Queering the Rural in Contemporary Argentine Cinema: *Taekwondo*, *Esteros*, and *Como una novia sin sexo*

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Abstract

In queer social histories, the city has been privileged as a normative space for queer identity and social progress to be actualized. Compared with urban spaces, rural spaces continue to be perceived as always dangerous and antagonistic for people who identify as queer. In cinema with queer images, this narrative of the rural as hostile is being challenged by films with queer images that contain positive narratives within a rural or non-urban milieu. In other words, these films are presenting counter-narratives to what scholar Jack Halberstam has called metronormativity. Under a metronormative optic, it is assumed that queer people in a rural space will adopt the spatial narrative of movement from that rural space to an urban space. In 2016, three Argentine films were released that challenged metronormative assumptions: Marco Berger and Martín Farina's *Taekwondo*, Papu Curotto's *Esteros*, and Lucas Santa Ana's *Como una novia sin sexo* / *Bromance*. Through the representation of queer desire in rural spaces, these films offer a counter-narrative to the privileging of the urban in queer sociality. Through close readings of these three films that take into consideration sexual fluidity, bodily experience, and their intersections with natural elements and iconography, it is evident that there is a contemporary impulse to cinematically convey queer rurality, an understudied and overlooked phenomenon.

Acknowledgements

There are far too many people to whom I need to express gratitude, both in my academic milieu and outside of it. I will start with the academics and scholars who have assisted me with my academic trajectory at Queen's University. I would like to thank Professor James Miller, who has continuously assisted me even before beginning my studies at the master's level in the Cultural Studies program at Queen's University. Professor Miller inspired me to realize that the humanities contain multitudes—to borrow Walt Whitman's quintessential verse—and that nothing is too unorthodox to academically explore. I'm grateful for Professor Susan Lord's graciousness, both as a mentor and for allowing me to participate in a course on Cuba, and a subsequent two-week exchange in Havana, where I was given the opportunity to learn about gender and sexuality and how it relates to cultural production, and where I was able to practice my Spanish before embarking on a longer trip to Argentina for research for this project. And lastly, I am immensely grateful to my supervisor Professor Jan Mennell, for her insight and expertise on Argentine literature and film, and for her kindness and mentorship during the arduous process of writing a master's dissertation.

I wish I could thank all of the people in Argentina whose names I will never know. When I think about the kindness and the grace of the people I met in Argentina, I am filled with emotions; even if it was a customer in a bakery bringing a tray to me when he could see that I didn't know where to find a tray, or a woman who saw me struggling with a grocery store door and helped me open it. There was the law student in Mendoza named Julieta who welcomed me into her home when I couldn't reach the host at whose apartment I was staying, after two women walking down the street saw me waiting alone and knocked on Julieta's door. I extended my stay

in Mendoza and spent time with Julieta's friends, eating empanadas and drinking Fernet on a river beach while we shared stories about our lives. These are the ways to learn about culture. It is not in the museum, but by speaking with people and doing something as mundane as having dinner together.

In Buenos Aires, I'm grateful for the taxi drivers who emphatically shared their views with me on politics, during conversations that I had not solicited. Whether it was what they thought about Donald Trump, or Fidel Castro (I was in Buenos Aires when Castro had died, and it seemed that his death was the sole subject on the news), I am thankful to have been part of these conversations where I often remained silent throughout, intently listening, to the point where one driver apologized, thinking he was being too fervent. This man's hesitation after speaking about politics mirrored my own recurring experiences where I am used to being told to stop talking about politics. But there was an unyielding passion and curiosity among the people I met. In Argentina, it felt like as soon as they detected a foreign accent, they asked, in Argentine *castellano*, "*¿de dónde sos*?" instead of the "*¿de dónde eres*?" ("where are you from?") of non-Argentine Spanish. This thrilled me, for it highlighted what my Argentine friend later told me; Argentines are curious people, and they are not afraid of asking questions. Cultural generalizations like this aren't always accurate, but I recognized continual patterns.

In the archives and museums I visited, I was graciously welcomed and assisted by film experts who I hope to invite to Canada in the interest of forging transnational dialogues, in the same way that Professors Susan Lord and Karen Dubinsky have done with their Cuban-Canadian exchange at Queen's University. It is truly vital to visit a country or place if we are to understand its cultural, social, and economic nuances. Many of these elements that constitute what we

consider a “country” and “culture” are not decipherable without visiting and speaking with people who live in the place in question. But when we visit a place outside of our own milieu, it is not the duty of the inhabitants to share their stories and histories with us. Still, the Argentines I met and spoke with shared a lot with me, and I will not forget the warmth and kindness with which I was received.

In my home and social life, I would like to thank my friend and editor of some of my long form journalism and writing that is outside of the academic sphere. Over two years ago, Karley Sciortino, an exceptional and groundbreaking writer whose work I have read and respected for almost a decade, accepted my pitches for her online magazine. After finishing my undergraduate thesis and beginning my research on queer Argentine cinema, I wanted to share my academic research with a larger audience. Writing for Karley has led to a fruitful and rewarding experience of writing for a number of other publications that I admire and respect. Many of these commissions have helped me support my travels for my research; flights to Argentina are not inexpensive on a graduate student budget.

Lastly, I am thankful for my parents, Geoff and Adele Cochrane, who have always supported my research interests, no matter how strange they can appear to people outside of the humanities, or outside of studies on gender and sexuality. I am eternally grateful to have parents that have come to see my presentations at conferences, even when those presentations have been on the same topics (and one that included driving a full day from Eastern Ontario to see me present a paper at New York University—thank you, Dad). Throughout my life, my parents have shown support for people with all kinds of identities, which I did not realize was out of the ordinary in a world where queer lives are always at risk of ostracism, harassment, and violence.

One of our most memorable trips was a road trip to Cape Cod in the early 2000s, with a stop in the gay mecca of Provincetown, where we all became enthralled with the drag queens and saw people living in a place where they could be themselves, not fearful of social exclusion or violence in a world where we are expected to naturally be heterosexual. I hope that if I become a parent, I can also offer my children the education I so naturally received by virtue of growing up with accepting, open-minded people.

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Introduction

In my first year of the second undergraduate program I started at 21, I was, like many undergraduate students, so overwhelmed that I did not realize you had to sign up for courses during a particular time period, lest you lose the privilege of being part of a course. This is not so for all courses, but it is generally the norm for language courses. I debated whether I wanted to take a minor in Italian or Spanish. I figured that I would be able to communicate with more people in the world if I could speak Spanish, and communication studies (and the sociology of communication among human beings), is what I majored in. I am interested in where communication fails; how we obscure our desires, our wants, our needs. This is why I have always been drawn to gender and sexuality, particularly with how social narratives relating to gender and sexuality intersect with moving image media such as cinema and television. I have always been interested in exclusion and difference. Who have we excluded from mainstream cultural narratives pertaining to gender and sexuality? I became aware that cinema was where I wanted to investigate exclusion.

As a second-year student in the second level of intensive Spanish, I took a course from an instructor who intimidated me with her incredible knowledge of Latin American politics, inspiring me to learn more on my own time. She challenged me when I made assumptions about a particular country, assumptions that were not blatantly offensive, but that could obscure a country's recent history in a military dictatorship, for example. Every time I asked a question that she challenged as if I was in a rigorous doctoral seminar, I rushed home to Google the historical figures who I didn't know. Unlike the other Spanish instructors, this professor showed a film at least once a month. I once asked her if she had ever screened *Y tu mamá también*, Mexican

director Alfonso Cuarón's 2001 film with two internationally-respected actors (Diego Luna and Gael García Bernal) playing two young men in their late teens who have a threesome with Spanish woman several years their senior (among many other sexually explicit and controversial scenes). The film elicits taboo in its depiction of non-normative sexuality in two ways: a threesome, especially one with two men and one woman, and homoeroticism. Responding to my question on whether she had screened the film to her students, my Spanish instructor scoffed. She told me that it had made some students uncomfortable, and that these students were male. This still puzzles me—many men fetishize threesomes where two women and one man is present, but mere kissing and touching between two men is anathema. Throughout history, there has been a fetishizing of women loving women, but responses of repulsion towards men loving men.

In that Spanish course, we watched several films, and the films that struck me the most were Argentine. It might have been the culture—I saw the explicit traces of Italian culture in this predominantly Spanish-speaking country, and their films were extraordinary. There was an energy and a passion in these films that I felt my own family embodied in rural Ontario, but that I rarely found outside of my family. For this reason, when I finally visited Argentina for three months as part of my research, I felt a sense of being at home.

When I finished this formative second-year intensive Spanish course, I continued watching Argentine films. I found many of them on Netflix and YouTube, and of course, Wikipedia searches led to my finding more and more films. What I found was a large number of films that explored the nuances of gender and sexuality, but not just the experiences of gay, cisgender, white, middle-class men. I am aware of the irony of this statement when the three

films I focus on in this dissertation are comprised of these characterizations, but my focus of this paper is on the repetition of these characters in a non-urban, rural milieu. These films are also linked by their peaceful conclusions. In mainstream cinema, there is a trope where many queer characters die, either of violence or HIV/AIDS. Two of the most famous examples of this are Jonathan Demme's 1991 film *Philadelphia* and Kimberly Pierce's 1999 film *Boys Don't Cry*. After reading about this stereotype and noticing it so often, I began to wonder if this was something I was simply imagining. Was I creating a self-perpetuating echo chamber? As I recently explained what my dissertation will entail to a director, a queer Brazilian-American woman I have become friends with, she stopped me: "The stories are all happy? The characters don't die at the end?" she asked. The characters in the three filmic case studies (i.e. films) that I review in this dissertation are indeed happy stories, or happily open-ended stories. They are not implausible either; they are not filled with plot holes or doubts that the characters could achieve such peaceful fates. These peaceful conclusions are, however, inextricably linked with privilege and race. Argentina is, like Canada, a (post)colonial country dominated by European settlers, and the queer protagonists in the three filmic case studies are presumably middle- to upper-class white men. But my point here is to highlight how remarkable it is that the year 2016 saw three Argentine films with not only happy queer endings, but where the urban is rejected for the rural.

