [of] a piece of his childhood’ and ‘reproduc[tion of] the gaze of a child’ (Oricchio 2003, 144). In *Sertão das memórias*, too, the region is figured as site of (mythic) return, in this case, to the director’s native town. This is also the case in *Mutum* (Kogut, 2007), another coming of age film in which again, ‘the *Sertão* is the childhood, the past that populates the Brazilian imaginary’ (*Mutum* website, cit. Randall 2017, 8). The figuring of the *Sertão* as a place of return reflects its position in the social geography of Brazil as the place of origin of many migrants now living in the coastal cities; in this sense, such films present, as Nagib argues of *Central Station*, narratives of reverse migration (2007, 43). As Oricchio remarks of the journey to the *Sertão* in both

films, 'rather than representing a return to some of the key figures of *Cinema Novo*, it appears to be a quest for something more archetypal, more remote, rooted in both tradition and the collective unconscious' (2003, 147). The *Sertão* functions in *Central do Brasil* as the 'cradle of Brazilianness' (Nagib 2007, 36) and as 'utopian, archaic territory' (Nagib 2007, 44). As Fussell writes 'one travels to experience the past, and travel thus is an adventure in time as well as distance' (cit. in Ruoff 2006, 18). The journey undertaken in *Central do Brasil* collapses space and time: the characters' journey implies the quest for the self and for the nation, but is also a journey 'back in time'.

To evoke this archaic sense of Brazilianness the film combines the tradition of documentary realism with an exoticising, touristic gaze. In his 'Notes for a Theory of the Road Movie', Salles contends that the genre is necessarily 'driven by a sense of immediacy that is not dissimilar from that of a documentary film' given that 'You simply cannot (and should not) anticipate what you will find on the road—even if you scouted a dozen times the territory you will cross' (Salles 2007). For example, the pilgrimage which Dora and Josué happen upon in Bom Jesus do Norte, the town where they expect to find Josué's father, was an actual event occurring which the crew took advantage of and filmed using the natural light from the pilgrims' many candles (Shaw 2003, 164–65), and which creates a very striking visual spectacle and echoes the warm tones which pervade the visual representation of the *Sertão* and continues the contrast with the cool hues associated with Rio. Other visual elements including the colourful dress of a pair of gypsies the protagonists meet in the town, and the *ex-votos* in the interior of a humble candlelit dwelling where Dora becomes overwhelmed, enters a trance-like state and faints—a spiritual experience which aids her personal transformation—are also notable for their warm colours and photogenic treatment. Through the use of colour and light, then, the region and its pre-modern or traditional practices are presented as visually appealing, and the selective use of documentary techniques suggests authenticity. The archaic past is posited as desired future and as antidote to the nefarious modernity which, in turn, characterises the present and recent past. The latter is represented by Dora's life in the city, and especially her plan to sell Josué in order to purchase a bigger television. For Oricchio 'the attitude of the individualistic Dora is absolutely in tune with the times, now that people no longer believe in collective solutions [...]' whereas '[i]n a globalised, post-industrial world, here in the *Sertão* children's toys, like spinning

tops, are made using traditional crafts. Here, relationships are warm, brotherly and open. The *Sertão* of *Central do Brasil* acts as a source of healing for a nation in need' (2003, 152). As Salles himself has commented: 'Dora [and her actions in Rio] represents old Brazil: that culture of indifference and cynicism we had in the 1970s and 1980s, which arose from the idea that we had to be industrialised and any means were acceptable to reach specific ends' whereas Josué 'represents the possibility of a certain innocence, or refusing a deterministic future and granting yourself another destiny' (cit. in James 1999, 14). Dora is redeemed by her contact with the child, whilst the *Sertão* and its traditional culture are suggested as a 'cure' for the modern urban condition.

As Deborah Shaw has argued, the modern condition from which Dora must be cured or redeemed also has gendered and sexual dimensions (Shaw 2003, 168–69). Dora's life in Rio is coded from the beginning as immoral (she deceives her customers as well as planning to sell Josué), and it seems no coincidence that she starts out as a not especially feminine unmarried woman who spends all her free time with another single woman, Irene (Marília Pêra), and professes her dislike of men. Precipitated by her contact with Josué, and by the journey—and her hopes of a romantic relationship with a trucker they meet along the way—Dora makes changes to her physical appearance during the course of the film, including wearing lipstick and more feminine clothes. Thus the moral and emotional transformation which Dora makes cannot be easily separated from the gender transformation. It seems that Dora, initially unmarried and unmotherly, must be made to conform to the standard role of the woman in a patriarchal society: she must be feminine (and indeed, Josué continually criticises her for being unfeminine and ugly), and she must occupy the role of mother, socially if not biologically, echoing a patriarchal ideology which sees women first and foremost as mothers. There is then, a kind of coercion of Dora in the film, in which contact with the child alongside the *Sertão's* traditional way of life and values, functions to 'correct' those changes in the role of women which are associated with modernity, and which, alongside the other aspects of the modern, urban condition detailed, seem to provoke anxiety.

Central do Brasil draws on both Christian and Romantic tradition in its figuring of the child as the cure for immorality and the ills of modernity. The film is replete with Christian imagery, especially imagery of the Virgin Mary, a figure which it is suggested Dora comes to resemble over the course of the film, as she undergoes her moral transformation.

In an important tableau in which (after her transformative trance episode) Josué tends to Dora, he holds her in an 'inverted Pietà' posture, evoking the crucifixion and thus Dora's re-birth, and placing Josué in the role of carer or overseer of the process (Nagib 2007, 44) (Fig. 3.1). Indeed, Walter Salles has described Josué as the 'transforming angel of the story' (cit. James 1999, 14). The notion of child as redeemer is of course traditional in both Christian as well as Classical tradition (Kuhn 1982, 44), and as Reinhard Kuhn, citing examples such as *Silas Marner*, notes, it is common to depict a child as having a 'revolutionary impact [...] on the life of an adult' (Kuhn 1982, 50).⁸ In this sense, as in a number of other narrative echoes, *Central do Brasil* resembles Wenders' *Alice in the Cities*, in which a pre-adolescent girl who is abandoned by her mother has a notable if more subtle redemptive impact on the life and consciousness of the somewhat rudderless middle-aged man who becomes her temporary travelling companion and guardian. And alongside this imagery of redemption, there is a further strain, that of 'a primitive or lost state to which the child has special access' (Rose 1984, 9).



Fig. 3.1 Josué cradles Dora in *Central do Brasil*

Rose's image of the child as a 'pioneer who restores [...] lost worlds to us' (1984, 9) is recalled in Josué's restoration of the moral and emotional worlds which Dora has lost, whilst also providing the impetus for a journey which suggests the restoration of cultural tradition or infancy, and ultimately, the lost soul of the nation.

As in several of the films discussed in this book, this idealised and universal child—as by definition beyond the political—functions as a distraction from or replacement for political content or analysis. Of the child in the modern cultural imagination, Rose writes that this figure is:

[A] perfect example of what Roland Barthes described as a 'bourgeois myth' which appeals to a generalised humanity by glossing over social and cultural division, presenting itself as a solution to all ills. This is the very definition and limit of a sentimental or weak liberalism which sees capitalist culture as reparable or redeemable by human-ness rather than in need of more radical challenge or critique. (1984, xiv)⁹

This is an apt summary of the function of the child in *Central do Brasil*, where any challenge to or critique of the economic or political system is displaced by the idea of the child's innocence and virtue, equated with the tradition and 'Brazilianness' to be found in the backlands. As this book argues, in situations of national crisis or unease, the child-figure may assume a central role as a figure through which cultural or political divides may be negotiated or overcome, and where political situations are deemed too difficult, or too unpalatable (for which read commercially unviable) for films to depict, the child is frequently deployed. In the next part of this chapter, we will see how a similar usage occurs as a way of circumventing a very different political context, that of late twentieth-century Cuba. Interestingly, of course, *Central do Brasil* borrows from the Latin American political and realist cinematic traditions (discussed in Chapters 1 and 2) in its citation of the figure of the poor and marginalised child, yet the romantic treatment of the figure distances the film from this tradition; both Shaw (2003) and Xavier contrast Josué with Pixote, the protagonist of probably the other most famous Brazilian child-film Hector Babenco's *Pixote, a lei do mais fraco* (1980). Xavier argues that:

Josué features as a new Pixote, who this time succeeds in finding his substitute mother figure, contrasting his own story with the disgraceful

experience of the original *Pixote*, who searched for the nursing mother in the figure of the prostitute, but found a character who followed the codes of realism, not the codes of the moral parable. Josué is the contemporary boy who shares with the little Italian of Benigni's *La vita è bella* and Wenders' *Alice in the Cities* the grace of a return to a protected life, at home or elsewhere, despite everything. This was impossible for many other children who have filled the screen through the 1990s, a decade in which children became emblematic characters in cinema. (2003, 60)

Aside from *Pixote*, *Central do Brasil* also recalls classics of the *Cinema Novo* such as Nelson Pereira dos Santos' *Vidas secas* (1963), an adaptation of the novel by Graciliano Ramos, again 'citing' the location of the *Sertão*, but also the use of the child, very prominent in that film. The narrative and spatial trajectory of *Central Station* cites that of *Vidas secas*, in which an itinerant peasant family journey undertake arduous journeys across the *Sertão* on foot.¹⁰ Various critics have discussed the *retomada* films' citing of the *Cinema Novo*, generally arguing that these citations are emptied of—or at least dilute—their political content in the 1990s films (Nagib 2007, 36; Sadlier 2009, 152). *Central do Brasil* also 'cites' the abandoned/orphaned/marginalised child-figure—associated with political and realist forms of filmmaking in Latin America—to produce an emotional response but not as part of any political programme.

On the contrary, the child 'replaces' politics, functioning as a kind of universal: universally appealing, and an object of 'universal' identification. As Xavier writes, amidst the contradictions implicit in the neoliberal system and the lack of any real possibility of equality or of opportunity in contemporary Brazil, 'Innocence [...] is recognised in the figure of the child only – this kind of moral reservoir that can still generate compassion, embody ideal values and promises, becoming for this very reason an emblematic figure of a contemporary cinema that seems to say again and again: the child is the only universal left' (2003, 62). In addition to these tendencies, the actor Vinícius de Oliveira seems selected to heighten this 'universality'; he is neither very brown nor very white, perhaps lower middle class—neither rich nor, until his mother dies, especially poor—and he is, after all, a *male* child—and is thus able to stand in for the universal Brazilian child, and ultimately, the universal subject.¹¹

The elision of politics, replaced by the appeal of the universal child, can be understood as central to the film's commercial success. As Shaw notes, it is well-known that 'feel good stories with sweet, ultimately

good children and happy endings have a good success rate at box offices' (2003, 161). In her book *The Child in Film*, Karen Lury identifies a common phenomenon in the paratext of the child-film, stating: 'There is a recurrent romantic narrative told in biographies and in publicity material which determines the particular child actors only emerged when the director identified them as the "one" from many others' (Lury 2010a, 153). This formula emerges in the marketing of *Central do Brasil*, for which 'each promotional interview that Salles gave' referred to the romantic story of the selection of the child actor, 'a shoeshine boy who approached Salles at an airport looking for business' and who, when asked by Salles to audition, 'insisted that the other shoeshine boys also be tested, a generosity of spirit that moved the director' (Shaw 2003, 163). Taking into account the points made earlier both about casting and about the child's facilitation of an elision of unpalatable political context, then as Shaw suggests, 'perhaps the main selling point of the film is the character of Josué and his portrayal by Vinícius de Oliveira' (Shaw 2003, 163).

EPIC JOURNEYS (II): *VIVA CUBA*

Juan Carlos Cremata's *Viva Cuba* (2005) a Cuban road movie with child protagonists that aimed at an audience of both adults and children, was the first Cuban film to be made by a Cuban director but not produced by the Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC) (Stock 2009, 153).¹² In this sense, the film itself signifies the birth of a new era or belongs to a particularly 'young' strand of filmmaking in Cuba: that which falls outside of the ICAIC production model of state-sponsored revolutionary filmmaking which since the 1959 Revolution had held total sway in the country. *Viva Cuba*, which won the Grand Prix Ecrans Juniors at Cannes in 2005, was made in collaboration with Cuban children's theatre company La Colmenita, from which the child actors were drawn. Its incorporation of some animation and magical realist elements is both designed to appeal to child viewers, as well as to express the imaginative and fantasy world of the child characters it portrays.¹³ This child-centred road movie, in which two children travel the length of Cuba on the run from their parents, takes the form of a comic coming-of-age story in which rites of passage which are experienced in the nation's rural areas and natural spaces allow for a learning about the self which happens alongside learning about the nation.

The national identity, or *cubanía*, which is envisioned in the film is strongly linked to childhood, imagined as a state which exists beyond the politics and political divisions of the adult world.

Viva Cuba was made during a period of transition and uncertainty for Cuba. The 1990s and early 2000s had been a time of upheaval in the country as the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of Soviet support for Cuba led to the Special Period (Periodo especial en tiempo de paz), or period of economic crisis during which food, fuel and other goods became scarce, and around 30,000 Cubans left the country. On the island, levels of crime and prostitution rose, leading to perceptions of a moral crisis. Emigration and the idea of a nation divided between the supporters of the regime and its opponents were defining themes of Cuban film from the period, for example in films such as *Fresa y chocolate* (1993), *Madagascar* (1994) and *Miel para Oshún* (2001). In addition, the ageing and illness of Fidel Castro in the early 2000s gave rise to questions about the country's future, specifically over the longevity of Cuban socialism in his absence. Questions over Cuba's political identity and its future became pressing as younger Cubans increasingly questioned the regime, and along with the sense of uncertainty about the future, there has been a pervasive sense of loss associated with the promise of Cuba's revolutionary past and the certainties it had once seemed to offer. At this time of uncertainty, symbolic weight has been given to the figure of the child and of youth as symbols of the future and as agents of change. This is the case in several films by fellow Cuban filmmaker Fernando Pérez, including *Madagascar*. Pérez's 2010 film *José Martí: el ojo del canario* is analysed in Chapter 4 of this book, where I argue that it continues the meditation on Cuban national identity and the country's future through a focus on childhood and youth.

Like *Central do Brasil*, *Viva Cuba* announces its preoccupation with national identity via its title, and its opening image—the word 'Cuba' painted on a wall—reinforces this. The film allegorises the ideological divisions in Cuban society through the families of the child protagonists, Jorgito (Jorge Milo) and Malú (Malú Tarrau Broche); the former are loyal *castristas* (Jorge's father works for the government), and the latter are bourgeois Christians critical of the regime and keen to emigrate. The two families are neighbours on a Havana street and are clear in their disdain for, and antagonism with one another. Jorge and Malú, however, are firm friends, and when Malú's mother decides to leave the country after the death of the little girl's grandmother, the children hatch a plan

which they hope will keep Malú in Cuba: they decide to travel, unaccompanied, to Punta del Maisí, where Malú's father lives, to ask him to intervene. Thus begins a road movie narrative in which the two children journey across the national territory, like *Central do Brasil's* Josué, in search of the father. The journey is, characteristically of Latin American road movies, undertaken via a variety of different modes of transport, including train, bus, car, cart and foot, reflecting both the characters' young age (they are unable, for example, to drive themselves and have to rely on others) but also the relative difficulty of travel in countries where modernity is uneven or incomplete.¹⁴ The journey, in taking the children from Havana to the island's easternmost point at Punta de Maisí, takes in almost the full length of the island, again suggesting the impulse to provide a complete picture of the nation, and invoking a famous journey of national foundation—that of the Castro brothers, Che Guevara and their comrades from the Sierra Maestra to Havana in 1959—in reverse. Thus, the search for Malú's father takes the form of a journey which incorporates the prior journeys of national father-figures within the contemporary context of Fidel's decline and of questions over the state's ability to provide for Cubans, a search for authority and identity in a time of confusion. Although the children do eventually reach their destination and find Malú's father, the identitarian quest is fulfilled rather by the journey itself, and by the situations and characters encountered along the way, which are also figured as rites of passage, which contribute to the children's emotional and sentimental education, to national- and self-discovery.

Viva Cuba draws on the unifying power of the child as a figure ostensibly beyond politics in its attempt to create a national narrative which might bridge a situation as politically uncertain and as polarised as that of Cuba in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As numerous commentators have noted, children—or perhaps, more accurately, the Child—have a perceived political neutrality which makes them a convenient vehicle for messages which may be strongly political, but which purport to be common sense or universal. Politicians of different stripes consistently attempt to mobilise the child-figure to their advantage and to make rhetorical use of the child and childhood (Jenkins 1998, 1–2). As Jenkins writes: '[The] dominant conception of childhood innocence presumes that children exist in a space beyond, above, outside the political; we imagine them to be noncombatants whom we protect from the harsh realities of the adult world, including the mud splattering of

partisan politics. Yet, in reality, almost every major political battle of the twentieth-century has been fought on the backs of our children' (Jenkins 1998, 2). Such perspectives on the child and childhood are also discussed by commentators on the centrality and potency of children in nationalist rhetoric (Stephens 1997; Stanbridge 2012). As discussed in the Introduction, for Sharon Stephens, 'the figure of the innocent and vulnerable child has strong political appeal and is [...] used to justify widely divergent political agendas [...]'. Such notions of the universal child, with pre-established needs and interests, tend to short-circuit more far-reaching political debates about fundamentally different visions of the nation implied by different positions in these debates' (Stephens 1997, 8). In addition, as Stanbridge argues, children's status as 'becomings' rather than 'beings', allows them to embody the 'developing nation ripe with promise' (2012, 47). This makes them particularly apt symbols of nations undergoing processes of upheaval which, as we have seen, are often the conditions underlying the production of road movies.

It is certainly the case that the child has had a similar centrality in the political discourse of Cuba, where images of children have been deployed with equal vehemence to support 'competing nationalist visions', as Anita Casavantes Bradford argues in her book *The Revolution Is for the Children: The Politics of Childhood in Havana and Miami 1959-1962* (2014, 2). For Casavantes Bradford 'a preoccupation with children [...] has been central to the multiple strains of Cuban nationalism that have emerged since the island's independence' (2014, 2). A famous example here is the case of Elián González, the five-year-old Cuban boy whose mother drowned crossing the Straits of Florida in 1999 as she tried to reach the USA with her son, leaving him clinging to an inner tube, to be rescued and taken in by his relatives already living there. A custody battle ensued between González's father, who, backed explicitly by Fidel Castro, wanted to bring the child back to Cuba, and the Miami relatives, backed by Miami's Cuban American community who wanted to keep him, with the US government supporting the rights of the father and thus in turn the stance of the Cuban government, and eventually intervening to ensure the return of the boy to his father by raiding the Miami relatives' home. Both sides—the Cuban regime on the one hand and the Cuban American community and its political representatives on the other—made ample rhetorical use of the figure of the child and the idea of childhood innocence in their deployment of Elián González as a symbol of their competing views of the Cuban nation, just as Casavantes

Bradford argues they had done since the early 1960s, through Castro's claim that 'la Revolución es para los niños', and through the exile community's 'portray[al of] itself as heroic defenders of Cuban children, innocent victims of Castro-communist indoctrination, oppression and deprivation' (2014, 1). In Cuba, the case was seized upon by the Cuban government to boost flagging nationalist sentiments, including amongst children themselves, who were 'pushed to the front of the protest movement' to return Elián (Anderson 2003, 648).

Elián González was returned to Cuba in 2000, just a few years before the making of *Viva Cuba*. The episode continued to reverberate in government rhetoric during these years, and *Viva Cuba* cannot be read without taking into account the politics of childhood implied by this context. Whilst in the case of González, the child served as a malleable, empty cipher on which both sides could project their political visions thus implying the fundamental political neutrality of the child as symbol, in *Viva Cuba*, the children are positioned as 'neutral' in the sense that they exist beyond, outside, indeed *above* a political debate which only serves to create conflict in the adult world of their parents. In the case of González, it is precisely the nature of the child's symbolism as beyond the political which enables him to be wielded as political weapon in an overtly political battle. In *Viva Cuba*, it is Jorge and Malú's symbolism as beyond the political, their status *as children* which (as in *En el país de los pies ligeros*) enables them to disregard the divisions—class, ideological and religious—that separate their families. The perceived neutrality of the child is thereby exploited for the implicitly political national narratives of unity and solidarity which were in fact an important component of regime discourse in Cuba around the time of the film's making. Interestingly, the adult generation in *Viva Cuba* are also more associated with entrenched gender difference (particularly through Jorgito's *machista* father and downtrodden mother), whilst the children are seen, to an extent, to challenge this, through their insistence on playing together rather than solely with their own sex, and rejection of the normatively gendered toys their parents prescribe. The film suggests that the children's childlike nature, their innate rebelliousness, and their lack of ideological indoctrination on a number of fronts allows them to see the world differently, and more sensibly than do their parents. The child-like qualities of Jorgito and Malú, their *difference* from the adult, is emphasised in the film, and this difference includes, amongst other things, a solidarity and friendship which the adults do not exhibit

towards one another. Central to the film's message, then, is the idea that childhood is a category which transcends divisions of class ideology, and (to a lesser extent) gender, which are associated with the adult world. Instead, the film promotes the notion of the universal child, a category which Stephens argues is 'used by states to regulate, control and attempt to eliminate internal differences that challenge the normative construction of national citizens' (1997, 8). By making this a story about children, and making Cuba a central protagonist, Cremata is able to assert a Cuban identity that is 'beyond' politics, and of course, the notion of a 'universal' childhood which is 'beyond' either national politics or particular ideological persuasions is designed to appeal to the broadest market, enabling the film to transcend differences between Cuban viewers of different ideological persuasions, *and* those between Cubans and non-Cubans.¹⁵

As discussed in the Introduction, for Jacqueline Rose, the child's place in the cultural imaginary, especially the notion of childhood innocence, are products of adult desire (Rose 1984, xii), a type of investment by the adult in the idea of the child which 'fixes the child and then holds it in place' (3–4). The representation of the child in *Viva Cuba* is notable in the sense that the child is figured as highly symbolic, contrasting strongly with the adult, and thus the film is strongly invested in the idea of the child's *difference* from the adult. Through their lack of ideological insertion, their freedom from the constraints of the adult world, in particular class and political structures, the child-figure becomes a fixed pole in a binary system. Childhood is presented as universal rather than particular, and its innocence is a rebellious corrective to the entrenched and problematic adult way of doing things.

The viewer of *Viva Cuba* is clearly asked to side with the children over the adults, and thus with unity over ideological division. And whilst the plans of Malú's mother would separate them for good, the children are identified with the desire to stay, together, in Cuba: echoing the González case in which the little boy's own purported desires to either return to Cuba or to stay in Miami were foregrounded. When Malú, in tears, exclaims '¡Yo no quiero irme de Cuba!' ('I don't want to leave Cuba!') images (perhaps staged) of González deployed by both sides in the custody battle are recalled, in which the little boy vehemently states his desire to either return, or not to return, to his homeland.¹⁶ In *Viva Cuba*, not only is the children's friendship presented as the solution to ideological divisions in the adult world, but also it seems to combat the

threat posed by emigration to the island's identity. Children, here, bear a symbolic weight of unity and integration comparable to that borne by the heterosexual romance in nineteenth-century Latin American narrative (Sommer 1991, 5). The later Cuban film *Habanastation* (Padrón 2011)—in which two boys from vastly different social backgrounds become friends—similarly models the overcoming of social differences through child friendship. Central to both *Viva Cuba* and *Habanastation* is the idea that undeveloped minds may escape or overcome class discrimination and social difference.

In *Viva Cuba*, the child is identified with a nationhood which the main adult characters in the film have lost touch with, with the re-discovery of an authentic *cubanía*, and in this sense, the film strongly resembles *Central do Brasil*. In a speech given at the film's Havana premiere in July 2006, Cremata said: 'Long live Cuba! Long live children!', adding 'this country is different because of its authentic character' (cit. in Stock, 166), suggesting, as theorists such as Stanbridge and Stephens have, a pairing of childhood and the nation, and an association of both with the idea of authenticity. As in *Central do Brasil*, it is the child who returns (us) to a desired national authenticity, through the journey away from the city and into provincial and rural areas. In *Viva Cuba*, the children leave the adults behind in Havana and undertake a journey across the national territory to the island's easternmost point at Punta de Maisí. Again, the journey is associated with 'coming close to the land', with discovery of the natural world including native flora and fauna, as well as the island's folklore and its cultural traditions, especially Santería, through the figure of Elegguá, the deity of children and roads in the Yoruba tradition, to whom the film is dedicated. In *Viva Cuba*, a strong dichotomy is established between the children who journey into the countryside—where they encounter multiple symbols of authentic *cubanía*—and the adults who remain at home in the city. This contributes to the sense, mentioned earlier, of the film's construction of children and adults as fundamentally different, and is a product of Romantic ways of thinking about the child. As Jenkins writes: 'One strong (Romantic) tradition [...] envied children's close relation to nature and their freedom from adult constraints. Romantic thinkers such as William Blake or Jean-Jacques Rousseau engaged in a "primitivist" celebration of children's "spontaneous feeling and intense experience"' (1998, 18). *Viva Cuba* understands the child romantically, as a spontaneous, authentic being, close to nature, folklore and musical

tradition—including native fauna like the *zunzún* (a kind of hummingbird) and dances such as the *guanche*—and to unmediated parts of Cuba, such as the never-before-filmed Punta de Maisí. The film's linking of the island's rural life and natural spaces with magic, via magical realist elements of the cinematography, further identifies what the film presents as the island's 'essence' with children and childhood, both magical domains which the older generation are too consumed by their problems and conflicts to comprehend. The implication is that, whilst their parents are too busy to do so, Cuba itself will care for and nurture them. As Ingham notes: '[t]he island is portrayed [...] as a paradise for children, where it is always sunny and where everything is colourful, with plenty of space and freedom to play' (2011, 214).

The film brings together a tourist gaze, especially on the coastal areas of the island, with a celebration of mobility and a sense of authentic *cubanía*. At various points in the journey, when the children overcome obstacles, there is a sense of exhilarated happiness that their journey is proceeding well. Here the film generally uses traditional Cuban guitar or *son* music to enhance the 'feelgood' tone suggested by the children's delighted faces as they hang out of the window of a vintage car or the back of a sidecar, taking in the beauty of the landscape, which tends to feature white sands, blue skies and seas, and palm trees, reminiscent of tourist brochures or postcards. On one such occasion, a filter is used which gives the image a nostalgic, slightly faded and yellowed tone associated with old colour photographs or film, used, for example, on other Cuban products for global consumption such as the cover for the best-selling *Buena Vista Social Club* album, and evocative of a 'vintage' aesthetic frequently used in the island's commodification. The use of magic in the film is largely not explicitly borne of the contact between different cultural traditions (such as the Amerindian and the European), as is the case in accepted understandings of magical realism, and in fact the film seems to explain the magical elements, which often happen through animation, such as the plant which magically comes back to life, as being part of the child's understanding of the world; indeed, the magic is only experienced by children, and is another way in which Jorgito and Malú's worldview is differentiated from that of the older generation. The clearest indication that the magical elements are part of the children's imagination is in the episode of the *güije*, a vision which the film initially presents as part of reality, but which it later implies was a hallucination experienced by a feverish Jorgito. The *güije* is a *duende* or

sprite common in Cuban folklore—as well as in cartoons and children’s television—of whom a farmer who gives them a ride warns the children, and who is later encountered by Jorgito. In Cuban myth, the *güije* is a small, black man with grotesque facial expressions who lives in the woods and comes out at night to frighten travellers, and this is exactly how he is portrayed in the film.¹⁷ If the magical elements are a device used to evoke a child’s gaze or worldview—along with other devices such as a lowering of the level of the camera—then they also function to enhance the exotic and touristic gaze of the film, for example in the sequence where the children sleep on the beach which delivers another of the film’s postcard beachscape images whilst animated shooting stars dance above them in the night sky.

