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Dark Rurality and Dark Ecology in Recent Argentine Cinema

Carlos M. Amador
Michigan Tech University

In a chapter in his most recent book, *New Argentine Cinema* (2012), and in a recent essay titled "Exhausted Landscapes" (2014), scholar Jens Andermann argues that a series of contemporary Argentine films explore the relation between the rural subject and the landscape as a scenery of exhaustion, where the land is a violent, inhospitable territory that imagistically replicates the extirpation of the peasant from the world of the neoliberal center. Andermann calls this understanding of the land a "dark rurality," a visual vocabulary for contemporary Argentine film that recalls the politically-engaged cinema of the 1960s and 70s' regular use of the landscape and the rural as part of a radical, utopian imaginary. Yet it is the representation of a broken, in his words, "exhausted" landscape, a "more disturbing vision of the countryside…[a] dark rurality, a discourse on the non-urban as primal and regressive" (Andermann 2014: 77).

Andermann argues that contemporary Argentine and Brazilian film uses representations to visualize an exhausted landscape that is nonetheless filled with national and historical density of meaning. In his reading, the landscape becomes a rural periphery that contains the refuse of the national and historical centers, so that the rural becomes a topography of ruins referring to human subjects riven by neoliberalism. His

models are *La rabia* (Albertina Carri, 2008) and *Los muertos* (Lisandro Alonso, 2004), which, in his reading, offer a representational schema of the landscape as an exhausted site of meaning. These contemporary Argentine filmmakers, he claims, abandon the expressly political vocabulary of the pastoral films of the 1960s-70s, effectively acknowledging the decline of utopian ideologies that had found expression in the rural possibility represented in them.

The rural no longer holds the allure that made it central to the utopian films of the 1960s, which favored the countryside (films by Leopoldo Torre Nilsson in Argentina, Glauber Rocha in Brazil).[1] As the political promise of the rural Left was evacuated by the neo-liberal era, and stands as yet unmapped in the era of the "pink tide," Andermann finds in the landscape of the rural a materiality that includes darkness, suffering, pain, and exhaustion. That is, he argues that post-millennial Argentine film has taken as one of its projects a reenvisioning of the rural *as conditioned by neoliberalism*. It is not a space that resists culture, but instead it is one that shows nature's implication with the limits of culture.

The present essay will pursue a different line in reading the cinematic climate that produced Carri's *La rabia* and Alonso's *Los muertos*, identifying what I will claim as a new generation's project for Argentine film, with respect to the rural and landscape, rather than a critique of neoliberalism per se**.** Since many filmmakers across Hispanophone America and Brazil lived through the descent of political and aesthetic promise after the 1970s, their aesthetic models did indeed begin to respond to the contemporaneous encroachment of neoliberal ideology and narrate its effects. In their films, the rural as representational site bore the brunt of much of the transitional tropes from utopian promise to neoliberal decay—becoming, in other words, another model for the center/periphery relation imposed by neoliberal market centers upon the commodity producing zones.

In this initial reading by critics like Andermann, the landscape, which once was a hopeful alternative to urban culture, becomes in this corpus of films a site of sorrow, a victim of neoliberal ideologies, leading to a particular pictorial construction of the rural and a narration that frames rural space through that ideology. This rural imaginary

[1] As Isis Sadek (2010) argues in her seminal article on *Cinema Novo* and spatiality, the aesthetic of Glauber Rocha and other directors "aspired to produce an intellectual 'underst[anding]' [...] of the most marginalized sectors of Brazilian society whose transgressions from the norm stemmed from their subalternity" (Sadek 2010: 62). From Brazil to Chile, the logic of politicized representations became an aesthetic norm transposed into filmic techniques. For a developed history of this phenomenon, please see Hart (2015).

was most often seen as repository for the semiotic construction of neoliberalism rather than existing in its own right, in its own history. Consequently, critics up through Andermann treat the rural in these films as a partial screen upon which to project the movements of neoliberal history—as documentation of the transformation of life under *el modelo*, neoliberal Argentina.[2]

Such readings, however, threaten to reduce these films to documentary value. In what follows I will suggest an amplified reading of these directors' projects *qua film*: arguing that they are producing a new filmic vocabulary akin to Timothy Morton's term "dark ecology." Each director moves beyond the tensions of his/her contemporary landscape and filmic conventions so as to draw out not only a critique of the neoliberal city using images of the country, but also an additional theme: the redefined interdependence between subjects and "land" that drives the rural film. I argue that Morton's notions of "dark ecology" (Morton, *Ecology Without Nature,* 2007, *Dark Ecology* 2016) and the "mesh" (from *The Ecological Thought*, 2010) provide us with tools to show how the filmmakers sought alternatives to traditional landscape and pastoral films, instead generating films that not only critique neoliberalism, but also stress new forms of collectivity and evolutionary teleology. With these conceptual tools, we can trace how a later generation of filmmakers moved beyond neoliberalism and its depictions of an ineluctable interdependence between rural vegetal and animal life and cinematic representation.

My reading will be supported by a Deleuzian analysis of the temporal and imagistic dimensions of this new kind of landscape film, exposing how the temporal dimension in these filmic images entails a moment of transgression and alteration of the viewer's experience. In sum, these new films transgress traditions in order to open a new space, one fostering a new kind of thinking about the land. That space is intended to deterriorialize traditional (and often neoliberal) anthropocentric images of the landscape that predominate when film scholars read landscape as a backdrop or semiotic material, rather than as part and parcel of a deeper critique of thought. Such traditional readings ultimately diminish the irruptive and transgressive potential that I see operating in the films themselves, by ignoring the ecological interconnectedness of the films at their narrative and visual levels.

[2] For an excellent source on the historical development and social extension of *el modelo,* please see Grimson and Kessler (2005).

This essay will use as its case studies two recent Argentine films that Andermann also analyzes—Albertina Carri's *La rabia* (2007) and Lisandro Alonso's *Los muertos* (2004)—in order to show how their reimagining of the rural landscape produces more than Andermann's "dark rurality." I argue that these films intend to represent this exhaustion, but also resurrect the rural as *dark ecology*—not as a land-*scape*, in traditional terms, but as a *land-space* that can be rethought [MY REWORDING]. Dark ecology conceptually describes the territory between more traditional ecological understanding—which is focused on conservation and sustainability—and more negatively-charged data available in the ecosphere, including the horror of capital-centered destruction, aesthetics (e.g., landscapes of destruction), ethics, and epistemology. In other words, dark ecology is interested in why certain terms arise within the paradigms of understanding ecology, and what work they do in terms of power relations. In addressing these spaces, it shapes a coeval mode of thought and practice, based on the appreciation of lugubrious and dangerous affects that are usually left unspoken in ecological thought. As Timothy Morton writes: "What is dark ecology? It is ecological awareness, dark-depressing. Yet ecological awareness is also dark-uncanny. And strangely it is dark-sweet. Nihilism is always number one in the charts these days" (Morton 5).

The filmmakers I discuss in this piece seek a new strategy to move beyond exhausted critiques of neoliberalism and non-ecologically driven notions of spatiality, shifting into a mode that works with the uncanny affects of dark ecology, with what is left after ecologies have been irredeemably altered and are no longer conventionally "natural." That is, these films exemplify how "dark ecology presumes that the lack of invisible places in our social space prevents us from separating public and private, local and global" (Morton 2010: 32). At the same time, they open up what W. J. T. Mitchell (2005) calls "a poetics of pictures" that claims a vision of the ecological that is dangerous, melancholy, and destabilizing with respect to the bucolic myth that had long been represented in the arts as a national historical site of redemption.