While these films are, in the traditional sense, Argentine and queer, the limitations of these taxonomies must be addressed. To meditate upon "queer" cinema and a "national" cinema can raise a number of concerns. Both terms have been criticized for being inadequate in looking at the nuances and dimensions of what is means to be queer and what can be described as a nation. As Andrew Higgins reminds us, the term national cinema is fraught with indeterminacy.

How does one conceive of a national cinema when borders, both material and immaterial, are consistently troubled, unsettled, and redefined? On the intricacies of defining a national cinema, Higgins writes: "[...] the parameters of a national cinema should be drawn at the site of consumption as much as at the site of production of films; an argument, in other words, that focuses on the activity of national audiences and the conditions under which they make sense of what they watch" (2002: 52). This questioning was behind my impulse to visit Argentine cinema houses, film festivals, film archives, and film schools, where I observed and took note of my surroundings.

That said, during my informal conversations with people who were working in the archives, in the libraries, and at the film festivals I visited, I was made aware of the similarities and differences between discourses on gender and sexuality. At one film school library in Buenos Aires, an undergraduate student offered to help me after overhearing my conversation with the librarian. I was looking for literature on gender and sexuality in film, written by Argentine scholars. My aim was to avoid a privileging of texts from the "West" or the Global North. The librarian noted the irony (but perhaps not an irony) that the only books that came up on his database were in English.

I went over to the undergraduate student who seemed interested in chatting with me about Argentine cinema. He also told me that I would probably have a difficult time finding literature on gender and sexuality from Argentine scholars. He explained that it is not a privileged discipline, which I contrast to the ubiquity of gender and sexuality departments in Canada, the United States, or the UK, among other examples. In other words, it is not abnormal for an

Argentine university, prestigious or otherwise, to lack a gender studies department. This student seemed sympathetic but pessimistic regarding my search.

At the same time, the post-screening Q&A sessions at the film festivals I attended (the international queer film festival Asterisco in Buenos Aires and the Mar del Plata International Film Festival) offered fruitful discussions that countered any assumptions that could be derived from a paucity of gender studies departments. Confident, impassioned twentysomethings raised their hands and asked questions during the Q&A sessions. I recall one young woman referring to Judith Butler, and two women nodding in acknowledgment when the Argentine transgender poet Susy Shock was featured in a pre-film sequence in which she would perform her poetry in various public locations.

The festivals' Q&A sessions also called attention to the geographical tensions in Argentina—the same tensions that exist in any nation. On occasion, audience members mentioned the region where they were born or raised. Salta, for example, was one region an audience member brought up, which is the hometown of renowned Argentine filmmaker Lucrecia Martel. When audience members bring up their extra-Buenos Aires upbringing, that is, that they are not from *la capital*, they are unsettling the privileging of the capital city. Scholar Tamara L. Falicov has referred to this notion as the *porteño*[1] gaze, which manifests itself through hegemonic cinema production that is set in Buenos Aires (2007: 148). I argue, furthermore, that this manifests through the resistance in which audience members from outside of Buenos Aires engage when they state that they are not *porteños*. It is not an innocuous gesture, but a statement

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[1] "*Porteño*/*a*" refers to an inhabitant of Buenos Aires. This denomyn is also used for inhabitants of Valparaíso, Chile.

wherein their very presence offers a counter-narrative to the privileging of a nation's hegemonic city.

The hegemony of the city, in general, is what stimulated the idea for this very dissertation. I argue for the use of a queer rural studies lens to disrupt metronormativity, a term that imagines the city as the only site of intellectualism, artistic production and positive reception, and social progress[2]. In *New Maricón Cinema*[3], Venkatesh problematizes the "[…] traditional gay migration narrative, that is, that nonheteronormative bodies and desires somehow always end up moving to the big city with its possibilities of market erotics and anonymity from the hetero gaze that seemingly stagnates in the rural." The use of the term "stagnation" is apropos in this excerpt; rurality, since the onset of modernity, has been viewed as a transitional space to temporarily inhabit, since to remain in a rural locale can often be seen as remaining in an intellectually bankrupt milieu. This is a generalization, but among nonheteronormative imaginaries, this is a very real thought process, and sadly, it is rooted in many experiences among those who embody marginalized gender identities and sexualities. Citing Jack Halberstam, Venkatesh discusses Halberstam's description of metronormativity:

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[2] It must be acknowledged that the use of the term "rural" can conjure a number of social and political implications in both Argentina and Latin America, as well as in other (post)colonial nation-states. For example, there are myriad nuances between rural demographics that are marginalized and those that have more privilege, whether that privilege pertains to "race," class, gender, and so on. The filmic case studies in this paper portray characters who are middle and upper class, temporarily occupying land that has historically been co-opted and removed from indigenous people, for example. However, the use of the term "rural" in this paper is intended to be used in conjunction with the interdisciplinary theoretical lens of queer rural studies. For further discussion on rurality and its intersections with cinematic texts in Argentina, see Andrea Cuarterolo's *Civilización y barbarie: en el cine argentino y latinoamericano* (2005), María Claudia André and Viviana Rangil's *El cine argentino de hoy: entre el arte y la política* (2007), and Jens Andermann's "Exhausted Landscapes: Reframing the Rural in Recent Argentine and Brazilian Films" (2014).

[3] The queerphobic slur *maricón* is currently undergoing a process of semantic reclamation in the same way that the term "queer" has been reclaimed. In Spanish-speaking contexts, the term is still frequently used homophobically, but Venkatesh is applying the term to reflect its ongoing reclamation, akin to the use of the term "queer" in the New Queer Cinema movement in the United States in the 1990s.

> [Jack] Halberstam theorizes metronormativity as evolving from David Bell's ideas of metrosexuality. [He] argues that 'while the story of coming out tends to function as a temporal trajectory within which a period of disclosure follows a long period of repression, the metronormative story of migration from "country" to "town" is a spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution and secrecy (Halberstam, 2005: 26-37 as cited by Venkatesh, 2016: 71).[4]

While the theory of queer rural studies is my overarching optic for analysis, I will be using close readings and screen analysis to examine the films *Como una novia sin sexo*, *Esteros*, and *Taekwondo*, three films that were released in 2016 in Argentina. The similarities of these films are striking: a group of presumably middle-class, European settler Argentine men take a vacation to a rural space. At the beginning of each narrative, it is not explicitly stated that these characters are queer. The echoes in characterization and setting emphasize the counter-narrative that has been evident in all three films, a counter-narrative that dismantles the notion that the dominant space in which to be queer is in the city. These films reject urban spaces as the only hospitable spatial formation for queer identities.

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[4] Venkatesh uses Halberstam's former name Judith, which Halberstam previously accepted among other forms of address, such as Jude, Judith, or his own chosen name (Jack) to correlate with his masculine gender identity. However, Halberstam has been frequently using the name Jack and I am following this indirect request to respect Halberstam's gender autonomy.

Chapter 1: Methodology

Introduction

In this dissertation I use queer theory, critical theory, and spatial analysis as part of my theoretical framework to engage with my filmic case studies, three Argentine films released in 2016 that depict men desiring men: *Taekwondo* (dir. Marco Berger), *Esteros* (dir. Papu Curotto) and *Como una novia sin sexo* (dir. Lucas Santa Ana). In the first two theoretical frameworks, I use the singular "theory" due to its myriad conditions of possibility. These schools of thought are also preferential to my work due to their discourses that seek social and political emancipation. In other words, these theoretical frameworks seek to dismantle oppressive social and political structures through awareness, policy change, and recognition through representation. Further, I am indebted to the subset of queer theory known as queer rural studies, an emerging field that, among other things, problematizes the unidirectional pattern of queer identities from a rural space to an urban space. However, historical processes and cultural texts illustrate that this unidirectional framework is theoretically insufficient due the inaccurate assumption that rural spaces are always unforgiving and strictly heteronormative. In addition to the theoretical framework of queer rural studies, I will implement close readings of relevant sequences. My principal concerns are the uses of space—cinematic, geographical, and symbolic—which I will illustrate in the chapters that focus specifically on each filmic case study in their own chapter.

Queer Studies in a Cinematic Context

Queer studies is a discipline that draws upon a countless number of disciplines. Queer studies and its theories are part of critical theory, and both seek political emancipation, such as

lifting and dismantling the constraints that are imposed on humanity by way of capitalism and heteronormativity, for example. To "queer" an object, in the discipline's broad discursive utterances, is seen as decentering the object from its heteronormative components.