If *Viva Cuba* calls upon the time-honoured Romantic association of the child and the countryside, and on well-worn touristic modes of viewing the island, both in the service of the identification of the children with *cubanía*, it also achieves this through the connection that it establishes between the children and past generations of Cubans. Malú is deeply affected by the death of her grandmother, and the children’s journey is one which takes in not just the nation’s geography, but also its history, in the form of the very familiar political myths of the Revolution. These include a children’s celebration of José Martí’s birthday—with none of the satire with which a similar event is presented in Díaz Torres’s *Alicia en el pueblo de las maravillas* (1991)—and a chance meeting with a Che-like figure (Pavel García Valdés), a bearded speleologist, who helps them reach their destination, whilst reminding the children of their friendship when they fall out, telling them that ‘sin amigos, no se va a ningún lado’ (‘without friends, you’ll go nowhere’). This encounter recalls a common trope within Cuban revolutionary discourse discussed by Anita Casavantes Bradford, which links the ‘kindly revolutionary’ figure explicitly to the child as a way of winning popular support. As Casavantes Bradford describes, after the 1959 Revolution, ‘to reach out to the government’s popular base, sympathetic journalists and editors prepared stories about Fidel and Raúl Castro, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos visiting *campesino* families in the countryside and published images of the rebel leaders playing with black and mulatto children’ (2014, 56–57).¹⁸ Thus—despite the fact that, as Ann Marie Stock has noted, the word ‘Revolución’ is absent from the film (2009, 156), and the director’s claim not to be ‘interested in talking about the Revolution’ (cit. in Stock 2009, 156)—the film draws heavily

on revolutionary discourse and myth, and particularly on the figuring of the child within these. Indeed the film itself can be seen as part of a Cuban political discursive tradition in which the child has featured heavily, both prior to 1959 and subsequently, as is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 (see 107–131).

These references to the past, as Georgia Seminet argues, combine in the film with references to the future—the children bury a box to be dug up in 2030, and the whole plot hinges on what will happen to Malú and thus the children's friendship, a question which goes unresolved—which place the children at a crossroads which symbolically expresses the position of the nation (2012, 190). The child-figure is especially well-suited to such a dual function, since whilst children remind adults of the(ir) past and may be associated with nostalgia, they are also one of the main symbols through which the future is represented. As Henry Jenkins has it 'Childhood—a temporary state—becomes an emblem for our anxieties about the passing of time, the destruction of historical formations, or conversely, a vehicle for our hopes for the future. The innocent child is caught somewhere over the rainbow—between nostalgia and utopian optimism, between the past and the future' (1998, 5). In the cases of *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba* the characters journey into the past—they encounter symbols of the nation's past and its cultural heritage in the rural landscape—yet their forward motion and their discussions about the future suggest a desired teleology and progress. The ending of *Viva Cuba* is ambiguous: although the children do reach their destination and find Malú's father, it seems likely that they will now have to face their parents' authority, whilst the older generation's antagonism resurfaces and shows no sign of abating. The film ends with the image of the children poised and teetering on a rock at the edge of the sea whilst their rowing families all but forget them, an image which suggests the precariousness of the Cuban situation, and inevitability recalls to a Cuban audience, again, the case of Elián González (Fig. 3.2).

Jorge and Malú's journey promotes the solidarity of the children in the face of the adversity represented by the wish of Malú's mother to emigrate—for which read a rather hazy Cuban 'solidarity' in the face of the desire to emigrate amongst a significant portion of the population, and the generalised uncertainty facing the country. In this sense, the film's ideological stance echoes the values and morality that were being instilled in Cubans via the Cuban education system from the early 2000s, as Kaptcia puts it 'a "communitarian" morality, a belief in the virtues,



Fig. 3.2 Malú and Jorgito cling to each other at the edge of land and sea, in *Viva Cuba*

value and role of solidarity (within Cuba and between Cuba and the world's oppressed), of support for one's fellow human beings, of participation (as a good in itself), and of honesty' (2005, 410). As Kaptcia argues, these codes were ones which had informed the early years of the Revolution but which re-emerged in the context of the Special Period and the later Elián González episode, 'to drive the post-2001 nationwide programme of educational reform' (2005, 399). Coming as it did in 2005, and with its twin address to children and adults alike, the film can be seen as part of the impulse to re-engage the country's young people, to promote the revolutionary process within the context of the 'Battle of Ideas', and as part of the attempt to combat what some saw as the 'moral crisis' of the 1990s.¹⁹ Other elements of the film support this reading: the warring adults, for example, are instructed by the police that if the two families work together they are more likely to find their children, and the two mothers then begin a process of reconciliation and eventual mutual support.

Like *Central do Brasil*, *Viva Cuba* offers a 'universal child' who functions as an antidote to all that is wrong with the adult world, and as such ultimately draws on the Romantic understanding of childhood innocence as a corrective to corruption and degeneracy variously associated with the adult, but also with the modern and the urban, or with (as in these two films) rejected aspects of the status quo (industrialisation and neo-liberalism in *Central do Brasil*, ideological polarisation and emigration in *Viva Cuba*). Like the symbol that Elián González became, this Child is emptied out of any particularity and becomes an empty vessel to be filled with meanings created by adults. Children are reduced to 'a categorical sameness in which they are made alike (to each other, to other children, to what we know)' (Lury 2010b, 286). In *Central Station* and *Viva Cuba*, the child is positioned 'beyond politics' and facilitates the films' evasions of political analysis, yet the children embody national visions. Trapped in the status of symbol, and the myth of innocence and of childhood as the polar opposite of the adult, the children in these films are fixed by adult desire and adult-created meaning; despite their mobility across the national territory, they lack the freedom to move outside these reified associations of childhood; like the landscapes they traverse, they are made into graspable objects of mastery. Despite *Viva Cuba's* attempts to provide a 'child's eye' view of the world, the fixed myth of the child—as innocent, outside politics and separate from the adult—dominates in this film, and thus, as in *Central do Brasil*, the child—in the sense of its actual body or agency—is absent, along with any sense in which the figure might unsettle or disturb. If part of the commercial appeal of those films resides in their conforming to hegemonic portrayals of the journey and of the landscape, part must also reside, I have contended, in the child they present; a unifying and universal child who enables the elision of political debate and functions as a mythic solution to all ills and a key to the nation's lost authenticity, through the journey into its rural spaces and cultural heritage.

IMMERSIVE JOURNEYING: *COCHOCHI*

The final film discussed in this chapter, Israel Cárdenas and Laura Amelia Guzmán's *Cochochi* (Mexico, 2007), is the tale of a journey undertaken by two Rarámuri brothers to deliver a package of tablets to a sick relative on the other side of the valley where they live. *Cochochi* has echoes of Marcela Fernández Violante's *En el país de los pies ligeros/Niño rarámuri*

(Mexico, 1983), discussed earlier, as it also tells the story of two children undertaking a journey in the Sierra Tarahumara, northwestern Mexico, as well as the fact that its purpose is to convey filmically the Rarámuri culture, even if the representation of that culture is here very different—lacking the romanticisation and exoticisation to be found in Fernández Violante’s film. *Cochochi*—which means ‘land of pines’ in Rarámuri, and is the name of a ranch in the community of San Ignacio de Arareko, in the southwest of the state of Chihuahua—was the product of a chance encounter of the directors with the two Rarámuri brothers, Evaristo (Evaristo Lerma Batista) and Tony (Antonio Lerma Batista) (who are around twelve or thirteen years old) whilst they were filming another project in the Sierra. Cárdenas and Guzmán decided to develop a film project with the boys in which they would play themselves, and in which other inhabitants of the area would feature, around the idea of what would happen if the children lost their grandfather’s horse. The extreme naturalism and minimalism of the style, as well as the use of non-actors, who speak mainly in Rarámuri, gives this fictional tale a documentary feel; along with its long takes and very slow pace, these characteristics have led it to be compared to the work of Carlos Reygadas, specifically *Stellet Licht* and *Japón* (López 2015, 42). *Cochochi* was produced by Canana, the production company of Diego Luna and Gael García Bernal, which has a self-proclaimed interest in depicting the realities of Mexican society and in films with a social purpose (López 2015, 10; Alvaray 2012, 73). Like the other films discussed, *Cochochi* uses the trope of childhood journeying both to represent rites of passage, and to negotiate an uneven modernity. However, in its choice of a small (but all-encompassing) journey, it avoids the totalising sweep of the journeys across the nation undertaken in the films previously mentioned. The journey undertaken—from one part of the Sierra to another—decentres the urban as locus of meaning, and (unlike the previous two films analysed) is much more difficult for the spectator to imagine cartographically, making the journey an immersive one. The cinematographic language of *Cochochi* elicits this immersion and contains a strong focus on the experience of the children. This immersive and experiential approach is paired with an avoidance of the figuring of the landscape as a pleasurable object of mobile vision.

As in all the films analysed in this chapter, the children’s journey in *Cochochi* is an episode which facilitates rites of passage and coming of age. The film begins with the boys finishing primary school and

an awards ceremony at which Tony is absent. When they are asked to deliver medicines to a relative living in another part of the Sierra, they take their grandfather's horse without his permission. On the journey they first lose the horse, and then one another, eventually to rejoin one another aided by a local radio messaging system. As in many folk tales and fairy tales, as well as films about childhood, the journey into the wilderness or the forest brings about an emotional maturation, a passage from childhood to adolescence or adulthood. When they return home, Evaristo must face his grandfather and report the loss of the horse (Tony is absent, seemingly unable to assume this responsibility). When Evaristo, in tears, tells his grandfather of the loss, he is surprised to find that the horse has returned home of its own accord, and is grazing in the grandfather's field. The story takes on an even stronger fable-like quality with this twist in the tail, and the motif of an animal invested with human qualities which teaches the children a lesson; indeed the film has been argued to represent a kind of 'oneiric reality', imbued with a melancholic tone produced by the boys' guilt at their misdemeanour (Cortés Ortega 2013). At the end of the film, Tony decides not to return to school, even though he has been awarded a scholarship place, whilst Evaristo decides to take up the place, under his brother's name. Thus the film reflects on a crucial juncture in the boys' lives, during which they define the paths they will take in relation to study and work, and thus develop their roles in the community. Their journey is one of personal and social learning and transformation.

If, as Eleftherotis suggests, the kind of movement conventionally presented in road movies is indebted to the 'linear, incremental and forward movement of a progressing subjectivity traveling towards ever-increasing knowledge' (2010, 120), the mobility presented in *Cochochi* can be understood as countering that approach. The majority of the boys' journey takes place across country rather than on the road, it is not linear but circular, with returns to the same place, whilst its origin and destination are not made geographically clear to the spectator. Mostly the children are on foot, but where they hitch rides, motorised travel is figured very differently to, for example, that of *Central do Brasil* or *Viva Cuba*, both of which use this kind of transport to generate the pleasures associated with aestheticised landscapes or exhilarated movement. As Eleftherotis writes: 'The "road movie" with its very specific set of pleasures is not seen as an appropriate generic framework for a film that is about continuous movement on roads and on paths' (2010, 2). However, like the

other films discussed in this chapter, it also adopts the ‘buddy’ format, in which two characters undertake a journey together, and in which the journey is also a means by which their relationship develops. In *Cochochi*, conflict between the two brothers is mainly associated with blame for the loss of the horse. More than a road movie, however, *Cochochi* resembles films about peripatetic children such as Abbas Kiarostami’s *Where is My Friend’s House?* and others of Iranian and Turkish cinema. In an article entitled ‘Children in an Open World’, Karen Lury analyses several of these films, including *A Time for Drunken Horses* (Ghobadi, 2000) and *Buddha Collapsed Out of Shame* (Makhmalbaf, 2007), discussing the kinds of mobilities and journeys pertaining to the children in them (Lury 2010b). In these films, as in *Cochochi*, the children are non-actors who are indigenous to the world presented, and their journeys are ‘laborious’ or ‘circuitous’ (2010b, 288), ‘repetitive, boring and dangerous’ (2010b, 289).

The kind of mobility presented in *Cochochi* thus contrasts with that envisaged by films such as *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba*, and more generally by the road movie. In that genre, landscapes are traversed and taken in as spectacle, and, as in the two epic examples discussed, frequently there is an impulse to grasp some greater whole, or to provide a totalising picture (of the nation). *Cochochi*’s minimalist approach, by contrast, takes us into a sensorial experience of the natural environment; its impulse is less one of mapping, mastery or possession, than of conveying a sensory and embodied experience. Likewise, in *Cochochi*, the emphasis is not on the landscape as scenery, or on its aestheticisation, but on the boys’ sensory experience of it, as part of it. *Cochochi* emphasises the experiential aspects of childhood mobility and its dangers, monotony and pleasures. Examples of this include the use of overwhelming sound—in the first instance of the waterfall where the children lose the horse, and in the second, of a rainstorm. In another example, the two boys get lost in thick fog, and the viewer’s vision is also obscured by it. In both cases, the natural world overwhelms the boys and throws them off course. In *Cochochi* the children neither ‘drift idyllically over pastoral landscapes’ (Lury 2010b, 289), and nor do they appreciate majestic scenery from the seat of a bus, car or train. In general, it is their walking which generates a tactile and embodied sense of contact with the land through the hand-held camera, and through images of them touching trees and rocks, or getting soaked by rain. Their constant physical contact with an at times overwhelming and ungraspable natural and rural

world, rather than something that can be set at a distance and appreciated aesthetically, affects the viewing experience. It contests the ocular-centrism of the cinema and of hegemonic cinema's version of mobility, instead producing a 'haptic' apprehension of the natural world which 'play[s] a tangible, tactile role in our communicative 'sense' of spatiality and motility, thus shaping the texture of [...] space and, ultimately, mapping our ways of being in touch with our environment' (Bruno 2002, 6). As Lury claims the New Iranian and Turkish films she analyses do, *Cochochi* 'explore[s] what it might be like to experience or feel the world as it is apparently lived by the children in these films' (Lury 2010b, 285).

As such, *Cochochi* is a film which counters presentations of the child and of childhood journeying such as those offered by films like *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba*. In *Cochochi*, the children have an adult responsibility, and the film devotes little attention to portraying the adults, so that there is no dichotomy established between adults and children. The children or their childish nature are thus not envisaged as a solution to anything; they are not romanticised. Likewise, the landscape is presented as at times harsh; there are many sequences with rain or grey skies; a certain rugged beauty is in evidence at times but what is far more striking is the way in which the sound and visual elements of the film attempt to bring the spectator into the landscape rather than hold it at a distance as spectacle. Where *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba* make the child highly symbolic, emptying it of its own bodily experience or agency, *Cochochi* tends to refuse the child's symbolic value, and instead to focus on his embodied experience.

NOTES

1. Here, I echo the findings of Yolanda Doub in her study of the Spanish American *Bildungsroman*. Doub writes that 'travel is an essential, and overlooked, element of the *Bildungsroman* in the Spanish American context' (2010, 10).
2. Here, Stanbridge draws on and cites Anthony Smith's *The Antiquity of Nations* (2004).
3. Walter Salles specialises in the road movie genre. He has also made *Terra estrangeira* (with Daniela Thomas, 1996), the previously mentioned *Diários de motocicleta*, and *On the Road* (2012), an adaptation of the Kerouac novel.

4. The *retomada do cinema brasileiro* is understood as having begun in the mid-1990s, when a boom in film production was precipitated by a new audiovisual law. Prior to this, the military dictatorship which ended in 1985, and the subsequent closing of Brazilian film company Embrafilme in 1990, had drastically impeded production. See Nagib (2003, xvii–xviii) and Moisés (2003).
5. See Nagib (2007, 40–43) for an overview of the film’s lack of political analysis, Oricchio (2003) for a discussion of the political valence of the *Sertão* in Brazilian culture and in *Cinema Novo*, and Mulvey (2003, 266–67) for a partial defence of the film’s political possibilities.
6. Bentes’ ironic formulation re-works Glauber Rocha’s famous ‘aesthetics of hunger’, the title of a 1965 essay in which he called for a formal enactment of the region’s poverty by the militant filmmaking of the *Cinema Novo* (see Rocha 1982 [1965]).
7. See note iv.
8. Variations on this theme have been discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.
9. The example Rose is discussing here is Peter Pan in the Steven Spielberg film *Hook*, but throughout her book, Rose uses the various incarnations of the myth of Peter Pan as a means to explore the cultural meanings of childhood more generally.
10. For more discussion of *Vidas secas*, see the Introduction, p. 17.
11. I partially echo Nagib here when she asserts that ‘The gallery of faces at the opening of *Central Station* composes a portrait of Brazil’ (2007, 39), and that ‘Two of the protagonists, the northeastern Ana and her son Josué, emerge from this array of faces as the prototype of the common Brazilian’ (2007, 40).
12. Anne Marie Stock documents how the director was refused support by the ICAIC, and how the film was eventually funded and produced through a combination of support from other sources including the Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión (2009, 149–53).
13. Other recent Latin American films about children which incorporate animation sequences include María Victoria Menis’s *La cámara oscura* (2008) which features a child’s perspective and animation, as well as two works by Albertina Carri, *Los rubios* (2003), discussed in Chapter 5, and *La rabia* (2008), discussed in detail in Chapter 6; all of these films are intended for adult audiences.
14. As Vicky Unruh notes, however, the film does not depict shortages or transportation difficulties to the extent that it could; when the adults need to travel from Havana to Punta de Maisí, they simply board a plane (2016, 88).
15. Anne Marie Stock makes the point that Cuban films must be ‘cod[ed] [...] with local *and* more universal references’ (2009, 156) in order to

- appeal beyond their small domestic market, and argues that Cremata is especially acutely aware of this need.
16. The BBC Four 'Storyville' documentary 'The Boy that Changed America' (Golden 2017) shows footage of González apparently spontaneously wishing that an aeroplane flying overhead would return him to Cuba, and a contrasting video made by the Miami relatives in which he vehemently states his desire not to go back to Cuba. The documentary suggests the latter film may be staged. Shown 6 September 2017.
 17. As the film's only presentation of a black adult, though (the only other black character in the film is a child, a friend of Jorgito, in a very minor role), the monstrous and fear-inducing *güije* is likely to strike European and North American viewers as deeply racist.
 18. Such images were also deployed to manage foreign perceptions of the regime in its early days, as Casavantes Bradford notes: 'Sentimental images of kindly revolutionaries playing with trusting and affectionate North American boys and girls sought to make visible the Revolution's benevolent intentions and the humanist values that united the two nations' (2014, 56).
 19. The *Batalla de Ideas* was the Castro-led campaign to re-engage Cubans, especially the young, with the ideals of the Revolution after the Special Period, a renewed ideological crusade against imperialist and capitalist values.

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The Childhood of a National Hero: *José Martí: el ojo del canario*

Fernando Pérez's biopic *José Martí: el ojo del canario* (2010, Cuba) portrays the Cuban independence hero's childhood and youth, following his education and his political, intellectual and emotional maturation. Like the films analysed in the last chapter, it focalises a crucial period in the country's history—here the abolition of slavery and the beginning of the independence struggles—through the eyes of a child, in this case the young José Martí. The film depicts even the very young Martí's life and consciousness as thoroughly intertwined with this rapidly changing political context. The film is subdivided into two parts, 'Pepe niño' (Pepe the child), in which Martí is around the age of nine (played by Damián Rodríguez) and 'Pepe joven' (Pepe the youth) (played by Daniel Romero), which ends when the young Martí has been imprisoned, aged 16, in a labour camp for his opposition to Spanish rule. It is focused to a large extent on Pepe's relationship with his authoritarian father, Mariano Martí (played by Rolando Brito), who worked for the Spanish authorities and was loyal to Spain, and the generational conflict occasioned by Pepe's growing support for Cuban independence. It also deals with his formative friendships, including with his tutor Rafael María de Mendive (played by Julio César Ramírez), and his classmate Fermín Valdés Domínguez (played by Francisco López Ruiz) and his relationships with his mother Leonor Pérez (played by Broselianda Hernández) and his sisters. The film features elements of the *bildungsfilm* and calls on its child protagonist in familiar ways; the theme of generational conflict

develops alongside an emphasis on national history and identity which the setting of national foundation and the biography of an independence leader suggests.

José Martí: el ojo del canario was commissioned by Spain's TVE, as part of a series of films about Latin American independence leaders entitled 'Libertadores', and was produced by TVE and the ICAIC.¹ At the time, several Latin American countries (though not Cuba) were celebrating bicentennials of independence, and certain 'pink tide' or new Left governments, notably Hugo Chávez's in Venezuela, were making political use of foundational narratives and independence figures. Cuba was undergoing a period of upheaval and reform, Fidel Castro having handed power to his brother Raúl in 2008. Whilst the reforms were largely economic and there was little political change, the retirement of Fidel was nevertheless a huge symbolic moment for Cuba and brought about greater political and economic uncertainty. In this context, the film establishes a dialogue between the political events of the late nineteenth century in Cuba and more recent events—especially around concepts of democracy, and national identity and values. The film focuses on the late nineteenth-century debate about democracy and freedom, and the generational struggle between pro-independence youth and their parents or Spanish loyalists, as a way of illuminating similar processes taking place today.

Fernando Pérez is one of Cuba's most prominent and respected filmmakers and is known for works which reflect on contemporary Cuba through the interiority or subjectivity of young protagonists, including *Madagascar* (1994) and *La vida es silbar* (1998). In *Madagascar*, for example, the teenage Laurita—who repeats the word 'Madagascar' over and over to herself—represents the younger generation's desire for change, the desire for escape or travel—potentially beyond the boundaries of Cuba, but also for escape, transformation or symbolic travel within the country's shores, either political or personal. *Madagascar* can be understood as a 'mythic site' of these potential, longed-for transformations (Mennell 2008, 102). Like the films examined in Chapter 3, *Viva Cuba*, and *Central do Brasil*, *José Martí: el ojo del canario* is a nationalist *bildungs*film: a film in which the child's sentimental and emotional education is strongly tied to learning about the nation, in particular its flora, fauna and its ethnic and cultural diversity. In *José Martí: el ojo del canario*, unlike the films of Salles and Cremata, though, the process of maturation and becoming-Cuban is strongly inflected with a political awakening and formation, in regard to race, class and to a lesser extent,

gender and sexuality. The film strongly emphasises the racist and oppressive social milieu in which the young Martí's political understanding was formed and devotes considerable attention to slavery and the position of Afro-Cubans in addition to the question of independence, issues which were integral to and strongly intertwined with Martí's future thought. Aesthetically, the film combines a certain visual austerity, especially in its depiction of Havana, which is non-iconic, and presented in greys, whites, browns and blacks, with an aural richness which emphasises the musicality of speech and street life,² as well as that of the natural world. In addition, the poetic works and other writings of Martí reverberate throughout the film.

José Julián Martí Pérez was born in 1853 in Havana to Spanish parents who had settled in Cuba. He was the eldest of eight children and the only male child. The head teacher of his school, Rafael María de Mendive, noted early the young Martí's talents, and eventually persuaded his father to allow him to support the boy's studies financially. After the first Cuban war of independence broke out (1868), José Martí began working on clandestine pro-independence pamphlets and newspapers and in 1869 was arrested for suspected opposition to the Spanish authorities, after a letter, authored by Martí and his friend Fermín Valdés Domínguez, was found in which their allegiances were made clear. At their trial, Martí claimed authorship of the letter and was sentenced to six years' hard labour at the Canteras de San Lázaro. His parents secured his early release, after which he was exiled to Spain, where he studied philosophy and literature. Later he travelled in the USA, Mexico, Guatemala and Venezuela, writing poetry, novels, drama and children's literature, founding several publications and contributing to many others, as well as occupying a series of academic and diplomatic positions. Martí continued promoting the cause of Cuban independence throughout these years, and from 1890, devoted himself to planning the Cuban war of independence and to the Partido Revolucionario Cubano. In 1895, during his first military expedition, Martí was killed by Spanish soldiers. Today, Martí is known as a founder of Latin American *modernismo* as well as a giant of radical thought, and is revered in Cuba, where his image and memory has been manipulated and utilised by successive regimes, as a teacher, prophet and hero, a phenomenon which has been labelled the 'cult of Martí'. In focusing only on Martí's early life, Pérez's film elides the activities which were mainly responsible for making him a national hero: his active participation in Cuba's struggle

for independence from Spain, his writing and political thought. It also avoids the representation of Martí's endlessly represented and memorialised death, a 'founding scene in Cuba's national myth' (Montero 2004, 19). Rather, the film devotes its attention to how his convictions came about. Commenting on this decision, Pérez has said:

El pensamiento, la vida y la obra de Martí es un boscoso universo ante el cual una película quedaría pequeña por su inalcanzable dimensión. Por eso, desde que me pidieron llevarlo a la pantalla, no tuve que pensarlo dos veces para decidir que la película sería sobre su infancia y su adolescencia. (Martí's thought, life and work are a dense universe of vast proportions which would make any film that tried to depict them look inadequate. That's why, when I was asked to make a film on the subject, I immediately decided that it would be about his childhood and adolescence). (Fernando Pérez, cit. Sánchez 2011, 70)

This book seeks to elucidate the status and functions of the child in Latin American cinema and Pérez's film—precisely because it chooses to focus on the childhood and adolescence rather than on the more obvious and well-known adult life of Martí—provides interesting material for such an analysis. In the first part of this chapter, then, I will analyse from a number of perspectives the decision to focus on Martí's early life. Susan Hayward writes that: 'the historical film invests the moment or person with "greatness" [...]' and adds 'historical films have an ideological function: they are serving up the country's national history before the eyes of the [...] people' (1996, 205). If Pérez doubted his ability to do justice to so great and renowned a hero, the purpose of having a child subject was precisely in order to be able to dispense (to an extent) with greatness, to be able to more easily humanise and de-iconise Martí, as well as allowing a greater creativity regarding the identity and qualities of the biographical subject, and thus for a freer, more fictionalised version. As Pérez puts it 'siempre se ha dado un Martí con la frente enhiesta, y esa imagen representa a los hombres de mármol, no a los seres humanos' ('Martí has always been depicted with his head held high, in a pose which is more appropriate for marble statues than for human beings' (in Ramos 2013). Thus, in Pérez's version, we are party to several occasions on which *niño* Pepe is frightened and powerless, to his teasing by other children, as well as to his sexual awakening. Whilst Martí has been thoroughly appropriated by the post-1959 revolutionary regime in Cuba, the focus on Martí-as-child allows for him to be apprehended as non-hegemonic and allows

Pérez to dispense with elements of the cult of Martí promoted by the Castro regime. However, perhaps inevitably, it also relies on the cult for its emotional effects, and especially on the cult's propagation amongst children through the Cuban education system.³

As with the historical representations discussed in the next chapter, the function of *niño* Pepe is also that of witness to history, and whilst the film does not figure him as passive, his status as child often renders him powerless in the face of the abuses of power perpetrated by others. This is particularly the case in the depiction of his relationship with his father, who is hot-tempered and at times abusive. His childish curiosity also drives much of the narrative: he is frequently pictured listening to, or watching those around him (sometimes secretly), and it is through his consistent observation of power relations both in the public and private realms, that the narrative unfolds, that the child-witness 'guides' the audience through the realities of nineteenth-century Cuba and that Pepe's growing political consciousness forms. As Fernando Pérez says in interview: 'busqué principalmente la mirada del niño y del adolescente: una mirada que reflejara en los ojos la sensibilidad del que observa' ('I was seeking the gaze of the child and of the adolescent: a gaze imbued with the sensibility of someone who observes' (in Bejel 2011, 169). Especially during the first phase of the film, in which Martí is a child ('Pepe niño'), he exists on the fringes of adult life and of the action, but this positioning makes him (as in Deleuze's famous formulation, discussed in the Introduction) 'all the more capable of seeing and hearing' (Deleuze 1989, 3). He is frequently pictured in doorways or dark interiors in an attitude of (often unseen) observation (Fig. 4.1). The most powerful of these witnessing moments comes when *niño* Pepe and his father Mariano Martí have travelled from their Havana home to La Hanábana, where Mariano has been installed as a local magistrate, responsible for, amongst other things, preventing slave ships from landing in Cuba. This episode is based on real events; father and son did indeed make such a trip, probably in 1862, when Martí was nine-years old (Montero 2004, 59). In Pérez's version, *niño* Pepe is out riding on his horse one day and stumbles across a beach where he sees his father attempting to free some black slaves who are being landed in chains and controlled by angry dogs and men with guns. The scene is violent and distressing and Pepe witnesses it, hidden, from the undergrowth. This sequence refers to a real experience, depicted in Martí's *Versos sencillos*, written in later life, in which, in Verse XXX he describes his experience



Fig. 4.1 *Niño Pepe, eavesdropping on the adult world, in José Martí: el ojo del canario*

as a nine-year-old witness to a similar atrocity, employing in the last stanza the powerful image of the politically transformative child's gaze. Here the film echoes certain attitudes towards the child associated with Romantic thought, especially that of Rousseau, and that of Martí himself, a new respect for children which emerged in the nineteenth century and which saw them as having a special insight or vision.⁴ Here is Verse XXX reproduced in full:

El rayo surca, sangriento,
El lóbrego nubarrón:
Echa el barco, ciento a ciento,
Los negros por el portón.

El viento, fiero, quebraba
Los almácigos copudos:
Andaba la hilera, andaba,
De los esclavos desnudos

El temporal sacudía
 Los barracones henchidos:
 Una madre con su cría
 Pasaba, dando alaridos.

Rojo, como en el desierto,
 Salió el sol al horizonte:
 Y alumbró a un esclavo muerto,
 Colgado a un seibo del monte.