Situating the New Argentine Cinema

Andermann's work provides a point of departure for the problematic pursued here: the exhaustion of images of the rural landscape, its inability to generate meaning because older, utopian concepts of the rural no longer are relevant to a political present. Andermann argues that contemporary Argentine filmmakers of recent generations are turning away from their own traditions, abandoning the explicit political vocabulary of

the pastoral films of the 1960s-70s, and thereby effectively acknowledging the decline of utopian ideologies that find expression in rural possibility. As Andermann puts it:

> The more interesting examples of contemporary Argentine cinema, I would argue revisit the cinematic, literary, and political archive of landscape in a double movement: on the one hand, in a critical redeployment of its genre elements (the road movie, the rural melodrama), their conventions clashing with the intrinsic rhythms of place; on the other, by reinventing an expressive naturalism in order to reveal the impulsive, violent underpinnings of history. (Andermann 2014: 64)

There are two provocative points concerning landscape in Andermann's citation. The initial point has to do with the overlapping of genre conventions and naturalist depictions in the new Argentine film, which is central to the critical workings of the movements of history. Simply put, conventional story representations help to create understandings of history in the naturalistic medium of film. Yet a dialectical movement is also clearly present in this reading. As the transformations of the political archive are subjected to critical reappraisal by the new filmmakers, Andermann brings to the forefront the consequence: the "critical redeployment" of cinematic potential that makes film an agent of history, achieving further self-definition.

For Andermann, what lies underneath the surface, invigorating this new Argentine cinema, is an underlying logic of crisis, a political exhaustion that operates as a paradoxical reinvestment of significance in a new historical narrative, replacing traditional images of landscapes as recuperative. Instead, the critical film's project should be to map out and resignify a territory that can produce productive imaginings of contemporary social life in manner that operates at the interstices of historical possibility and filmic achievement. As Andermann writes:

> I argue that these films' presentational qualities—their modes of making us "understand both their bordered world and the world at large"—are to an extent contested by an archival self-consciousness, that is, by the way in which they both call on and dismiss the repertoire of rurality proper to a previous, national cinematic modernity. Thus, they both identify rural landscape as an iconic, historically layered and contested site of representation and enact the exhaustion of this very tradition. (Andermann 2014: 51)

Here, he alludes to the difficulty of re-signifying parts of the national experience (the "archival self-consciousness") that have achieved almost iconic form in the hands of the older generation of Argentine filmmakers and authors. Nonetheless, exhausting the tradition of representation facilitates this new generation of filmmakers' extraction of signification from the exigencies of the cinematic tradition, and reveals a tension present in the political hopes embedded in the Latin American filmic canon. These

films demonstrate a clear capacity for absorbing traditions and transforming them, in a different kind of filmic genre and practice that arrives at a sort of political self-consciousness and self-determination.

Andermann's second point, however, is more difficult to articulate. Landscape, while representationally reconfigured in these filmmakers' works, is still seen by this critic as a mere backdrop. The spatiality and resonance of landscape is not tied to the dynamics of landscape as participant in the filmic vocabulary, but rather construed as a relatively stable bank of images that can receive critical reevaluation and framing. In his discussion of Pablo Trapero's now-classic road movie *Familia Rodante* (Rolling Family, 2004), for example, Andermann writes that:

> landscape remains largely just that: an external, detached and foreign natural scenery in the distance [which] explode[s] into the open whenever its members are obliged by engine failure to immerse themselves into concrete locations on the side of the road, the landscape suddenly morphing from a distant wallpaper into an actual place to be negotiated and engaged with. (Andermann 2014: 65)

Landscape, in Andermann's reading, thus only appears when human subjects emerge to reframe the landscape through their vision and action.

However, other voices dispute this reading, as I will also argue below. For example, Gonzalo Aguilar (2008) illustrates this point with force, arguing that what would be known as "New Argentine Cinema" after the economic crash of 2001 is a cinematic investigation of varied cultural and political effects immanently erupting from the moment of economic crisis.[3] When the Argentine peso crashed, losing nearly all of its value in a few hours, the emergent situation in everyday life and politics alike became a serious intervention into the potential topography of the nation's cognitive map. Such semiotic crises led filmmakers to attack the problem socially, while opening up the space for new performances of national identity.

Aguilar therefore points us toward a generational change in the use of nature in representing national identity. As many filmmakers across Hispanophone America and Brazil experienced how political and aesthetic promise declined after the 1970s (especially Carri and Alonso, discussed below), newer aesthetic models began to respond to the encroachment of neoliberal ideology and to narrate its effects—new historical experience called for new forms of signification and representation. The rural as representational site bore the brunt of much of the nation's contemporaneous

[3] There is a substantial bibliography on the role that non-governmental actors play in imposing a shock style of neoliberalism upon developing economies. Two vital texts specifically focusing upon the Argentine situation are: Blustein (2005) and Levey et al., eds. (2014).

historical transition from utopian promise to neoliberal decay, as traditional tropes also became evacuated of meaning—becoming, in other words, recognized as simply another traditional model for the center/periphery relation imposed by neoliberal market centers upon the commodity-producing zones. What once was hopeful, then, becomes a site of sorrow, and so a new pictorial construction of the rural arises to narrate the nation: rural space is now treated less as untouched, but more as a repository for the semiotic constructions that can question neoliberalism in new ways, responding to transformations of life under *el modelo*.

Timothy Morton's idea of the *mesh* (Morton 2010) helps to clarify what role these cinemas would play in introducing such new semiotic repositories to a viewership that drastically needs to understand itself in new ways. Nature, history, and ecology are part of this mesh of interdependence. Morton helps us see that, within a semiotic framework, these new semiotic repositories need to be reconfigured. New visions of the subjects and "land" that make up the signifiers in the rural film, and thus also shifts in the historical-political grounds through which the subject is created, will require a rejuvenation of what these tropes can express. I believe that his idea of a "dark ecology,"[4] construed as a semiotic repertoire used for making sense of experience, describes what is at stake for such post-neoliberal film, after the decline of traditional landscape tropes. The idea of ethical and political entanglement is not merely a metaphor or an injunction, but rather an attempt to tether normative thought to a genuine political ontology. As Morton writes:

> Coherence and entanglement are features of the quantum world that defy our ideas about what things are: they are single, never deviant from themselves; they stay put… Coherence is when the parts of an object weirdly overlap so that they become the "same" thing, defying our idea of rigid differences among parts and between parts and wholes. Entanglement is when an object appears so deeply linked with some other object that if the one orients a certain way, the other will *immediately* (defying the speed of light) orient in a complementary way. The objects are separate yet "the same." (Morton, 2016, 89)

In the next section, we will see how both Carri's *La Rabia* and Alonso's films implement a kind of dark ecological vision, using as the center of their visual vocabularies the concept of habitat that now marks the human as a non-privileged, unexceptional member of an ecological discourse. That is, a dark ecological semiotic repertoire is in

[4] Timothy Morton's vision of dark ecology plumbs not only the spaces of melancholy and sadness in ecology, but focuses on the epistemological darkness of a "'depthless ecology': either unimaginably deep or having no depth at all—we can never tell. In the end, I decided to call it *dark ecology*" (Morton 2012: 59).

these films created to actively resist the discursive divisors that frame human activity as an inescapably superior activity. What makes "sense," in flim, in Carri and Alonso's movies, is the negation of human superiority and of the immersion of human subjectivity in the anonymity and precariousness of the rural landscape.