The filmic case studies I have chosen are explicitly queer, and do not immediately require a queering, as films with subtextual queer iterations incite, such as *Rebel Without A Cause* (dir. Nicholas Ray, 1995) in the Hollywood canon, or the renowned Argentine film *De eso no se habla* (dir. María Luisa Bemberg, 1993)[5]. The example of the seminal American drama film *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955) and its recognition in various countries' cinephilic contexts (and those of casual film viewers, of course), is precisely one of the factors that indicates how a transnational framework for film analysis is urgent. The prefix "trans" in itself alludes to the notion of methodological hybridity. Evidently, in contemporary discourses on sexuality (but not in all geographical and linguistic spaces), "trans" is an ontological designation for one's rejection of the singular somatic formation that does not coalesce with the one particular gender identity, or with the sex or biological variation with which one is born.

To speak of transnational cinema with a queer theoretical framework is highly appropriate, particularly in light of our late capitalist, globalized world. As Benedict Anderson has elaborated, the idea of a nation is an imagined political community (1983). Anderson writes: "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." The same parallel can be drawn between the queer imaginary and the queer,

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[5] See David William Foster's (2003) chapter, "Introit Queer Difference," for an elaboration on the queer exposition of Charlotte's (played by Alejandra Podesta) dwarfism and her mother Leonor's (Luisina Brando) act of metaphorically closeting Charlotte.

transnational communities that emerge and become spectators and/or active participants within these spaces. People who think about queer cinema, either as spectators or as academics (or both), for example, will unite and discuss the films they have watched, the queer film festivals they have attended, and the difficulties of navigating a political field such as queer studies. In Buenos Aires during the queer film festival Asterisco, I spoke to Esteban Masturini after a screening of *Esteros*, one of my filmic case studies. Masturini plays the adult Jerónimo in *Esteros*. I told him that I was a researcher visiting Argentina to learn more about the nuances of queer film within an Argentine context. I lauded his performance in the film, telling him that I felt an identification with the character in the sense that I recognized the excitement, the pain, and the intimacy that the characters experienced—in spite of my positionality which is not that of an Argentine man who is attracted to men in a world where homophobia is rampant. My Canadian-Argentine friend who accompanied me to the screening lightheartedly teased me after we left, telling me that what I said to Masturini sounded absurd. I explained to my friend that what I was saying to Masturini represents a recognition that occurs when we consume a cultural text, whether it is a poem or a film. It is irrelevant that Masturini's character is a gay Argentine man and I am a queer Canadian woman. Scholar Vinodh Venkatesh described exactly what I was feeling while describing one of the central characteristics of what he is calling *New Maricón Cinema*, a particular contemporary Latin American cinema with queer subject matter: "In New Maricón films […] specific techniques and audiovisual qualities (and not solely visual and narrative modes) move me toward difference through the generation of empathic feelings" (2016: 12).

The character Jerónimo and I are different—this is evident. But like Venkatesh has expressed, the film elicited visceral responses that were rooted in romance, companionship, eroticism, carnality, and a host of other feelings. During my second viewing of this film, at the Mar del Plata International Film Festival, I suspected that the audience felt similarly through their reactions; energetic clapping to the song that unites Matías and Jerónimo (Puerto Rican singer Jerry Rivera's 1992 salsa hit "Amores como el nuestro," a recurring song throughout the film that sonically unites and underscores Matías and Jerónimo's lifelong bond). The sheer enthusiasm that led to multiple audience members wanting to participate in the Q&A, from a man who came down to praise the film in what seemed like an endless but heartwarming tribute; the grandmother of one of the child actors who praised the film and repeatedly told director Papu Curotto how happy her grandson was to participate in this film. I found the latter instance rather interesting—the film does not eschew childhood sexuality, but celebrates it. In a scene where Matías and Jerónimo—as children—are spending time together in the summertime in a shared bedroom, Jerónimo is manually stimulating Matías sexually. This sequence is not depicted as a pathological situation, nor do the characters suffer any explicit pathological, psychological, or behavioural issues, which have historically been presented in mainstream film with queer subject matter that reach dominant markets (Epstein and Friedman, 1981; Coates, 2013).

Queer Rural Studies

In the above elaborations, I have highlighted my broad theoretical frameworks of queer studies and critical theory. My intervention is that of a queer rural studies lens in which urban spaces are challenged as the privileged site for affective, social, and political emancipation

through recognition and celebration of gender and sexual difference. As Lesley Marple aptly explains, "There is a seeming oxymoron in the use of the term 'rural queer.' The norm for queer experience in queer culture, academia and media is the urban queer experience. [...] Rurality is the subject which is often broached only in the interest of discussing the horrific backwoods from which some urban queers flee" (2005: 71). The films *Taekwondo*, *Esteros*, and *Como una novia sin sexo* challenge the notion of rural settings as dangerous, socially regressive spaces where queers will be forced to hide at the risk ostracism or violence. That being said, these films have a limited temporality in the queer characters' presence in rural spaces. They are spending temporary leisure time in these spaces; the states of being on holiday, on a trip among friends, or on a retreat. I therefore bring in the ruminations from cultural anthropologists Arthur Van Gennep and Victor Turner on liminality to discuss psychic, physical, and cinematic space. These films are also representations of the trajectories from homosocial[6] to sexually fluid[7] relations; the entry of women into these spaces is seen as intrusive and as a violation of the sacred leisure time among straight, white, middle-class men in Argentina, despite the intrinsic heterosexuality of these spaces in a (post)colonial context.

In my chapters on the specific filmic case studies, I use a comparative approach with Walt Whitman's poetry from the 19th century with particular emphasis on his poem "Song of Myself". As will be made evident in comparisons between Whitman's poetry and my analyses of my filmic case studies, I consider the American Whitman to be a proto-Queer Rural Theorist;

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[6] Homosociality refers to social interactions between individuals who identify as the same gender.

[7] I am using the term "sexually fluid" rather than "homosexual" here because it cannot be assumed that the characters are strictly homosexual, especially when some of the male characters from my filmic case studies engage in romantic, erotic, and sexual relations with women.

scholarly interpretations of Whitman's oeuvre have indicated expressions of desire for both men and women[8] (this exegesis will be made obvious in the poems and excerpts I will include in the succeeding chapters). Evoking Whitman in this sense in our current moment is germane; the preoccupations with the nature/culture[9] binary are rooted in a concern for avoiding colonial and (neo)colonial assumptions that nature is barren, devoid of the peoples who inhabited it before violent colonization. Besides this colonial legacy of the nature/culture binary, there is the issue of metronormativity, where urbanity is privileged as the sole site of intellectual conditions of possibility. These intellectual conditions of possibility presuppose the notion of social progress, and unfortunately, feigned progress. By feigned progress I refer to the fallacy of tolerance, where one tolerates the Other as if the Othered subject's embodiment is nefarious (e.g. "I tolerate your homosexuality, but I am covertly repulsed by it"). I use this example as something I have not only read but which I have heard about and witnessed firsthand.

Films as Case Studies

In his treatise on New Argentine Cinema, titled in Spanish as *Una década de nuevo cine argentino (1995-2005): Industria, crítica, formación, estéticas*, Ignacio Amatriain addresses Gilles Deleuze's claim that some filmmakers can be theorists. I am extending this argument to

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[8] The claims that Whitman was, in the 19th century, writing about his desire and love for men has been chronicled extensively in both academic and non-academic literature. In an essay published in 1999, cultural historian Richard Norton wrote that "Walt Whitman and gay liberation were synonymous for me," citing Whitman's 1980 poem "Calamus" as a coming-out letter:
The one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover in the cool night,
In the stillness, in the autumn moonbeams, his face was inclined toward me,
And his arm lay lightly around my breast -- And that night I was happy (Rothenberg Gritz, 2017).

[9] The nature/culture binary is a fallacy that presupposes a stark difference between humans and the environment in which we live. Rather, the elements we have labelled "nature" and "culture" have a symbiotic relationship and are invariably connected, rather than separated.

defend most filmmakers as theorists or thinkers, with a further extension that mitigates the historic privileging of the auteur which has, among other things, excluded the creative license and contribution of the production crew (e.g. screenwriters, editors, etc.) and the cast. As film scholars and cinephiles know very well, I include the latter case because actors and performers have a significant role in creating a character's magnetism. It is noteworthy to think about Amatriain's emphasis on filmmakers as agents of philosophy, which I also argue can be applied to the other co-collaborators on a film (the aforementioned writers, editors, and actors, for example):

> *El ineludible libro de Gilles Deleuze, además, nos ha convencido que algunos directores pueden ser considerados como pensadores, y que sus filmes deben ser vistos como eslabones de una obra sistemática y rigorosa*. The unavoidable book by Gilles Deleuze, however, has convinced us that some directors could be considered thinkers, and that their films should be viewed as links in a systematic and rigorous work (2009: 11).[10]

When considering films as case studies, it could be perceived that only films that fall into categories like art cinema, national cinema, and political cinema could contain the most theoretical or intellectual content (as opposed to commercially successful films that are not considered artistic, political, or intellectual, for example). However, no matter the genre (or meeting of genres), film and moving-image media are indeed art forms which fill the gaps of literary history and historiography. In the 1990s, for example, the New Queer Cinema movement provided a number of art films which simultaneously alluded to the perennial positive versus negative images debate. Examples of positive images include depictions of queer people as good

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[10] Translation my own.

citizens who engage in heteronormative relationships that include monogamy and a teleological trajectory of "settling down". In films with negative images, the respectability politics of the former example are eschewed in such a way that queer characters can be social outcasts, engage in criminal activities, and enjoy polyamorous relationships, among other examples. In New Queer Cinema of the 1990s, the debates over these forms of representation echoed the anxiety that negative images could re-establish stereotypes of queer people as social undesirables. If this stereotype is perpetuated on-screen, it would be perpetuated off-screen, so goes the argument.