Un niño lo vio: tembló
 De pasión por los que gimen,
 Y al pie del muerto juró
 Lavar con su vida el crimen! (Martí 1999, 201)

(Lightning, a bloody streak
 Cleaved thundering clouds of gray
 As a ship disgorged its hundreds
 Of slaves upon the quay.

A whipping wind broke the backs
 Of thick-topped, tropical trees
 As a chain of naked slaves
 Trudged on without surcease.

The tempest raged with fury
 The slave barracks were teeming
 A mother and infant child
 Were passing by, screaming.

When the sun, desert-red, rose over
 The horizon bright and free
 It shone on a dead slave's body
 Hanged from a ceibo tree.

A child saw it all: he trembled
 With passion beyond his time
 And swore at the foot of the dead man
 To avenge with his life the crime.)⁵

In Pérez's film, though, *niño* Pepe does not see 'un esclavo muerto', but instead, a terrified fugitive black child hiding in the mangrove, the branches of which form a prison-like mesh around his naked body. In an echo of the poem's third stanza, we see a slave woman screaming,

as one of the traders shouts ‘¡esta negra tenía un cachorro! ¡se fugó un cachorro!’ (‘this bitch had a kid! we’ve lost a kid!’) In a spellbinding shot-reverse-shot sequence, the gazes of the two children, Pepe and the anonymous shivering black child, meet (Figs. 4.2 and 4.3). In the script, the moment is described as follows: ‘Su desamparo [el del niño esclavo] palpita en la mirada de Pepe niño, que se estremece frente al rostro de su semejante’ (‘The slave child’s suffering vibrates in the gaze of Pepe, who trembles as he looks into the face of his fellow child’) (Pérez 2011, 40). The child’s gaze on atrocity here is similar to the use of child witnesses to state terror which will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to recent Southern Cone filmmaking, as well as Kelleher’s discussion of the child in film as engaging in ‘acts of ocular witness’ to ‘moments of significant historical crisis’ (1998, 35).

Later in the film, to his white friends’ amusement, *niño* Pepe becomes frightened when he sees barking dogs, which recall this incident and the terror of the black slave child. The slave-landing sequence described above is the most striking example of a device on which the



Fig. 4.2 *Niño* Pepe spies the slave child, in *José Martí: el ojo del canario*



Fig. 4.3 The slave child looks back at Pepe, in *José Martí: el ojo del canario*

film frequently relies: the confrontation of the child's gaze with shocking oppression and violence in order to obtain a greater impact on the spectator. The most affecting victim of violence in the sequence is also a child, the shivering black child, whose suffering is all the more difficult to bear because of his tiny, defenceless stature; in this way, the film draws on the legacy of the New Latin American Cinema discussed in Chapter 1, which frequently had recourse to images of suffering and dying children as an emotional and politicising tool. As Hemelryk Donald et al. write: 'when the child is pulled to the foreground onscreen, their suffering is marshalled to make us register surprise and shock, and to justify a larger national narrative of victimhood and recrimination' (2017, 4). The image of the meeting of the two children's gazes is also important to analyse, not least because of the script's emphasis—inscribed filmically by the above-mentioned shot-reverse-shot—on this moment, but also because the slave child's insertion, and the two children's silent interaction is a conscious fictional deviation from the autobiographical material provided by the poem. The moment suggests a comradeship/solidarity *as children*,

and they are constructed as equals both by the script ('su semejante') and by the shot-reverse-shot which places neither in a dominant position. This levelling portrayal of the two children—despite the enormous difference in social position between them—recalls the employment of children in discourses of racial equality such as those of Martin Luther King who famously dreamt that 'one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists [...] little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers'.⁶ Although Pepe is a child himself, and unable to act in the moment (he is himself hiding and runs away before his father can catch him spying), the incident, as the poem makes clear ('juró/lavar con su vida el crimen!'), and the film underlines, would go on to condition his future acts. Unlike the children of the dictatorship films to be discussed in Chapter 5, who are to a greater extent consigned to passivity in the face of political injustices, Pérez's film stresses the active possibilities of a child-witness who will go on to affect his circumstances. Its representation is of course conditioned by biographical realities: Martí *did* go on to change history and political thought; yet it is still worth recognising that it is through the child-witness as potent cinematic signifier that Pérez chooses to frame questions of oppression and potential social change.

The trip to La Hanábana is also the setting for a number of other experiences which are related simultaneously to emotional and physical maturation as well as to gaining knowledge of rural Cuba in its natural and social aspects. As his father tells him: 'el campo te va a dar fuerza de espíritu, Pepe' ('the countryside will give you strength of character, Pepe'), although, as usual, Pepe exceeds his father's wishes and contravenes his rules. In La Hanábana, the nine-year-old Pepe meets Tomás, a old black man who speaks in rhythmic, Cuban Spanish with contractions and dropped consonants very different from the dominant linguistic modes of Havana thus far heard in the film. Pepe and Tomás become friends, and Tomás introduces Pepe to the local flora and fauna, including the Ceiba and its folkloric importance, saying: 'Ceiba es sagrá y muy sabia, y te va a cuidar' ('The Ceiba is sacred and very wise, and will protect you'). In an important sequence, Tomás and Pepe take a night-time walk unbeknownst to Mariano. Here the film moves away from its visual austerity, emphasising the moonlight as it falls on the glistening skin of a snake winding over the forest floor and uses a lush soundtrack of forest noises, perhaps inspired by Martí's own *Diarios de campaña* in which he describes a night spent sleeping outside:

La noche bella no deja dormir. Silba el grillo; el lagartijo quiquiea, y su coro le responde; aun se ve, entre la sombra, que el monte es de cupey y de paguá, la palma corta y espinuda; vuelan despacio en torno las animitas; entre los ruidos estridentes, oigo la música de la selva, compuesta y suave, como de finísimos violines; la música ondea, se enlaza y desata, abre el ala y se posa, titila y se eleva, siempre sutil y mínima; es la miriada del son fluido: ¿qué alas rozan las hojas? ¿qué danza de almas de hojas? (The beautiful night makes sleep impossible. The cricket chirps, the lizard shrills, and its chorus responds. Even through the darkness one can see that the wood is of *cupey* and *paguá*, a low, thorny palm. Fireflies circle slowly about. Through the shrill sounds, I hear the music of the woods, soft and complex, as if made by the most delicate violins; the music wavers, entwines and unravels, opens its wings and alights, flutters and rises, always subtle and faint, an infinite, flowing melody. What wings graze the leaves? What diminutive violin, indeed, what waves of violins extract the melody, and the soul, from the leaves? What dance is this, the souls of leaves?). (Martí 1996, 252)⁷

The child Pepe's wonderment and openness to the natural world is emphasised as, instructed by Tomás, he lies with his ear to the ground to hear the noises of the forest. Like Martí's diaries and poetry—for example, his poem 'Dos patrias'—this sequence frames the night in terms that are sensual and erotic and aligns this night-time with *cubanía*.⁸ Alongside Tomás, then, Pepe learns about a very different side of Cuba: Afro-Cuban culture, folklore, the natural world: he learns to ride a horse and fish, to drink sugar cane juice. When they return from their night-time walk, it is to a furious Mariano who threatens Tomás with jail. Tomás kneels, pleading mercy at his feet, enraging Mariano more. Pepe looks on in horror as Mariano visibly recoils and backs away, shouting at Tomás not to touch him. Later, when they are again alone together, Pepe entreats Tomás to promise never to kneel down in front of anyone again. Tomás replies with the line 'Yo no prometo ná; los negros saben cuando bajar la cabeza y cuando no' ('I promise nothing; blacks know when to bow our heads and when not to'). This response forces Pepe to notice the power he himself had assumed over Tomás by making the request, as well as to recognise that Tomás knows better than he how to operate from the subaltern position. Thus, Tomás teaches Pepe further important lessons, about power, knowledge and ethnic difference in Cuba, and about himself.

It is no coincidence that it is in the countryside that this intense learning—about the nation and about the self—takes place. The Latin American nationalist *bildungsfilm* brings together two traditions. The first of these is the idea—common to Latin American narratives of national foundation such as, to give a Cuban example, Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841)—of the countryside as the repository of national identity, and of its natural and folkloric elements in particular as associated with the national spirit or soul. The second major tradition which is in play here, which also has its roots in Romantic thought, in particular that of Rousseau, is that of the child in the country, that is, the countryside as an ideal(ised) place for the child where s/he can be free, can be a child, but also as a place of maturation through the rites of passage encountered in the natural world. As Owain Jones argues, the idea of countryside as a special and natural place for the child has a strong cinematic tradition (Jones 2007, 178). Like *José Martí: el ojo del canario*, as well as the films analysed in Chapter 3, *Viva Cuba* and *Central do Brasil*, these films tend to involve the child's displacement from the urban to the rural. The rural location, and all that the child discovers there—the natural and cultural elements which amount to learning about the nation, as well as the rites of passage which amount to learning about the self—is emphasised further through its contrast with the urban setting with which these films commence. The natural world is figured as ideal site in which both childhood and nationhood exist in their purest forms, the etymological linkage between 'natal', 'nature' and 'nation' underlining this symbolic overlap.

In Martí's own late Romantic, early modernist thought, there is often a focus on children and the young. He wrote prolifically on education and pedagogy and taught in schools in New York and Guatemala as well as at the University of Guatemala. In his poetic work, as in the above fragment, the child-figure is prominent, and his Rousseauian belief in the innate virtue of the child influenced his poetic work *Ismaelillo*, as well as his political writings. The film's subtitle '*el ojo del canario*' comes from another of the *Versos*, in which Martí's poetic 'yo' figures himself as a schoolboy:

Yo pienso, cuando me alegro
 Como un escolar sencillo
 En el canario amarillo
 ¡Que tiene el ojo tan negro!

Yo quiero, cuando me muera,
 Sin patria, pero sin amo,
 Tener en mi losa un ramo
 De flores, –y una bandera! (1999, 200)

(I think my happiness carries
 Just as a school child might
 Thoughts about bright canaries
 With eyes as black as night.

Neither country not master for me
 To recall that I was brave
 Some flowers – and a flag! – will be
 Enough to mark my grave.)⁹

Through its subtitle, then, the film alludes to the theme of childhood in Martí's writing, as well as to the idea of Martí himself as an 'escolar sencillo' which is projected through the poetic voice of this poem and which is duly represented in the first half of the film. Although the poem does not allude to the question of (the canary's) freedom or captivity, Pérez uses the image of the bird to highlight this question in the film, through the inclusion of sequences in which it appears in a cage. For Hernández Chioldes, the poem exhibits a nostalgia for a lost Arcadian world of childhood, for a loss of innocence (1983, 195), and the moments in the film in which the caged canary appears—the trip to La Hanábana at the age of nine discussed above, and later Pepe *joven*'s interview with a magistrate prior to his trial—could certainly be understood in this vein. However, the image of the caged canary serves more to reinforce the film's general theme of oppression and power versus humiliation or resistance, and the film picks up on the poem's identification of the poetic voice (and thus the idea of Martí's own) with the canary and its own situation of captivity or potential liberation, especially at its second appearance; it appears to be when Pepe *joven* sees the caged canary in the magistrate's office—a moment intensified by a sudden close-up on the caged bird—that he decides to remain true to his values and, rather than offer the retraction for which the magistrate is asking, to claim authorship of the letter and stand by its seditious contents. The identification between the canary and Pepe *joven* is reinforced by editing here, in the cut from an image of the canary behind bars, to an image of Pepe walking into his own cell where the prison bars close behind him.

As well as writing about children, Martí also wrote for them, and for a short period published a magazine, *La edad de oro*, four issues of which appeared in 1889. It was entirely authored by Martí and comprised fairy tales, poems and translations and summaries of classic and foreign literature (Foner 1979, 26–27).¹⁰ As García Marruz points out, Martí set up *La edad de oro* when he was already renowned across Latin America as a writer and thinker, indicating the importance he placed on writing for children (García Marruz 1969, 292). Martí wrote in *La edad de oro* ‘Para los niños trabajamos, porque los niños son los que saben querer, porque los niños son la esperanza del mundo’ (‘We work for children, because children know how to love, and children are the hope of the world’) (1979 [1889], 10). His view of childhood combined ‘a Rousseauian belief in the innate virtue of children and a Lockian notion of the child as tabula rasa’ (Casavantes Bradford 2014, 19), and in his political writings he ‘[...drew] on the symbol of the child in calling for the establishment of an independent, egalitarian and multiracial republic’ (41).

In focusing on Martí as child, then, Pérez’s film emphasises some of the intellectual tendencies of the era it depicts and of Martí’s own thought: the Romantic respect for the child and belief in the child’s virtue, insight and understanding is evoked by the film’s dwelling on the child’s acts of witnessing and moments of political cognizance. Martí’s political deployment of the child-figure reverberated throughout twentieth-century Cuban politics (see Casavantes Bradford 2014, *passim*), and has also been crucial to the rhetoric of the revolutionary government, discussed at greater length in the last chapter and exemplified by Fidel Castro’s proclamation that ‘La Revolución es para los niños’ (‘The Revolution is for the children’) (Casavantes Bradford 2014, 1). The film thus reflects not only Martí’s thought but also the continuing importance of the child in post-1959 political discourse; as Anita Casavantes Bradford argues in *The Revolution is For the Children* the revolutionary government has utilised the politics of childhood to combat dissent since its beginnings (2014, 46–47, and *passim*). Antoni Kapcia echoes this view, arguing that in Cuba, youth is used as an ideological weapon, and that the ‘political value of mobilising Cuba’s youth’ was apparent from the educational revolution of the 1960s and re-emerged in the 1990s, alongside the Elián González campaign (2005, 400).¹¹

If the focus on Martí as child makes the film particularly expressive of its biographical subject’s own thought and of the intellectual tendencies

of his time, as well as of subsequent ideological tendencies in Cuba, the decision can also be understood as intensifying the extraordinary emotional resonance of the film for the Cuban viewer. As Pérez Betancourt states in his essay on the film: ‘lo que se trae entre manos es confrontar el Martí que cada cubano lleva adentro con el Martí niño y adolescente que [Pérez] concibe’ (‘what the film brings about is the confrontation between two Martí: the child and adolescent Martí conceived by Pérez, and the Martí that every Cuban carries within’) (2011, 124). The film’s deployment of a child protagonist, and one who holds an important emotional appeal for the Cuban viewer, initiates a double appeal to the spectator’s own childhood which perhaps accounts for the extreme emotional reactions of many local audiences. Emilio Bejel reports that at a screening of the film, at the Charles Chaplin Theatre in Havana on 12 December 2010.

At a certain moment of the film, all the moviegoers [...] were crying almost uncontrollably. Once the movie was over, the entire audience, while still crying, gave a standing ovation to the film and several embraced one another. Later I spoke with other Cuban friends who told me, without exception, that they had reacted in the same way when they went to watch the movie (2012, 67).

For Bejel, ‘our reaction to the movie has a lot to do with the long history of emotional and ideological teaching about Martí that we Cubans have undergone since our births and to a series of psychological and even historical complexities that all converge in our mind in the moment we watch the movie’ (2012, 68). It also has to do, I suggest, with the child, with the young Martí that the film presents, with the children that the viewers once were, with the way that the child-film brings about contact between the two, and with the associations of both the figure of Martí, and the former child self with mourning, nostalgia and loss.

José Martí: el ojo del canario returns Cuban viewers to a powerful connection forged with Martí in childhood through schooling. Bejel discusses the ways in which Cuban governments of opposing ideological stances have, since the beginning of the twentieth century, utilised the image of Martí as a means of consolidating their power (2012, *passim*); prior to and since 1959 this has happened through the education system which has been used to create a nationalist cult of Martí (Quiroz 2006, 71). In Cuban schools, Martí is referred to as ‘El maestro’ (‘The teacher’), and his life example and poetry are incorporated into the schooling of all children. Not just scholarly respect, but

love and affection are encouraged for Martí, who as well as being seen as a teacher, is also understood as a loving father figure. The state emphasises this fatherly connection with children through, for example, the statue ‘Martí Anti-Imperialista’ by Andrés González González, erected in the Plaza Tribuna Anti-Imperialista in 2000 as part of Castro’s response to the Elián González affair, in which Martí is depicted with a child in his arms as he points an accusatory finger at the US diplomatic office. Cuban children are constructed in a loving relationship with José Martí as father (desire), as well as being encouraged to emulate him (identification).¹² If the Cuban education system (like all education systems) functions as an apparatus of State Ideology (in Althusserian terms) (Althusser 1971, 136–37), then the image of Martí (and other heroic martyrs such as Che Guevara) is used to interpellate Cuban schoolchildren as subjects, just as Althusser explains that Christ is used to interpellate subjects within the religious Christian ideology (Althusser 1971, 165–68). The comparison with Christ is not incidental, since Martí is frequently figured in quasi-religious terms. Like that of Christ, the figure of Martí marshals the individual subject’s desire and identification; interpellation happens on an emotional and affective level with reference to familial structures, specifically the father–child bond.

If, for Cuban audiences, there is likely to be a general identification with the figure of Martí, the film’s cinematography functions to reinforce spectator identification with the on-screen Martí or *niño* Pepe. Cinema conventionally functions through intense spectator identification with on-screen characters, built up through, for example, the witnessing of their interiority, the sharing of acts of viewing and voyeurism with them, and the close-up. In *José Martí, el ojo del canario*, all these techniques are used to build a strong identification with the central—child—character. In particular, as explained earlier, the act of witnessing is privileged as, again and again, *niño* Pepe witnesses injustice and oppression and gathers the information which forms him politically. He observes family life, life in the streets and taverns, and clandestine slave trading activity: all of which are the settings for the abuse of the weak or powerless by the powerful. He is frequently pictured in doorways or dark interiors in acts of (often unseen) observation, and—whilst their empathetic rather than voyeuristic qualities are emphasised—this positioning strongly aligns his gaze with that of the cinematic spectator. In this sense, then, the film uses traditional mechanisms to create an identification with the child protagonist. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 1, it has been argued that

films with child protagonists, when viewed by adult audiences, tend to invite a ‘conversation’, between the adult viewer and her/his own childhood self to the extent that the on-screen child evokes and calls forth that previous child self (Lury 2010, 111; Wilson 2005, 331).¹³ Films may refer to common childhood experiences—such as those of listening to or watching the conversations of adults, as in this film—in a bid to heighten identification and return viewers to their former selves. As Ludmilla Jordanova writes: ‘Our capacity to sentimentalise, identify with, project onto, and reify children is almost infinite’ (1990, 79) and *José Martí: el ojo del canario*, like many child-centred films, tends to appeal to this capacity.

The double appeal to the spectator’s own childhood—firstly, through the interpellative and emotional connection forged in the Cuban viewer as a child, and secondly, through the cinematographic means by which identification or dialogue is invited between the adult viewer and her/his child self—must be understood as bound up with a sense of loss and nostalgia, especially if we are to understand the emotional response to the film discussed earlier. Bejel explains how Cubans are constructed as mourning Martí, his loss having even precipitated a ‘social form of melancholia’ (2012, 87), of which the ‘obsession with and reproduction of [his] image’ can be understood as a symptom (2012, 88). For Rojas, Martí’s premature death means that Cuban history has been written and understood through loss (2006, 7). He argues that ‘Lamenting Martí’s absence has always been a central figure in the discourse of the Cuban republican frustration. Melancholic testimonies appear as early as the very first years of postcolonial period’ (2006, 8). Childhood, too, is often understood within modern culture as a lost object which induces states of mourning, melancholia or nostalgia. Childhood is a reminder of time and its passing, of fleetingness and impermanence, and thus ultimately of death. As David MacDougall writes: ‘Although adults may associate with children constantly, they can never quite recapture what it was like to be a child, with a child’s ignorance of adult experience. Films of childhood are therefore often commemorative, even elegiac. Many are imbued with a sense of loss, sometimes when they seem most joyful—for lost sensitivities, lost beauty, lost prospects’ (2006, 67–68). It is in this sense, too, then, that the choice of a child protagonist seems to heighten the melancholic emotional effects which Cuban viewers are already likely to associate with the figure of Martí, if we follow the arguments of Bejel and Rojas. To the extent that the cinematic medium brings about ‘the

preservation of life through its representation' (Bazin 1967, 10), yet itself balances precariously between presence and absence, between plenitude and loss, the film allows both for the revivification of these lost objects, Martí and the child, and for the experience of their loss, echoing the tendency within Cuban cultural production and discourse to depict Martí 'not as a completely dead man but as a resurrected or "resurrectable" Christlike hero' (Bejel 2012, 105).

A further layer of mourning is added when we consider the film's contemporary moment, replete with its own sense of the elegiac in relation to the demise of the socialist project which once fired the generation of Pérez, who completed his own training with the ICAIC, and whose first short films, made in 1975, *Puerto Rico* and *Crónica de la victoria* were propaganda for the regime (Mennell 2008, 90). As Stubbs discusses, all historical films (some would say, all films) are in some sense 'about' the time of their making, and it is commonplace to argue that films set in the past are in dialogue with their contemporary moment (2013, 42). *José Martí: el ojo del canario* is no exception. Both the time of its setting and that of its making are moments of great transition for Cuba in which the ever-present questions of Cuban national identity and direction are even further to the fore. The film constructs parallels and analogies between past and present, using its depiction of the past to pose questions regarding the present. In a sequence from the second half of the film, a class on Ancient Greek political concepts erupts into a heated debate over the democracy—or lack of it—in mid-nineteenth-century Cuba. As the young men of the class alternately lambast the status quo or argue for maintaining it, their arguments uncannily evoke the Cuban present. Pepe's friend Fermín bemoans the lack of freedom of either expression or the press, whilst Carlos complains he is not represented by the present regime; other students, loyal to the Spanish crown, belittle these views, arguing for the preservation of the status quo and that an end to Spanish rule would lead to chaos or stating that 'nos mandan los que nos tienen que mandar y seguirán mandando' ('our leaders are the ones who ought to lead us and who will continue to lead us'). Any of the arguments used in this scene could be, and indeed have been made about the post-1959 regime, and it is important that Pérez situates the debate in a school-room, amongst the young, who are often figured as the site of the most heated debate around and against the current regime, and who have been, since 1959 and with renewed vigour since the Special Period, discursively figured as the sector of the population which must be both won

over and mobilised as ‘ideological weapon’ (Kapcia 2005, 400). Locating this mid-nineteenth-century ‘battle of ideas’ in the schoolroom helps associate the discussion of democracy and its meanings and application to Cuba’s present and future with youth, and invites the young Cuban spectator of the early twenty-first century to identify with the discussion. The film—and its focus on its protagonist’s childhood and adolescence—can thus be read as part of the ongoing concern with the reinvigoration of Cuba’s youth. However, rather than seeking to wed them specifically to the Revolution, it asks its viewers to probe categories like ‘democracy’ in the same way the characters do.

If the film invites renewed debate about a term, or value—democracy—which many would argue has been in short supply in Cuba since (and prior to) 1959, it also centres its narrative and symbolism around a series of values which have been rhetorically central to the regime’s construction of a revolutionary Cuban national identity, including those of justice and pride, specifically the pride and defiance of the weak in the face of threats from the powerful. Characters debate the theme of justice throughout the film, and many dialogues centre on it: it is as central to the actions of Don Mariano (in his capacity as magistrate, his crack-down on slave trading in the provinces, and as a policeman in Havana) as it is to the thoughts and actions of his son. Whilst father and son are in near-constant conflict, their views on justice are similar: as Pepe *joven* informs the magistrate interviewing him prior to his trial: ‘todo lo que yo sé de justicia, se lo debo a él’. Another key term which surfaces in the dialogues of both is that of duty. Whilst each of them believes duty should be paramount in guiding one’s actions, Mariano sees his duty as loyalty to Spain, and his son’s principal duty as supporting his family, whilst Pepe feels duty bound to study and to fight for the cause of Cuban independence. The fact that the film features conflict over the understanding of questions of duty reflects, again, the changing landscape of contemporary Cuba, and introduces the potential relative, contingent or changing nature of duty, and the need for a new generation to consider its duty, which may contrast with that of previous generations. This is congruent with a socialist view of childhood which ‘saw generational conflict as a primary engine of historical change and celebrated children as radical political actors’ (Casavantes Bradford 2014, 14).

This focus on contemporary concerns extends to the film’s treatment of issues of gender and sexuality, which can be understood as resignifying Martí for a contemporary audience. The issue of gender plays out in

the film through Mariano's domination of his household, his wife and daughters, especially Chata, who is beaten by her father for having a relationship with a boy and runs away from home. If, as argued earlier, Pérez has Tomás teach Pepe about his privileged racial position, Chata makes him understand something about his gender. As she is making to run from the house after the beating, saying 'Si no quieren que me case me voy con él aunque sea debajo de un puente' ('If they don't want me to marry, I'm going with him, even if we have to live under a bridge'), Pepe cautions against this (Tu no puedes estar tirada debajo de un puente, ¿Qué van a decir la gente (*sic*)? [You can't go and live under a bridge, what will people say?]). Chata's vehement and passionate retort: '¿Y a ti te importa lo que dicen de ti? ¿Tu no estás luchando por la libertad de Cuba? Pues yo estoy luchando por la mía' ('Do you care what they say about you? Aren't you fighting for Cuba's freedom? Well I'm fighting for mine'), clearly spells out the differences between him, a young man who, despite his authoritarian father and Spanish rule, has access to freedoms she will never have, and her own female condition, with the lack of any financial, legal or political rights that implied. Pérez's version of Martí's life suggests moments of learning appropriate to the *bildungsfilm* genre, and it does so in a way which reflects a contemporary progressive stance on questions of difference. Likewise, unlike his friends who ridicule the director of the Villanueva theatre, calling him *maricón* (queer), Pepe befriends him and asks him for work, in order to feed his nascent love of opera. The theatre later stages pro-independence acts and the director is seen to be working with Pepe *joven* and friends for the cause. Through its privileging of this friendship, it attempts to resignify Martí in a way which is in accordance with today's increased acceptance of sexual dissidence and which is corrective of the Castro regime's homophobia. In this sense, Pérez's film echoes the filmmaking of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, the famous revolutionary filmmaker who tutored Pérez at the ICAIC in the 1970s (Mennell 2008, 90), and whose *Fresa y chocolate* (1993) tries to address the Revolution's 'errors' of homophobia through a narrative in which David, a young communist militant and representative of the regime, learns to accept homosexuality through his acceptance of and eventual friendship with Diego, a camp gay man.¹⁴

José Martí: el ojo del canario emphasises some of the more common meanings and representational tendencies associated with the figure of the child in the cinemas of Latin America. In addition, the focus on

Martí as child provides a fresh image of Martí, which manages to escape some, though not all aspects of his myth, allowing for some resignification. The value of the child-figure to this film, and specifically to the portrayal of Martí, is its long-standing and still common association in Latin American cinema with acts of witness to social injustice and oppression, and the inflection of this figure's gaze with social and political insight or value. As in other films which choose to focus social and political themes through the eyes of a child, *José Martí: el ojo del canario* relies on the newness and innocence of this gaze to jolt the adult spectator into a new-found consciousness of the questions it addresses, including images of violence and cruelty, but also the moments of learning which are intrinsic to the *bildungsfilm*. In addition, the privileging of the child in this version of Martí's life is a fitting reflection of his own thought, which, influenced by the Romantic philosophies of the era, gave importance to the child as individual subject, utilised the child symbolically within political discourse, and even addressed itself to the child. The traditional associations of the (male) child with national tropes are, unsurprisingly, to the fore in this biopic of a national hero, and oft-repeated themes of the child in the countryside as a potent symbol of nation and learning about nation are strongly in evidence. The child-figure can be understood as being at the centre of the film's emotional effects: it transports viewers to their own childhood, and in the case of Cuban viewers, recalls the identification with and/or desire of José Martí forged in childhood. The film brings together the sense of mourning associated with the child (self) and that associated with Martí in Cuba to create an apposite filmic meditation on the contemporary moment, filled with mourning and nostalgia, and, like its young protagonist, with potentiality.

NOTES

1. In addition to Pérez's film, the series included *Revolución: el cruce de los Andes* (Ipiña, 2011), which deals with José de San Martín and Artigas: *la redota* (Charlone, 2011), about José Artigas. Several of the films commissioned are still to be completed. See <http://www.loslibertadores.net>. Accessed 25 September 2017.
2. In this sense, the film strongly echoes Pérez's earlier work *Suite Habana* (2003) which uses the sounds of Havana streets musically, as well as recorded music to tell the stories of the lives of its characters, in place of dialogue.