To read dark ecology in new Argentine film in this way is to suggest that part of the gambit of the new cinematic vocabulary is to move beyond the representation of rural spaces as visual dioramas of the crisis of neoliberalism. It also suggests that, imbricated within the destructive power of crisis capitalism, is the ecological inextricability of humans from the natural world—a different mesh of domains conditioning the human. In this way, the New Argentine Film needs to be understood less as a metaphor for the precarious of human subjectivity under capitalism, but rather more as a presentation of how nature as a blank screen enables various representations of human concerns, insofar as the films critique inherited semiotic conventions, not only reflecting a dynamism of interaction with ontological import. In this way, Carri's and Alonso's films transcend the filmic history of the Spanish American rural and instead reflect cinematically on the ecological as a modality of everyday life.[5] They use the ethics of ecology in order to deinstrumentalize the relation of human thought to nature, especially in a neoliberal context. It is, in the words of Timothy Morton, a way to re-model ethics for a world in the era of rapid climatological change.

This requirement sets new readings of this generation of Argentine films into motion. We must reclaim how a traditional repertoire of cinematic images of nature became transformed into a set of representational strategies that allow these filmmakers to elaborate this tension between all the agents in the ecological film (and how the director, landscape, and viewer are seen as working together to produce a cinematic matrix that adequately addresses the new constellation of the three elements).[6] That is, these films do not only engage and rescript traditional historical representations, but also actively implicate their viewers in *seeing* and *reading* these representations in new terms, as part of a cultural politics moving past neoliberalism.

[5] Albertina Carri's *La Rabia* and Lisandro Alonso's films have emerged as some of the most critically examined works of the New Argentine Film. In this article, I address specifically Jens Andermann and Gonzalo Aguilar's receptions of these films, but there is an excellent body of scholarship addressing both director's *oeuvres*. Please see especially Page (2009).

[6] See Lefebvre (2006), who addresses the temporality of the image and the film.

Crisis, Neoliberalism, and the Dark Ecology of Contemporary Argentine Film

As noted above, Carri's and Alonso's work stands out as part of a singular filmic archive in contemporary Argentine cinema, emerging out of new networks of state sponsorship and market realities for Argentine film.[7] But we must also acknowledge that they are films that travel the circuits of international film festivals and occupy the syllabi and texts of academic criticism, thus receiving widespread attention despite their limited releases. Despite the minimal popular attention these films receive, I insist that they nonetheless occupy a crucial space in the cultural sphere, where filmmakers consciously argue from the position of the relative autonomy of economically unviable films.[8]

Jens Andermann has argued that Carri's *La rabia* and Alonso's *Los muertos* offer a representational schema of the landscape that fertilizes its image of an exhausted site of meaning, contrasting these represented landscapes with the countryside-minded, utopian films of the 1960s (films by Leopoldo Torre Nilsson in Argentina, Glauber Rocha in Brazil), arguing that they function in different Deleuzian space-times of representation (see Andermann 2012). However, it is easy to see that they engage in a different program: the political promise of the rural left was invalidated by the era of neoliberalism, and their films attest to meanings of the rural still unmapped in the era of the "pink tide," at a moment when the landscape of the rural reveals a materiality seen as darkness, suffering, pain, and exhaustion. The human subjects in both Carri's and Alonso's films are representationally tied to a devastation of economic and subjective possibility, even when embedded in the landscape that cannot redeem them, spiritually or financially. Neoliberalism has forced the evacuation of rural sites like the village of *La rabia,* and has dismissed or utterly destroyed the normal ties that bind a community together. Such facts require a new aesthetic mode for representation, central to the experimental gambit of this *New Argentine Cinema*—a new aesthetic mode that Gonzalo Aguilar terms *nomadism* and *sedentarism*, one that aligns the preoccupations of

[7] For nuanced and robust histories of the connections between market realities and Argentine cinema, see again Page (2009), and Pinazza (2014), as well as Aguilar (2008).

[8] Gonzalo Aguilar links the formal qualities of the New Argentine Cinema to a practice of an undermining of the political: "The fact that when the political is addressed in the new Argentine cinema, critical discourse culminates in its negation (as *prepolitical* or *depoliticization*) leads us to wonder whether we might not instead redefine its status...as a category that acquires new powers and qualities in a medium whose function changed radically during the 1990s" (Aguilar 2008:119).

the film with an aesthetic of social breakdown or filial rescue.[9] These films show land-*spaces* that are part of the nation, not land-*scapes* in the traditional, rehabilitative sense.

Andermann's reading of new Argentine cinema rests on the acknowledgment of human displacement, set against a natural backdrop that serves as the cinematic raw material for the pulsation-image that strengthens the filmic proposition of a new Argentine vernacular. This is especially the case with *La rabia* and *Los muertos*, whose silences and sounds speak to the utter desolation of potentiality for an existence free from violence. But this reading still casts the cinematic world of the natural as speaking outside of an intersubjective circuit in which the "natural" is a representational repertoire enmeshed with national forces, as I argue here. Nature's mimetic gambit reduces itself, in the work of otherwise perceptive critics like Aguilar and Andermann, down to a non-representational but luminous material interlacing of affect with the pulsation-image, which is a disruptive image style that highlights the anti-mimetic and affective dimensions (particularly negative or deconstructive ones) in films of dark rurality.

I concur that I am insisting on an understandable, but prejudicial aesthetic reading of the "natural" film, based in no small part on the conditions of its production and distribution—these "natural" films mean to critique in less conventional ways. Both at the level of the plot and the image, *dark ecology* speaks through the silver screen out of these films. The viewer is entreated instead to engage a logic of the *mesh*, to experience their own inability to fully extricate the human from a natural that is never natural, that is always-already referenced to the human. Even at the level of the filmic, at the level of the meaning-carrying image, these films now unite relationships between subject and nature within the proper field of the *ecological*: "In this sense, the birth of landscape can really be understood as the birth of a way of seeing, the birth of a gaze by which what was once in the margin has now come to take its place at the centre" (Lefebvre 2006b: 27).

[9] As Gonzalo Aguilar writes: "Nomadism and sedentarism are complementary signs of new times, but they show different states. Nomadism is the absence of a home, the lack of powerful (restrictive and normative) ties of belonging, and a permanent and unpredictable mobility; sedentarism shows the breakdown of homes and of families, the inefficacy of traditional and modern associative ties, and the paralysis of those who insist on perpetuating that order" (Aguilar 2008: 34). These two modes of expression suggest a strict linkage between social dynamics and aesthetic depiction. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to critique these two modes, it is crucial to understand how depictions of social distance and destruction play a significant role in the new Argentine cinema.