As I will elaborate further in the following chapters, the spatial representation, characterization, and dialogue from the three films is representative of how language discussing queer identity presents itself subtextually. The use of the word "*maricón*" or "*marica*" among assumed heterosexuals in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America is emblematic of this subtextuality. This is not to say that the use of queerphobic slurs is unique to Argentina and Latin America. It occurs in my home country of Canada, but at a level that is more covert than what I have just described. Its position of being covert (e.g. behind closed doors, figuratively or literally) does not presuppose progress; it is simply that queerphobia in all its iterations is cloaked and disguised, always already embedded in social and societal power relations.

Chapter 2: Marco Berger and Martín Farina's *Taekwondo*

Introduction

Argentine filmmaker Marco Berger has established himself as an auteur, a term I use with great care. I am using it strategically here, especially in light of Berger's all-encompassing involvement in his productions: as director, screenwriter, and editor, and occasionally as producer. Berger's films address homosociality and homosexuality within two principal categories: the diegetic (or narrative) function and in the visual function, the latter specifically being in the realm of the somatic or the bodily sphere. The first category entails themes of middle-class ennui that may not always be apparent, but upon deeper consideration, become expressly evident. In this chapter, I examine *Taekwondo* in terms of its bodily or somatic representation, the role of hegemonic masculinity vis-à-vis queer male subjectivities, resistance to metronormativity with a privileging of the rural vacation, and liminality as both a physical and psychic phenomenon.

David William Foster, the seminal scholar of queer Latin American cinema, has taken note of Berger's prolific exposition of the nuances of queer male subjectivities that germinate in Berger's cinematic repertoire. According to Foster, Berger:

> [...] has moved to the forefront of in the field of queer filmmaking in Argentina, a country that has itself taken the lead in Latin America in producing provocative films that shed the clichés of so much commercial gay filmmaking in the United States. Going beyond the formulas of boy-meets-boy and boy-beds-boy texts, which necessarily involve the money shot of actual sexual gymnastics at the expense of the subtleties of human emotion and erotic complexities, Berger's films focus on the circumstances in

> which individuals are suddenly confronted with the potential for homoerotic experience, often against their awareness and in contradiction to their presumed heterosexuality. It's not that they "discover" that they are "really" gay. Rather, they are led to discover a wider arena of erotic potential for their bodies than they had previously imagined (2014).

Foster's description of a confrontation of a "potential for homoerotic experience" is important to note here, and it is one of the many impulses behind my meditations on queer space in rural and outdoor settings in three Argentine films. In doing so, I want to highlight the importance of recognizing queer subjectivity outside of the city's limits. I am specifically referring to liminal, temporary experiences in rural and outdoor spaces in *Taekwondo*, *Esteros*, and *Como una novia sin sexo*, since the rural and outdoor spaces are spaces that characters visit and then return to their homes. Based on dialogue and their presentations of the self, the characters appear to live in non-rural spaces, and the countryside is their temporary exit to a space that has historically been viewed as dangerous. The danger of rural spaces is not unfounded, and I do not claim that this is a myth that requires debunking. The brutal murders of transgender man Brandon Teena in 1993 in Nebraska and gay man Matthew Shepard in 1998 in Wyoming occurred in rural settings and continue to haunt us when we imagine what living in a rural context can entail when one is queer.

However, hate crimes such as the above atrocities also occur in cities, and media coverage (especially in alternative media spaces, such as the socially progressive networks that circulate through Twitter and Instagram), regularly report the alarming statistics of violence against queer people, especially when queer people are also people of colour and/or transgender. Living in a city provides evidence that the city as the only place where queer subjectivity can

flourish relies on social fabrications. Kelly Baker points out this mythmaking, stating that "rurality as an often-ignored yet immensely pervasive thread of identity [...] is absent from hegemonic, and I would add, urban, conceptualizations of queer visibility" (2012: 39). Rural, outdoor, and countryside spaces are not inherently devoid of possibilities for queer subjectivity and experience, and the production of three Argentine films within the same year that diegetically and aesthetically present this counter-narrative is relevant to our contemporary moment. Since Marco Berger's *Taekwondo* is highly intertextual, I draw upon the literary works of Walt Whitman and the photography of Bob Mizer that evoke similar imagery and queering of space. To illustrate the intertextuality, I take advantage of close readings of sequences that call attention to leisurely, rural, and outdoor queering of space.

Film Summary

Marco Berger's feature-length film *Taekwondo* is a dialogue-driven drama and comedy of manners. Set in the house and surrounding property of the character Fernando (Lucas Papa), the featured spaces are the interior and exterior of the large, beautiful house: living room, bathroom, bedrooms, tennis court, pool, and soccer field—the latter presumably located in a nearby space. Fernando invites Germán (Gabriel Epstein), a friend from his Taekwondo class, to get together with Fernando's oldest friends, a cohesive group who chat about the nuances of sex, relationships, and desire. The banter emphasizes their close bonds, and Germán's performativity is at once timid and excited. Fernando's friends are friendly with Germán, asking him questions about himself, and include him in their conversations while spending their leisure time at the property. The film presents the sexual tension between Fernando and Germán; Germán is unsure

if Fernando is attracted to him, or to men in general. Germán shares his concerns with a friend during a phone conversation, and to another friend who visits the house (a friend who also talks about his desire for men).

The film's slow narrative follows the group of handsome young men as they lie around by the pool, the tennis court, on the couches, and in bed. In Berger's oeuvre, there is a tendency for physical or sexual affection to not occur between characters until later in the film, and *Taekwondo* also follows this trajectory. In Berger's films, the characters often engage in a liminal intimacy, its liminality characterized by being in between platonic and erotic intimacy. My theorizing on Berger's employment of a physical erotic delay has multiple possibilities. One rationale could be Berger's own ideal of what constitutes erotic intimacy, as many people like to delay erotic intimacy in a relationship, one result being that excitement occurs in the absence of physical intimacy. As a friend once told me about her long-distance relationship with her partner, "I find presence in his absence." Thus, in this argument for Berger's erotic delay in the diegesis, there is an erotic presence in its very absence. Another rationale can be the apprehension of instigating physicality from a queer dimension. The reason that this would occur is obvious, since rejection can result in ostracism and violence, whether it is symbolic or physical. The erotic delay is finally addressed with the film's final moments, in which Fernando asks Germán, if he could at least kiss him, at which point a passionate embrace ensues.

Male Homosociality and Nude Bodies

Taekwondo's diegesis perpetually amplifies the sexual tension with its emphasis on nude and nearly nude cisgender male bodies in close quarters (as far as we know in terms of their

gender and sexual identities, for they may not identify as cisgender men, but this is not directly specified in the film). The bodies in *Taekwondo* express a performative, hegemonic masculinity of muscles; some muscles bigger and more present than others, but their existence is visible. With respect to somatic and bodily strategies, the camera lingers on the young men (who are presumably in their twenties) and their hegemonically attractive male bodies, using close-ups and low-angle close-ups typically with a shallow depth of field. Berger emphasizes this type of masculinity by lingering on parts of the male bodies with close-ups on parts of the characters' arms and legs, for example. The camera also lingers on penises, covered and uncovered. In an early scene, the male character Fede (Juan Manuel Martino) sits on a kitchen counter completely naked while Fernando tells Germán (who has just entered the dwelling) about the house and property. Fernando light-heartedly tells Fede to put some pants on. This tongue-in-cheek deployment by Berger alludes to the tenuous link between homosociality and homosexuality, which I will discuss further in this chapter when referring to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorizing on homosociality between men.

Visually, there is a historical link that emerges in the visual logic of the film. From the 1940s onwards, the Los Angeles-based photographer and filmmaker Bob Mizer deployed a similar aesthetic in his photographic and occasional filmic works. Mizer's house had a swimming pool and property where he would photograph the models, whom he captured in repose and in elaborate enactments of wrestling, the latter being costumed and positioned as homages to Classical (Roman, Greek, or Egyptian) tussling. Mizer used the photos of these "beefcake" men for his magazine *Physique Pictorial*, a thinly-disguised magazine that was, in actuality, intended for a queer male gaze. In *Art and Homosexuality*, a treatise on the historical

links between artistic practices and queer identity, Christopher Reed offers a glimpse into the rationale behind this excessive performance of hegemonic masculinity:

> A growing gay subculture supported a market for images of homosexuality characterized, in reaction against prevailing stereotypes, by extreme masculinity. The loom of "physique" magazines—so called because they were ostensibly devoted to muscle building—helped visualize this alternative idea of homosexual identity and confer on it a locale: southern California. (2016, 165).

This passage reflects the femmephobia inherent in the queer male imaginary. Gay men have and continue to face difficulty when they embody so-called effeminate behaviour or iterations—actions that are similar to hegemonically feminine actions (Miller, 2015: 638, 639, 648). The effeminate "Sissy" archetype existed in the American cultural consciousness, and the simulated physique magazines were a counter-narrative to the presumption that queer men always embody femme characteristics in their performance of the self. The aversion to a femme performance of the self is underscored in a note that was unearthed in Mizer's Athletic Model Guild compound:

> CODE OF BEHAVIOR:
>
> More masculine at all times
>
> Manly Stance/Erect Posture
>
> Voice lower and slower (Unknown source as cited by Hanson: 2016, 8)

As Dian Hanson writes, "Bob realized early that accomplishing his goals required him to become a confident leader, a man other men would trust, admire, and obey. His attraction to masculine strength demanded that he be masculine and strong. At age 18 he recorded an incident in his diary where his mother's boarders mocked a gay friend's effeminacy" (ibid).