3. Interestingly, Walter Salles' biopic of Che Guevara, *Diarios de motocicleta* (2004) takes a similar path, choosing to portray his youth and the formation of his political consciousness rather than the acts for which he is famous.
4. See Plotz (2001, 19–20).
5. Translation by Anne Fountain, in Martí, J. (2000, 81).
6. From the 'I have a dream' speech.
7. The latter part of this translation is taken from Montero (2004, 143).
8. Ramos discusses the eroticisation of the night in 'Dos Patrias' (2000, 276).
9. Translation by Anne Fountain, in Martí, J. (2000, 71).
10. For more on *La edad de oro*, see Foner (1979) and García Marruz (1969).
11. For more discussion of the case of Elián González, see Chapter 3, 71–106.
12. Martí's loving connection with children is strongly emphasised in research and writing on him. For example Cuban researcher Froilán Escobar 'recorded the oral testimonies of children who met Martí during his final journey' (Montero 2004, 127), whilst an article entitled 'Martí Intimo' by Blanche Zacharie de Baralt discussed the memories of a child who met Martí: 'At three years of age, Ubeta could already recite 'Los zapaticos de Rosa' [one of Martí's most famous poems for children], and one day when Martí visited the home, the young child sat upon his knee and gave the recitation. Martí was so impressed that the next day he sent the child a doll with rose-coloured shoes, and with the gift a dedication in verse' (cit. in Foner 1979, 29).
13. Lury writes: 'By making the child the figure that witnesses or participates in events there is what amounts to a form of prosopopoeia: that is, a conversation between the living (the adult survivor) and the dead (the child self [...])' (2010, 111).
14. As Shaw writes, 'Alea [...] had always claimed the right to be critical within the framework of the revolution' and in his films 'he expressed his frustrations with the insistence on cultural orthodoxy' (2003, 13).

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The Child in Post-dictatorship Southern Cone Film

If Latin American film of the 1990s often featured realist or neorealist representations of the poorest and most destitute children in society, and focused on these children as a means of indicting contemporary political and social structures, the 2000s saw a wave of films from Southern Cone countries which utilised middle-class child protagonists in a different way: to look back on traumatic episodes of the recent past. These countries spent the last decades of the twentieth century in a process of dictatorship and its aftermath. This chapter will look at films from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay, countries in which military juntas took power in the 1960s or 1970s and perpetrated appalling human rights abuses.¹ These countries returned to democracy in the 1980s, or in Chile's case, in 1990, and to a greater or lesser extent the cinematic and cultural output of the post-dictatorship period has been preoccupied with the depiction and examination of these years. In the 2000s, when individuals who had experienced the years of repression as children reached adulthood, and in some cases began making films, a new current of Latin American cinema emerged: films that depict the dictatorship years through the eyes of a child.

This is the case in a wave of child films from the Southern Cone which are in several cases based on the experiences of those who were children during the dictatorships, including the Argentine films *Cordero de Dios* (Cedron, 2008), *Andrés no quiere dormir la siesta* (Bustamante, 2009),² and *Infancia clandestina* (Ávila, 2012) the Chilean *Machuca* (Wood, 2004), and the Brazilian *O Ano em que Meus Pais Saíram de*

Férias (hereafter, *O Ano*) (Hamburger, 2006). The majority of these films follow the semi-autobiographical tendency identified by Karen Lury in relation to post-conflict European and US filmmaking. As she writes, ‘some of the most famous films about war which feature children are either directed by men remembering their own wartime experience (*An Revoir Les Enfants*, *Hope and Glory*) or based on memoirs or semi-autobiographical stories (*Empire of the Sun*, *Diamonds of the Night*, *Fateless*, *Mirror*)’. Another famous Southern Cone example, and one which has received significant critical attention, is the Argentine film *Kamchatka* (2002) the director of which, Marcelo Piñeyro was a 23-year-old film student active in the Juventud Peronista, who was forced into exile in Brazil by the 1976 coup, whilst screenwriter Marcelo Figueras was fourteen at the time of the coup. Lastly, the Uruguayan film *Paisito* (Díez, 2008) was directed by a Spaniard who grew up under Franco and written by a Uruguayan who incorporated his childhood experiences (Hogan 2012, 53). Comparisons can be drawn between this corpus of Southern Cone films and contemporaneous films from other parts of the region which view the political tensions of the Cold War period through the eyes of a child, including Laura Astorga’s *Princesas rojas* (2013), which tells the story of two young sisters whose parents are Sandinista militants operating clandestinely from Costa Rica, and Mariana Rondón’s *Postales de Leningrado* (Rondón, 2007), which depicts the child of *guerrillero* parents in 1960s Venezuela. In interview, Mariana Rondón explicitly compares this film, which tells the story of her own childhood, to the wave of Southern Cone films emerging around the same time which is analysed in this chapter (cit. Delgado 2017, 497).³

David Martin-Jones details the similarities between *Machuca*, *Kamchatka*, *Paisito* and *O Ano*, which all ‘[locate] child protagonists in a recreated past under military rule to meditate on those who disappeared and the manner in which such lost pasts can be reconstructed by the generation who were children at the time’ (2011, 70). *Cordero de Dios*, *O Ano*, *Infancia clandestina* and *Kamchatka* all tell stories from the perspective of the children of left-wing parents (generally sympathisers rather than militants) who are disappeared and/or murdered during the dictatorships, and these films thus echo the prominence achieved in the 1990s and 2000s by groups like HIJOS (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia, y contra el Olvido y el Silencio) in Argentina and Uruguay, which represent the children of those disappeared, murdered and exiled during the recent dictatorships. These films tend to use melodramatic

and nostalgic modes in their portrayals of the past, and they focus in all cases on middle-class children and generally on male children (*Cordero de Dios* is the exception here). Children may perform a ‘witness’ function in relation to the historical events and abuses taking place around them; they may function to symbolise the powerlessness and vulnerability of a nation being subjected to violent repression. Lury writes of the European films cited above: ‘In each case the child-figure is double-voiced; the child’s limited and often unconventional view of the world and war is framed by the adult’s knowingness and retrospective understanding’ (2010, 109–10). These are films in which the primary motivation is ‘to look back, to relive the past with all the immanent intensity of the presentness of childhood but tempered with the knowledge of loss located in a future yet to come’ (110), and this structure is frequently visible also in the Southern Cone examples analysed in this chapter which in general speak in a kind of ‘double voice’, combining the relative lack of knowledge of the child regarding the political situation in which he/she finds herself, with the hindsight and greater understanding of the adult, a voice which may be present through narration, through the presence of the adult character in the film or simply through the adult spectator’s own understanding. This chapter surveys this important area of Latin American filmmaking about children, exploring some key films, including an early precursor to this sub-genre, the Argentine *La historia oficial* as well as the Chilean *Machuca*, which used the child to win over politically divided domestic audiences. Finally, the chapter focuses in depth on Cedrón’s *Cordero de Dios*, a more recent addition which has received less critical attention, showing how the film includes a focus on non-visual triggers of childhood memories and on the mediation of memory, as well as how it intervenes in contemporary debates over intergenerational memory politics, and utilises the toy motif in a complex way to encapsulate innocence and guilt, powerlessness and agency, trauma and loss.

In these films, the child functions as a locus of memory and a site of trauma. Following from Deleuze’s discussion of the ‘child-seer’ summarised in Chapter 1, the child’s limited agency and understanding of the world in these films encapsulates the crisis of adult subjectivity in the face of the bewildering historical realities these films depict (Miller 2003). In their volume *Representing History, Class and Gender in Spain and Latin America: Children and Adolescents in Film*, Rocha and Seminet place a special emphasis on the functioning of child-figures in historical films such as these, noting that ‘preadolescent children are much more

frequently cast in filmic narratives constructed on historical memory and trauma [...]. Young children, hypothetically untainted by ideology, are cast to revisit history' (Rocha and Seminet 2012, 4). Lury's chapter on war films posits a number of reasons for the presence of children therein which are equally applicable to these post-dictatorship films. For Lury, the presence of the child, and especially the child's innocence—general, and in the context of adult war-making—makes it easier to 'provoke emotion and moral satisfaction' a process which may confirm the viewer's superiority (2010, 105–6). Often, too, the child's powerlessness or vulnerability is understood to stand for that of the country undergoing a turbulent or violent period; Lury gives the example of Ana in Víctor Erice's classic *El espíritu de la colmena*, who 'functioned as an apparently innocent and readily interpreted representative of "Spain" in troubled times' (Lury 2010, 108).⁴ For Sophie Dufays, the child can be understood as a being who lacks knowledge about the limits of existence. As discussed in the Introduction, Dufays argues that 'This state of first innocence is of particular interest to the medium of cinema, which [...] tends to project into the gaze of the child a certain ideal of visual neutrality, an ability to *discover* a "virgin" world. It can be argued that cinema often confronts this child with death and sexuality in an attempt to bring an "innocent" gaze, free from habits and prejudice, to bear on these phenomena' (2014b, 22). The gaze of young children, and especially middle-class young children, which is generally quite protected, has even greater connotations of innocence and thus the use of these characters as witnesses to, or as victims of, state violence is especially effective as a means of sensitising the adult spectator.

Echoing Lury's discussion of the 'double vision' facilitated by the child protagonist, Martin-Jones, whose analysis of *Kamchatka* in his book *Deleuze and World Cinemas* constitutes a major contribution to the field explored in this chapter, draws on Deleuze's notion of the child-seer to argue that films such as *Kamchatka*, *Machuca* and *O Ano...* create an 'adult-child seer', that is to say, a point of view oscillating between the relative lack of understanding of the child and the hindsight of the adult. He writes: the 'power of the "adult-child seer"' is to be both 'overwhelmed [...] by the limit situation, and yet [...] to be aware of its historical resonances, even if the child character is not' (Martin-Jones 2011, 81). The political value of this figure, for Martin-Jones, is that it facilitates a dialogue between the past and the present, a feature generally of historical films, but one which the presence of this adult-child seer makes

more self-conscious. As he puts it, such films ‘[delve] into the recreated past in order to find the layer of time in which the origins of the contemporary present can be found’ (70). This dialogue between past and present is to some extent a feature of all these films; as we will explore later, in *Cordero de Dios* the narrative oscillation between present and past, and the presence in the narrative of both the adult in 2002, and the child she was during the dictatorship in 1978 gives rise to a more intense reflection on the mediation of memory than we find in the other films discussed here, as well as giving more opportunity to foreground issues relating to contemporary politics, such as the reopening of the trials of the military.

There are also important historical reasons, more specific to the Southern Cone, why children feature prominently in the cultural memory of these dictatorships. Discussing Albertina Carri’s documentary film *Los rubios* (on which more later), Gonzalo Aguilar draws attention to the urban nature of the guerilla movement in Argentina, and the way that it caused daily and family life to become militarised (2008, 164), such that children were caught up in it to a greater extent than had the guerilla operated mainly in rural areas. Carri’s parents were abducted when she was three years old, and this abduction, and Carri’s relationship to the absence of her parents forms the subject matter of *Los rubios*. In Argentina, forced disappearances were a widely used tool of terror, with an estimated 30,000 people abducted by the state, held in clandestine detention centres, and buried in unmarked graves or drugged and dropped into the Río de la Plata. In that country, around 500 illegal adoptions took place, in which babies were taken from left-wing mothers in detention centres and given to military or right-wing families.⁵ This practice was dealt with in a film released just after the fall of the Argentine dictatorship, Luis Puenzo’s *La historia oficial* (1985), which won an Oscar for Best Foreign Film (1986), was made and set during the period immediately following the end of the dictatorship in Argentina and revisits and allegorises the country’s very recent past through the story of well-off *porteño* couple Alicia (Norma Aleandro) and Roberto (Héctor Alterio), as Alicia gradually comes to consciousness of the country’s recent history, and within that understanding comes to realise that the couple’s adopted daughter Gaby (Analia Castro), now a five-year-old, was illegally taken from a ‘subversive’ mother who was disappeared by the regime, and that her husband Roberto was complicit in this crime. In the family story, the national one—its victims, its

perpetrators and those who did not, or chose not to, see what was happening around them—is reproduced in miniature. Although the story is primarily Alicia’s drama, the child plays an important role: she is a living symbol of the traumatic events of the recent past, of the divisions and violence perpetrated by one part of the population on another; she symbolises the love and pain which characterise the stories of so many families destroyed by state terror, and which are the core subject matter in films like the ones analysed in this chapter. However, the crucial difference between *La historia oficial* and the films made in the 2000s by those who had grown up during the dictatorships is that *La historia* does not attempt to represent the point of view of the child. Rather, the child functions more symbolically as a perfect victim and innocent, a device which allows the increase of pathos. An interesting counterpoint to *La historia oficial* is provided by Gastón Biraben’s *Cautiva* (2003), which adopts the point of view of Cristina (Bárbara Lombardo), a fifteen-year-old Argentine girl who is informed by the state that she was illegally adopted and that her parents were disappeared by the regime.

As in later films such as *Kamchatka* and *Cordero de Dios*, *La historia oficial* deals with the middle-class family, an institution in which the child functions as emotional and psychological lynchpin, utilising the child–parent relationship as a means of interpellating the middle-class viewer. In *La historia oficial*, furthermore, there is a focus on Gaby as primary victim of the regime rather than on her disappeared parents who only appear in the film once, in a brief shot of their photograph, and whose story is largely elided by the film, an aspect for which the film has been heavily criticised. By depicting a young child rather than her militant parents as primary victim, these criticisms suggest, the film depoliticises its subject matter, more easily garnering the sympathy of a conservative, middle-class audience. As Foster writes of the film: ‘one of the most efficient ways to discredit the Proceso and its *guerra sucia* [...has been] to appeal to the universal abhorrence of the clandestine distribution of innocent babes as booty to supporters of the dictatorship’ (Foster 1992, 42–43). This focus on ‘innocent babes’ supports Ana Amado’s view that: ‘entre los relatos disponibles se impuso la narrativa de las “víctimas inocentes” para los muertos y desaparecidos’ (‘out of the potential stories, it was the narrative of “innocent victims” to talk about the dead and the disappeared that was imposed’) (2009, 14), as a way of justifying and legitimising the work of human rights organisations. In this sense, *La historia oficial*, coming as it did early in the formation of such discourses,

both predicted and precipitated the depoliticising impulse which saw the figure of the child/the innocent elevated to a central role in these discourses, in which ‘La inocencia fue usado como sinónimo de apolitismo. Su antónimo, el compromiso político, fue usado como sinónimo de presunción de culpabilidad’ (‘innocence was used as a synonym of the apolitical. Its antonym, political engagement, came to be used as a synonym for presumed guilt’) (Raggio, cit. in Amado 2009, 15).

As argued in Chapter 3, the child may be employed as a cinematic means of overcoming politically sensitive situations and as a guarantor of neutrality in a bid for wide audience appeal. In the case of *La historia oficial*, the child can be understood as a means of universalising the pain and suffering caused by state terror, in a way that focusing on the activities of her militant parents would have made more difficult. In this regard, it is worth noting that the other major (adult) victim portrayed by the film, Ana (Chunchuna Villafañe), who tells of her torture and rape at the hands of the authorities, is similarly ‘innocent’ of left-wing militancy—she was in a relationship with a subversive rather than being politically active herself, and her militant partner is absent from the diegesis. On the one hand, Ana and Gaby, and especially Gaby as child, function to sanitise the discussion and to preclude more ‘difficult’ subject matter. On the other hand, the film’s focus on illegal adoption meant that—well ahead of its time—it was highlighting crimes which would become central to debate only later, in the 1990s and 2000s, when the grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo began to identify many such cases, eventually leading to the arrest of Generals Videla and Massera and others and to their being tried for responsibility for illegal adoptions.

Made in 2004, Andrés Wood’s *Machuca* contains echoes of *La historia oficial* in the sense that the child functions in the film as a means of presenting a view of the past which is acceptable across Chile’s deep political divides. Like other films in this chapter, *Machuca* is semi-autobiographical; in socialist, pre-coup Chile, Wood attended a school named St George’s where, under the direction of left-leaning priests headed by Father Gerardo Whelan, boys from the shanty towns were admitted to the school to study alongside the better-off. This experiment is depicted in the novel *Tres años para nacer* by Amante Eledín Parraguez, on which the film is based; Parraguez was one of the poor children admitted to the school. The film’s protagonist Gonzalo Infante (Matías Quer), a pre-adolescent boy from a well-off family, makes friends with one of the poorer newcomers, Pedro Machuca (Ariel Mataluna). Again, as in several

films discussed in Chapter 3, the friendship of children from different social backgrounds acts as allegory of social integration.⁶ Thus begins Gonzalo's education in politics, and his sexual awakening, as he, Pedro and Pedro's cousin, the more politicised Silvana (Manuela Martelli), attend political demonstrations and experiment with kissing. Gonzalo, who had, up until this moment, had a fairly sheltered childhood in his upper-middle-class family—even if this family is, itself, disintegrating—is propelled into the complex reality of the Chilean political and social landscape, visiting his friends in their shantytown and learning about the political tensions and opposing forces in Allende's Chile. When the coup happens, the school is taken over by the army and the priests ejected, and Gonzalo is not sure what has become of Pedro, who stood up to the army officers. Gonzalo goes to the shanty town and there witnesses the military's rounding up of its dwellers and the killing of Silvana. Of all the films discussed in this chapter, it is *Machuca*, in this sequence which confronts the child's gaze with the most shocking violence. In fact, most of the films dealt with here protect the child from the worst violence of the military regimes—preferring to leave it to the adult audience to infer the violence which is taking place. On the other end of the spectrum to *Machuca*, the Brazilian *O Ano* uses cinematography, as Rocha argues, to shield the child's gaze, for example, in a sequence where 'the camerawork blurs the contours of the apartment when it has been ransacked – to distort the fact this has happened – probably by the military authorities looking for the parents' (Rocha 2012, 91). For Rocha, who compares *Machuca* and *O Ano*, the fact that *O Ano*'s young protagonist Mauro (Michel Joelsas) is permitted to maintain a childish innocence in relation to politics and state repression whilst *Machuca*'s Gonzalo is not, can be attributed to the distinct forms of memory politics prevailing in Brazil and Chile as the films were made. As she writes, *Machuca* was shot as Pinochet was being charged with human rights violations, whilst *O Ano* reflects a much more timid approach to transitional justice being taken in Brazil: *O Ano* 'closes with a happy ending that illustrates the still prevailing discomfort to fully revisit that important and tumultuous period of contemporary Brazilian history' (Rocha 2012, 97).⁷

In *Machuca*, though, the child's gaze on extreme violence functions, as discussed above, as a means of rendering the spectacle newly shocking to the spectator. Despite this, and despite readings of *Machuca* which understand it as an ethical text, concerned with a quest for 'radical justice'

and a critique of neoliberalism (Martín-Cabrera and Voionmaa 2007, 75), the presence of Gonzalo in *Machuca* also serves as a vehicle for a conservative and conciliatory politics. Steve Stern discusses the wide appeal of *Machuca*, which in 2006 was voted the best Chilean film of all time by viewers of the TV programme *Chile Elige*, gaining a quarter of the total of 2 million votes (2010, 305), and which has been embraced by those of different political persuasions in Chile, including those on the Right, whilst those on the Left have generally refrained from criticising the film (309–10). For Stern, this broad appeal is in part attributable to the film's historical moment which he argues was ripe for a cultural text which 'return[ed] to the society that had exploded in 1973 – and [found] something of value in it' (311). Stern also suggests, though, that it can also be attributed to the child's viewpoint which enables the film to '[escape] political didactics' (305) whilst enabling 'viewers to shed defensiveness' (306).

The near-universal acceptance of *Machuca* in Chile rests on its being able to appeal to Chileans of different political persuasions in a political landscape which still remains notoriously polarised. For Rocha, too, the child is the key to this appeal. She finds in *Machuca* and *O Ano* some similar strategies, stating:

To be financially viable, films [...] need to cater to the tastes of domestic audiences. Appealing to domestic audiences posits a problem, however, particularly when the representation of the past amounts to revisiting periods in which societies were deeply polarised by opposing ideological beliefs. That is to say, to what extent can plots overcome the divisiveness of the past so as to guarantee these films' acceptance? It could be said that one such strategy is the use of children [in the] dual role of actor and witness. Their presence engages spectators, who identify with their powerlessness and limited agency. As focalisers, children, who have traditionally been associated with purity, seem to provide audiences with a neutral view of a tumultuous past. Consequently, their innocence is emphasised so as to highlight how traumatic violence irrevocably marks them as survivors and witnesses. (Rocha 2012, 85)

It is significant that it is the chubby, baby-faced, white child Gonzalo who is chosen to represent the neutrality, purity and innocence which allow *Machuca* to win over even the Right, despite the narrative's identification with a desire for social mixing through the boys' friendship,

and despite the film's depiction of the brutal violence of the coup. And notwithstanding the film's title, its protagonist is not Pedro Machuca; the lower class boy is permanently figured as 'other', whilst the viewer is identified with the perspective of Gonzalo throughout. As Rita De Grandis puts it: 'Had the poor, darker boy told his own version of the story, the film would probably not have broken box office records' (2011, 242). And neither does the film focus, as do many of the other films discussed in this chapter, on the children of left wing, or disappeared parents. Instead, Gonzalo is representative of the white, upper-middle-class, and he is male: as such he can be understood to represent a kind of 'universal subject', not coincidentally, he is figured as 'a likeable, even lovable guide for our route into the past' (Wright 2015), who acts to make the film's challenges to prevailing economic structures and memory discourses palatable to a wide range of viewers. Tyrus Miller, drawing on Deleuze's discussion of the child in Italian neorealism, elaborates the category of 'pure witness': the child living through a turbulent period of history yet, as a child, devoid of the capacity to act or affect his circumstances (Miller 2003, 209–13). As a pure witness and as a member of the dominant group, Gonzalo also functions as a means of absolving those spectators who may have been adults at the time but who remained silent and passive during the repression. The—lovable, neutral, universal and innocent—child becomes a comforting and complacent identificatory vehicle for the adult who remained a silent witness. In this sense, despite the similarities pointed out earlier, the film differs importantly from *La historia oficial*, in which the adult protagonist's coming-to-consciousness of, and speaking out against, the repressive structures in which she had played a part constitutes the film's principal transformation. As Brémard writes of the use of the child in filmmaking about dictatorships, *Machuca* invites reflection on the extent to which this use represents the idea of 'good conscience', a myth which becomes necessary to the generation which was unable to fight the dictatorship (2008, 9).

For Miller, who analyses a group of post-war European films featuring children including *Forbidden Games* (René Clément, France, 1952), *El espíritu de la colmena* (Víctor Erice, Spain, 1973) and *Mirror* (Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR, 1975) a key concern are the spaces and processes by which the films allow the child to recapture agency 'beyond the pure witness state' (Miller 2003, 213), through play, ritual, mimetic behaviour and time travel, in a way that *Machuca*'s Gonzalo does not. As he writes:

The category of the ‘pure witness’ pertains to film narratives centered on characters barred from any effective, proportionate response in action to their situation. Children, because of their limited horizon of experience and the physical limits of their bodies, are easily cast as this type of character. Yet the intensification of sensory experience that compensates for the loss of active agency and the dream-like indiscernibility of subjective and objective dimensions of the experience point beyond passive witnessing towards a new domain of agency residing in imaginative processes [which] range from the lowest level of play or ritual-like processes through bodily metamorphosis and travel through time. (2003, 213)

Games, play and imagination also feature strongly in related ways in several of the Southern Cone films under discussion. In films including *Andrés no quiere dormir la siesta* and *Kamchatka*, specific games—*poliadrón* and *TEG* (*Tácticas y Estrategias de Guerra*, based on the US game ‘Risk’), respectively—are used to evoke the historical context of violence, war and domination.⁸ In *Kamchatka*, a middle-class family go into hiding from the Argentinian military, as the lawyer father (Ricardo Darín) and scientist mother (Cecilia Roth) are worried they are at risk due to their political beliefs. The child protagonist, their son Harry (Matías del Pozo), plays *TEG* with his father whilst they pass the time at their country hideout. Later, the parents leave their two sons with their grandparents in order to safeguard them, go underground, and are never seen again. ‘Kamchatka’ is a place name from the *TEG* board, which is remote and difficult to capture, and before he leaves, the father tells his son that Kamchatka is ‘el lugar desde donde resistir’ (‘the place to resist from’). Whilst, on the one hand, *TEG* was created in 1976, the year of the coup in Argentina (Blejmar 2014, 139) and clearly mirrors the military’s own activities, the game also functions to provide the child with a sense of agency and the possibility for resistance, whilst Harry’s own imaginative acts—‘Harry’ is in fact the under-cover name he has chosen, inspired by Harry Houdini—also centre on imaginative investments in escape and resistance, and his games represent attempts to understand elements of the repressive political context, as when he paints his brother white after his father criticises the state’s ‘whitewashing’ of political prisoners. In *O Ano*, football—the national team’s participation in the 1970 World Cup, as well as local games in which Mauro participates—functions as the child protagonist Mauro’s distraction and escape from the reality of his missing parents, as well as, it can be argued, a distraction for the spectator from the subject matter of political repression.

Notwithstanding this potential critique of *O Ano...*, it is the case that the focus on games, play and imagination in these films serves to shift the world of the diegesis closer to the experience and understanding of the child, and in several cases, especially those which feature games involving manipulation and mastery, the child's play functions as a path to subjectivity and selfhood as well as a means of mastering anxiety including that provoked by the political context. Notable here is the recent Peruvian film *Las malas intenciones* by Rosario García Montero (2011), which shares with the Southern Cone films discussed here its use of a child protagonist to revisit a violent period of the country's recent past, in this case the 1980s in Peru. In *Las malas intenciones*, the child protagonist Cayetana (Fátima Buntinx) uses cut-out figures of Peruvian national heroes, which she manipulates as she plays, through this manipulation working through both her painful family situation, whilst also, it is implied, processing the conflict between Shining Path and the State which is ever-present in the background of her consciousness. Cayetana constructs a fantasy world and the film uses animation and her voice-over narration to represent her inner life.⁹ For D. W. Winnicott, playing allows the child a sense of existing as a person and constitutes a search for the self (Winnicott 1991, 71–86). The transitional object, and later, toys, allow the experience of 'magical control' or omnipotence (63), whilst play can be used 'to master anxiety, or to master ideas and impulses that lead to anxiety if they are not in control' (144). For Brian Sutton-Smith, too, toys can be a means to agency or mastery, and this is one of the functions fulfilled by play; as he writes: 'in a variety of ways children use [...] toys for their own autonomy' (1986, 215). These perspectives of Winnicott and Sutton-Smith strongly recall Freud's discussion of the *fort-da* game in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in which the infant stages the disappearance and return of objects in order to process and master the distress or displeasure caused by the mother's coming and going, and thus 'passes over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game' (1953 [1920], 17), in this way beginning to come to terms with as well as to pass on (to others, to toys and so on) difficult experiences. Games and re-enactments can thus be seen as attempts to convert oneself from passive to active, and child's play as a narrative device through which imaginative transformations, attempts to cope with historical circumstances on an affective level, may take place.

Despite this chapter's primary concern with fiction film, it is worth commenting here in depth on Albertina Carri's documentary *Los rubios*,

which has a number of interesting points of contact with the fiction films under discussion. In this meta-documentary, the director muses on the (im)possibility of portraying her disappeared parents or of telling their story. As a means of referring to the moment of their kidnapping, Carri uses stop-motion animated sequences of Playmobil figures through which she represents their abduction as one by aliens, rather as a child might try to make sense of such occurrences through play. Therefore, like the other films discussed here, the film makes use of a child's gaze or imaginary for the understanding or depiction of the traumatic event. As Gonzalo Aguilar discusses, the use of animated Playmobil sequences has been interpreted by some commentators as depoliticising the kidnapping, whilst Aguilar himself contends that: 'the proliferation of children in Carri's movie seems more inclined toward questioning a way of doing politics (that of her parents) that transforms children into the material of a political problem. [...] In politicising all aspects of social life, this activism ended up putting at risk realms that should have remained sheltered. [...] By investing their entire life in political activism, [Carri's parents] dragged their children, who were in a position neither to choose nor to comprehend this engagement, into the struggle' (Aguilar 2008, 165–66). For Aguilar, it is important that *Los rubios* chooses to use the miniature—and therefore diminutive and childlike—device of Playmobil figures for representing the traumatic past; it 'stresses the childlike perception that the movie seeks out' (166) and is suggestive of filmic forms Carri might have seen as a child, such as super-action and science fiction (166). In addition, the choice of toys which could have been familiar objects during Carri's childhood illustrates the extent to which memory—childhood memories in general as well as the specific event which they are used to recreate—becomes attached to objects, such as toys. Commentators on *Los rubios* have drawn attention to the ways that the use of animation and toys allows the director to 'represent the unrepresentable' of trauma and to represent subjects which would be too painful or violent were she to use actors.¹⁰ A similar strategy is used by Carri in her later film *La rabia*, as I argue in Chapter 6. The Playmobil sequences can also be understood as a kind of traumatic repetition which allows for the experience to be worked through and mastered; the conversion of the experience into play, and the playful and unexpected insertion of these sequences into the documentary suggest the idea of creativity and play as a means of coming to terms with the past, whilst the animation of the figures suggests also a creative play with mastery and omnipotence

which, as seen above can be understood as both a means of attaining subjectivity and of mastering anxiety. In her essay ‘Risky Resemblances’, Elisabeth Bronfen argues that, whilst the exact copy may be deadening, repetitions which introduce a difference—here, perhaps, the use of science-fiction and Playmobil—can be constructive (Bronfen 1992, 325); such repetition ‘does not merely imitate but also reproduces something new’ (1992, 325).