To be sure, representations of the Latin American landscape have emerged frequently in discourses critiquing neoliberalism, often as parts of a network of neoliberal exploitation for ecotourism and ethnotourism, ideological fetishism of the protected wilderness, and the irreality of artistic representations that underscore the rigorously over-determined relation between landscape and representation. As Gabriela Nouzeilles points out: "among the cultural fictions produced by the geographic imaginary of late capitalism, Latin America represents one of the last natural refuges, and as such has become an object for all manner of fantasy, many of them tied to commercial consumption" (Nouzeilles 2005: 12).[10]

In turn, however, I am arguing that traditional landscape discourses must also be seen as functioning within the matrix of seduction, embedding the viewer within the space of an erotics of vision that is predicated upon the maintenance of the nature/culture divide and that invests a certain kind of sentiment in the image of the landscape feeding the human capacity for memory and consolidation. Landscape, and its anagram *land-space*, tease out this ordering of the relation between the horizon and its contents. Landscape, as Simon Schama argues, is a very constructed visual mode that brings into relief what is seeable in "nature," in order to provide a vocabulary for social memory and forgotten traditions: "our entire landscape tradition is the product of shared culture…built from a rich deposit of myths, memories, and obsessions" (Schama 1996: 14).

In a parallel trajectory to Schama, Martin Lefebvre historicizes landscape in film as visual education, as a tool that presents and helps to reify a nascent relationship between the viewer and the natural—that of the filmic gaze: "In this sense, the birth of landscape can really be understood as the birth of a way of seeing, the birth of a gaze by which what was once in the margin has now come to take its place at the centre" (Lefebvre 2006b: 27). Considering the birth of the gaze in this way is also the nascence of the possibility of an ecologically-driven heuristic for understanding films that are not limited to representing the rural in exhausted semiotic forms. In the ecological perspective of Morton's *mesh*, there is no need to *a priori* assume the evacuation of rural meaning, as the very division between rurality and the urban here is construed and pursued as a fiction of a particular mimetic order. In this case, it seeks to divide and conquer that division which has been so convenient for neoliberalism, in order to assert

[10] All translations from the Spanish my own.

the rural as a land-space characterized by an emptiness of sense, and hence as unrelated to the human.

Thus, in rethinking these boundaries between the urban and the rural, landscape itself is revealed as a type of ecological fiction, a bordering and restraint of the excesses that actually make up the fluid, porous characteristics of the dark, undisciplined land-space domesticated as landscape or "nature." In this conceptual framing, the natural goes beyond delineating what landscape reveals as both a formal visual category and a natural form rendered apprehensible through those traditional visual categories. Yet here we return to the seductive power of the landscape, as well, to see how nature as landscape promulgates a utopian filmic nature.

Latin American film of this generation, I believe, consciously tries to transcend these limitations. It knows that its land-spaces are often uniquely situated within the matrix of landscape images as political investments, as canvases on which the struggles of national construction and political emergence were translated directly into traditional images of the land and territoriality. Far from an exhaustion of the rural, then, what occurs in this post-neoliberal moment, in particular in Alonso's *La libertad,* is a resurrection of the *rural*, albeit in a radically different political and ethical register: as Morton's dark ecology, and in the dark rurality that directly alludes to neoliberalism without being fully immersed within the tropes of capitalist realism.[11] These films evacuate the utopian content of the rural and fill the void of representation with images of a much darker ecology. Instead of representing the landscape as dominated by anthropocentric concerns and tropologically divided between human and non-human spaces, Alonso and Carri thus reinvigorate the rural as the dark ecology of a new ecological thought, wherein these two traditional poles are revealed as fatally enmeshed in Latin America, a world needing a new ecology, both for nature and for the subjects defined by it.

These films thus are intended to rethink the semiotic of this interconnected mesh, and to underscore how the ecological must be reimagined, particularly in the era of neoliberal depredations, if a cinematic vocabulary for the disruption of the boundaries of nature and culture is to emerge as adequate for the new generation. In

[11] Capitalist Realism is a model for imagining aesthetic possibilities under the current regimes of neoliberalist production; it argues that there is no fundamental outside to aesthetic regimes imposed by capital. As Mark Fisher suggests, "a pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action" (Fisher 2013: 20). For a further accounting of Capitalist Realism, please see La Berge and Shonkwiler (2014).

other words, what Alonso and Carri respectively produce with *Los muertos and La rabia* is an intentionally transgressive cinema undermining the tradition of viewing the landscape as political aspiration. They use the new semiotics of their *land-spaces* to collapse traditional sentiments of distance between human subject and putative natural order and to assert an enmeshed critique of both domains—to conceptualize the rural as somehow "not-culture" is a worn-out fiction.

In each of these films, the lens emerges as optical interlocutor, suggesting that the landscape is anything but empty: it focuses on the landscape's plenitude and on human inhabitation within the fullness and dimensions of nature as a land-space. Whatever borders there are between nature and culture are negated by what can best be described by what Tiago de Luca (2014) calls a "realism of the senses." De Luca's term makes manifest how cinema articulates sensual possibility by ordering (or reordering) the visual and sonorous in its representations. In other words, de Luca argues for a relationship of coherence between the meaning-making strategies embodied in the visual modalities apparent on the silver screen and those present in the sensorium of the subjects viewing that screen. The power of filmic representations lies in their ability produce an imagistic logic that underscores the real in the filmic, so that it can carry out a renovation of the filmic contract.

This is a significant move in the history of leftist critique—one that harks back to the days of Sergei Eisenstein and early debates in socialist cinema. In a more recent era, Jameson's (1992) geopolitical aesthetic sees film as representing the particular social and political tensions of a globalized critique of capital (much in the vein of the Frankfurt School). Similar to his own notion of third-world literature, Jameson's geopolitical aesthetic positions the cinematic as part of a circuit of consumption and production that instantiates and reifies one strategy of representation. In other words, even a social-critical cinema like the typical Argentine film always contains the seeds of this phenomenon within it, but in shifting these representations to respond to capitalist crisis, these filmmakers are trying to shift landscapes into land-spaces and reclaim what de Luca highlighted as the relationship between the corporeality of the spectator and the images on the screen. Citing Elsaesser and Haggler's idea of the "ideal spectator," de Luca's theory structures the long take as the necessary visual expression at work for presenting new realisms across the globe—new space-time delimitations with real affective dimensions infused with new critical potential. Thus, like this generation of filmmakers, de Luca highlights the fact that realist film embeds a horizon of expectation

that coevally and conterminously structures both viewer and producer at the level of reception and production, and that this horizon of expectation can be transformed.

Recall that realism of the senses can then be read as a map for cognition (to slightly alter Jameson's terminology from *The Political Unconscious* (1981)), which foregroundsmaterial reality and makes a case for a phenomenologically-grounded experience. As de Luca writes, with regards to the cinema of realism of the senses:

> These are cinemas designed to reclaim the phenomenology of the viewing experience through a sensuous contact with material reality as richly captured and enhanced by the film medium. More than an interpretative and alert spectatorial attitude based on the scanning and arrangement of narrative cues, they solicit an engagement with the audiovisual components of the image as physical presences in their own right, that is to say, as sensory realities. (de Luca 2014: 10)

In this sense, part of the procedure of cognitive mapping through film is a moment of phenomenal expression and reception that transmits a cognitive map as well as a pattern of affective engagement. As noted above, this is more than a binarism between the representational politics of naturalist presentation and the fictive space of film. Tiago de Luca's work provides for more types of cinematic realism, allowing for a more nuanced consideration of the politics and practice of cinematic vocabulary as historically situated within multiple traditions of representation, production, and consumption.