The characterization and physical visuality (the costuming, or lack thereof) in *Taekwondo* is embedded in this power relation of embodying a masculinity that engenders trust from others who embody a similar masculinity. Hanson discusses the transgression that was experienced by queer men who read the bodybuilding magazines that preceded Mizer's *Physique Pictorial*: "Gay men bought the bodybuilding magazines, but always with the knowledge that they were trespassing in hostile, hetero territory" (ibid, 11). Germán's performance exudes this apprehension of entering a potentially unwelcoming space, especially if the space he is entering will not be welcoming of nonheteronormative identities. Germán's eyes are bright, but he appears nervous behind his seemingly permanent smile, a smile that seems to overcompensate for his discomfort in this milieu that is at once hypermasculine and exceedingly queered. The mise-en-scène in *Taekwondo* mirrors this dialectic, where the men sit and pose in proximity to one another during their leisure time, similar to the way in which Mizer's beefcake models are photographed. Alongside the notion of forging a more rugged masculinity in the visual representation of homosexual subjectivity, *Taekwondo* addresses this notion. The male characters in *Taekwondo* adhere to tenets of hegemonic masculinity, like the suppression of excessive emotion and the vulgar discussion of female bodies[11].

In this paper, the three filmic case studies disentangle the notion that being queer is only enacted once queer sexual behaviour has occurred. This fallacy maintains the notion of monosexuality, the term that describes the assumption that heterosexuality and homosexuality are the only possibilities for a sexual orientation. Additionally, this fallacy constructs

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[11] This is not a value judgment on how the bodies are discussed, for I am conscious that women and non gender conforming people can discuss bodies in this way as well. That said, I am using the term vulgar as a description of common, banal utterances that can provoke discomfort when uttered outside of private spaces or in the company of people whom one does not share an intimacy or rapport.

subjectivities as "becoming" gay or returning to heterosexuality, with examples such as experimentation (e.g. "college lesbians", "hasbians"). Within the diegetic context of *Taekwondo*, Berger's lingering erotic tension between Germán and Fernando rejects the experimentation fallacy[12], specifically by ending the narrative with a consummation of their romantic desire. By waiting until the third act for this consummation to occur, Berger avoids any suggestion of the characters' experimentation.

The Vacation and Its Spatial Possibilities for Sexual Desire

The context of a vacation contains multitudes of intimate, erotic, romantic, and sexual allusions. Generally speaking, vacations are taken with an individual or a group with whom one holds an intimate relationship or relationships. Vacations are mostly spent with family, friends, lovers, or partners. The destination wedding, or the honeymoon after the wedding, is where newly-wedded partners can indulge in the utmost intimacy and erotic exchanges.

The "vacation" is a term that holds a utopian promise. However, I acknowledge the possibility that this vacation will be nuanced; I might engage in satisfying leisure activities, I might get food poisoning, and I might meet someone who compels me to feel an erotic desire, leading to a satisfying relationship, whether fleeting or longer-term. I use the term with the understanding that vacations are not entirely leisurely, but that they require emotional labour, physical labour, among other varieties of labour, in order for the vacation to continue. While vacations can be enlightening, illuminating experiences leading to feelings of self-actualization and recovery, they can also be rife with tension and distress. Thus, I do not wish to argue that the

[12] By experimentation fallacy, I am referring to the troublesome logic that conduct outside of heteronormativity and heterosexuality is mere experimentation.

lens of the vacation for analysis of homosocial-turned-homosexual relationships is a utopian intervention. My intent is to highlight the counter-narratives that have always existed and continue to exist against metronormativity, which has its own utopian promises of progress, intellectualism, and acceptance of marginalized identities. I turn to the late theorist Michel Foucault, then, to evoke his notion of heterotopia, or heterotopic spaces:

> *Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical[13]. *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy "syntax" in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to "hold together". This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) dessicate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences (Foucault, 2002: xix).

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13 The use of "chimerical" is apt; it alludes to the illusory, dangerously utopian view that a geographical space will promise happiness and affective fulfillment, which the urban nor the rural necessarily affords. My aim is to illustrate how these three filmic texts—incidentally all Argentine with white male queer characters venturing on their own vacations—are helpful in mapping this contemporary tendency of exhibiting counterspaces to the privileged urban.

The spaces in *Taekwondo*, *Esteros*, and *Como una novia sin sexo* contain heterotopic settings inasmuch as they offer spatial alternatives for queer desire. Queer desire has been ideologically situated as incompatible with rural settings in recent social, historical, and cinematic memory. *Taekwondo*'s narrative demonstrates the physical departure of a heteronormative milieu for a liminal and heterotopic space that neither accepts nor rejects queer identities[14]. Examples of these liminal and heterotopic spaces are Provincetown in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and Fire Island in Long Island, New York. Both of these places are historically queer meccas, and have disrupted heteronormativity by providing a meeting place for nonheteronormative identities. Film, like many other cultural texts and narratives, has depicted rurality as a space to be feared when one is queer. This ideological conundrum has been addressed by the motifs in *Taekwondo*, *Esteros*, and *Como una novia sin sexo*, where a non-urban space is a site of possibility rather than danger for those whose identities disrupt heteronormative paradigms of identity.

Cinematographic Close-ups and Intimacy

The cinematography of *Taekwondo* relies heavily on close-ups, which subsequently forge a sense of erotic intimacy that, to the spectator, is unmistakable. During conversations between the characters, seemingly innocuous conversations become eroticized by the lingering focus on faces, which vacillate from character to character as the conversations elapse. While the film feels like one long date between Germán and Fernando, the use of frequent close-up shots between two characters at a time creates a similar affective state for the characters who speak

[14] My claim that spaces like Provincetown and Fire Island neither accept nor reject nonheteronormative identities can be seen as pessimistic, but my aim is to draw attention to the problematic notion that a safe space can be absolutely safe. Is is difficult to claim that a space can be safe, for there are always myriad risks and dangers associated with any space.

with one another in pairs. In other words, it appears as if the film is exhibiting a series of intimate dates between men; that liminal, transitional period before a tryst becomes physically and sexually intimate. The close-ups are not restricted to faces, however—they linger on other parts of the body as I mentioned previously. In an early sequence of the film, Germán is reading J.D. Salinger's novel *Catcher in the Rye* on the floor of a large bathroom. In the foreground, Fernando removes his t-shirt, and after leaving the frame to turn on the shower, removes his shorts. Germán exhibits the apprehension of his desire for Fernando, an apprehension that is heightened in light of it being a nonheteronormative desire that could be rejected by the group. Germán's eyes remain fixed on the pages of his book, only stealing a glance when Fernando is not looking. Still, this a tension that many viewers, heterosexual or queer, can recognize and identify with. After Fernando removes his shoes, socks, shorts, and underwear within Fernando's visual periphery, the frame's space is taken over by the image of Fernando's buttocks, oscillating from the back to the side, and when it is at the side, the viewer is afforded a side-view of his penis. "Do you like it?" Fernando asks Germán, referring to the book Germán is reading, but the irony and tongue-in-cheek quality of this statement is overt. The sequence of images supersedes the dialogue. The subtext is that Fernando is asking Germán if he likes his body, his naked body, his physically finessed body, his penis. Chirping birds dominate the film's sound amid open windows as he reads his book. The foliage of the property's trees is juxtaposed with the interior architecture of the bathroom; bathhouse-reminiscent design, a historic symbol of a male, homosexual meeting space.

I will return to the purpose of the natural entities such as foliage, but before going further, it is useful to elaborate upon the haptic visuality of the close-ups. For Laura U. Marks, haptic

visuality refers to the phenomenon wherein "the eyes themselves function like organs of touch" (332). In Vinodh Venkatesh's *New Maricón Cinema*, Marks' meditations on haptic visuality are also used as an analytical lens, demonstrating the recurring aesthetic strategies in contemporary Latin American and Argentine queer cinema. Marks claims that haptic visuality is the multisensory experience in which the viewer's body is affectively and physically involved in a symbiotic, dialectical process with the film's text or "skin" (ibid). Venkatesh's claim is situated in the construction of empathy that is forged between the viewer and the filmic text, whether the viewer is queer or not.

My interventions in this paper are in accordance with Venkatesh's claim, but I want to extend this notion by pointing to the use of eroticism that is forged between the viewer's body and the film's body through aesthetics, medium, and narrative content. In the first act of *Taekwondo*, the subtle eroticism that remains consistent in Berger's films is enacted in a sequence where Germán is lying on one of the country house's twin beds, on the phone with a friend. Germán's friend, who remains offescreen through the film's diegesis, is aware of Germán's sexual orientation. The sequence straddles the boundary between a medium shot and a close-up, the camera placed between Germán's legs, facing his groin and face. Germán's groin is out of focus, while his face is in focus, but the presence of his groin recalls Roland Barthes' punctum, the element in a photograph that moves the viewer. The studium (that which initially draws in the viewer), by contrast, is the pose of a young, handsome man on a bed, an erotic display in a private space (Barthes, 1981: 26-28). Germán speaks to his friend with a different performativity from that which he displays with Fernando and the group of young men. While he is hesitant and sheepish with the group, a performance that is generally regarded as normal when

meeting new people, Germán is direct and almost impatient with his friend as they try to figure out whether Fernando is interested in Germán (and whether he is interested in men at all). The shots oscillate from the angle between Germán's legs (the camera seemingly placed near his feet, facing the direction of his groin), to a close-up that frames his legs from his left side; we are exposed to his hands that finger his stomach hair. The hair on his legs and left foot are also visible, the body hair being a recurring motif of intimacy, nudity, and eroticism in Berger's films.