As Blejmar contends, *Los rubios*’ use of Playmobil and animation ‘redirected our gaze away from the experiences of the adult survivors and towards those of their heirs, offering a new, childlike perspective on the dictatorial period’ (2017, 227). Marianne Hirsch has written about the way that second generation survivors, like Carri, too young to remember the repression first hand, experience ‘postmemory’, ‘a [...] very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation’ (Hirsch 2012, 22). Strictly speaking, postmemory deals, like *Los rubios*, with events the author cannot remember and which have been transmitted to her by others.¹¹ Yet questions of postmemory and intergenerational memory are also relevant to fictional films made by directors who were children old enough to have some direct memories, using protagonists of a similar nature, such as the films discussed in this chapter. In the film to which we will turn our attention for the remainder of this chapter, *Cordero de Dios*, questions of postmemory and the intergenerational politics of memory are paramount. This is the case to a greater extent than for example, in *Kamchatka*, *Machuca*, or *O Ano...* because in *Cordero de Dios* the narrative oscillates between the present (2002) and the past (1978), and between the experience and understanding of a young adult and that of her child self. As such this film contains an emphasis, absent in these other examples of the sub-genre, of the processes by which (post)memory operates, as well as an examination of how it constitutes the subjectivity of the protagonist. In *Cordero de Dios*, too, the child’s games, singing, and toys all play important roles in the expression of memory, trauma and loss.

MEMORY, MEDIATION AND AGENCY: *CORDERO DE DIOS*

Lucía Cedrón’s *Cordero de Dios* is, again, a semi-autobiographical fiction which draws on the director’s memories of childhood during the years of military rule, and especially on events involving her family members.

The film is unusual with regard to the sub-genre discussed in this chapter because it features a female child and because the diegesis is split between two historical moments (1978 and 2002). The film can be described as set in 2002 with flashbacks to 1978, and to this extent, the child Guillermina (Ariana Morini) is less central than her adult counterpart (Leonora Balcarce). In the other films discussed in which we can speak of an ‘adult-child seer’, this concept is more subtle; in *Cordero de Dios*, the film meditates more clearly on the mediation of memories of childhood by adult experience and knowledge, and on the relationship between the child’s consciousness and that of the adult who remembers. In *Cordero de Dios*, childhood experience is presented *as a memory*, and the processes of remembering, as well as memory’s mediation, are built into the film’s construction. Both the contemporary context of 2002—with the political and economic turmoil of post-crash Argentina, and the reopening of the trials of the military—as well as the historical context of 1978 are overtly figured, with the consequence that the relationship between past and present is more obviously foregrounded than in the other films discussed in this chapter.

As with the films discussed earlier, the child in *Cordero* functions to symbolise the nation’s powerlessness to act under military rule. She has little understanding of her political context, in particular due to her young age; she turns five years old in the part of the narrative set in 1978. Her presence in the narrative allows for a poignant exploration of the way the effects of military rule—especially her parents’ fear, her mother’s temporary abduction and her father’s subsequent murder—affect a young child who has little real understanding of her situation, permitting an increase in pathos. Guillermina as a child contains strong echoes of *La historia oficial*’s Gaby: in both films, the child’s fifth birthday features in the narrative and both girls are presented with a soft toy which is meant to absolve the harm done (to her) by the adults in her life. In both films, too, the girls sing apparently innocent songs which in fact function as expressions of the repressive political context. However, the structure of *Cordero* and the presence of the adult Guillermina in the diegesis means that the emphasis, unlike in *La historia oficial*, is on the way childhood experience is remembered, on how memories are triggered through the senses, especially sound and touch, as well as how the memory of childhood is mediated by the emotions and occurrences of the present.

The plot can be summarised as follows: Guillermina’s affluent 77-year-old grandfather, Arturo (Jorge Marrale), is kidnapped in Buenos

Aires in 2002, and the kidnappers contact Guillermina asking for the ransom. Her mother, Teresa (Mercedes Morán), has been in exile in France since her father Paco (Juan Minujín), a left-wing journalist, was killed in Buenos Aires in 1978 in mysterious circumstances. Teresa now returns to Buenos Aires to help raise the ransom money. However, this entails two options which Teresa finds difficult to countenance. The money could be lent them by an old military friend of Arturo's, General Delfone (Horacio Peña), who demands in return that Teresa not testify regarding events under the regime, something she had planned to do; in this sense, the film includes an overt reflection on the contemporary politics of memory. Alternatively, they could sell the house in which Guillermina lives, and which they lived in as a family prior to Paco's death, and to which Teresa is emotionally attached as a memory of her husband. Guillermina's urgent desire to do anything to secure her grandfather's release and Teresa's reluctance to do either of these things causes conflict between the two women. Teresa's reluctance also stems from her antipathy towards her father, and from the flashbacks, we learn that she has always suspected his involvement in Paco's death and has never forgiven him. Several prior flashbacks to 1978 from Guillermina's point of view show us how Paco, Teresa (played as her younger self by Malena Solda) and their friends lived in constant fear of the military. Knocks on the door late at night and temporary power cuts have the adults in a state of anxiety of which the children are only semi-conscious. Later, in a flashback from Teresa's point of view, she is called to attend a friend wounded in subversive activity, captured and tortured by the military and held in a detention centre, missing her daughter's fifth birthday. After Teresa's release, she learns that Paco has been killed—ostensibly by a stray bullet—and comes to suspect her father was involved in his murder. A final flashback from Arturo's point of view confirms that he secured her release by giving his friend, General Delfone, the whereabouts of his son-in-law, in order that his murder be arranged and appear to be an accident: Teresa's life was traded for that of her husband. In the present, Teresa decides to sell the house to pay her father's ransom, and the film ends as the two women collect him from where he has been left by the kidnappers, whilst the future of their relationships, especially Teresa's potential forgiveness of her father, remains an unanswered question.

The plot evokes elements of the director's own biography. Lucía Cedrón was born in 1974, the daughter of acclaimed left-wing

filmmaker Jorge Cedrón who made, amongst other films, the underground film *Operación masacre* (1973), an adaptation of the journalistic novel by Rodolfo Walsh. In 1976, the year of the military coup, Jorge Cedrón and Lucía's mother Marta Montero left Argentina and went into exile in Paris, where Lucía remained until 2002. In 1980, whilst in Paris, Marta's father Saturnino Montero Ruiz—a right-wing politician and former mayor of Buenos Aires (1971–1973)—was kidnapped and a ransom demanded. When Marta was reporting the crime at the Paris police headquarters, Jorge Cedrón died mysteriously in the building of several stab wounds, the official story being that he had committed suicide. Shortly afterwards, Montero Ruiz was released without ransom. There are several hypotheses regarding the death of Jorge Cedrón, but the case has never been satisfactorily resolved.¹² Lucía was brought up by her grandfather, and shortly after his death in 2001, she returned to Argentina and commenced work on *Cordero de Dios*. As the above plot summary and this biographical summary make clear, the film is far from a faithful account of her family story; rather, there are points of contact between them. As the director says in interview: ‘No hice una película sobre [la muerte de Jorge Cedrón]. Hice una película sobre otra cosa, una película de ficción. Utilicé algunos de los momentos que yo viví, o que yo transcurrí, o que transcurrieron seres, por mí queridos, cercanos, para contar otras cosas’ (‘I didn’t make a film about [the death of Jorge Cedrón]. I made a film about something else, a fiction film. I used some moments that I had lived, or had been through, or that those dear or close to me had been through, to tell something else’) (Cedrón and García Castro 2008).

The construction of the film suggests a fluid and unpredictable passage between past and present, with the senses—including sound, smell and touch—signalled as the triggers for memories which often erupt into the present. The director has commented that ‘el tiempo tiene forma de espiral. Los círculos vuelven a pasar por el lugar pero sin tocar los mismos puntos’ (‘time is a spiral. Its circles pass by the same place but without touching the same points’) (Cedrón and Revista Zoom 2008). Thus, we sometimes move from present to past without a cut, as in a memorable sequence in which the adult Guillermina crosses a room in her house and exits the frame in the foreground, after which the camera approaches the open door frame of the kitchen in the background of the shot, which the characters of Paco and the child Guillermina now enter and begin

cooking and singing together; we have passed from 2002 to 1978 without a cut and in a way that suggests the experience of living in a house replete with personal memories. The experience of postmemory has been described as characterised by ‘emanations’ and ‘incoherent manifestations’, as well as ‘memories erupting without any sense of predictability or temporal linearity’ (Serpente 2011, 139). *Cordero*’s fluid movement between past and present, and the way spatial or auditory cues plunge Guillermina suddenly into a series of flashbacks which are non-chronological, that is to say, which appear throughout the film not governed by the order in which they happened in the past, suggest the sudden and unpredictable eruption of the past into the present, and can be understood as creating a filmic poetics of postmemory.

The visual language of the film emphasises barriers to vision, and mise-en-abyme structures such as matrioshka dolls and frames within frames, suggesting the difficulty of seeing the past clearly or being able to piece things together conclusively. This is supported by the flashbacks from different points of view which suggest a past which cannot be reduced to a single version, and a respect for the differing subjective experience of the different generations involved. In line with the tendency towards what Hirsch calls ‘spectacular postmemory’ (cit. Serpente 2011, 138), films such as *La historia oficial* and *Kamchatka* privilege the visual as a conduit of memory and the past—especially through their foregrounding of photographs of the disappeared, which echoes the use of photographs by human rights organisations in the Southern Cone. By contrast, *Cordero* links memory less with the visual than with the auditory, the olfactory and the tactile. Guillermina’s memories of the past are triggered by sniffing a bottle of perfume, fingering an old necklace or by listening to a recording of her father’s voice. For Gaston Bachelard, smell possesses an intimate link to memories of childhood, and he examines this link in the work of various poets, where it is frequently evoked to nostalgic effect (1969, 136–41). As he writes: ‘a whole childhood [can be] evoked by the memory of an isolated fragrance’ (1969, 141). Even more than smell and touch, Guillermina’s memories of her father are bound up with sound, in them, he is often whistling, singing, or speaking on the radio or on the telephone. In *Cordero de Dios*, it is not the visual image of the missing person that acts as an ‘umbilical cord’ (as Barthes wrote of the photograph of the lost loved one [1981, 80–81]), but rather the sound of him or sounds associated with him. The image

of the child Guillermina as she hangs onto a telephone receiver with a long curly cord which exits the top of the frame during the last phone call she has with her father in fact suggests the idea of sound as ‘umbilical cord’ through which memory brings back the missing person (Fig. 5.1). Through its privileging of sound and of the other senses, *Cordero* contests the hegemony of the visual, suggesting the idea that childhood memories can be more faithfully evoked through touch, sound and smell.

In *Cordero de Dios*, the mediation of memory is built into film’s construction, as the film meditates on the relationship between the child’s consciousness and that of the adult who remembers, as well as on how events occurring and knowledge acquired in the present can colour memories of childhood, and by implication, of the dictatorship years. In a flashback from Guillermina’s perspective fairly early in the film, she remembers the last time she saw her father. The self-conscious presentation of the episode *as a memory* brings to the fore the extent to which it may be coloured by the knowledge (which she did not have at the time) that this would be the last time she saw him. The child Guillermina is presented as on the far side of a window, looking through it and towards the camera whilst in the window pane, we see the reflection of the father



Fig. 5.1 Guillermina speaks to her father on the telephone for the last time, in *Cordero de Dios*

as he leaves her, walks away down the garden, gets into his car and drives away (Fig. 5.2). The child's expression clearly communicates sadness, but mediation is suggested by the multi-layered structure, whilst its status as a memory and importance in the adult's consciousness is suggested by the long duration of the shot. As Sophie Dufays observes, the fact that we see the car disappearing as a reflection in the windowpane indicates that the image of the father is turning into a memory, by association with a broader relationship established in the film between memories and reflective surfaces (2014a, 161). The film's structure also emphasises the functioning of postmemory as second-hand memory in examples where we see Guillermina's memories of the past being shaped by the versions of the past which she hears from older generations. When Guillermina listens to Teresa's version of the past—in which she explains her conviction that Arturo was involved in Paco's death—it is as if a new meaning of the past has been created for Guillermina. She goes to a bleak water-side location, presumably the River Plate, and listens to a recording of a song she sang as a child with her father. In the above-mentioned kitchen sequence, we heard the beginning of this song, a Venezuelan *malagueña* (popular song) from the era of dictator Juan Vicente Gómez; now we hear the full version, in which the following verse features:



Fig. 5.2 Guillermina and her father's reflection, in *Cordero de Dios*

Murió mi padre, yo estaba ausente
 Ausente estaba, yo no lo ví
 Pero dice mi madre, que en su agonía de muerte
 Alzó sus brazos y me bendijo a mí.
 (My father died, I wasn't there
 I wasn't there, I didn't see
 But my mother says, that as he died
 He raised his arms, and blessed me.)

It is as if, after hearing the version of her mother, Guillermina comes to a fuller understanding of areas of the past (the song) that were obscure to her which now become visible/audible. The song's words suggest a new understanding of her father's death. This understanding comes against the grey and wind-buffed shore, as she looks out over the sea into which many of the victims of the regime were dropped, their bodies never to be recovered. The sequence brings on another flashback, in which the child Guillermina and Teresa visit Paco's grave. The mother's story creates a new meaning of the past which had not been apparent to the child.¹³ In addition, through the conflict between the two women over the meanings of the past, and the daughter's challenge to her mother's authority over that meaning, as when she asks her mother '¿sos capaz de dejar morir a una persona por honrar la memoria de otra?' ('are you capable of letting one person die because you are honouring the memory of another?'), the film foregrounds questions of intergenerational memory politics, admitting the nuancing of memory and allowing for its resignification (Richard, cit. Serpente 2011, 146). The film is thus congruent with the discourses of second-generation survivors of the dictatorship, which question the dominant version of their parents in order that the younger generation's stories, experiences and subjectivities can also be heard. As Guillermina comments to her friend Carlos (Manuel Vignau): 'Yo sé que lo que les pasó fue terrible, pero ¿qué hacemos con esto ahora?' ('I know that what happened to them was terrible, but what do we do with it now?'). As Werth, following Elizabeth Jelin, writes: 'the transmission of the multiple meanings of the past requires the creation of an intergenerational 'we' and recognition that a new generation will reinterpret and reconstruct the past to give it new meaning' (2010, 176); in *Cordero*, the struggle over what to do with the past, and the daughter's assertion of her own subjectivity in this struggle, forces the mother to transmit a story of the past which she had kept silent; together the two

women move towards an intergenerational ‘we’, as they come to understand one another better and move towards a joint course of action. In the process of negotiating the present situation, the mother also shifts her position: she comes to a decision to testify against Delfione and concerning her experience of persecution—she rejects the conciliatory politics represented by the General’s offer—yet she is also able come to the decision to sell the house, which implies a process of healing and letting go. *Cordero de Dios* is a polyphonic text which allows for different generational perspectives on the past to be spoken in concert. Not simply an exploration of the workings of memory in general or (post)-memories of the Argentine dictatorship in particular, it is in addition an intervention in contemporary debates on intergenerational memory and its politics.

The figure of the child assumes a crucial emotional significance in *Cordero de Dios*. Indeed, as can be argued in relation to several other films already discussed in this chapter, the child can be understood here as offering a convenient emotional anchor for a wide audience that might be more reluctant to identify with an adult ‘subversive’ protagonist. *Cordero de Dios* evokes the young child’s experience of sorrow, of pain, of solitude and of interminable waiting, especially around the experience of her fifth birthday, which both of her parents miss, for reasons she is ignorant of: her mother is being held in a detention centre by the authorities; her father is searching for her mother. Even her grandfather—who is meant to be with her—is absent; we find out that this is because he is arranging the father’s murder. The child’s pain and suffering are taken as seriously by the narrative as the pain and suffering of the adults; the child’s experience of time, of waiting, is evoked by the long flashback sequences from her perspective. In them, her solitude and idleness are foregrounded. She wanders, idly, around her grandfather’s estate, plays alone and sings to herself. After having celebrated her birthday without her family but with just her grandfather’s housekeeper, Guillermina plays with wooden blocks and houses, whilst singing a song, ‘Un mundo al revés’ (‘A back-to-front world’). An intense close-up on Guillermina’s feet and legs as she sits cross-legged on the patio expresses the young child’s absorption in play and in her bodily experience; gradually, as the camera moves out, we see her manipulating wooden blocks on a wooden house structure. The sequence combines an idyllic scene of play—wooden toys, a sunlit patio, tactile enjoyment, singing—with darker notes: the context of Guillermina’s solitude, and the words to the song, which suggest evil, wrongdoing, and a topsy-turvy world in which identities and roles are not what they seem:

'Había una vez
 un lobito bueno
 al que maltrataban
 todos los corderos
 Y había también
 Un príncipe malo
 Todas estas cosas había una vez
 Cuando yo soñaba un mundo al revés'
 ('Once upon a time
 There was a good little wolf
 Who all the lambs
 Were mean to
 And there was also
 An evil prince
 Once upon a time there were all these things
 When I dreamed a back-to-front world')

Suggesting an allegory of the political context contained within the ludic world of the child. The scene is highly reminiscent of the very last scene of *La historia oficial*, in which Gaby sits, also on a sunlit patio, sleepily singing 'En el país del no-me-acuerdo':

En el país del no-me-acuerdo
 Doy tres pasitos y me pierdo
 Un pasito par'allí
 No recuerdo si lo di
 Un pasito par'allá
 Ay, qué miedo que me da.
 (In the land of I-don't-remember
 I take three steps and I get lost
 I can't remember, did I take
 A step this way?
 A step over there
 Oh what a big scare).

In both sequences the very young, female child is aligned with innocence, with self-absorption and extreme unconsciousness of the world around her—to the extent of being almost asleep in the earlier film. In both scenes, a peaceful childhood idyll is created, and this serves to throw into relief the images contained in the songs, and the events occurring in the world of adults or the political reality. In *Cordero de Dios*, this peaceful solitude is interrupted by Arturo, who, as we later find

out, is returning from the scene of Paco's murder, and he brings with him Guillermina's birthday present, a cuddly toy lamb, who she immediately names 'Catalina'. As in Guillermina's song, neither the kindly *abuelo* figure nor the soft toy, is what it seems.

The toy lamb is important from both a narrative and a symbolic perspective. It is the lamb which functions to incriminate Arturo, when Teresa spots that these toys are being sold at the bakers next to where her husband was murdered, and deduces that her father must have been at the scene, later confirmed to us via a flashback from Arturo's point of view. Through its association with the film's title—the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world' (John 1, 29–34) refers to Christ's choice of suffering crucifixion at Calvary—the image comes to represent the sacrificial victim, Paco. Blejmar writes that 'toys [...] are [...] a kind of "dead amongst us"—a ghostly condition that they share with the complex neither dead nor alive position of the disappeared' (Blejmar 2013, 51). Although Paco is murdered rather than disappeared by the regime, mystery and uncertainty still surround his death—despite her suspicions, Teresa has never had proof of the motive for or circumstances of his death. The toy's 'neither dead nor alive' presence is echoed by sequences from the film in which characters seem haunted by Paco, most clearly where Teresa goes to pick up his belongings and his car, just before she spots the lamb in the shop window. The air is thick with Paco, as she slides into his car seat, and, using the lighter of his that she has just collected, lights a half-smoked cigarette he has left in the ash-tray. The haunting music which accompanies this sequence intensifies as she notices the shop window full of snow-white lambs, suggesting their uncanny status as substitutes or doubles.

If the lamb image represents Paco's sacrificial status—he died so that others (that is, Teresa) might live—it is also a substitute for him, given to the child in exchange for the murdered father, by the grandfather. Brian Sutton-Smith writes of the place of the toy in modern culture as a form of consolation, as 'advocated as a humanoid antidote for loneliness' (1986, 45), a stand in for siblings, parents and friends, in a modern culture which is increasingly privatised; in this sense, the soft toy—with its connotations of affection and comfort—is a particularly appropriate choice of toy for the purpose which it assumes in this narrative. Sutton-Smith argues that 'although toys are given as gifts, they are not for free' (22); rather, they are given in exchange for the bond the giver hopes to have with the child (53). The lamb in *Cordero de Dios* is a gift given to

the child to compensate the loss of her father, to absolve the guilt of the grandfather and to bond the child to him. It comes to represent the father and also his loss; yet because of the girl's name the child gives it—reminiscent of her own name—it is also a figure of the child herself and the way that loss is incorporated into her identity. During the remainder of the film, little Guillermina is never seen without the toy lamb: she carries it to her father's grave when she and Teresa visit it. She asks her mother whether her father will go to heaven or stay on Earth. 'Vos ¿qué preferís?' ('What do you prefer?'), her mother replies. Clutching the lamb, Guillermina replies that she wants him to stay here on earth. As Sutton-Smith writes: 'the notion of toys stands paradoxically both for our powerlessness in the face of fate and for the power of children's resistance in an elementary or childish way. The toy is like a fetish object into which we stick our pins in order to magically affect some distant person for whom it stands. Perhaps toys in general are a metaphoric fetish against impotence' (1986, 219).

The multifaceted lamb image, or as the director puts it, 'la figura de un corderito que tiene toda la ternura y la belleza idílica en el recuerdo infantil y que, por otro lado, es la clave en torno a la cual se va a enredar y a redondear la trama' ('the figure of a little lamb which has all the tenderness and idyllic beauty of childhood memory and which, on the other hand, is the key around which the plot is woven and around which it circles') (Cedrón and Revista Zoom 2008), also comes to represent this film's approach to memory, since in the revision that Guillermina must make of her understanding of her childhood toy are condensed the other revisions, the constant interplay between memories of the past and newly acquired information or the versions of others which require us to revise our own. Like the structure of *Cordero de Dios*, which allows for the second generation survivor—Guillermina—to claim some agency over the past and to define its meaning alongside the older generations—a project with which the film itself is ultimately concerned—the little girl's naming of the lamb suggests the possibility of her wresting control of the narrative from the hands of older generations as well as perpetrators. If, as discussed earlier, toys and play tend to function in films of this type as means by which child protagonists come to understand their historical situation or to exercise some form of agency over it, then the image of the soft cuddly toy is an especially apt titular image.

As this chapter has shown, the figure of the child has an important place in the post-dictatorship filmmaking of the Southern Cone,

affording films and filmmakers a number of narrative and symbolic possibilities which adult characters do not. The figure of the child of parents abducted or murdered by dictatorial regimes in the Southern Cone has assumed a central position, as second generation survivors of these regimes have reached maturity, and as their concerns and identities have become central to the public discourse on memory. In such films as *Kamchatka*, *Infancia clandestina*, *Cordero de Dios* and *O Ano*, the child's pain at losing parents becomes a crucial way of expressing society's wider loss, whilst the child functions, for many, as a more obvious identification figure than a politically motivated or militant adult and can thus be used to ensure a wider appeal. As seen in Chapter 3, then, the child can become a means of circumventing a difficult political context. Children can act as perfect victims and innocents, which allow complex historical realities to be communicated or understood in less complex ways, as means of universalising pain and suffering, of sensitising the spectator to violence and repression. To evoke the child's world, filmmakers often include images of play, games and toys, but the insistence on these in post-dictatorship filmmaking must also be due to the opportunities they offer for the imaging of domination and resistance, thus allowing for the symbolic imaging of the context of repression whilst staying faithful to the child's viewpoint. Child characters also offer—to a greater or lesser extent in these films—the possibility of a 'double voice', the combination of childhood experience and limited understanding with the hindsight of the adult. In *Cordero de Dios*, this function of the child in post-dictatorship filmmaking is made more explicit, and the 'double voice' is figured more overtly since the narrative oscillates between the viewpoint of the child Guillermina and her adult counterpart, allowing for a more sustained reflection on memory's mediation.

NOTES

1. The periods of dictatorship were as follows: Argentina (1976–82), Brazil (1964–1985), Chile (1973–1990) and Uruguay (1973–1985). The repression was coordinated across the Southern Cone countries via Operación Condor.
2. Although the film is not autobiographical, Bustamante discusses as his motivation for making this film his realisation as an adult of what was happening around him during his childhood under military rule (Breckenridge 2011).

3. Another film of note in which children and the Chilean dictatorship are linked in a different way is the documentary *Cien niños esperando un tren* (Agüero, 1988) which is analysed in an excellent essay by Sarah Wright (2017).
4. In a classic article, 'The Children of Franco in the New Spanish Cinema' (1983), Marsha Kinder argues that directors, who, like Víctor Erice, had been children under the Franco regime saw themselves as 'emotionally and politically stunted children' (58), infantilised by the regime, and projected this emasculation through their (female) child protagonists.
5. For more details on these practices, as well as on the subsequent efforts to identify those children illegally separated from their biological families by the military regime in Argentina, see Maffla (2007).
6. This is dealt with in Chapter 2 and is a feature of the films *En el país de los pies ligeros*, *Viva Cuba* (which features a boy-girl pair) and *Habanastation*.
7. See also Randall (2017), for a further comparison of *Machuca* and *O Ano* (2017, 35–66).
8. On the symbolism of the game and play in *Andrés...* see Breckenridge (2012).
9. For excellent discussions of *Las malas intenciones*, see Thomas (2014) and Barrow (2017, 55–62).
10. Jordana Blejmar makes this point in relation to another of Carri's films, *Barbie también puede estar triste* (2002). She writes that 'subversive play and guerrilla toy films make it possible to discuss apparently unrepresentable, 'sacred' or taboo subjects, such as sexual violence, xenophobia and forced disappearance, in ways that more realist or documentary accounts cannot' (2017, 228).
11. See Nouzeilles (2005).
12. For more information on the life and death of Jorge Cedrón, see Fernando Peña's *El cine quema. Jorge Cedrón* (2003).
13. Dufays makes a similar point (2014a, 163–64).

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- Postales de Leningrado.* 2007. Dir. Mariana Rondón. Venezuela: Sudaca Films.
- Princesas rojas.* 2013. Dir. Laura Astorga. Venezuela, Costa Rica: Hol y Asociados, La Feria Producciones.



Unruly Bodies: *La rabia* and *El último verano de la boyita*

In the 2000s and 2010s, global arts cinema has seen a cluster of films which question gender and sexual ideologies through the non-conforming child-figure, and Latin American cinema has been no exception to this trend, with important examples emerging in countries such as Venezuela and, especially, in Argentina. This chapter examines the theme of ‘unruly child bodies’ in recent Latin American cinema, arguing that since the mid-2000s, such representations have made of the child-figure a significant means by which Latin American cinema communicates feminist and queer political thought. This recent development can be linked to the changing production and funding landscape, as well as to the changing political and legal contexts of Latin American countries. This chapter starts with a brief survey of films with related themes, before moving on to examine in depth two Argentine films from the late 2000s, Albertina Carri’s *La rabia* (2008) and Julia Solomonoff’s *El último verano de la boyita* (2009) in which the child is linked to the animal as a way of imaging corporeal, sexual and gender non-conformity.