"Realism of the senses" allows for the development of a stylistics that helps to situate Carri and Alonso within the melancholic realism of dark ecology, as a new kind of semiotics. In it, the bucolic joins with the sardonic, lamenting through the sensorium of inseparability and undecidability that is the de Lucan realism of Albertina Carri's *La rabia* or Lisandro Alonso's *Los muertos* and *La libertad* (2001).

Cinematic Dark Ruralities

La rabia's dark rurality is to be sought in its realization of the dark ecology that provides the missing "invisible places in our social space [that prevent] us from separating public and private, local and global" (Morton 2007: 32). It most often shows those spaces under the cinematic filter of everyday light, as outdoor scenes set under the shifting luminosity of foliage cover and in the glaring light of hay fields. The uniform lines of the *pajonales* (haystacks) of *La rabia* is an agricultural community embedded within the greater totality of the *rural*, characterized by the uniform lines of the haystacks that bring the made-ness of city spaces and evidence of human handiwork into the

rural, albeit at a visible distance from it. Carri situates *La rabia* in the lugubriousness and unsparing harshness that presages the violent sexuality and animalistic moral exchanges that form the film's plot.

At first glance, the village has no obvious or immediate connection with urban space or even with the modalities of the neoliberalized Argentine countryside, whose vast resources are marshaled for the massive international commodities market.[12] But the film rapidly dissuades us from that assumption. The film actually begins with a disclaimer stating that the animals actually killed in the movie "lived and died according to their habitat." And rather than situate habitat in the human-free space of nature preserves and the distance from the human, humans and animals share the habitat and killing as part of *the mesh*. As Morton puts it, this understanding "permits no distance. Thinking interdependence involves dissolving the barrier between 'over here' and 'over there,' and more fundamentally, the metaphysical illusion of rigid, narrow boundaries between inside and outside. Thinking interdependence involves thinking difference" (Morton 2007: 39). Immediately thereafter, the opening scene plays out against a darkly lit background; streams of illumination combing through fields of sorghum, hay, and wheat spread provides a depth of obscurity that renders the film almost noir-like in its representations.

Within the cinematic frame, this darkness does not operate as an obscurantist move against the readability of this land-space. Instead, it is the implementation of what Deleuze calls the "complementary givens," which allow for the comprehensibility of the double reference that will be pursued throughout the film: the ecological mesh and the cinematic expression thereof. As Deleuze claims: "Cinema, in fact, works with two complementary givens: instantaneous sections which are called images; and a movement of a time which is impersonal, uniform, abstract, invisible, or imperceptible, which is 'in" the apparatus, and 'with' which the images are made to pass consecutively" (Deleuze 1986: 15). This film embeds the cinematic time of the rural in this kind of visual *noir* to empirically introduce the relations between the two poles of the mesh, using the ecological to render both the rural and the city comprehensible.

Thus, this *noir* critique of neoliberalism, this *dark rurality*, is a filmic mode not exclusively intended to represent the human subjects whose value is irrevocably

[12] Agricultural industry represents at least twenty percent of Argentina's GDP, and up to seven percent of the workforce is employed in food in agriculture. For more information, including historical briefs and analysis of national agricultural policy, please see the "Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations" (2015).

flattened by neoliberalism, but also what their existence rests on, a land-space underneath the film's representations of violence, hopelessness, and decay. It belies at every step viewers' attempts to divide the human and non-human worlds and its cherished discourses of green ecology. Instead, it turns directly to *dark ecology*: a more melancholy, dirtier, more complex ecological hermeneutic that situates both human subjects and the non-human in a common *mesh*. This system of interconnectivity does not abjure representations of violence, but rather negotiates the restive reality of ecological inhabitation. Precisely here, in the conjunction between the technical, cinematic representation and the ecological thought, we find a reframing of the rural as part of an ecological totality, just as the film's frame insists on showing a land-space rather than a background landscape.

The plot following these initial images is fairly simple. Ale and Pichón, neighbors in the rural community of the *La rabia*, are involved in a torrid sexual affair. Ale's mute daughter, Nati and Pichón's son, the physically disabled Ladeado, witness their violent couplings amidst a backdrop of the workaday violence of the rural spaces: the killing of weasels that rob the chicken coop, the slaughtering of a pig for the community meal, the murder of a dog who cannot stop attacking sheep. Thus, there is no artificial habitat for humanity, no place where the rural animal, be it human or non-human, is spared the possibility of destruction. This is, sadly, but honestly, a condition of the mesh—of all the spaces linked to each other between the country and the city. Such images of the exhaustion of the rural are images of a new, provisional, but nonetheless obvious *thinking, imagining, or reflecting* on the earth and the human subject in the era of ecological disaster, the era of the ecological mesh. *La rabia* consistently imagines rural violence not as a falling away from a state of grace, but rather as part of a cycle of inhabitation that is "primal and regressive"; it addresses ecology without the sentimentality of the earlier generation of rural films' utopian projects.

The result, however, is by no means only negative. Despite the horror produced in *La rabia,* the landscape is:

> vast yet intimate: there is no here or there, so everything is brought within our awareness. The more we analyze, the more ambiguous things become. We can't really know who is at the junctions of the mesh. Even when we meet them, they are liable to change before our eyes, and our view of them is also labile. These beings are the *strange stranger*. (Morton 2010: 40)

The intimacy of that "strange stranger" extends to the topography of mutual recognition and spiritual reordering of what is understood to be the conditions of the *mesh*. In this representation, the beings in this land space are imbricated in a network

where horror, aggression, and violence openly lead the viewer to recognize that—instead of the marginalization of the human subject by neoliberalism-—what is actually being represented in this film is a *mise-en-scène* of a human-rural network that is asymptotic to neoliberalism. It is an empirical representation of dark rurality's connection of beings, stripped of moral judgments and evaluations.

The film does not break this frame. It remains centered on the dark rural as it pursues the conflict between two sets of farmers working in *La rabia*, a large landholding in the vast Argentine pampas. As I described above, Pichón is embroiled in an intense affair with Ale, his neighbor Poldo's wife. Their sex is marked by an intense and violent connection, laden with moments of sadomasochistic exchange, all of which is witnessed by their respective children. Operating parallel to the adultery story is the conflict that Pichón and Poldo have around Ladeado's beloved dog, who regularly escapes his tethers and kills Poldo's goats. This fluid crossing of boundaries cements the impossibility of domesticating ecological and animal experience in the mesh. The dog flouts the divisions of territory in atavistic fashion and becomes the hunter of the lambs—one example of the allegory of atavism interlaced throughout the film.

The ecological mesh is this truth: that the nature/culture divide is at least porous, and in the most extreme case, almost completely meaningless. The dog's violence is neither eruptive nor transgressive, but linked to the simple dynamics of predatory animals that come to the domesticated agricultural sphere in order to feed. Despite the human law invoked to preserve the livestock, there is no supplementary moral virtue to the killing of the dog, but instead there is a simpler recognition of the predatory possibility of the dog's species. It is not *this* dog that is a problem because of disobedience, *all* dogs do this by nature. Dark ecology merges here in the intersectional moment between the dog's life and the mode of justice exercised in its execution. In the sense of a brutish materialist representation, the death scene is as Deleuze suggests, from the "any-instant-whatever" of cinema, taken out of any filmic visual field that would privilege a visible morality.