The haptic visuality in *Taekwondo* and the two other filmic case studies of this paper is complemented by the presence of natural entities—in other words, "nature." I use this term with care due to the assumption that it is separate from urbanity and humans. As I described in my chapter on my methodological groundwork, my intervention is also predicated on the use of a queer rural studies lens, one that engages with natural entities, which simultaneously dismantles metronormativity and the assumption that the urban is the only site where marginalized sexual desires can be consummated.

In the 19th century, American writer Walt Whitman valued the conditions of possibility of natural entities in the consummation of desire. In both *Taekwondo* and Whitman's 1892 poem "Song of Myself", grass and trees are consistently present in the diegetic universe and cinematic space of the film. In the poem, Whitman gave prominence to the use of grass as a metaphor for sexual desire, and in light of Whitman's arguable sexual positionality as homosexual or sexually fluid, the poem is an apt parallel to Berger and Farina's cinematic depictions in *Taekwondo*. In "Song of Myself," Whitman wrote the following:

> [...] Tenderly I will use you curling grass,
>
> It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,

It may be if I had known them I would have loved them, [...] (1891-1892)

Whitman is describing the grass which grows from the bodies of young men, young men who are the subject of Berger's films, and the subject of *Esteros* and *Como una novia sin sexo*. In *Taekwondo*, close-ups are prominent on the male characters' body hair—long and unruly—on their legs, chests, and pubic areas. The curling hairs recall the curling grass, and perhaps most transparently, the hair that often grows prolifically on male chests, of which Berger and Farina remind us in *Taekwondo*. These close-ups parallel the close proximity Whitman shares with the grass in "Song of Myself." The poem creates a visceral quality in what Laura U. Marks described as embodied spectatorship. Citing Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Marks describes this as the "phenomenological encounter [as] an exchange between an embodied self-in-becoming (the viewer) and its embodied intercessor (the cinema)" (151). In both "Song of Myself" and *Taekwondo*, the possibility for embodied spectatorship is present, where one could imagine feeling the gentle prickling of the grass against skin, or taking in the fresh, satisfying odour of green grass. The intermittent chirping of birds from inside and outside the house in *Taekwondo* is what the reader cannot explicitly glean from "Song of Myself," but it is subtextual when thinking about the ever-present sounds of the entities that exist in nature.

The close proximity of the grass in "Song of Myself" stylistically echoes the intimate close-ups and cinematic depictions of young, hegemonically attractive male bodies in *Taekwondo*. With its descriptions of bodies from a point-of-view perspective, "Song of Myself" is distinctly scopophilic[15] and voyeuristic. In *Taekwondo*, the camera lingers just a moment too long on the bodies and disembodied parts of the characters for it to be devoid of eroticism. As a

[15] Scopophilia refers to the derivation of pleasure by looking at something, and I will elaborate more specifically on it in the chapter on *Como una novia sin sexo*.

result, the cinematography forges an intimacy that the embodied spectator cannot ignore. When the male characters sit idly by the pool, in an exquisite shot that resembles a tableau from the mind of Bob Mizer, Whitman writes in a similarly scopophilic manner in "Song of Myself":

> [...] Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,
>
> Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;
>
> [...]
>
> The beards of the young men glisten'd with wet, it ran from their long hair,
>
> Little streams pass'd all over their bodies. [...] (1891-1892)

In this passage, it is vital to highlight Whitman's inclusion of beards that glisten from their contact with water. Despite the present-day trend of bodily hair removal, many types of body hair have an erotic function, titillating the desiring subject who views the hair on their object of desire. Whitman is describing his appraisal of beauty in the glistening beards of the young bathing men, while Berger and Farina emphasize the erotic function of body hair through their close-ups that substantiate erotic intimacies; homosocial desires, triangulated desires, and presumably homosexual desires, the latter which echoes the desire between Fernando and Germán.

When Physical and Psychic Liminality Meet

The physical social meeting spaces in *Taekwondo* exemplify liminality, a notion that anthropologist Victor Turner has used to describe the temporality between youth and adulthood, that in-between time when one comes of age in a particular space and time (1995: 95). In *Taekwondo*, the tennis court, the soccer field, and the pool at Fernando's country house represent

the notion of the "*country*" in the Argentine socio-cultural imaginary. Here, the term "country" refers to country homes that many middle and upper class Argentines acquire as spaces outside the city for weekend trips. In a *New York Times* article on Tigre, the wealthy town 45 minutes north of Buenos Aires, the phenomenon of the "country" is raised, gated communities that resemble British and American country clubs (Luongo, 2010). In this transient space, a sense of controlled rurality is exhibited. At Fernando's family's country house, the male characters sit around, drinking *mate* and smoking marijuana, discussing topics that are not polite conversation in spaces where they would work (presumably offices, based on their socioeconomic positionality), or in spaces where their family or girlfriends (who they mention in the diegesis, and who eventually show up at the house) would be present.

The liminal quality of this space is evident, emphasized by the characters' discussions of their relationships and their desire for sex. This liminality is also present in Germán and Fernando's burgeoning relationship, which elicits a feeling of prohibited desire in a youthful context. It feels adolescent in its timidity and apprehension, and this coming-of-age liminality is again highlighted by the book Germán has chosen to read—*Catcher in the Rye*—a quintessential coming-of-age story which reckons with the theme of rebellion. This reading choice is telling in what its presence is intended to suggest; the protagonist Holden Caulfield is subsumed by feelings of alienation and existential pain, feelings that people who embody marginal sexualities suffer from disproportionately (not due to their biology, of course, but due to the surveillance and scrutiny that people with marginalized sexualities experience as a result of living in a heteronormative society).

The coming-of-age liminality of *Taekwondo* is also met by more abstract narrative formations. In an earlier sequence of the film, Berger and his co-director Martín Farina experiment with an elaboration on dream logic, albeit a heterosexual one. Dream logic is predicated on a psychic liminal state, one that remains consistently indecipherable in spite of humanity's best efforts to quantify it. In an early sequence of the film, Fede enters a bedroom where Juan (Andrés Galvadá) is having a daytime nap, an assumption that can be made with certainty since the room is filled with natural light. Before I describe the narrative content of this sequence, it is useful to recall Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's seminal articulations on homosociality and triangulated desire. Sedgwick drew from René Girard's *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, where Girard introduced the notion of mimetic desire (the desire which one develops for an object by virtue of another person wanting that object). In Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, the works of authors from "Western"[16] literature are evoked to illustrate how female objects (or female characters, diegetically speaking) have become the conduit for a male, homosocial relationship to express homosexual desire for the other, whether it is an emotional or physical expression:

> [...] it is not physical space that measures the gap between mediator and the desiring subject. Although geographical separation might be one factor, the *distance* between mediator and subject is primarily spiritual (1993, 9).

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[16] I use quotation marks on the notion of the "Western," a problematic term which presupposes a congruity between Anglophone and/or colonial countries that contrast countries of the so-called "East." In our globalized contemporary moment, the "Western" moniker is troublesome and fosters the belief that continents that have faced violent colonialism and military intervention (e.g. Chile and Argentina among many other worldwide examples) also have extremely wealthy citizens in addition to extreme poverty, just as so-called "Western" countries such as Canada and France also have inhabitants who face extreme poverty. The "Western" assumption also neglects the history of European settler colonialism in continents such as South America where indigenous inhabitants have had their land seized and their human rights disregarded.

Here, the term "spiritual" coincides with my above description of "emotional" desire, which is how the characters in *Taekwondo*, with the exception of Fernando and Germán, express their desire through their homosociality. They perform these desires without physical contact, and thus, through emotional or spiritual expressions. From the beginning of the film, where Fede sits on the counter without pants or underwear, his penis is difficult to ignore. Fernando lightheartedly tells Fede to put some pants on, but the scene is unequivocally startling. It is candidly exhibitionistic, a theme that runs throughout *Taekwondo*. In conjunction with the above excerpt from *Between Men*, the physical space is not as relevant in this sequence; Fede is sitting on a kitchen counter in close proximity to Fernando, who is describing the house to the social group's newcomer Germán, but it is Fede's presentation of his penis and the cinematic inclusion of this that indicates a spiritual, erotic proximity.

Likewise, the narrative content of the sequence in which Fede enters the bedroom with the sleeping Juan is rife with deployments of homosocial desire. Juan recounts his erotic, lucid dream to Fede, a titillating story in which Juan was having sex with an unknown, beautiful woman. Juan had just woken up after Fede casually entered the room, seemingly focused on his midday snack, a piece of white bread which he dips into an oozing egg. In his just-woken state, Juan tells Fede that he can still taste the unnamed woman. Fede listens, invested in both the oozing egg that he eats with an insatiable hunger that he exhibits throughout the film. He is both interested in the story and in the egg and bread, and agrees with Juan on the explicit titillation that the dream elicited for Juan. Sedgwick's articulation of triangulated desire implies that a connection is forged between two men through a third party, the fantasized woman. The desire is not unidirectional towards this woman, however; both Fede and Juan are expressing an

emotional or spiritual desire for this woman to substantiate their desire for each other. The oozing egg, which Fede raises to his mouth, amplifies the eroticism, as the consumption of food in literature and in film is wont to do[17]. However, the oozing egg's viscosity is reminiscent of the fluids that ooze from bodies upon sexual arousal. At the conclusion of the lucid dream, Juan tells Fede that the woman's vagina turned to sand. Borrowing Sedgwick's lens, the unravelling of the aroused female genitalia is an allusion to the collapsing of the fantasized woman's position between both Fede and Juan. The inclusion of a dream in this sequence of triangulated desire is another heuristic process to engage with liminality. Sleep and dream logic are psychically and somatically liminal. A dream like Juan's which ends with the woman's vagina turning to sand is a germane reminder of the tenuousness of psychic processes. *Taekwondo* thus encapsulates both physical and psychic liminal spaces. The physical space deviates from Turner's description of liminality in that it is a temporally liminal space, the Argentine "country", an appropriate milieu for middle to upper class Argentine men to idly discuss the nuances of their heterosexual romantic relationships and erotic desires.