The films analysed in this chapter are all made by women directors, and many of them feature transgressive young female characters. There is a tradition in Latin American film by both male and female directors of using transgressive young women to effect a challenge to the gendered and the sexual status quo, as can be seen in films including *La Raulito* (Murúa, Argentina, 1975), films by the Argentine feminist filmmaker María Luisa Bemberg and the Grupo Chaski’s *Juliana* (Espinosa and Legaspi, Peru, 1989). In both *La Raulito* and *Juliana*, the young female

protagonists dress as boys in order to better negotiate, or survive in, situations of urban poverty.¹ The focus of this book is more properly on childhood, so this chapter will leave aside representations of adolescents, to explore ways in which younger, pre-adolescent children are linked in recent Latin American film to the challenging of gender and sexual ideologies. As well as the aforementioned Argentine films, these include the Venezuelan *Pelo malo* (2013) made by director–producer team Mariana Rondón and Marité Ugas. Rondón and Ugás have worked together on several films with child protagonists, either co-directing, as in the case of *A la media noche y media* (1999), or interchanging director and producer roles, as in *Postales de Leningrado* (Rondón 2007) and *El chico que miente* (Ugas 2010).² As Delgado notes, all these films show ‘children expected to adhere to rigid, outdated gender tropes’ (2017, 488), however, it is in *Pelo malo* that these themes are brought to the fore, with the story of Junior (Samuel Lange Zambrano), a pre-adolescent boy living on an underprivileged Caracas estate, who is desperate to straighten his mop of curly hair and to dress as a singer for his school photo. Junior is different from the other boys, he sings and sways to music whilst they breakdance, and shots suggest his desiring gaze on an older boy in his housing estate. All this enrages his mother, who fears he is gay, and finally forces him to shave his head, yet she is also, in her own way, challenging gender norms through her desire to work in a male-dominated job (security guard). Junior’s desire for straight hair is a transgression of the macho gender norms especially strongly upheld in this socio-economic context, yet it also bespeaks the desirability of white or Hispanic over Afro-Venezuelan phenotypes. As Subero notes (forthcoming, 290), unlike films such as *Ma vie en rose* (Berliner 1997) or *Tomboy* (Sciamma 2011), *Pelo malo* does not suggest that Junior wants to be a girl or even that he feels trapped in his body. Rather, it shows the repression exerted by his social and familial environment in a more subtle way, in the sense that it is the more ambiguous desires, such as the desire to straighten his hair, and a certain glamour and way-of-being-in-the-world that this implies, which generate conflict. The film also explores the possibilities offered by play and imagination to children attempting to negotiate ‘difficult predicaments’ and as ‘strateg[ies] for survival’ (Delgado 2017, 487).

Like *El último verano de la boyita*, discussed at length later in this chapter, *Pelo malo* forms part of a significant current in global arts cinema of recent years which portrays queer and/or sexually

non-conforming childhoods. Other examples include Pedro Almodóvar's *La mala educación* (2004) and the films by France's Céline Sciamma, *Water Lilies* (2007), and the above-mentioned *Tomboy* (2011). In turn, these draw on earlier examples such as *Ma vie en rose*. Works like *Pelo malo* and *El último verano* can also be linked to a wider group of recent films which explore gender and sexual non-conformity in adolescents (especially girls), including the films of Lucía Puenzo and those of Lucrecia Martel. In her book *Children on the Threshold in Contemporary Latin American Cinema*, Rachel Randall proposes that Latin American cinema has had in recent years an increasing tendency to depict girls, a trend which she links to haptic and non-visual modes of representation (2017, xli–xlii). I have written elsewhere of the adolescent female protagonist in recent Latin American film through whose defiant gaze a challenge to regimes of gender and sexuality is expressed and whose presence may be attributable to the current transnational funding landscape (Martin 2016). As Deborah Shaw (2013) claims as part of her analysis of Martel's *La niña santa* (2004) and Puenzo's *XXY* (2007), such protagonists act as vehicles for a progressive politics of gender and sexuality which may be favoured by the social or festival-linked European funding bodies which are now involved in many Latin American co-productions, including films like *Pelo malo*, *El último verano* and *La rabia* as well as films by Martel and Puenzo. Whilst *Pelo malo*'s setting—urban Venezuela—is very different to that of the (predominantly Argentine, often rural) films which make up the majority of this corpus, its funding and production lineage is not.³

Rocha and Seminet link the prominence of the child in recent Latin American film to the growing number of women filmmakers (2012, 13),⁴ many of whom privilege the child's disruptive tendencies and challenge cultural norms. These films by women filmmakers all take a similar approach to the political, locating it in the personal, the familial and the corporeal realm, considering the lives of children, along with marginal sexualities, desires and transgressions. Women and children have historically occupied marginal and subordinate positions in relation to dominant patriarchal culture, whilst in literary and filmic expression women have frequently focused on the child for the exploration and subversion of the power relations of domestic and family life, as a means of subverting the wider culture. Sexuality has functioned historically as a crucial site for the control of women as well as of children, and both groups have had their sexuality alternately denied and mystified within patriarchal

culture. As such, women artists including the makers of films analysed in this chapter have focused on dispelling myths of childhood innocence or asexuality. Works such as *El último verano de la boyita* and *La rabia*, which I will now go on to explore, focus their critique of gendered and sexual ideologies through a child's defamiliarising gaze, attempting the filmic representation of a child's reality and pairing the sexually and socially transgressive child with filmic aesthetics which transgress the conventions of hegemonic cinema. In *El último verano* and *La rabia*, which are both rural narratives, the motif of the unruly child body, which has affinities with the animal or engages in animal becomings, comes to be a site for the staging of feminist and queer politics. The child's becoming-animal as a figure of transgression of the socio-sexual counters conventional and conservative identifications between childhood and the rural.

DISRUPTIONS TO HEGEMONIC VISUALITY AND ANIMAL BECOMINGS: *LA RABIA* AND *EL ÚLTIMO VERANO DE LA BOYITA*

Romanticised conceptions of childhood are strongly bound up in modern culture with romanticised versions of the rural and the natural world. Childhood innocence, specialness and purity require, in the cultural imaginary, 'a special, pure and natural place to be in – the countryside' (Jones 2007, 178). This Romantic alignment of childhood innocence with the natural world positions the child as antidote to anxieties about modernity, degeneracy, sexuality and materialism. As discussed previously, the child's place in the cultural imaginary, and in particular the idea of childhood innocence, is the product of adult desire (Rose 1984, xii), a type of investment by the adult in the idea of the child which 'fixes the child and then holds it in place' (3–4). These ideas have found particular expression in film, which, according to the work of Owain Jones (2007) and Phil Powrie (2005), tends to romanticise the rural child, looking nostalgically 'backwards' at both childhood and rurality as innocent and authentic, as 'states of nature'. The post-Enlightenment idea of the child as innocent and pure has endured despite the influence of Freudian theories of child sexuality and has been widely critiqued as an adult construction intended to produce normative, Oedipal sexuality, and to suppress sexual dissidence (Rose 1984; Bond Stockton 2009; Pérez 2012). Kathryn Bond Stockton, in her book on the queer child in

literature and film, suggests that the innocent or normative child which has been ‘made famous by landmark studies of childhood and by the Romantic poets’ is the only kind of child which ‘seems safe to us and whom we therefore seek to safeguard at all costs’ (2009, 30).

Recent filmmaking in Argentina has sought to destabilise romanticised conceptions of childhood innocence through the appropriation and critical resignification of conventional imaginaries of childhood rurality. Performatively citing classical representations of the country-child *topos*, Carri’s *La rabia* and Solomonoff’s *El último verano de la boyita* resignify the rural locale and the natural world, through child-figures who challenge gender and sexual codes including those of innocence. These filmic challenges emerged at a moment in Argentine history—the late 2000s—during which both urban–rural relations and gender and sexual discourses were undergoing profound upheaval. In 2008, the rural right’s opposition to the leftist government’s progressive taxation plans led to protests and food shortages as farmers cut off supplies of soy, grain and beef and propelled rural groups and debates about the countryside to the centre of Argentine politics and media discourses.⁵ The films discussed in this chapter critique the romanticising portrayals of the countryside which were surfacing in media reports at this time and which in Argentina’s political and cinematic traditions have long been opposed to the degenerate space of urban modernity.⁶ During the same period, transformations of the public discourse around gender and sexuality led, in 2010, to Argentina becoming the first Latin American country to legalise same-sex marriage and later to the passing of a comprehensive transgender rights bill.⁷ These films draw on cinematic tropes associated with rural childhood—such as the child’s reverie or daydreaming, or its affinity with animals—performing them in ways which work against normative constructions of childhood, and offering lines of escape from gendered and sexual teleologies. Filmic experiments with form also offer lines of escape—here not only from dominant constructions of childhood, but also from the constraints of the narrative fiction film and its ocularcentrism, through a privileging of the immersive, the haptic and the tactile, which calls into question the boundary between viewer and image, bringing the viewer into embodied contact with the childish world these films seek to evoke.

Albertina Carri’s films subvert dominant constructions of the rural in Argentine cinematic and political discourses, undermining the place of these in the national imaginary (López Riera 2009, 163–170). This

chapter proposes that Carri's use of a child protagonist in *La rabia*, which explores questions of sexuality, violence and death, through the eyes of Nati (Nazarena Duarte), a mute child with 'ciertos rasgos autistas' ('certain traits of autism') (Carri, in Pinto Veas 2009), is not incidental to this project. Nati lives with mother, Alejandra (Analía Couceyro), and father, Poldo (V́ctor Hugo Carrizo), *campesinos* in La Rabia, an isolated rural area of the province of Buenos Aires (Kairuz 2008, 12).⁸ Their land borders that of Pichón (Javier Lorenzo), another farmer, with whom Alejandra is having an affair, and who has a son a little older than Nati, Ladeado (Gonzalo Pérez). In contrast to Argentine portrayals of the countryside which romanticise *campesino* culture as noble and community-oriented, Carri's vision draws upon John Berger's notion of the peasantry as 'survivors' of capitalism and modernity (Carri, in Kairuz 2008, 12). The brutal world depicted is one in which there is little solidarity or joy and in which violence is naturalised. Ladeado drowns some weasels in an early scene and later has to watch his dog being shot. The children see Pichón and Alejandra's sadomasochistic sexual encounters and witness or experience domestic violence. This atmosphere is somatised by the two children; Ladeado is lame, whilst Nati's silence is punctuated by bouts of uncontrollable screaming, and by removing her clothes in public, all tendencies which provoke anxiety and shame in her parents. The sexual rivalry of their fathers is played out through the children and prohibitions on their playing together or crossing onto the neighbouring land. The film ends when Poldo discovers drawings by Nati of a sexually aroused Pichón. Perhaps assuming that Nati has been sexually abused by Pichón, Poldo drives to his house, probably to kill him, but instead is murdered by either Pichón or possibly Ladeado (this is left unclear), who later kills his father. Violence is a central concern of the film, and the child's gaze on violence—most strikingly encapsulated by the image of Nati in close-up, watching from a hidden vantage point, as Ladeado is beaten by his father for playing with 'la muda' ('the mute child')—emerges as a crucial image.

The film favours the heightened, expressive use of sound over dialogue and incorporates extended animation sequences, suggesting the visual rather than verbal nature of Nati's inner world. It also has strong echoes of the fairy tale and of traditional filmic figurings of rural childhood. At times whimsical, even magical, its fairytale aesthetics and settings contrast strikingly with matter-of-fact sequences of sex and animal slaughter, more documentary in tone. A timeless, mythical quality is

suggested by the opening shots of Nati in a red velvet pinafore as she gambols through tall grass, bathed in the soft pink light of the early morning, suggesting the kind of ‘fantasised pastness’ often found in the child film (Powrie 2005, 348). The film ‘[registra] como se ve el campo desde la ciudad, para luego desarmar esa visión’ (‘registers an urban vision of the countryside, and then proceeds to dismantle that vision’) (Kairuz 2008, 12), an operation to which the child’s perspective is crucial, as the brutality of her environment is filtered through Nati’s impassive gaze and as we are confronted with her own desires, voyeurism and violence.

Traditional filmic representations of rural childhood privilege such ‘romanticised, self indulgent scenes of carefree play’ (Nicholson cit. in Jones 2007, 182), which in turn recall Gaston Bachelard’s notion of childhood ‘reverie’ or daydreaming. Such reverie is idle, unproductive time of inattention or ‘psychic *détente*’ (Bachelard 1969, 5), associated with freedom, nature and spatial metaphors of wandering and rural-ity, so that it also functions to naturalise the topos in question, that of childhood innocence and rural idyll. *La rabia* evokes reverie through its images of idle outdoor play and through the animated sequences which suggest Nati’s inner world, wordless landscapes which move between the figurative and the abstract, incorporating both natural and social environments, fantasy and reality. Nati’s reverie, though, is associated with none of the simple purity of Bachelard’s vision, as her gaze becomes associated with voyeurism and violence, whilst the animated sequences are threatening and disturbing. Nati’s figurative drawings, which depict the frightening stories told by her father or the sexual acts in which she sees her mother engaged, are violent and pornographic.⁹ For Carri, Nati’s drawings ‘va[n] en contra de esa idea de los niños como reservorio de la ingenuidad’ (‘contradict the idea of children as repositories of innocence’) (cit. in Kairuz 2008, 13). Nati’s silence, moreover, evokes none of the ‘innocence’ which a Rousseauvian account might associate with the pre-verbal. Instead, Nati emerges as a disquietingly sexual child, whose mute expressionlessness—she sees everything, but reveals little—makes her, like Henry James’s children, uncanny and unknowable. As Carri observes, the real mystery of the film is Nati’s imaginary (in Kairuz 2008, 13). Nati’s habits of removing pretty dresses and urinating in public, and her desire to play with fire, and clean guns, also function to undermine ideas of childhood simplicity, innocence or purity, as well as positioning Nati as a site of gendered coercion and transgression, as

her parents attempt to repress these behaviours, usually invoking ideas about what ‘las nenas’ (‘little girls’) should do or be.

El último verano de la boyita shares with *La rabia* an emphasis on unruly child bodies, on children who do not grow up or develop in expected ways. The film was produced by the Almodóvar brothers’ El Deseo Producciones, which also produced Almodóvar’s own *La mala educación* and Lucrecia Martel’s *La niña santa* and *La mujer sin cabeza*, all of which feature themes of childhood or adolescent queer or same-sex desire. *El último verano* revolves around a young character, Mario (Nicolás Treise), supposed to be male at birth due to a large clitoris and a high level of male hormones, but who is genetically female.¹⁰ Mario lives as a boy, the child of a rural working couple in a traditional German community in the Argentine province of Entre Ríos. The film is told, though, through the perspective of a younger child, Jorgelina (Guadalupe Alonso), the urban, middle-class daughter of the farm’s owner Eduardo, a doctor (Gabo Correa).¹¹ The film tells the story of what happens one summer, when Jorgelina, who has acquired some knowledge about puberty from an older sister, holidays at the farm with her father. Reunited with her playmate Mario, she begins to question his refusal to go in the water, or remove his shirt, even in the most intense heat. Mario, without fully understanding it himself, is going through female puberty. He does not know exactly what is different about his body, but he does know that he must keep his developing breasts hidden all costs. His parents, in denial themselves, nevertheless manage to maintain a strict imperative to silence. The traditional rural community, however, knows something is amiss, and his male peers casually bully Mario, especially resentful, perhaps, of his equestrian prowess and hence his claim on the community’s gold standard of masculinity. But Mario’s difference is an open secret or perhaps simply a suspicion: it remains unspoken. It is the arrival of the younger child that disrupts this reign of denial, signalled by the flock of sitting birds startled into take-off when Jorgelina and her father first approach the estate in their car, presaging the city-dwellers’ disturbance of the conditions for Mario’s gender stability: silence, privacy, the constraints of work and a lack of state interference in rural life.¹² Eventually, unable to fathom Mario’s menstrual bleeding, Jorgelina goes against his wishes and tells her father, an act which leads to Mario being beaten up by his father as a punishment for disclosure. The film follows Jorgelina’s gaze on Mario, both her fascination with the bodily details that don’t add up, as well as her admiring

gaze on him as he works and rides horses. In *El último verano*, idealised images of the child's affinity with the natural world, and the Romantic faith in the insightfulness of childhood perception,¹³ are re-channelled towards queer political ends.

Both *El último verano* and *La rabia* focus on 'abnormal' children who are aligned, within the symbolic universe of the film, with the animal, and both image bodily domination, discipline and resistance through the animal. In *El último verano*, the image of breaking in a horse is poignantly linked to the bodily domination of Mario and to the various types of violence (verbal bullying from his peers, physical violence from his father) which he endures as a result of his difference. In *La rabia*, Nati's non-verbal state functions to align her with the animal, and the film establishes a relationship between her coerced, manipulated and transgressive body, and that of a pig, the slaughter of which is a significant event in the film. For Deleuze and Guattari, the politics of becoming-animal are associated with oppressed or minoritarian groups in revolt, especially children—whom Deleuze considers 'political prisoners' (Deleuze 1995, 41). For them, the act of becoming-animal 'undermines the great molar powers of family, career and conjugality' (2004, 257) and is a response to oppression. Deleuze and Guattari maintain that 'all children build or feel these sorts of escapes, these acts of becoming-animal', because children inhabit a 'zone of indetermination or uncertainty' (2004, 301) in which there is room for other becomings, or 'unnatural nuptials' outside 'the programmed body' (2004, 301–2). They continue 'all children [...] do it to a greater or lesser degree, and in doing so bear witness to an inhuman connivance with the animal, rather than an Oedipal symbolic community' (2004, 302). Through their becomings-animal, the children in these films resist or escape the regulation of bodies and desires which characterises their environments.

La rabia foregrounds bodily programming through the image of Nati's body being pulled and pushed about, mostly in attempts to dress her or stop her screaming. Her muteness and bodily unresponsiveness suggest an unwillingness to take up a (gendered) subject position, to respond to the gendered chiding of her parents, and a general lack of cooperation in the business of fulfilling normative models of development. One of the most striking sequences in *La rabia* shows the slaughter of a pig. The sequence is documentary in style and does not shy away from showing the most graphic aspects of its subject matter. As the throat is slit, the blood collected, the pig shaved and eviscerated,

Nati watches, transfixed and expressionless. As the dead pig hangs from a rail and its inner carcass is washed, Nati watches, emitting short screams as water hits the animal's flesh (Fig. 6.1), creating a corporeal link with the animal, a becoming-pig of Nati, with echoes of the fairy tale and its themes of shape-shifting and animal metamorphosis.¹⁴ For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming-animal is not a question of resemblance or identification, rather it is one of alliance, and of movement. Shortly after this sequence, after a particularly wild bout of screaming, Nati's mother comments that 'grita como un chancho' ('she screams like a pig') and removes her from the sight and earshot of the neighbours, suggesting the undermining of the order of family and community threatened by this pig-like screaming; this idea is reinforced later, when Nati's father wakes in the night to the sound of wolves attacking his sheep and goes out into the darkness with his gun. He takes aim at a shape barely visible in the moonlight, only to realise at the last minute that it is a naked Nati; there are no wolves to be seen.

If Nati's becoming-animal suggests a revolt against her programming and the family order, her filmic presentation presents a challenge to conventional cinematic codes of child-representation. Echoing Rose's contention that representations of children are merely 'a portion of adult desire' (1984, xii), André Bazin proposed that the classical cinematic



Fig. 6.1 Nati looks on as the pig's body is washed in *La rabia*

figuring of children is a comforting one in which adults can recognise themselves, in which they use child-figures to explore themselves, a process he terms ‘anthropomorphism’ (Bazin 1997, 121), and which I discuss at greater length in Chapter 1 (1). To follow the Bazinian metaphor, by aligning Nati with the animal, that is, by refusing to ‘anthropomorphise’ her, *La rabia* resists the colonisation of the child that Bazin critiques in classical representations. Through the images of Nati’s body being pushed and pulled around, *La rabia* stages not only the Deleuze–Guattarian ‘programming’ of the body but also the cinematic manipulation of the child-image which Bazin proposes. Nati seems to refuse to ‘perform’ for the camera in the usual way. Bazin’s discussion draws particular attention to the *faces* of children and their capacity to reassure the adult spectator through identification and readability. *La rabia* dwells insistently on the image of Nati’s face, with lingering close-ups of her face and eyes as she watches acts of sex and violence, but her gaze is difficult to read, blank or impassive. She watches in rapt attention from a hidden position, as Ladeado is violently beaten by his father (Fig. 6.2). The close attention to her voyeuristic gaze invites speculation on her inner world, yet there is little clue as to what she is feeling. For Bazin, ‘the fact is, simply, that the signs of play and the signs of death



Fig. 6.2 It is difficult to read Nati’s voyeuristic gaze as she watches her friend being beaten in *La rabia*

may be the same on a child's face' (1997, 124). We don't know whether Nati apprehends the beating of Ladeado as play, with pleasure or with guilt (he is being punished for playing with her), with empathy or horror for his suffering, or all, or none of these. For the spectator, though, the visual pleasure and unique power of affect elicited by the child's face, contrast strikingly with the sounds of pain we hear as Ladeado cries out with each blow. Nati's face explicitly does not give reassurance by reflecting the adult spectator's emotions, but instead provokes an uneasy mixture of pleasure and unpleasure.

In *El último verano*, the image of becoming-animal also plays a role in the resisting of bodily disciplining and programming and, in this case, in the imaging of the child's *queer* resistance. In dialogue with the Deleuze and Guattarian notion of affective child-animal associations, of the animal's particular capacity to 'move' the child (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 284), Bond Stockton suggests that the child's relationship to the animal may be a way of fashioning a crucial delay or pause in normative patterns of development. Tomboys are frequently associated with animals, especially horses and dogs (Creed 1995, 99), and in Bond Stockton's analysis, these attachments are understood as ways of the lesbian child 'metaphorically and materially fashion[ing] a pause: [...] a crucial delay in expectations being placed upon themselves ([and crafting] sidelong movements of their own) on the threshold of adulthood' (2009, 5). In *El último verano*, Jorgelina finds comfort in her dog at the moment her sister calls her a 'varonera' ('tomboy'); in the case of Mario, the horse connection is explored much more extensively. Mario lives and works with horses and is agreed by everyone to be an exemplary rider. His preparation for the contest in which he will prove his masculinity through a display of horsemanship spans the narrative. In his spare time, he whittles horses' heads. The action of doing so poignantly evokes his contained anger at his treatment by his father (the containment of his corporeality which starts at the skin level of strapping down breasts but which goes far deeper) and suggests that even in his rare idle moments his imagination is equine.

In gaucho tradition, the loss of the ability to dominate the natural world was equated with feminisation and even death (Viveros Vigoya 1997, 61). Horses ridden by women were believed to become lame, whilst men refused to ride mares. The hypermasculine relationship of male rider to stallion was elevated above any relationship with women, itself richly suggestive of the queer.¹⁵ Whilst today's rural Argentina

cannot be simplistically equated with nineteenth-century gaucho culture, these codes still influence modern rural masculinities. Mario's beating results in him running away from the farm, after his displeased father sells Mario's horse, el Yayo, to one of the bullies, Claudio (Claudio Quinteros), also a competitor in the upcoming race. The day of the race arrives, and just as it is commencing, and Claudio is about to mount el Yayo, we see Mario advancing across the fields to reclaim his horse. He goes on to win the race, providing a dramatic and triumphant finale for the film. Mario, however, doesn't stop riding, and as a loudspeaker invites him up to the podium to have his photo taken, the camera follows him as he rides away into the distance.

Given his gender and sexual ambiguity, the fact that Mario wins the race, performing the ritual dedicated to the maintenance of strict gender division in exemplary fashion, clearly queers the ritual, especially as the diegetic spectators either know about or suspect his difference. Mario both partakes in and destabilises the masculine norm. Both his closeness to horses and his equestrian prowess have the effect of subversively re-citing national rituals of masculinity, constituting performances of gender which are resistant in their disconnection of the ritual from the sexed body. And Mario *keeps on riding*. He doesn't return to be photographed and to assume his place in the symbolic gendered community which the race is intended to maintain. Rather, his flight suggests a rejection of this and of the race itself. In Bond Stockton's analysis, the animal figures as an 'ally in schemes of resistance' (Bond Stockton 2009, 97), a way of moving sideways, when the child cannot acceptably grow up. Mario's becoming-animal is an example of 'the assemblages a child can mount in order to solve a problem from which all exits are barred him' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 286). In Mario, a Butlerian resistance—the subversively disloyal repetition of national gender codes—is imagined within the context of a Deleuze–Guattarian 'becoming'; a classical queer politics thus works alongside the establishment of liberatory bodily relations and intensities beyond the human. The repetition which introduces a difference puts into practice new ways of relating to and moving in the world. The becoming-horse of Mario is 'the body [...] which can occupy the norm in myriad ways, exceed the norm, rework the norm, and expose realities to which we thought we were confined as open to transformation' (Butler 2004, 217).

The connection between Mario and the horse has an important cinematic precedent in Argentine director María Luisa Bemberg's 1993

film *De eso no se habla*, in which the protagonist, Charlotte (Alejandra Podesta), is a dwarf who we follow from childhood into young adulthood, and whose mother (Luisina Brando) tries to subjugate, closet and repress her bodily difference. As David William Foster has convincingly argued, *De eso* can be read as a queer text and Charlotte's non-conforming body and her mother's attitude to it as metaphors for difference and its repression at a number of levels, including the sexual, the ethnic and the cultural. Charlotte's love affair with an older (and physically much larger) man, Ludovico (Marcello Mastroianni), comes to stand for other forms of sexual dissidence, and her oppression is aligned with that of her mother's servant, the ethnic and cultural outsider Mojamé (Walter Marín), who is revealed at the film's end to have been its narrator, the voice of whom is provided by the gay actor Alfredo Alcón (Foster 2003, 17–18). In *De eso no se habla*, Charlotte's attitude to her mother's repressive stance is one of progressive attempts at liberation. When her mother buys her a horse, a gift intended to allow her to perfect the pastimes of a proper young lady, Charlotte's relationship with the animal and the uses to which she puts it recalls the narrative of *El último verano*. As Charlotte rides her horse around and around the inside of the barn where she has been instructed by her mother to practice in private—to conceal her bodily difference from the world—the film language, which uses sensual slow motion, music and blue lighting, signals this as a transformative and liberatory moment, and it is here that Charlotte's small body astride the enormous horse captivates the attentions of Ludovico. Later, as in *El último verano*, the horse acts as a means of attaining freedom, as she uses it to visit the circus, which she will eventually become a part of. When she finally leaves her repressive small town and her mother's control, she does so on horseback. *De eso* quite strikingly, then, also features the image of the 'queer child' whose body does not conform, and who leaves the repressive community astride a horse who has become a signifier of bodily and of gender freedoms.

Both *La rabia* and *El último verano* also experiment with film form in ways which attempt to create a child's sensory, perceptual or embodied experience. These aesthetic moves pose a further challenge to the visual domestication of the child. Echoing Bazin, Karen Lury has drawn attention to how the child in film has traditionally stood in 'for something else: the ideology of the family and society at large' (Lury 2010, 286). In such cases, 'The child, the actual body, agency and living-ness [...] disappears and instead the child figure, the child as convenient symbol takes

his or her place' (2010, 286). By contrast, the films I am discussing here, through an invitation to tactile or embodied forms of spectatorship and in the case of *La rabia* through the use of animation, evoke immersive childhood relations to the world, bringing about the 'becoming-child' of the spectator, as they throw into doubt the sense of separation between spectator and image.

Film theory and criticism have been especially concerned recently with the question of how film evokes childhood experience.¹⁶ The Deleuzian time-image, 'a pure optical-sound image, the whole image without metaphor, [which] brings out the thing in itself, literally, in its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or unjustifiable character' (Deleuze 2005, 20), is particularly associated with the child's gaze (1989, 3). The slowing of time and slackening of action in *La rabia* and *El último verano*, the pure optical and sound situations they present, evoke childhood temporality and reverie and open up the image to investment by the senses and the body. In recent Argentine cinema, a small wave of such films has been precipitated in recent years by the tactile, immersive work of Lucrecia Martel, which also associates epistemologies of touch, sound and smell with child characters. Laura Marks' discussion of the haptic—images which decentre the visual and privilege touch (2000, 2002)—can be a useful category for the aesthetics of film which attempts to evoke the child's sensory experience, vulnerability and lack of visual mastery (Wilson 2005, 335). In turn, these kinds of immersive and tactile aesthetics are understood by theorists such as Marks and Vivian Sobchack (2004) to appeal to the spectator's embodied memories and thus to subvert the distinction between what is onscreen and off, between a rational, disembodied viewing subjectivity and its viewed object. The child's sensorium and its translation into cinematic language are issues central to the work of Martel, who thinks of her camera as a child of 10 or 11 and who values this perspective for its curiosity and lack of judgement (Martin 2011). In her film *La ciénaga*, released in 2001, themes of the child's becoming-animal are paired with an approximation of the child's sensorium in a way that is strongly echoed in *El último verano* and *La rabia*. In *La ciénaga*, the viewpoint is loosely associated with two children. Momi (Sofía Bertolotto) is verging on adolescence and feels passionately about the family's indigenous maid Isabel; hers is an example of the young girl's defiant gaze which challenges gender and sexual regimes which I suggested earlier has come to characterise recent Latin American cinema. The other child is Luchi (Sebastián Montagna), a

boy of perhaps five years old, whose relationship with reality and with the animal is shown to be strongly mimetic: he tries to submerge himself in a swamp in imitation of a cow, and he becomes obsessed with the mythical subject of a story told by the older children, a many-toothed *perro-rata*. Convinced that he is growing extra teeth, he seems to think he is turning into the *perro-rata*, and the animal comes to dominate his mind, eventually leading to his death. Luchi's tendency to take on the shape of his discursive and material surroundings is echoed by his physical pressing up against reality, as in shots where his little hands press against the inside of car windows (Fig. 6.3). He exhibits a wonderingly open relationship to otherness and to the world which *La ciénaga* itself attempts to reflect through its own highly tactile language, evoking the 'aberrant forms of life and consciousness' associated with 'children and madmen' (Merleau-Ponty 2004, 56), and which are repressed in conventional cinema. As I argue elsewhere (Martin 2017), Martel's work led to a series of later films by Argentine women filmmakers in which unconventional and transgressive portrayals of childhood, gender and sexuality are figured through tactile and haptic aesthetic modes, in which narrative otherness is inscribed aesthetically through the tactile, the immersive and the embodied, and through experimentation with sound. These include



Fig. 6.3 A tactile and mimetic visuality: Luchi presses his hands up against the inside of a car window in *La ciénaga*

La rabia and *El último verano*, but also Carri's previous film *Geminis* (2005), and Puenzo's *XXY* (2007) and *El niño pez* (2009). Films like *La rabia* and *El último verano* also show how such sexual and sensorial explorations are not, as Randall has claimed 'reserved for bourgeois girls who [...] enjoy [...] material comfort' (2017, xxvii).