Without question, the most significant part for the "ecological thought" on which this film rests is the actual slaughter of the pig, which takes place roughly halfway through the film. This real-time killing takes place in order to provide a lunch for the community of agricultural workers, creating a moment during the meal where the simmering hostilities between the protagonists is laid to rest.

A similar moment occurs in *Los muertos*. In this film, ex-convict Vargas (Argentino Vargas) is released from prison after having served an extended sentence for the murder of his two siblings, and he travels out of the city and into the far rural areas of Argentina, first by bus, then by boat, in order to reunite with his family. As Vargas enters the depths of the rural sphere, the scenery becomes more densely foliaged, just as the zones of commerce and exchange represented in it become more tenuous and more rustic (a prostitute's home and a clothing store, which is little more than clothing boxes behind a wooden counter)—more tied to indigenous vernacular discourses about the Chaco rainforest.

Yet there is no moment of abrupt transition between the country and the city, nor is there a division between any urban or sylvan space. Vargas' travels simply bring him ever deeper into a jungle that demands of him the stripping away of urban space and the activation of the tools of wilderness living. He makes fire using stone tools; he easily creates a shelter for himself in the open air. Vegetal life becomes more prominent, and there is the constant increase in ambient sounds of animal life. Alonso's use of animal noise works off the premise that sonority conveys locality and regularity of setting, but it also answers to the need for concrete experience in recasting symbolic space.

Alonso's film begins with scenes of dead bodies in the Argentine jungle, deeply embedded within the foliage. What in other films might serve as a moment of forensic discovery or terror appears here simply as an afterthought, another moment of the mesh. A viewer might suspect that Vargas is the killer, but Alonso leaves this question unanswered, focusing instead on the exploration of Vargas' character and his relation to the environment, and on the mesh between his two life spheres. As Benjamin Mercer (2010) argues: "Vargas is always adapting to the environment, so in that sense he seems to become a sort of mirror image of it." Alonso's films have been read as accounts of the "where" of the landscape, "where a man might simply be forced to kill his brothers to save them from the terminal agonies of starvation ("the original motive in the *Los Muertos* script, according to the critic James Quandt's thorough *Artforum* survey of the director's work" [Mercer 2010]). I argue instead that Vargas' adaptability signals instead the interconnectedness of these spheres.

In this case, the mesh and ecology take center stage in the form of starvation as an element uniting the phases of his life—to see it as simply a problem for human ingenuity would be to afford humanity a triumphalist power it may not fully possess, and to ignore the power of the land-space in that hunger. Vargas avoids this error by

representing nature as both backdrop and actor, both as a screen onto which the lifeworld projects its values and, ultimately, as causal agent in the struggle. If we take Mercer's claim literally that the Vargas' character is a mirror image of the landscape, we see that Mercer is arguing for the mirror not as metaphor, but rather as a lens that frames the image to make it document the ontic relations between the human subject and nature.

Yet from the perspective pursued here, to argue that Alonso's film accounts for the intersubjective relation between the natural and the human underserves the pulsation of affective possibilities instantiated into experience by the film. The representational logic coupled with the projection of anxiety and melancholy in *Los muertos* opens the landscape image much more deeply to the mesh of dark ecology. And this turn makes it possible to contemplate the relations between human and inhuman reality at the filmic and ecological level, thereby confronting and challenging limited possibilities for ecological imagination. Through the optic of dark ecology, "[e]cological thought contemplates a subaesthetic level of being, beyond the cute and beyond the awesome... This level unsettles and disgusts. It doesn't mirror our fantasies" (Morton 2010: 91).

Nonhumans and humans in Alonso's filmic *mesh* account for, record, and testify about nature in non-traditional ways, so that they are, in Morton's terms, *strange strangers* to one another, occupying the same space but always at a reserve[13]—they exist through the separation of species-being that is nonetheless a unity of relations. Thus, even a tree testifies in a way that we are always at some level inscribing and mistranslating. This again enlarges our perception of the mesh and its action in this land-space. As Andermann summarizes:

> I would suggest that these sequences seek out a vision of and in nature beyond its association with the protagonist (and thus also beyond the borderlands of society, where the hero still dwells and that are marked out as borders precisely through these minimal incursions into a "nature beyond"). (Andermann 2014: 68)

Or as David Martin-Jones writes, the point is the "film's construction of affective landscapes (depictions of bodies as repositories of time, in particular, bodies merging

[13] For Morton, the strange stranger represents an ontological relationship that exceeds the graspable meaning. The strange strangers stand intimately in an "allowing of and a coming to terms with the passivity and void of the strange stranger" (Morton 2007: 80). This ontological identity allows for the human and non-human to be enmeshed in an a-teleological proximity.

with landscapes as they give testimonies that demonstrate the histories encased in these landscapes)" (Martin-Jones 2013: 716).

Here again, the pastoral landscape of green ecology is replaced by a dark ecological mesh on this land-space connecting the city and the country. Like Andermann, I believe that this *dark ecology* creates a Deleuzian pulsation-image:

> The pulsation-image [...] describes a peculiar form of immanence: as incision, rupture, radical beginning and inevitable end. Associated with liminal moments of the human, in which the latter both collapses and constitutes itself—birth and death, sexuality and violence—the pulsation-image is a break in the continuity of action and affect, often manifesting itself as symptom or as fetish (taking hold of the body or the object-world). (Andermann 2012: 85)

At the same time, that rupture creates a new kind of rationality, one found in the films of both Carri and Alonso. As Andermann puts it: "The otherness of place and protagonist is, then, also the effect of a visual rhetoric that binds them to each other, forcing us to infer the 'truth' of one from the relation with the other, yet never revealing themselves outside of this relation" (Andermann 2014: 63). In the cases of *La rabia* and *Los muertos*, I suggest in addition that this "break in the continuity of affect" is itself the putting into position of another affect—one that asserts the rural as a zone that goes beyond its function under neoliberalism. The rural is neither merely the backdrop nor the historical projection screen for human suffering.

In fact, part of Andermann's reading rests on the notion that the exhausted landscape operates as a sort of marker for historical failure—as the enervation of history's representation. This points to a way out of some of my initial disagreements with Andermann, so that his work may be extended to apply to the cases under consideration here. The historical tradition of much of Latin American film from the 1950s until just prior to the beginning of the twenty-first century had always incorporated the marginalized classes as figures of centrality dealing with the vicissitudes of achieving historical consciousness. Now, a new option arose. As Andermann summarizes: "The double regime of cinematic space as setting and as landscape allows cinema to tease out a critical viewing capable of relating the constructivism of the editing to the intricacy and real durations of the material world, and of playing— as does the filmmaker—one against the other in a dialectic akin to that of history itself" (Andermann 2012: 53).

I suggest that, in an extension of the notion of traditional ideas of the rural through the addition of the concept of dark rurality, this affect might be called a *dark intimacy* that unites human and non-humans in the ecological mesh, rather than setting

them in a dialectic, as Andermann insists. Instead, the relation between the landscape and the human here is one of intimacy and specificity. If damage is done to being, even by another being, the relation of dominance connecting them becomes close-up and visible. Thus, graphic representations of violence become the essence that unites Carri's disclaimer and the true-to-life violence committed against the animals in the film; Alonso's images of death in the jungle reconfigure our perception of death away from green ecology to a darker position.