Within the liminality of these spaces, the idle diegetic strategy of *Taekwondo*, whose cinematic pace is slower than *Como una novia sin sexo* and *Esteros*, dovetails with Jack Halberstam's meditations on queer time and space which Venkatesh describes in *New Maricón Cinema*. As Halberstam aptly remarks in *A Queer Time and Place*, "queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to these logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death." What I am seeking to illustrate

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[17] Murakami, Fuminobu. *Postmodern, Feminist and Postcolonial Currents in Contemporary Japanese Culture: A Reading of Murakami Haruki, Yoshimoto Banana, Yoshimoto Takaaki and Karatani Kojin* (61).

through cultural texts as case studies from different time periods—Whitman's literature, Bob Mizer's photography, and Marco Berger's *Taekwondo*—are the ways in which rural and outdoor spaces situated among nature are indications of counter-spaces. These counter-spaces and their cultural depictions unsettle the limits of the city. In Whitman's case, one can be situated in nature, outside of overcrowded social formations, and contemplate their subjectivities. In Southern California, Bob Mizer created an outdoor space on his private property where re-enactments of homosocial encounters were queered, photographed, and disseminated in magazines for public consumption. *Taekwondo* mirrors Whitman and Mizer's works in its leisurely, outdoor representations of a queering of space outside a city's limits.

Conclusion

It must be emphasized that *Taekwondo* and the two other films I have chosen are depictions of white, middle and upper class men, the privileged category of identity that often washes over the myriad identities on the ever-expanding queer spectrum. Although there often is a liberal practice of acceptance or tolerance in Argentina within this socioeconomic milieu, there is still a risk of violence—both symbolic and physical—and ostracism (which can occur anywhere in the world, in any space)[18]. Fernando and Germán create a queer counter-space, paralleling Halberstam's notion of a queer counter-public among more marginal subcultures that he mentions above. These non-urban spaces are transgressive inasmuch as they are not

[18] It is important to note that the notion of tolerance is one that raises myriad concerns. To tolerate something is to imply that it is difficult or challenging for it falls under an unsavoury or immoral act, for example. In *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (2009), Wendy Brown writes that tolerance frequently refers to "beliefs or practices that may be morally, socially, or ideologically offensive but are not in direct conflict with the law" (12).

confirmed spaces such as the historically gay vacation spaces of Provincetown, Connecticut, or Fire Island, New York, which have been and continue to be gay meccas that engage in a process of queering everyday heteronormativity.

Within the film, heteronormativity is cinematographically queered by camera shots that engage in a visual disembodiment. This disembodiment echoes what Laura U. Marks has ruminated upon with her claims of haptic visuality, where the viewer experiences a tactile experience, versus optic visuality. Vinodh Venkatesh has also discussed this strategy within the new wave of queer Latin American cinema which he calls New Maricón Cinema, a disparate movement from its predecessor which Venkatesh calls Maricón Cinema. The eroticism that these shots elicit and invite as a symbiotic relationship between the text and viewer have been expressed in the works of Walt Whitman in "Song of Myself" and in Bob Mizer's photography. While it may seem arbitrary to situate these interdisciplinary texts in relation to one another, these texts form a coherent narrative that I argue must be viewed in relation to one another, rather than remaining within a "national" context, which places constraints on historicizing these works we consider as "queer."

These queered spaces where Whitman's poetry took place, where Bob Mizer photographed his models, and where Marco Berger and Martín Farina's characters temporarily exist are heterotopic spaces. In contrast to utopic spaces, heterotopic spaces are heterogeneous—we cannot be sure that they are ever a "safe" space, but they are spaces where nonheteronormative conduct routinely takes place, for this conduct is still viewed as a deviation from what is socialy constituted as normal normal. As I elaborated with respect to the elaboration of the character Juan's dream, psychic liminality is analogous with the liminality of the

heterotopic space which the characters in *Taekwondo* temporarily inhabit. Dreams are temporary habitations of the mind, and its inclusion in the dialogue echoes the transient state of social theory. Queer rural studies is another type of social theory that has been introduced as a response to the privileging of the city, emphasizing its urban space as the only habitable place for nonheteronormative identities, and for identities to practice nonheteronormative desire. Through the physical and psychic processes of liminality, in both a coming-of-age format and the coming out[19] of the characters, the film visually proposes an alternative to the notion that queer identity is incompatible with non-urban spaces.

[19] For queer subjects living in a heteronormative society or milieu, coming out is a continuous process wherein one must always present oneself as a gendered and sexual "other" for a normative gaze (e.g. cisgender, heterosexual). With my use of the statement "coming out", I refer to Fernando and Germán's "coming out" as the confirmation of their desire for each other.

Chapter 3: Papu Curotto's *Esteros*

Introduction

At a certain point in my research, I began to play with the descriptions I would use for this project's subject matter, particularly when people would ask what my current research entails. I began using "Argentine films with queer images" rather than "queer Argentine film" and vice versa. I'm uncomfortable with the notion that many people do not watch films that do not align with their own identity, and thus, I did not want to try and make these films "accessible" and reduce the importance of focusing on queer identity in cinema, an area that has historically been marginalized and erased. However, Papu Curotto's film *Esteros* is so powerful in its rendering of empathy for the characters that I would consider it first and foremost a love story before any other description. This "accessibility" was evident when I saw the film for a second time at the Mar del Plata International Film Festival in November of 2016 after having seen it for the first time at the queer film festival Asterisco in Buenos Aires in October of 2016. The song "Amores como el nuestro" by Jerry Rivera that was repeated throughout the film and into the closing credits led to an engaged audience clapping along and an enthusiastic question and answer period in a full screening room (film festival screening rooms often see audience members trickle out during the closing credits, subsequently missing the Q&A and leaving the room half empty. This was not the case with the screening I saw at Mar del Plata, and I believe that this is because the film was very moving). Even before the film's screenings in Argentina, the rights were purchased by the prestigious film distribution firm Breaking Glass Pictures in August 2016, following its premieres at the Toronto Inside Out Film Festival in May 2016 and

the Outfest Los Angeles in July 2016. At the time of writing this, the film is also on Netflix in Canada, the Unites States, and Puerto Rico.

Esteros is Papu Curotto's first feature-length film, an extension of his 2016 short *Matías y Jerónimo* / *Matías and Jerónimo*. In an interview with the English-language online magazine *Remezcla*, screenwriter Andi Nachon explored the importance of a rural setting for the film. Nachon's comments echo my claims that the filmic case studies in this project do reflect a move from the urban to the rural, and that this move has political purposes:

> For me the script was really about that. There were two strands here: there's the love story between two boys but it's key that it happens in this specific context. But when it comes to Argentinean films, I think it's also crucial to move away from the urban world, exploring different areas outside of the city. And in that the landscape was very important —it's almost a part of the characters. It's a place that Matías longs for. It's a kind of lost paradise for him. (Betancourt, 2016)

Nachon's statement reflects my meditations on the estuaries (or *esteros*), the wetlands located near Jerónimo's family's country home where Matías (Ignacio Rogers) and Jerónimo (Esteban Masturini) spent their summers together as children. The film is rich in its complexity and necessary in our contemporary social landscape; representations of childhood sexuality can be difficult and controversial (especially since these representations are of queer sexuality among children). It is useful to think again of Michel Foucault's conception of heterotopias, which I discussed previously vis-à-vis *Taekwondo*, as well as Ernest Hemingway's description of a querencia from *Death in the Afternoon*, which I have extended into my own notion of the *queerencia*. I also elaborate upon Vinodh Venkatesh's notion of the aqueous, a metaphorical

formation which presents its own opportunities for queer structures of feeling. With the use of Venkatesh's notion of the aqueous, I am calling attention to the images of water in *Esteros*. These images emphasize the use of water as a metaphorical strategy for liminality and sexual fluidity, for movement that occurs within psychological, social, and sexual experiences, for example. While an extensive discussion on water would exceed the scope of this dissertation, I am focusing on its use in *Esteros* (along with its use in *Taekwondo* and *Como una novia sin sexo*), to emphasize the sexual fluidity that is present in these narratives.