La rabia, for example, creates a particular impression of materiality and embodiment through tactile and haptic images—for example in the close-ups of the dead pig's hairy body being washed—but also through the use of sound. Dialogue is limited in this film, and largely to adults, but the soundscape is rich and strange with atmospheric sound, usually backgrounded in film, and here amplified to non-naturalistic, expressive and hyperreal levels. Pure sound-images of the natural world—the acousmatic rustling of leaves and the sound of wind in trees, as well as snarling and other animal noises, create a sense of menace as well as an immersive relationship to the environment not solely predicated on the visual. Human breathing (well known for its role in horror) and bodily noises can often be heard, especially when the camera is on the children. Audible breathing creates a 'haptic' effect: it immerses us, giving a sense of proximity or embodiment, creating a corporeal relationship between the viewer-listener and the film, which brings the spectator into physical contact with the child protagonist.

This strange, haptic and acousmatic sound—that is, sound which we don't know the source of—is particularly prominent in *La rabia*'s animation sequences. This use of sound is highly reminiscent of Martel's complex, immersive soundscapes. Martel, speaking of her approach to sound in *La ciénaga*, points to sound as the most intimate, immersive and tactile element of filmmaking and one which she utilised as a means of evoking a child's perceptual world (Monteagudo 2002, 74). These sequences of *La rabia* create a strange sonic landscape full of human and animal bodily sounds, including orgasmic moaning, heavy human breathing, snarling animals, unidentified squelching and rumbling, and Nati's own screaming. They also function to interrupt the diegesis, taking the film to a non-narrative space which is both a depiction of Nati's inner world—her daydreams or reverie, the processing of the events she witnesses, but which also moves between figuration and the abstract, and thus beyond representation, into texture and sound. For Carri, these sequences were an opportunity to 'liberar zonas, crear agujeros negros dentro de la historia' ('liberate zones, create black holes within the narrative') (Carri, in Kairuz 2008, 13), a way of representing the

unrepresentable: emotion, reverie, imagination. These sequences, then, offer an escape from the constraints of narrative fiction film, and they also function to decentre action and the visual, to privilege haptic sounds such as crackling and crunching which evoke texture and touch, unsettling hegemonic viewing practices and immersing the spectator bodily in the child's experience, thus undermining the position of the rational viewing subject upheld by classical cinematic codes.

These animation sequences also foreground the spatial processes which are an important means of evoking the child's world in *La rabia*. Films with young child protagonists often revolve around thresholds, as they narrativise the negotiations of inner and outer realities, of me and not-me, in which young children are engaged (Kuhn 2008, 69–70; Powrie 2005, 348). In both *La rabia* and *El último verano*, the geography of childhood, the crossing and re-crossing of boundaries between home and not-home, safety and danger, is striking. Like the children's games which entail the leaving and rejoining of security, it is 'A fort/da, a repeated back-and-forth from safety to danger and back again' (Kuhn 2005, 410). In *La rabia*, Nati crosses and re-crosses a barbed-wire fence as she moves between her parents' land and that of Pichón, a fence which will resurface in the animated sequences, multiplying and becoming insurmountable as relations worsen between the fathers and crossing between their lands is prohibited. Following Kuhn's and Powrie's readings of the diegetic threshold as the child-film's means of narrativising the drama of individuation, the multiplying fences also suggest the difficulty of the negotiation between inner and outer worlds which is characteristic of autism.

Rather like Víctor Erice's classic *El espíritu de la colmena* which the directors of *La rabia* and *El último verano* both explicitly cite as an influence (Carri, in Kairuz 2008, 12; Solomonoff, in Martin and Shaw 2012), both films under discussion are spatially organised around childhood geographies: thresholds, the moving between safety and danger, spaces of imagination and reverie. Both, in fact, feature the negotiation of a barbed-wire fence; both, like *El espíritu* before them, draw on the archetypal spatial dynamics of the fairy tale and that form's oft-repeated journey into the forest, a place of potential danger. In *La rabia*, this is memorably evoked by a beautiful sequence in which Nati and Ladeado are filmed from within the forest, their silhouettes visible against an archway of light as they penetrate the forest and move towards the camera. Like many fairy tale heroines, and girls like Ana of *El espíritu*, Nati enters

forbidden and dangerous territory, but her motivations for doing so, and the effect it has, are not made explicit, as would be the case in narratives where the forest would teach the child or trigger some kind of transformation. For *El último verano*'s Jorgelina, who journeys into the forest on the night when Mario goes missing, the forest fulfils a more conventional role: it is involved with Jorgelina's learning that some things are better left unsaid, as Mario's disappearance has been caused by her own betrayal of his trust and disclosure of his sexual difference to her father—it is thus bound up, as is traditionally the case, with learning a lesson and acquiring maturity.

El último verano draws on the long tradition—from the picaresque to romanticism and neorealism—of using the child's perspective to critique the social and ideological, to achieve distanciation from or insight into the status quo. The film is told from Jorgelina's point of view, and this child's perspective frames both the film's politics and its aesthetics. In interview, Solomonoff notes that approaching the topic of sexual identity from a child's perspective allowed her 'una libertad de mirada [...] Una mirada, en definitiva, totalmente alejada del discurso de género más politizado [...]. Era una mirada más poética' ('[A] much freer gaze [...]. This gaze is far removed from a more politicised gender discourse, from medical or psychoanalytic discourses. It's a more poetic gaze' (my translation) (Heredero 2010, 41). However, Jorgelina's child perspective has the effect of queering the rigid gender regimes which the rural community operates. When she learns, for example that the purpose of Mario's equestrian feats is, in her father's words, to enable him to 'probarse como un hombre' ('prove himself as a man'),¹⁷ she responds, '¿Por qué lo tiene que probar? ¿Por si no le gusta?' ('Why does he have to try it? In case he doesn't like it?'), a poetic, childish take on language which evokes gender as performance. The political value of the child's gaze lies, here, in its capacity to expose the 'natural' as culturally constructed, as well as in its playful fluidity, its ability to escape 'common sense'. *El último verano* draws on the Romantic notion of the child's superior, instinctual access to truth and insight, redeploying this notion in the service of queer politics.

On a conceptual level, the child's gaze is employed here as a means of throwing into relief cultural constructions of gender and sexuality. However, the perceptual or sensory effect of the film is just as crucial as its narrative meaning-making. Deleuze argued in the cinema books that the political potential of cinema is the way it causes us to see, to feel, to

sense and ultimately to *think differently*. In *El ultimo verano*, the importance of the child is also as a gaze through which to create affects and sensations which derange the everyday, which disorder regimes of the visual, of domination and of sexuality. The film achieves its various ruptures of the ideological, through its use of movement and the tactile and its treatment of time, creating a childish mode of looking, feeling and sensing, and a spectator engaged bodily in these political potentialities.

In the film's opening sequence, ranch hands violently wrestle a horse to the ground, such subjugation of horses as a form of breaking in being a traditional marker of *gaucho* masculinity. This sequence creates an aesthetic to challenge these images of domination, however, using film language that will not permit easy mastery or appropriation of the object, through its use of movement and the tactile. Extreme close-ups of parts of the horse permit the viewer little control of the image and privilege the texture of horse hair which evokes the sense of touch, whilst the camera is destabilised by the violent movement of the action. But although the content centres around domination and violence, this is offset by a mediating gaze which is not schooled in the workings of power or in these practices and rituals, and this is the child's gaze, that of Jorgelina, with whose perspective the film is aligned. The disorientation of the viewer here again calls to mind Marks' theory of hapticity and the evocation of the child's lack of mastery. The film's tendency to get so close to the object as to prevent mastery, as well as its emphasis on the physicality and materiality of the natural setting, is means of appealing to sensory, embodied knowledge, and evoking the immersive nature of childhood experience, the lack of separation between oneself as subject and the world as object. The image of a rotting orange, being eaten by ants, is held in close-up for several seconds: its significance is anti-metaphorical; it is, in Deleuze and Guattarian terms, 'not representative but affective' (2004, 284). So it engages the viewer in a becoming-other, a becoming-child, through an evocation of childhood looking, its idleness and intensity, its morbid fascinations, its directionlessness. It suggests what Karen Lury, following Bachelard, calls childhood 'seeing':

Seeing is the [...] absorbed but pointless gaze which follows ants and beetles as they labour in the grass, returns again and again to the scab on your knee, explores cloudy breath on a windowpane. (2005, 308)

Childhood experience of time is also evoked by the film's emphasis on duration, (on what the director calls 'tiempo muerto', 'dead time'), with frequent images of Jorgelina whiling away the hours of lazy summer days, long sequences in which nothing happens, and images such as the orange, in which the ants' industrious activity only serves to emphasise the overall stillness of the optical, or more properly in this case, the haptical, situation and the experience of duration, of time lived and felt.

The presentation of Jorgelina herself also challenges ideas about pre-pubescence as at once asexual and straight. When she lends Mario a book about sexual reproduction in humans, he studies the pictures, eventually confiding in her 'yo no soy normal' ('I am not normal'). Her response, 'yo tampoco soy muy normal...igual me gustás así' ('I'm not very normal either...anyway, I like you as you are'), positions her as his queer double. Jorgelina paints on a moustache to go to carnival (Fig. 6.4), and her attraction to Mario can be read as a lesbian or queer attachment. So, for example, we see Jorgelina repeating the word 'Mario' to herself as she plays in water. In this sequence, childhood desire and reverie is



Fig. 6.4 Jorgelina and Mario invert gender norms in *El último verano de la boyita*

evoked through tactile and embodied experience: the touch of water on skin, idle and playful movement, fascination and the directionless play with, and delight in, language and its textures. So we are invited to countenance the idea of queer and desiring children, just as we are returned, perhaps, to our own childhoods, through a variety of cinematic means involving ways of seeing, moving and touching. If queer children, as Bond Stockton argues, have been left out of history and popular belief, *El último verano* breaks this silence, constructing a queer-child world which unsettles the dominant heteronarrative. What is more, it does this, in this sequence, by reconstituting in the spectatorial body the intensities of childhood—realising the queer political potential of the embodied appeal to childhood experience. For Deleuze, the automatic movement of cinema pushes film to new potentialities by:

[P]roducing a shock to thought, communicating vibrations to the cortex, touching the nervous and cerebral system directly. Because the cinematographic image itself ‘makes’ movement, [...] it brings together what is essential in the other arts; [...] it converts into potential what was only possibility. (1989, 151)

For Deleuze, ‘what is essential in the other arts’ is their creative potential to allow a ‘becoming-other’. In this sequence, the queer, desiring, child body moves the spectator politically through movement and appeals to embodied memory.

The privileging of childhood desire, sexuality and queerness in *El último verano* and the ambivalence of childhood desire, voyeurism and violence in *La rabia* both run counter to post-Enlightenment imaginaries of childhood which emphasise the child as locus of innocence and purity. Both films image a revolt from established corporeal, gender and familial regimes through the animal connections of their child protagonists. This becoming is also elicited extra-diegetically, through the films’ appeals to embodied spectatorship, their production of a spectatorial ‘becoming-other’. Whilst the children in the films I discuss here do have (as I have argued) symbolic or political meaning, the films’ politics also reside in their subversion of traditional representational systems, their de-hierarchisation of classical viewing systems, their privileging of the child’s body, desire and experience, their resistance of the visual domestication of the child and their refusal of the child’s total domination by adult systems of meaning.

NOTES

1. *La Raulito* deals with a cross-dressing adolescent girl, in fact played by the 32-year-old actress Marilina Ross. For a discussion of this film from a queer theoretical perspective, see Olivera (2013).
2. The other films of Rondón and Ugaz are discussed briefly in Chapters 5 (133) and 7 (193).
3. *Pelo malo* was a co-production between Venezuela, Argentina, Peru and Germany, with support from, amongst others, Ibermedia, the Berlinale's World Cinema Fund and the Global Film Initiative. *La rabia* had support from the Hubert Bals Fund alongside national sources, and *El último verano* from the Almodóvar brothers' company El Deseo Productions.
4. Alongside several of the filmmakers discussed in this chapter, Rocha and Seminet list Vera Fogwill, Sandra Kogut, Celina Murga, and Claudia Llosa.
5. The Sociedad Rural opposed increased levies on agricultural exports, which were intended to raise funds for social investment and to encourage farmers to grow crops for domestic consumption. The conflict brought into renewed focus the long-standing antagonism between rural and urban interests in the country.
6. Carri explicitly refers to *La rabia* as such a critique (in Kairuz 2008, 12). As Andermann tells us, in Argentina, 'classic cinema's rural melodrama had counterpoised countryside to city as a space of innocence and simplicity in the face of a modernity harbouring decadence and perversion' (2012, 76).
7. The law, passed in 2012, allows transgender people to change their name and gender on public documents without having undergone surgery and without medical or legal permission.
8. Carri went to live in this region at the age of 4, when her parents were disappeared by the 1976–1982 military regime (see Chapter 5, 133–163). *La rabia* was shot in Roque Pérez, a village near La Rabia.
9. In this use of child's play as a means of processing and perhaps resisting trauma, Carri returns to a theme of her celebrated documentary *Los rubios* (2003) in which playmobile figures were used to recreate her parents' kidnapping, in animated sequences which punctuated the footage much as the animations in *La rabia* punctuate the diegesis. This creation of extra-filmic or extra-narrative spaces through animation is aligned in both films with the child's gaze, perspective, or reality. See Chapter 5 for a fuller discussion of *Los rubios* (133).
10. Mario has Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia, which causes masculinisation in females and (because it is caused by two recessive genes) is more common in communities with high levels of endogamy such as some rural

Argentine communities of former immigrants. The film is set in one such German community.

11. The film echoes narrative strategies, identified by Lusnich in early twentieth-century Argentine film, for ‘conciliación entre campo y ciudad’ (‘rural-urban conciliation’) involving rural male characters and the urban daughters of their bosses (Lusnich 2007, 133).
12. Mario’s condition has not been medicalised because of the family’s rural location and outlook. His parents have taken him out of school because they need help on the farm, but also probably because in school his difference is likely to be discovered. The absence of medicalisation also means Mario has escaped the routine surgical intervention that he would doubtless have undergone as an urban, middle-class child (a child of Jorgelina’s social condition). This would likely have meant the cutting down of the clitoris to a size deemed acceptable for a female.
13. The idea of the child’s insightfulness is present in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762), Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* (1817) and Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* (1850), in which the child is conceived as a kind of visionary.
14. In ‘Screening Pigs: Visibility, Materiality and the Production of Species’, Laura McMahon proposes that the pig is a ‘threshold creature’ for the human, inviting ‘cross-species identification’ in the ‘liminal zone between death and dismemberment’ (2015, 208).
15. As in the rhyme ‘Mi caballo y mi mujer/viajaron para Salta/el caballo que se vuelva/mi mujer no me hace falta’ discussed by Lehman (2005, 153).
16. This was a question posed by Annette Kuhn in her talk ‘Cinematic experience, film space, and the child’s world’ 21 January 2009, Queen Mary, University of London. See also Wilson (2005).
17. The verb ‘probar’ also has the meaning ‘try on’ or ‘to try out’.

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Transnational Mobility, Authenticity and the Child: *Alamar*

In Chapter 3, I looked at films in which children undertake different kinds of journeys—epic and linear, or smaller-scale and more complex—within the borders of the nation, arguing that those epic journeys portrayed by *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba* posit the child as a kind of ‘pioneer’, who, in the words of Jacqueline Rose, ‘restores lost worlds’ and especially imaginaries of the lost or threatened nation to the viewer. In this final chapter, I again turn to journey narratives—but here to those narratives in which child characters traverse national borders, in particular an unusual Mexican film released in 2009, Pedro González Rubio’s *Alamar*. In *Alamar*, I find some commonalities with those films discussed in Chapter 3—such as the ‘restoration of lost worlds’, and the way, as I argued in that chapter, that the child-figure as symbol of innocence and authenticity plays an important part in films’ negotiations and symbolic overcoming of cultural, geographic and political divides. Many of the ways of understanding the child journey narrative which Chapter 3 revealed in relation to *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba* can also be applied to *Alamar* and condition my reading of it. I devote some attention here to establishing *Alamar* as in some respects fitting with these representational tendencies. However, I am also particularly interested in my discussion of *Alamar* in placing it within a Mexican and Central American context of films about border-crossing children, as well as in arguing that in *Alamar*, we can understand the child as a figure for a form of mobile, oscillating spectatorship which is not evident in films such as *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba*, concerned as they are with a

linear trajectory. Lastly, I argue that the child in *Alamar* is used to validate the cinematic image, to assure us of its veracity, in a film which exists in a complex relationship to fiction and documentary.

As discussed in Chapter 1, theorists of and commentators on the child in film are fairly unanimous in the view that the child-figure can be regarded as a conduit for adult preoccupations.¹ Although they adopt differing theoretical frameworks, critics often agree that the cinematic ‘value’ or function of the child protagonist is to permit adult spectatorial *movement*: the possibility of a flexible or perhaps fractured spectatorial position—in space-time, between past and present, or self and other—the child’s view thus allowing for a defamiliarisation or a shifting between the familiar and the unfamiliar, a flexible, heterogeneous or mobile spectatorship. So for example Lebeau argues that the child protagonist affords the adult viewer contact with the radical otherness of the *infans* (2008, 17–18); David Martin-Jones shows how *Kamchatka* provides a ‘pathway into the past’ but allows the ‘adult-child-seer’ to move between the helplessness of the child and the historical awareness and understanding of the adult (2011, 81), whilst Phil Powrie suggests that the child film enables a form of viewing which he terms ‘heterospection’, defined as ‘being-adult whilst also being child, inhabiting two different but complementary space-times’ (2005, 352). These critical perspectives support Claudia Castañeda’s reading of the child in her book *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds*, in which she argues that the child is constructed in modern culture as a figure of possibility and transformation, of potentiality and becoming. The child is a figure through which the adult subject experiences or imagines transformation, a figure which is always available to be inhabited by adults and which permits the disruption of subjective and identitarian limits. Bringing together scientific accounts of child development with the child’s figuring in critical theory (including Foucault’s ‘night of the lost child’ and Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘becoming-child’), Castañeda writes that:

[T]he child’s time-space is the form that reforms the subject, that allows the subject to transgress its own prior limits. To inhabit this form [...] enables the experience of possibility itself, an experience that the subject is by definition denied. (2002, 146)

This figuring of the child as a permanently inhabitable body and, as she writes elsewhere, as ‘flexible body’ (2002, 46–82) is critiqued by

Castañeda as a form of colonisation and othering of the child, and she and others have argued that such an othering serves to represent both the disruption and the shoring up or stabilising of adult subjective boundaries, for example in Jacqueline Rose's formulation, previously discussed, in which she shows how the child's association with nature and truth—with instinct not the cerebral, with innocence not decay—'carries the weight of one half of the contradictions which we experience in relation to ourselves' (1984, 50) and which adults need in order to maintain themselves as such.

Various places that the child has occupied in Latin American film and which I have identified in this book can be traced in Pedro González Rubio's *Alamar*, a film which allows for extensive analysis of the child as a cinematic figure that invites or permits spectatorial mobility and does so within a narrative in which such a mobility can be seen as a way of negotiating the cultural tensions between urban and rural settings, between tradition and (post)-modernity, and between the Mexican and the European. *Alamar*, like several films already discussed in this book, again invokes the Romantic association of the child with innocence, authenticity and the rural and natural world, which has, as Rose argues convincingly, come to function in the modern imagination as an antidote to the anxieties generated by the modern condition (1984, 43 and *passim*). The long-standing association between the child and the natural world, but also the association of childhood, as a temporary state with nostalgia and loss, makes the child an effective vehicle in this film for an ecological message about the loss of a natural environment. As is extensively discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to the New Latin American Cinema and as arises in subsequent chapters also, the child is frequently used in Latin American cinema to emotionally engage spectators with a political cause, as is the case in *Alamar*. This child is also a mobile child, the migrating offspring of a separated transnational couple, and his back-and-forth journeying has an allegorical resonance in relation to the historical situation of a globalising, transitional Mexico. The child in *Alamar* is Natan, the five-year-old son of Mexican Jorge Machado and Italian Roberta Palombini, and his travelling from his mother's home country to his father's and back again creates a narrative which oscillates between places European and Latin American, between the urban and the rural, between modernity and tradition. The child in *Alamar* becomes a vehicle for imagining the transformations, potentialities or contradictions implied by the realities of a contemporary,

transitional Mexico as it negotiates questions of inheritance, globalisation and cultural difference which have characterised the political and cultural spheres in the post-PRI, post-NAFTA era. In *Alamar*, then, the child-figure permits mobilities, oscillations or transformations which may allow the spectator to experience or to negotiate shifting or heterogeneous contexts.

As commentators on contemporary Mexican cinema have shown, there has been since the early 2000s a predominance of child- and youth-centred filmic narratives which have expressed anxieties around the future of the nation in post-PRI, post-NAFTA times. In a recent article, Nuala Finnegan lists some 28 Mexican films about childhood and youth since the early 2000s (2013, 231), a trend which she and others read as indicative of a cultural preoccupation with coming of age, the loss of the certainties associated with traditional PRI politics and, as Ignacio Sánchez Prado puts it, the loss of ‘innocence’ associated with Mexico’s transition to the ‘vertiginous modernity’ of neoliberalism (2012, 122) and shift to what Roger Bartra terms a ‘post-Mexican condition’ (Bartra 2002). Sánchez Prado sees Alfonso Cuarón’s *Y tu mamá también* (2001) as the inception of this trend, and Finnegan argues that, since that film, other Mexican films such as Riggen’s *La misma luna* (2007), Eimbcke’s *Lake Tahoe* (2008), Cuarón’s *Año uña* (2007), Sariñana’s *Niñas mal* (2007), Coton’s *Soba* (2004) and Naranjo’s *Drama/Mex* (2006), as well as *Alamar* have continued the trend by exploring cultural identity through central child or adolescent figures, which seem to operate as a ‘site of cultural angst’ in times of uncertainty (2013, 231). Finnegan focuses in particular on transnational narratives of migrating and travelling children, arguing that in some child-focused films, children become ‘agents or mediators of identity within a transnational imaginary’ (2013, 232). This is the case in the film she analyses in detail, Gustavo Loza’s *Al otro lado* (2004). Another recent Mexican film focusing on child migration is the commercial comedy *No se aceptan devoluciones* (Derbez, 2013), which, despite its vastly differing genre and tone, has strong structural and narrative echoes of *Alamar*: it deals with the young daughter of a separated Mexican father and North American mother who, again, crosses borders due to her transnational parentage. As the children in these films travel between the home countries of their separated parents, their vulnerability to adult decisions and changing cultural contexts evokes wider cultural dilemmas or feelings of

powerlessness and vulnerability in the face of the experiences of transition, globalisation and cultural difference.

If the child's mobility across national borders has become a common trope in Mexican and Central American cinema, special mention is due to a number of films which deal with the migration attempts of undocumented and unaccompanied minors, facing—unlike Natan—grave danger and violence. These include the above-mentioned *La misma luna* (which I discuss below in more detail) and *Al otro lado* as well as *El camino* (Yasín Gutiérrez, Costa Rica, 2008) and *Sin nombre* (Fukunaga, Mexico, 2009).² In *El camino*, the 12-year-old Saslaya (Sherlin Paola Velásquez) flees sexual abuse by her grandfather in Nicaragua, leaving for Costa Rica with her younger brother with the aim of finding their mother, but eventually losing him in the process and by the film's end finding herself in another situation of sexual exploitation. In *Sin nombre*, Honduran teenager Sayra (Paulina Gaitán) and Mexican ex-gang member Willy (Edgar Flores) attempt to make it to the USA aboard the train known as *La Bestia*, which is used by many undocumented migrants to cross Mexico. Because of the perilous practices of jumping on and off as it moves, clinging to the sides and riding on the roof, the train—also known as 'El tren de la muerte'—claims the lives and limbs of many travellers, who are also frequently exposed to forced recruitment or murder by narco-gangs. Filmic narratives such as these are part of a broader tendency of border narratives which feature dangerous journeys to focus on child characters, such as Sonia Nazario's Pulitzer Prize-winning journalistic account *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* (2006). The documentary *Lecciones para Zafirah* (Rivas and Sarhandi, 2011) also treats the topic of migrants who use *La Bestia* to cross Mexico and also has a child at its centre, but here, the position of the child shifts: the little Zafirah, a child of around five years old is not a traveller, but listens to her mother tell stories of those who ride *La Bestia*. The child's education is simultaneously that of the spectator, who is asked to learn the lessons that Zafirah learns about the terrible consequences that boarding the train can have for some migrants, both as a means of warning those that might be tempted to do so as well as of raising awareness of the issue more broadly. Where films have an explicitly didactic or educative purpose, this may be channelled through a child character alongside whom the audience is positioned as learner, as I also argued in relation to *En el país de los pies ligeros*, discussed in Chapter 3.

La misma luna, in which the nine-year-old Carlitos (Adrián Alonso) crosses the border illegally in search of his mother who has previously migrated to Los Angeles, has a lighter, comedic approach to the same topic, and is a further example of the way such films, like *Alamar*, employ an oscillating structure which enables a transitional, transnational and transformative spectatorship, for which the child is a particularly effective conduit.³ Alongside *Enrique's Journey* and Rebecca Cammissa's documentary film *Which Way Home?* (2009), *La misma luna* is classed by Ana Elena Puga as part of a sub-genre she terms 'migrant melodrama' (2016, 73). In these narratives, the trope of the innocent and vulnerable child searching for his or her mother appears and is part of a stock narrative structure which for Puga appeals to the melodramatic imagination (2016, 73).⁴ Puga argues that migrant melodramas 'depict undeserved suffering by innocent victims as the implicit price of inclusion, or even fair treatment, in a new nation-state' (2016, 75). Of course, the child's associations of innocence make the figure a perfect vehicle for the construction of such a narrative. For Debra Castillo, who also analyses *La misma luna* extensively, the child Carlitos—a cute, male, smartly dressed, light-skinned, innocent yet resourceful and intelligent child—is central to this emotive potential of the film and thus to its political potential; 'the cute child immigrant becomes the most telling test case possible for displaying the inhumanity of current U.S. immigration policy: the perfect affective response to the xenophobe's sound-bite stridency' (Castillo 2009, 21–22), an idea which emerges in several reviews of the film which suggest that or speculate on whether the film could move Lou Dobbs, a stridently anti-immigration US radio and TV host, to tears.⁵ As in films examined in earlier chapters including *Viva Cuba* and *Machuca*, the child is used here as a vehicle for the softening of a topic which may provoke strong reactions and hardened positions, here amongst certain groups in the destination-country: in *La misma luna*, 'the child is an innocuous emissary who by the very fact of his [...] innocent gaze ameliorates the bitterness that often defines discourse around immigration on both sides of the border' (Castillo 2009, 24). Castillo also compares *La misma luna* to *Enrique's Journey*, as well to Jorge Ramos's 2009 book *Dying to Cross: The Worst Immigrant Tragedy in American History* which itself, in her words 'obsessively returns to the child' (22), arguing that the figure of the small child—especially those found at sea including a 1920s case and that of Elián González—haunts US immigration discourse (22). In *La misma luna*, then, the child's long-standing association with the

political in Latin American cinema resurfaces in a modified form: the child is used as a representative of a despised or denigrated group (as indeed, he/she is in the street child films analysed in Chapter 2, as well as, one could argue, in *En el país de los pies ligeros*'s representation of the indigenous via a child discussed in Chapter 3, and also in the films discussed in Chapter 5 in which the children of disappeared and murdered political dissidents 'stand in' for their parents) in order to elicit audience sympathy for that group. In making Carlitos the face of the Mexican immigrant, *La misma luna* aims to produce the 'sustainable cognitive transformation' in audiences which for Podalsky is part of the reason why the New Latin American Cinema employed the figure of the child (Podalsky 2011, 45), since the child is deemed to be 'an inappropriate object for [...] hate' (Castillo 2009, 24). As we shall see, *Alamar*'s variation on the common filmic linking of the child and politics is of a different order. Here, it is not the case that the child is representative of a marginalised group; instead, in a film which makes its appeal not on behalf of a human group but on that of the environment, the film employs the child-figure to evoke common associations of childhood as fleeting and impermanent, with the accompanying sense of loss and nostalgia, as a means of eliciting the spectator's emotional engagement with a threatened ecosystem.