Dark ecology's cognitive map thus functions in these films to remap Argentina's topographical features into images that disrupt the viewers' total immersion into the "natural," to disrupt and deconstruct any line trying to hold beings apart—that line is exhausted and so requires new representational schema to render into experience unrepresentable social forms. In Carri's and Alonso's films, the audience finds unsparing depictions of the rural not as merely exhausted of political content, but as represented in new ways to offer a more honest, unflinching look at the political and ethical embedded in "dark ecology." The old utopianism of the landscape-dominated man has been foreclosed by the effects of neoliberalism, and dark ecology points to what has been unseen or misconstrued. That older ecological and pastoral vision is still tied to the imagining of either utopian political projects or the extraction of capitalist value.

At the level of images, however, Carri and Alonso have created a new visual aperture onto a landscape where the social relations between subjects are revealed to be far less "mediated" by the divisions between animal/human/land than by a more holistic and integrated imagistic vocabulary that belies the clear superiority of the subject over nature. The films provide the images for dark ecology that, as W.J.T. Mitchell argues, act as the "visual construction of the social." For Mitchell, "visual *nature* is therefore a central and unavoidable issue, along with the role of animals as images and spectators" (Mitchell 2005: 343). Through film we are called to reflect on the mesh, on our ecological existence as spectators and species.

In short, I argue that the visual construction of the social achieved in these films should be seen as the visual construction of *the ecological mesh*, aimed at reordering the manner in which film gestures beyond the nature/culture representational divide—moving beyond traditional critiques of neoliberalism into a new generation of social-political critique.

Some Conclusions: The Dark Rurality of the New Argentine Film

Part of understanding the interpretative gambit surrounding the New Argentine Film that I have been suggesting here requires an investigation of how new modalities of composition create anew the social relations between cinematic production and filmic framing—how a new syntax of cinematic representation enables new forms of epistemological critique.

Here again, we can return to Jameson's now well-worn concept of cognitive mapping, with respect to Andermann's "reframing of the rural." Jameson's term helps the viewer and critic understand how "films and other cultural artifacts construct on the level of form--rather than representation 'content'—models of their relations to the social totality, including a conceptualization of their own mediality and its place and function within that totality" (Andermann 2014: 50). Yet I believe that the films discussed here go further, suggesting that both Jameson and Andermann fail to recognize that any "social totality" must include the non-human world—the world of nature is undervalued as part of the totality. The reframing of the rural in this way, however, emerges as an interpretive move that is part of the best tradition of critique: requiring the cognitive rearrangement of the subject during capitalist times.

This gesture is, I believe, parallel to the reframing of intersubjective experience that Jameson is suggesting in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992). He presents not only a way of mapping the social and political apperceptions of subjectivity, but an "unsystematic mapping" (Jameson 1992: 1) that negotiates lines of escape for the individual subject from the weight of cultural commitment. However, the geo- prefix in his use of the term geopolitical, in this reading, refers to the globalized connections of neoliberal capital, ignoring, at least superficially, how geography itself is a blurring of the line between nature and culture—how landscape, as land-*space*, must always also be seen as an attempt to contain lines of escape and put into practice a political (re)ordering of the land. In this fashion, it possible to imagine that the cognitive creation of landscapes is, at least minimally, about controlling the environment in order to create a containable idea, a concept that facilitates the imagining of the natural and the overwriting of land-spaces by dominant ideologies, facilitated by a particular aesthetics of representation.

The "reframing of the rural" that Andermann links to the decline of utopian sentiment and the emergence of a neoliberal assault on the rural, in the cases of these films, has been cognitively mapped onto the celluloid frame as narrative using images that stress the insufficiency and danger of the current understandings of the rural—which question neoliberalism's heritage of Enlightenment tropes. In fact, I have argued

that Carri's and Alonso's films intersect in a representational schema that exposes insinuations crossing the traditional natural/cultural divide. Such films produce reflections across varying dimensions of signification, producing aesthetic effects that impel a heuristic of the affective and transnational modalities in the films—especially with regards to their position in the globalized neoliberal world of aesthetics. Andermann argues that the reframing of the rural is a type of Jamesonian cognitive mapping, situating the films in their specific contexts—national, market, and international—yet he does not acknowledge the epistemological radicalism that I have been tracing here.

What is left out of such traditional accounts of cinematic cognitive mapping is the vision of land-space as the substrate for any and all ideological functions. The land-space can erupt with subversions of what "is" (the conventional understanding that maintains the division between nature and culture) to challenge existing notions of self-consciousness within the rural sphere. Without understanding the role that ecological or natural dynamism play in the undercurrents of the filmic landscape, without going "beyond landscape," in the words of Fredric Jameson, we cannot see how this new generation of films maps out the various contingent and necessary symbolic moments of postmodernity, or late capitalism, in new ways.

Jameson's point about film rests on a capacity for critical analysis to meet film and produce a sophisticated, albeit contingent and globally configured site of aesthetic practices:

> [W]e map our fellows in class terms day by day and fantasize our current events in terms of larger mythic narratives, we allegorize our consumption and construction of the object world in terms of Utopian wishes and commercially programmed habits—but that must be added what I will now call a geopolitical unconscious. This it is which now attempts to refashion national allegory into a conceptual instrument for grasping our new being-in-the-word. (Jameson 1992: 3)

This is what I believe these new Argentinian films achieve: challenging one of Latin America's most cherished mythic narratives—the fundamental division between the cultural production of the human animal and the natural world.

These positions in the mise-en-scène of the new Argentine film shape the question of ecological and "human" situations. The melancholic borders between the instrumental logic of human domination and control dissolve the vision of the rural as either neoliberal recuse or pastoral enclosure. "Coherence and entanglement" is the horizon of ecological fusion taking place in Alonso and Carri's films, and the unity of

the ecological and the filmic allows for the illustration of a melancholic and threatening affect that operates at the level of the ecological fissure between nonhuman and human subjectivities.

Furthermore, the map of capitalist totality is conspicuously absent as both Albertina Carri's *La rabia* and Lisandro Alonso's *Los muertos* operate at a reserve away from the circuits of urban capitalist accumulation and consumption. The town of *La rabia* operates under the spacing of the Deleuzian interval-image/pulsation-image, but with the added dimension of a temporal presence made possible by the crepuscular lighting and the time-image of shifting, contradictory temporalities between the pastoral and the personal time of memory, sexuality, honor, etc.

The scene of commerce in the town shop—with an almost totally obscurantist light frame and the mise-en-scène—links weak local circuits of production and exchange to the near isolation of the town of *La rabia*. Paths to the map of images and relation to capitalist totality are blurred by the filmic representation of the slimmest connection to the market. *La rabia* is read as a film of psychic destruction, destroying the coherence of sanity through its editing. Cynthia Tompkins argues that there is a dialectical relationship between editing and cognition that realizes a type of illusory, dreamlike space:

> En términos formales los sueños tienden a ser representados mediante fundido a negro, fundido encadenado (*dissolves, fade in, fade out*), superposiciones, complejos movimientos de la cámara, efectos especiales, entre ellos imágenes abstractas, o a través del montaje, para sugerir una especie de extrañamiento que se asemeje al estado del sueño a pesar de que se representen objetos concretos. (Deleuze, 2003b:58; cited in Tompkins 193)

Here the editing tension works to ironically reinforce the connection between dark rurality/ecology and the frame of the film. Tompkins' reading of *La rabia* describes a coherent relationship between the cyclical temporality of the rural, the obscuring materiality of the relationships between Ladeado and Nati as witnesses of the struggles for sexual release, and justifications between the adults. Running parallel to the emotional and sexual violence of Ale and Poldo's relationship is the shifting of temporal moments that reflect the closure and distance of *La rabia* from the outside world. As with the murders in the Chaqueño jungle in *Los muertos*, which insulates the frame through the long, languid tracking shot that runs along the victims' bodies, Carri's film shuts off the flow of the urban but retains the ecological mesh in its most destructive and fatalistic registers.