A docudrama⁶ or 'featurementary' made in 2009, which won a series of awards at the Morelia, Rotterdam, San Francisco and Toronto International film festivals, *Alamar* is a low-budget, independent piece, written, financed, directed and filmed by González Rubio, a Mexican who had spent long periods of his life living abroad, and who made the film several years after returning to Mexico.⁷ It is an eco-film, which aims to raise awareness about preserving the Banco Chinchorro, an atoll reef lying to the south of the Riviera Maya, off the coast of Mexico's south-eastern Quintana Roo State. Banco Chinchorro is the largest coral atoll in the Northern Hemisphere and was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1996.⁸ The reef is home to many species of unique wildlife, but is threatened by the intense development of the region. Nicknamed 'Nanook of the South' by viewers at Morelia (Smith 2010, 22), *Alamar* combines an ethnographic focus on the isolated coastal communities of the region, with an interventionist yet observational approach: the main body of the film concerns a fishing trip to Chinchorro undertaken by Jorge, a Maya tour-guide and ornithologist, and five-year-old Natan, a trip planned and staged by the director,

during which the camera observes father and son playing themselves, as they fish, cook, eat, sleep and play. Playing Natan's grandfather Matraca is Néstor Marín, a fisherman the three met during pre-production. The film competed in narrative fiction categories in most festivals, but nevertheless retains a strong documentary impulse to record the natural environment, as well as to campaign on its behalf. In the tradition of many documentaries, it takes the form of an actual journey, and much of the content is driven by chance events that unfold along the way. Unlike many contemporary post- or performative documentaries, though, *Alamar* does not foreground the cinematic apparatus or crew⁹; despite its liberal dose of fiction and performance, it displays a potent desire, or nostalgia for a more straightforward documentary authenticity such has been traditionally associated with the ethnographic.¹⁰

This desire for a stable referent also conditions the depiction of Chinchorro, which is aligned in the film's symbolic system with childhood and which as such recalls the discourses of Western modernity which tend to align non-Western cultures, as well as rural spaces, with childhood and therefore with 'pastness'. Chinchorro and childhood are figured as at once luminous, magical and experientially authentic as well as threatened, fleeting or impermanent, such that the film is characterised by a series of tensions between plenitude and unity on the one hand, and loss and impermanence on the other, in terms of its themes as well as its visual and documentary rhetoric. These tensions are exemplified by the film's framing structure. *Alamar* begins in Rome, where Natan lives with Roberta. In the middle section, Jorge takes Natan on the fishing trip to Chinchorro, and the film ends with Natan's return to Italy, and to his mother.

The central narrative of the fishing trip to Chinchorro (60 mins)—luminescent, slow, full of wide-open seascapes and immersive close-ups—contrasts strongly with the urban Italian narrative frame (13 mins), which is more claustrophobic and emphasises mediation, fragmentation and speed. The child's leaving Chinchorro and return to Italy coincides—in true *bildungsfilm* style—with learning, with his sentimental and ecological education. He befriends Blanquita, an egret who visits the palafitte that the actor-subjects and crew of two inhabited for the duration of the shoot, and his realisation, at the end, that the bird has left and will not return, coincides with his understanding that he is leaving Chinchorro and that the magical trip with his father has come to an end (Fig. 7.1). These lessons of love and loss are a rite of passage



Fig. 7.1 Natan and Jorge befriend Blanquita in *Alamar*

which heralds the end of childhood, and which, in the absence of any traditional expository mechanisms, also communicate the film's ecological message: coexistence with the bird (the environment), but not its domination or possession. The film genres and ideologies of childhood are, then, intimately bound up with the film's documentary impulse and political aim.¹¹

The child in *Alamar* enables a transitional or oscillating spectatorship which mediates issues of historical change and cultural difference in a transnational context, bringing to light, and allowing for movement between, the different cultural and temporal experiences that the film associates with Chinchorro and Rome. At the end of *Alamar*, the child makes a visual representation of the fishing trip—a drawing—which he places in a glass bottle and casts out to sea (Fig. 7.2). Before we see the bottle bobbing away on the water, Natan addresses the camera for the first time, declaring that 'este papelito va a ir a Italia, o a México' ['this little piece of paper is going to go to Italy, or to Mexico'] poignantly evoking a sense of uncertainty about the future.¹² Through the child's imagining of the fate of the drawing—an object which suggests his own potential physical displacements, but also, as 'film-object', those of the (transnational) film—the spectator is engaged not only with the child's negotiation of the cultural differences associated with shifting between these physical locations, but is also (as in neorealism and in the historical narratives previously discussed) allowed to experience the



Fig. 7.2 ‘Este papelito va a ir a Italia, o a México’ (‘This little piece of paper will go to Italy or Mexico’): *Alamar*

vulnerability of the child faced with overwhelming circumstances, but from within the framework of an adult understanding, thus suggesting a kind of *fort-da*, a shifting between passivity and activity. González Rubio’s own biography is also marked with a back-and-forth movement of global journeying and a range of different locations and contrasting cultural contexts: he is a Mexican who was born in Brussels and spent part of his youth in New Delhi, later studying media in Mexico and film-making in London. He moved to Playa del Carmen as an adult where he made several documentaries for an ecological centre in the Yucatán (Sippl 2010) and the documentary *Toro negro* (Mexico, 2005) before beginning work on *Alamar*.

The beginning of the film, shot in Rome, emphasises a lack of cultural understanding and communication failure as Natán’s mother Roberta Palombini tries and fails to elicit an Italian phrase from Jorge, an act which is symbolic of the story of their relationship breakdown, which they go on to tell in this frame section. Here, spectator distancing is guaranteed by shaky camera work, frames within frames and a proliferation of visual technologies which call attention to reality as mediated by images. The transience of the couple’s relationship is visually evoked throughout the frame by fragmented images and still photographs which poignantly document its early days and suggest its ephemerality. The Mexican fishing trip section, by contrast, emphasises

the deepening of (male–male) familial bonds through communication, apprenticeship and inheritance and is therefore suggestive of continuity through time. The hypermediation and self-consciousness of the frame section are contrasted in the fishing trip section with an aesthetics of immersion and immediacy, an apparent lack of intervention between sign and referent.

These contrasts between the frame and the main narrative bring to mind Naficy's work on the aesthetics of displacement, in which the home space is constructed as boundless and timeless, whilst the diasporic space is figured as confined and temporally regulated (Naficy 2001, 5). In contrast to the fragmentation and disconnection of the frame—exemplified by the demise of the love relationship—the fishing trip suggests rural Mexico as a place to reconstruct relationships, and the overwhelming presence of the father (Natan is accompanied by father Jorge, but also by Matraca, playing the grandfather), along with the fishing trip's linking of father, landscape and inheritance, posits identity as a stable referent.¹³ In this sense, the film echoes some of those discussed earlier in which anxiety over globalisation is offset by an emphasis on the sacredness of family relationships, as Castillo argues of *La misma luna* and *Al otro lado*, films in which 'globalisation is brought home to the very heart of the family' (2009, 24). The child is transitionally positioned, then, between Mexico (associated with the natural environment, patriarchal structures and a visual immediacy) and the uprootedness of his transnational parenthood and situation, associated on the visual level with the replacement of the real by representation. The film is not simplistically binary, it is worth noting, in its approach to time and modernity: Chinchorro is not represented as archaic or folkloric, the fishermen use outboard motors, radio communications and some modern fishing techniques. The film's treatment of time suggests both the common use of the child as a means of looking back at, recuperating or symbolising loss or lost time, as well as a means for exploring alternative articulations of time.

Andrei Tarkovsky, whose *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) is one of the classic child-films, wrote that 'what a person goes to the cinema for is time: for time lost or time spent or not yet had' (1989, 163). Through identification with the child-figure, *Alamar* engages us in a nostalgically tinged retrospection typical of the child-film. Some of the first words of *Alamar* introduce the theme of time as a major one, when Jorge, accompanied by melancholy music, states, referring to his relationship with Roberta, that 'El tiempo que estuvimos juntos fue un tiempo

mágico' ('the time we were together was a magical time'). The theme of lost time thus emerges as important in the discourse of the relationship breakup, exemplified in particular by a disjuncture between a happy family photographic portrait and Jorge's words, 'cuando nos dimos cuenta que ese sentimiento había cambiado...pues fue muy duro' ('when we realised that our feelings had changed ...well, it was very difficult'). As Belinda Smail writes, the 'greatest desire' in watching children is to see the 'exaggerated change that images of children symbolically promise to deliver' (2010, 146). She argues that 'the child is a potent objectification of time passing' (2010, 144). Like many childhood films, *Alamar* is a meditation on loss and the passing of time, in equal measure joyful and elegiac.¹⁴ Furthermore, the film explicitly posits the child as antidote to these anxieties and losses; as Roberta puts it, she and Jorge were not destined to stay together, but they were destined to come together at a certain moment to produce this specific boy, Natan. Through the suggestion of the mythical return to a 'tiempo mágico'—the pre-lapsarian voyage to Chinchorro, associated with Mexico, the rural and the father—the film engages the spectator in a process of retrospection or meditation upon loss of certainties associated with the contemporary Mexican context. As in *Central do Brasil* and *Viva Cuba*, the child in *Alamar* moves from the problematic urban space to an archaic rural space of innocence which is figured as a natural place for the child: both ideologically aligned with childhood and child-friendly.

The talismanic child as restorer of lost time also fulfils a crucial function of the moving image: the stopping of time, the overcoming of death, or to paraphrase Bazin: the preservation of life through its representation (1967, 10). Like cinema in general, *Alamar* is poised on the threshold between plenitude and loss, presence and absence, life and death. Like film (especially ethnographic film), it turns around the possibility of preserving the fleeting moment, but it also narrativises the impossibility of doing this.¹⁵ It is not altogether surprising to learn that *Alamar* started out as a film about death in which Jorge would play a dying man, through whose demise it would speak about the destruction of nature, about fragility and impermanence (González Rubio, in Colcannon 2010). The director changed his plans when he met Jorge's son Natan: instead of death, instead of mortality, the child. The film's new focus thus became the child's journey of discovery and his relationship with the father. But death haunts the film, which is replete with objects which represent loss—Blanquita, the bubbles Natan blows when

back in Rome, and which recall the magical world of Chinchorro, but slip slowly out of his grasp. They are child-objects: like childhood, they will only last for a short time.

In addition to this experience of retrospection, of lost time and its restoration, the film creates diverse articulations of time associated with the different locations it depicts. I don't suggest that this is a completely binary system; the fishing trip has its moments of action and speed. However, through its many long, still shots of the seascape, and of sunrises and sunsets, it suggests an experience of continuous and enduring time, a temporal seamlessness as days and nights merge into one another.¹⁶ If we watch films in order to have temporal experiences, and if our viewing of child-films implies a certain spectatorial flexibility in relation to time, then perhaps certain child films can allow not simply an experience of looking back or being transported into the past (retrospection), but also, as in the case of Deleuze's child-seer, open up different articulations and experiences of time. If the time-image disrupts those clichéd images which position us economically, psychologically and ideologically—that is to say *which construct us as subjects*—then the child-seer can be understood as a figure enabling access to an image-world which disrupts subjective boundaries through its articulation of time, rather as Castañeda suggests Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming-child' operates in relation to adult subjectivity (Castañeda 2002, 146). In *Alamar*, the child's view both mediates the diverse experiences of time associated with heterogeneous configurations of modernity *and* suggests an experience of time in Chinchorro which disrupts modes of spectatorship conditioned by dominant configurations.

The slowing of time in the fishing trip section, the pure optical situations it presents, also open up the image to investment by the senses and the body. Long, still shots of the seascape are accompanied by an immersive soundscape of lapping water. There are multiple images of literal immersion and many underwater sequences, including images filmed from beneath of Natan learning to swim. These sequences evoke the tactile qualities of water as well as suggesting a child's immersive relationship to the world, the lack of separation between self and world, subject and object. Images filmed above water, too, have a visceral, tactile immediacy: the scaling, gutting and cleaning of fish, for example; the cleaning of the boat with sand; the fish scales which stick to Natan's skin. González Rubio states that he wanted to bring the spectator close to the child's material and sensorial experience of the environment

(Sippl 2010). Such appeals to an embodied form of spectatorship, to haptic or immersive film languages, have been related in particular with attempts to evoke a child's visuality, his or her vulnerability and lack of visual mastery (Wilson 2005, 335). Rather than suggesting that film is able to or should attempt to replicate the vision of children, the child here serves as a figure through which contemporary films experiment with modes of visuality which work to undo the perspectivist viewing practices associated with the production of the Western, rational, masculine and adult subject (Marks 2000, 2002). Here, again, the child functions in Castañeda's terms as a site for the disruption of subjective boundaries, subverting distinctions between onscreen and off, between a rational, disembodied viewing subjectivity and its viewed object, as was argued to be the case also with several films discussed in the previous chapter, including *La ciénaga*, *La rabia* and *El último verano de la boyita*. Associating the child's gaze with a disruption of hegemonic ways of looking in cinema, these films also undermine conventional cinematic ways of viewing and conceptualising the child, which according to Bazin have been sentimentalising and have served to confirm and shore up adult power and identity (1997 [1949], 123). Rather than constructing a traditional and masterful viewing subject, which is objectifying and colonising in relation to both the landscape and the child—as does, for example, the previously mentioned *Central do Brasil—Alamar* (despite in some respects adhering to a traditional and Romantic alignment of the child with the rural and with nature) can nevertheless be seen as an example of an aesthetics which shifts the cinematic relation to the child and functions through its phenomenology, through experiments with time and visuality, to engage the viewer in a kind of 'becoming-child' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 256–341) emphasising the tactility, and the lack of control or mastery which come with the kinds of immersive, slow and non-perspectival visual language the film creates.^{17, 18}

For Thomas Elsaesser, the revival of interest in the body, the senses, the skin and touch in filmmaking and theory is crucial to what he terms the 'new realism' (2009, 7), of contemporary world cinema. The particularly visceral and sensorial film language which is associated with the attempt to evoke the child's experience—and which may unsettle conventional spectatorship—is itself a product of the Romantic tradition which holds that the child has a more direct and privileged access to the objects of the real world, and especially the natural world (as critiqued by Rose [1984, 8]), and is used here to create a visual immediacy and directness

which in *Alamar* becomes a cornerstone of its rhetoric of authenticity. Just as children are seen as more authentic and natural than adults held to be separated from their ‘true’ (childlike) selves by the intervention of socialisation, the fishing trip section of the film becomes, through its visceral language, the film’s standard of a lack of manipulation, a lack of intervention between sign and referent. Uncertainty about authenticity and performance, about documentary and fiction, does surround *Alamar*, however, and it is to this question of what the child might signify in a context in which the authentic is both rhetorically important, yet also manifestly threatened by the film’s strategies, that I will turn now.

There is a certain anxiety in the reception of *Alamar* over the film’s genre, an anxiety that stems from the tensions I have suggested are exhibited in the film itself—tensions between, in the end, a referential plenitude and the staging of its breakdown, and for which childhood stands. Viewers at the Morelia Festival, where the film competed in the fiction category, reportedly emerged from the screening questioning the genre of the film they had seen (Martínez 2009), whilst interviews routinely question González Rubio about the film’s documentary status to which he responds simply that he has made a film, and reviews and post-screening discussions often focus on this ‘genre trouble’.¹⁹ Despite its use of framing and reflexivity, and paratextual information about actors and script, and unlike the contemporary crop of post- or performative documentaries, the film cultivates a rhetoric of observation and authenticity to which the image of the child is important.

Ideas of childhood naturalness and authenticity have been central to the appeal of technologies of vision since their inception, according to Lebeau, who notes that the first photograph of a crying child (‘Ginx’s Baby’ [1872]) sold 300,000 copies (Lebeau 2008, 10–11).²⁰ As early as the 1920s, Béla Balázs had written about the child’s perceived authenticity as crucial to understanding the particular appeal of the child in film:

Babies have the same charm in film as animals: it is the sense of eaves-dropping on nature. Babies too do not act, they live. But *even with older children who do act it is the naturalness of their unconscious expressions and gestures that delights us more than their acting*. For us grown-ups the physiognomy of children is as strange and mysterious as that of animals and it is made the more strange and mysterious by the fact that it is not entirely alien. *And to watch children who imagine themselves unobserved is like a glimpse of Paradise lost.* (1924, 61, my emphases)

Whilst children can and do perform, visual representations of them seem less likely to be interpreted as performance. Indeed, as Lebeau's work on the child in early cinema makes clear, the allure of the cinematic 'reality effect' is magnified when paired with the apparent 'naturalness' of children. Lebeau cites François Truffaut as commenting that 'all that a child does on screen, he seems to do for the first time' (cit. Lebeau 2008, 73). We believe, it seems, (in) the child. Karen Lury also observes this effect in the use of child actors in the New Iranian cinema, where the children's bodies, their 'skin tone, beauty, disabilities, [...] littleness, [...] gestures, gait and accents – are emphasised by the directors and received, [...] as a guarantee of these films' authenticity' (2010b, 285). For writers on neorealism, the child's presence therein has been seen as a way of lending the genre its desired naturalism. Bazin in *What is Cinema?* for example sees the child as providing instances of contingency which for him enhance the reality, the 'phenomenological integrity' of this kind of filmmaking. Of De Sica's *The Bicycle Thieves* (Italy, 1948), he writes, along these lines, that 'in the middle of the chase the little boy suddenly needs to piss. So he does' (1971, 52). In his review of *Germany, Year Zero*, discussed in Chapter 1, the child had already been established by Bazin as a privileged signifier of the real and of neorealism, since the fact that, according to Bazin, 'the signs of play and the signs of death are the same on a child's face' (1997 [1949], 124) makes the child a privileged vehicle for the psychological objectivity which he sees as amongst the defining characteristics of the style (124).

In these readings, the child's body becomes a privileged signifier of the real, an image of the longed-for index, a way of suggesting the fulfilment of the anxious desire for the ontological sign, a desire which has been argued to underpin all cinematic representation, but which has a particular charge, documentary theorists have claimed, in the creation and spectatorship of documentary. The truth-value associated with the child as spectacle becomes a code by which cinema ensures belief, like the apparently inessential 'guarantors of authenticity' which Roland Barthes proposed ground realist cinematic representation (cit. Stam 1999, 143). In a film like *Alamar*, with its contrasting visual languages yet ideological investment in the authentic, the child's naturalness and spontaneity become a means of stabilising an unstable documentary discourse. In interviews, González Rubio draws attention to the difference between the child and adult performers. He mentions that there were

no rehearsals as these would have ‘killed the precious qualities you get with a child, spontaneity and surprise’ (Nayman 2009) and suggests that, whilst Jorge had to be told not to act, Natan had no difficulty being spontaneous for the camera (Sippl 2010). The film makes much of moments in which the child’s reactions are spontaneous: his fright when a recently caught fish he thinks is dead suddenly jumps out of his hand, his experience of learning to swim with a snorkel, and gasping for air, and many more. Also important here are moments of crying, such as the child’s tears when, after searching in vain for the egret *Blanquita*, his father talks to him about their imminent departure and the return to Rome.

For Lury, there is ‘something stubbornly compelling about the physical manifestation of tears’ which are always (even in fiction) ‘potentially not representation’ (2010a, 182). That is to say, tears are—perhaps more than other physical manifestations—understood as a privileged index of the real. In the debates over the film’s authenticity which take place in reviews, tears are focused on as an anchor of documentary authenticity: one reviewer writes that: ‘cuando Jorge le enseña a su hijo a pescar, le da algunos regaños y los sollozos son reales’ (‘when Jorge teaches his son to fish, he tells him off a bit and the tears are real’) (Huerta Enviado 2009). The child’s bodily manifestations, exemplified by the embodied realism of tears, reinstate the innocence of the image, returning to it the truth-value which has been partially threatened by the film’s combination of fictional and documentary strategies. The child, through its associations of naturalness and spontaneity, the imagined immediacy and immersive nature of its being in the world, becomes a means of ‘getting around’ the film’s generic haziness, allowing *Chinchorro* to retain to some extent its status as an authentic, stable referent or at least the film to retain its nostalgia for this. In *Alamar*, the child stands rhetorically for the authentic, the natural, the spontaneous, evoking a reality or an indexicality uncontaminated by the film’s uncertain documentary status and necessary for its eco-political message.

The understandings of the child presented in *Alamar* bring to mind Peter Handke’s ‘Als das kind kind war’/‘Song of Childhood’. This poem features in Wim Wenders’ *Wings of Desire* (1987), a film in which David Harvey reads childhood as part of a romantic resolution to the problem of a fragmented and alienated postmodern condition. These are the poem’s first stanzas:

When the child was a child,
 It walked with its arms swinging,
 It wanted the stream to be a river, the river a torrent,
 And this puddle to be the sea.

When the child was a child,
 It didn't know it was a child,
 Everything was full of life and all life was one.

When the child was a child,
 It had no opinion about anything, no habits,
 It often sat cross-legged, took off running [...] *and didn't make
 faces when photographed.*

Child-films, like the poem, frequently position the spectator nostalgically, in relation to a lost time of corporeal freedom, psychological innocence or inexperience, unity and plenitude. This understanding of the child also positions the figure, as here, in privileged relation to nature and the natural, to essence and truth, a positioning which conditions the child's meaning in visual technologies and forms which always appeal to some extent to a desire for the real. *Alamar*, like the poem, links the child's physical embodiments of realism (spontaneity—'taking off running') with the idea of his authenticity in the face of visual representation (unlike adults, the poem implies, the child does not perform for the camera). Childhood plenitude as an always temporary, always disappearing state functions in *Alamar* to represent both the breakdown of visual systems, where the reality or ontology of the image is in question due to the methods and forms of the text; it also refers to the dissolving certainties of a transitional Mexico. Whilst watching films is always an experience of mobility or liminality, always an experience of the reinforcing and undoing of our boundaries, being at once here and there, then and now, and whilst the lure of film is also always in some sense temporal, *Alamar* helps us to see how these aspects of spectatorship may be intensified through the child-film. And in the case of *Alamar*, although the film participates in discourses which 'other' children—or perhaps because it does—the presence of the child engenders a transformative visuality, even whilst the film remains wedded to conservative and Romantic myths of childhood.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Bazin (1997) and Lury (2010a, 106).
2. Reflecting the prominence of this type of child-film in films from the 2000s, Rocha and Seminet (2014, 105–147) devote several essays of their volume *Screening Minors in Latin American Cinema* to the topic of ‘Mobile Youth’, and these essays explore films including *El camino*, *Al otro lado*, *La misma luna* and *Sin nombre*.
3. As Puga writes of *La misma luna*, ‘the camera work and editing [...] takes us back and forth between Los Angeles and Mexico in ways that shrink the distance between the two locales and visually simulate the experience of transnationality’ (2016, 85).
4. Puga is drawing here on Brooks’ *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (1976).
5. Castillo devotes the beginning of her article to a discussion of these reviews. She also groups *La misma luna* together with *¿Quién diablos es Juliette?* (Marcovich, 1997) and *Al otro lado*, both of which explore the child’s cross-border journeying to reunite with migrant parents, as well as *Trade* (2007) about a 13-year-old Mexican girl sold into sex slavery in the USA, all of which tell stories of children travelling (either voluntarily or against their will) across borders.
6. The film styles itself as a ‘docudrama’ on its DVD case. On [imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com), it is listed as ‘documentary/drama’. It does not, however, fit with the most common use of the term ‘docudrama’, which is usually applied to films which recreate or reconstruct historical events. Rhodes and Springer define the docudrama as ‘a fabricated recreation of actual people or events’ (2006, 5).
7. The film was produced by Carlos Reygadas’ Mantarraya Producciones. It was shot by González Rubio on a single High Definition camera. Underwater photography was performed by Alexis Zabé, who also worked on Reygadas’ *Stellet Licht*. It is a digital hybrid, shot on HD, but converted to 35 mm.
8. The film ends with the intertitle: ‘Efforts are being made to declare Banco Chinchorro a UNESCO World Heritage Site’. Consultation of UNESCO’s list (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/1963>) suggests the Banco Chinchorro is a tentative site but does not have full status. Accessed 21 February 2018.
9. An example of the sub-genre of ‘post-’ or ‘performative’ documentary in recent Latin American film would be Albertina Carri’s *Los rubios* (Argentina, 2003), which is discussed in Chapter 5 (133).
10. As Diane Sippl (2010) notes, ‘the ethnographic “home movie” is no stranger to Mexico’; she cites Dariela Ludlow’s *Un día menos* (2009)

and Juan Carlos Rufo's *Los que se quedan* (2008) as examples of this kind of film, in addition to the films of Reygadas which, like *Alamar*, use non-professional actors from locations in rural Mexico.

11. Like *Alamar*, two films by Marité Ugas and Mariana Rondón also focus ecological concerns around the stories of mobile children. This is the case in their film *A la media noche y media* (Venezuela, 1999) in which a coastal town is threatened by tidal waves, and *El chico que miente* (Venezuela, 2010) in which a town is devastated by a mudslide. Both films deal with children who are left abandoned and itinerant due to these (imminent) disasters, and who invent stories and games as ways of coping with their situations. The role and meaning of the children in these films are somewhat different to that of *Alamar*, though. As Delgado writes: 'In [...] these films the child protagonists, often unnamed, draw on their imaginations as a way of coping, a mode of thinking through difficult predicaments and a strategy for survival in a world where they are too often abandoned or let down by the adults around them. It is the children who have to deal with the consequences (environmental, political, social and emotional) of the decisions made by adults. There are moments in *A la media noche y media* and *El chico que miente* where the children are framed in a world that appears almost post-apocalyptic, generating important and testing questions about global warming and environmental damage and the world that will be inherited by the children of the present' (2017, 487).
12. The potential for movement and transition embodied by the child contrasts in *Alamar* with the grounded locality represented by Matraca, the film's oldest character, a fisherman of perhaps 50 or 60 years of age.
13. The film is also dedicated to González Rubio's grandfather.
14. MacDougall argues that 'Although adults may associate with children constantly, they can never quite recapture what it was like to be a child, with a child's ignorance of adult experience. Films of childhood are therefore often commemorative, even elegiac. Many are imbued with a sense of loss, sometimes when they seem most joyful – for lost sensitivities, lost beauty, lost prospects' (2006, 67–68). The film opens with the words, spoken by Jorge in a wistful voice: 'Natan, Natan....crece, crece' ('Natan, Natan, how he grows'), implying not only the intense focus on the child which the film sustains, but also on the loss of childhood, on its passing.
15. Renov argues that film in general, but especially ethnographic film 'depends crucially on this fabled ability of the moving image form to preserve the fleeting moment' (1993, 26).
16. In digital filmmaking, there is virtually no limit to the length of shots, which allows digital filmmakers to create different experiences of time than those created in traditional cinema.

17. These shifts in the representation of childhood can understood be in relation to changing political and cultural paradigms, in particular the rise of childhood agency (in discourse if not in practice), and increased understanding of children as subjects, following the 1989 UN convention on the rights of the child (James et al. 1998, 6). Recent work in film studies has developed a closer attention to questions of child agency and experience (Lury 2010a).
18. Two recent studies of the Brazilian film *Mutum* (Kogut, 2007) suggest that this film is also part of the trend I am proposing, in the sense that it can be understood as using a sensorial approach to represent the child's subjectivity. See Randall (2017, 8) and Henzler (2018, 27–28).
19. At the Toronto Film Festival, the post-screening discussion featured a 'dispute' over the film's documentary or fictional status (Sippl 2010). See also Martínez (2009).
20. Lebeau sees this phenomenon as part of the Victorian interest in and commodification of the child (2008, 10–11).

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