Traditionally, this divide has only been noted when it appears to disrupt this antinomian arrangement during moments of crisis, where disaster, extinction, or geological upheaval make almost immediately visible the arrangements of the political relations of the previous order. Yet the thought forms emerging from Jameson and Andermann's deployment of cognitive mapping articulate a deeper ideological admixture of truth and deviation that is reflected in the idea of dark ecology.

Considering the New Argentine Film as engaging a dark ecology, represented in the form of dark ruralities that summon up violence in conjunction with the landscape, allows the filmmakers to affirm cyclical or abortive, melancholic temporalities of the countryside—images that have been lacking in our analyses of national ideologies. Through them, we are called to practice an ecocriticism that undoes the traditional parsing of ideologies onto space. As Morton argues:

> "Ecology without nature" could mean "ecology without a concept of the natural." Thinking, when it becomes ideological, tends to fixate on concepts rather than doing what is "natural" to thought, namely, dissolving whatever has taken form. Ecological thinking that was not fixated, that did not stop at a particular concretization of its object, would thus be "without nature." To do ecocritique, we must consider the aesthetic dimension, for the aesthetic has been posited as a nonconceptual realm, a place where our ideas about things drop away. (Morton 2007: 21)

Considering the aesthetic dimension as these New Argentinian filmmakers do thus seems to be a precarious point of ingress for both critical pedagogy and ecocritique, which presumes, in the age of the Anthropocene, nothing less than admitting an immediacy of attention to heretofore unconsidered dimensions of the inherited neoliberal project, based on catastrophe's imminence. After all, is not this aesthetic turn a move toward the construction of a new relation between film and the audience, a reconstruction and new internalization of the spectator/film relationship? Here we turn again to Deleuze's impulse-image in order to argue for such dark ecological thinking the fostering of a new connection, in this case, between the exhaustion of our contemporary understanding of the rural and an understanding of the ecological without nature—of the *mesh* as opposed to a dichotomy.

As we have seen, the exhaustion of the rural that Andermann noted occurs through the deployment of cinematic modalities and forms of visual arrangement that enact a rupture between the representational integrity of the landscape and the capacity for film to move away from diegetic modes. Andermann had invoked the Deleuzian notion of the time-image, whereby the cinematic order of narration is broken by the temporal machinations of the time, in order to double the affective reception of a film

scene. In Alonso's landscape, the interiority of the landscape is evacuated of distance, effectively becoming a flattened percept in order to realize the dynamism of the *mesh* and its temporal situation; in Carri's, the timeless facts of nature emerge to challenge the evaluations of the present.

It is noteworthy that this emergence of a new rurality is embedded in the rhetoric of national insufficiency and broken political hopes for national subjects who have lost hope for radical political transformation. During the 1990s, with Ménem's presidency, Argentina saw the wholesale privatization of state assets (from the rail system to agricultural processing factories and oil refineries), which often led to closures due to unprofitability. More importantly, the *rural* sectors initially and most heavily bore the brunt of the implementation of such neoliberal policies. The rural was thus *really* transformed from the space of political hope and possibility to an "an interior space of misery and rebellion" (Andermann 2014: 17). In these films, then, the rural as *dark rurality* has become a cinematic "image-world," to use Susan Sontag's words, which visually examines the affective fractures and detritus of a pastoral, bucolic zone that has collapsed upon itself as the refuse of neoliberal economic machinations:

> [i]nstead of reendowing place with mnemonic and affective density, [as 60s and 70s films] sought to do, these recent films from Argentina and Brazil approach the rural interior as what at first appears to be an exercise in oblivion. By stripping it of previous inscriptions, these films invest landscape with an enigmatic nature. (Andermann 2012: 55)

But what I have argued here is that these new filmic landscapes tap the power of the land-spaces to be anything but enigmatic.

Andermann's idea of the exhaustion of the rural is embedded in a specific model for the function of the rural as the guarantor of identity. His idea is that the rural landscape in Argentine film deployment seems to be a space of trauma, of violence without limits and the source of a particular medium for the transmission of violence. I have argued instead that, beyond the exhaustion of the rural, there is a type of resuscitation of the rural that revives landscape as a signifier imbricating the signs of violence and atavism with the plenitude of nature. Human subjects are embedded in filmic conventions where "dark rurality" opens a breach into the *new ecological thought,* as Timothy Morton suggests.

The "dark ecology" of this new ecological thought thus lies at the heart of the dark rurality of Argentine film, where human collective and subjective identity is exposed to the land, and the mythology of utopian rural dominance is replaced by darkness that admits the possibility of destruction. Recognizing the action of this dark

ecology provides us with a pathway to reflection on an ecological thought that refuses to reify the fetish of the double otherness of the human to nature. Dark ecology acts as both a type of *noir* atmospherics and as a reconfiguration of the natural as Real—mediated and attenuated by the symbolic imaginary for the sake of subjective appropriateness and creation.

This cinema claims for itself the role of a chief mediator and structuring mechanism for political critique through dark ecology at the level of a new contemporary filmic vernacular that actively configures the visual sphere of nature. Andermann argues that cinematic nature is "an external, detached and foreign natural scenery in the distance, any actual interaction being cut short by the speed of movement, registered in the shot through the disappearance of the foreground" (Andermann 2014: 65). In contradistinction, Timothy Morton's dark ecological thought refuses any conceptual distinction between non-human nature and the human other. Yet this New Argentine Film takes up a more complex project.

As Aguilar has argued, the landscape of New Argentine film overlaps with the exhaustion of the utopian, politicized depiction of the landscape of *cinema novo* or the 60s *films engagées* of the era. This is an important move filmically, given the reification of power in traditional topographical meaning for projects serving a national elite and developing modernity.

At the end of the day, I'd like to suggest reading Carri and Alonso as *auteurs* of the emerging discourse reframing the human in its interconnectedness, a choice that adds another component to Andermann's vision of exhaustion as the cognitive map of a world riven by neoliberalism. Mapping the ecological overlap of Carri's rural community, or Alonso's Martínez, reveals the naming of the indissoluble implication of the natural through the interstices of filmic representation.

In this sense, I have tried in this essay to extend our critical vocabulary using the concept of the cognitive map to include dark ecology as a point that reimagines the scale of the social and political. Timothy Morton's ecological thought recommends to us that we need to continue exploring the Jamesonian cognitive map with regards to the semiotic sophistication of Latin American film. In so doing, we can see how a new generation of intellectuals appeals to the dynamic scales of capitalism in the age of anthropogenic climate change. This is a new "geopolitical aesthetic," used in an extraordinary generation of filmmaking in order to get at the unrepresentable lack of dark ecology by re-presenting the visual fields inherited from their own traditions.

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