Film Summary

Before summarizing *Esteros*, it would be remiss to exclude the narrative of Papu Curotto's 2016 short film that is a sort of prequel to *Esteros*. The short film, *Matías y Jerónimo*, introduces Matías and Jerónimo, two young boys who are also approximately ten years old. The film opens on a beach in Corrientes province where *Esteros* is also set. The mother of one of the boys—it is unclear whose mother she is—is sitting on the beach while the boys play. When the boys begin to throw mud at each other, in a display that is subtextual rather than overtly homoerotic and sexual, the mother tells the boys that they are leaving. The next scene is in the shower where the boys continue to play and put what appears to be mousse in each other's hair. These scenes reflect an intimacy that is beyond platonic friendship. Following the beach and shower scenes, the boys attend a carnival, where they are in awe of a male carnival dancer, adorned in a glittery costume which rejects a macho, male gender presentation. After a sequence where the camera lingers on this carnival dancer and his unadulterated happiness, voices are heard uttering homophobic slurs. The boys witness the carnival dancer being chased through a

back alley, and as they walk home, the perpetrators of the presumed act of violence—which is not shown—are playing with the costume regalia that the carnival dancer had owned. The film ends with this somber note, and it is noteworthy that a scene of violence like this is not shown in *Esteros*, nor is this kind of homophobic violence shown in Marco Berger's *Taekwondo* or Lucas Santa Ana's *Como una novia sin sexo*. It is noteworthy in its disruption of narratives where queer characters have historically been faced with violence and death in moving image media.

In *Esteros*, by contrast, the film begins with the adult Matías (who has been living in Brazil for several years) and his Brazilian girlfriend, Rochi, who are preparing to attend a Halloween party. Matías is visiting his hometown in the province of Corrientes, and Rochi has accompanied him. The film's narrative oscillates between the time period of Matías and Jerónimo's childhood, which indicates a 1990s setting, particularly with the inclusion of the 1992 song "Amores como el nuestro". Matías and Jerónimo dance to this song as children, and then again as adults when they are alone together, visiting the country home in the watery estuaries. In the introductory sequences, Matías seems unenthused and downcast, which at first appears to be a reaction to not wanting to attend the party. His awkward disposition is one that makes him appear perpetually uncomfortable, not only with himself, but with his sexuality. When Rochi cheerfully says they are going to be zombies for the Halloween party, Matías protests: "but you don't like zombies!" The discrepancy in desire and their understanding of one another is obvious. Rochi is consistently eager to please Matías, and her projected kindness makes her characterization rather sympathetic. Simultaneously, there is a sadness in her attempts to make Matías happy, particularly in her obliviousness that he is troubled.

In a serendipitous moment, the makeup artist Rochi hired is Jerónimo, Matías's childhood friend. Matías and Jerónimo had a childhood romance, which admittedly seems to be an unusual statement in light of the routine desexualization of children, but it is arguably the most appropriate definition. Presumably in their twenties, the young men have not seen each other since childhood, when Matías's father accepted a job in Brazil, relocating the family. Matías's gloomy disposition brightens, and Rochi is thrilled that the two of them know each other already. It is, after all, an intimate act to have makeup applied to one's face. The close-up of the handsome, ethereally confident Jerónimo focusing on Matías's face while he gently applies the makeup builds the erotic tension.

When Rochi encourages the two to rekindle their friendship, the presumed heteronormativity is once again present. If Jerónimo were instead a female character, would Rochi have encouraged Matías to spend time alone with Jerónimo at the house in the estuaries? Would Matías and Jerónimo been able to be friends as children, and permitted to be alone if they were a heterosocial (male and female) pair? In other words, if they were a boy and girl, would their parents have allowed their close physical intimacy to continue? These preoccupations aside, Matías and Jerónimo head back to Jerónimo's family's country home, where their desire for each other is consummated. Once Matías reveals to Rochi that he has resumed a romantic and sexual relationship with Jerónimo, she is upset, but there is no resistance to Matías and Jerónimo's relationship, either from Rochi or any other factors within the narrative.

Heteronormativity and the Perceived Innocence of Children

Within the constraints of respectability politics, it is difficult to discuss sexual conduct between children. There is, of course, the concern that any representation or discussion of sexuality among children is exploitative, akin to child pornography or child abuse. However, it would be remiss to ignore how children routinely engage in sexual behaviour with one another, behaviour that adults who recount their stories cannot explain or understand. As a result, shame is often felt by those who discuss conduct that they engaged in as children, even if the person with whom they engaged with was also at a similar age. I was surprised to see a sexual scene in *Esteros* between the young Matías and Jerónimo, as they lay in bed at Jerónimo's parents' country home. The scene is a long take of Jerónimo manually stimulating Matías's genitals sexually, after Jerónimo has invited the shivering Matías to join him in his bed, offering to keep him warm under the blankets. This scene—and their sexual activity as children altogether—complicates the notion that consent cannot be legitimate among children and young people (in many places, it is illegal for a minor to have sexual relations with another minor, with the argument that children cannot consent to sexual relations). However, the ethics of this dilemma is not what I am focusing on, but on how heteronormativity can allow for queer conduct to be performed. In other words, Jerónimo's mother assumed that the two male children could sleep in the same room. If there was a male and female child, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the children would have separate sleeping spaces. In "Here, There, Everywhere: The Ubiquitous Geographies of Heteronormativity" (2008), Paul Hubbard explains the links between space and heteronormativity:

> [...] heteronormativity is a term that captures the imposition of certain beliefs about sexuality through social institutions and social policies. These ideas concern a 'normative

> heterosexuality' in which it is assumed individuals' sexual identities conform to a social norm of heterosexual love, sex and reproduction. Far from being one sexual choice among many, this stresses that heterosexuality is culturally hegemonic, with the reproduction of a heterosexual/homosexual binary an important structuring device subordinating the homosexual at the same time that it institutionalises the heteronormal (Weeks 2007).

Hubbard describes the assumptions that heteronormativity generates. As a result, heteronormativity voids the belief that a child could engage in nonheterosexual affection that goes beyond platonic friendship. The film illustrates how heteronormativity is often what allowed the relationship between Matías and Jerónimo to flourish. Besides the bedroom, the outdoor spaces of the film, such as the hammock, the still waters of the estuaries, and the shower are what allowed Matías and Jerónimo to have time together where their intimacy was strengthened, both emotionally and physically. While there are films (and other moving image media) that have shown children who engage in what would be considered romantic and sexual relations, it is unusual to see children of the same "gender" in these positions. Again, this recalls the invisible yet powerful rules of heteronormativity, which inform our values in a given space, whether we are conscious of them or not.

The rules and assumptions that inform our cultural imaginary are reflected in cinema through their very absence. What I mean is that the sheer lack of children represented as subjects with possibilities for sexual behaviour, especially as nonheteronormative subjects, is what solidifies the assumption that these subjects and their behaviour deviate from an arbitrary constitution of "normality." In *Queer Issues in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2003),

David William Foster reminds us of the identities that are "a deviation from what are understood to be the paradigms of compulsory heterosexuality." Even when the intention is not to negatively appraise or declare a value judgment, the norms and practices of compulsory sexuality continue to demarcate a person or a group as an "other":

> Even when "sexual preference" is not used to insinuate a discriminatory or condemnatory stance toward nonheteronormativity, it is nevertheless only used to indicate nonheteronormativity: one does not evoke the category of sexual preference and then go on to explain how the individual is committed to monogamous and reproductive heterosexuality (61).

While all three primary filmic case studies of this paper address this surveillance of the nonheteronormative subject, *Esteros*'s rendering of Matías and Jerónimo as children is a reminder of the dominant assumption that children are devoid of sexual thoughts and conduct and that it is therefore impossible for them to be nonheteronormative subjects. In a scene depicting the two boys frolicking through the muddy grounds and the water, the boys return to the house where Jerónimo's mother scolds them, worried that they would become sick in the presumably cold weather. Jerónimo's mother closes the bathroom door, and Jerónimo enters the shower. Matías hesitates, but Jerónimo casually invites him into the shower. In a later scene, Matías and Jerónimo have fallen asleep together on the hammock at Jerónimo's family's country house. This scene is expressly intimate, foreshadowing the erotic and romantic intimacy that the boys will experience in following scenes as both children and adults.

The Estuaries as Heterotopia and Que(e)rencia

The estuaries ("*esteros*" in Spanish) not only play a pivotal role in the film's narrative arc, but in the lives of Matías and Jerónimo. Rochi tells Jerónimo that Matías frequently and fondly brings up the estuaries and the country home Matías visited as a child. Jerónimo appears confused, and tells Rochi that the home in the estuaries is his family's property, and not Matías's. Surprised, Rochi tells Jerónimo that Matías had never mentioned him. The absence of Jerónimo in Matías's mythologizing of the estuaries alludes to Matías's longing for the place in which his desire for Jerónimo was fulfilled, and his inability to reckon with the shame of his sexuality. While the film could have avoided shame and instead allowed Matías to be merely sexually fluid, there is a strategic emphasis on Matías's discomfort with his sexual orientation. I do not wish to assume that Matías is living a lie and is merely using Rochi to cloak his untapped sexual orientation. Rather, I am rejecting the cultural narrative of monosexuality, where one is either heterosexual or homosexual, with no acknowledgement of the vast spectrum of human sexuality. Whether the film's director Papu Curotto and screenwriter Andi Nachon are acknowledging the breadth of sexual orientation is unclear, but there is sufficient evidence to argue that a sexual fluidity has been chosen rather than a monosexual lens in Matías's characterization.

In a later scene where Matías and Jerónimo, as adults, are staying at the country home in the estuaries, Matías gets frustrated with the fridge's broken door. Jerónimo calmly walks over and begins to fix the fridge with a screwdriver. Matías's frustration continues: "It's so easy for you," he tells Jerónimo. "Matías, it's just a fridge," Jerónimo responds. "Fuck the estuaries," Matías continues, in an outburst that is evidently a displacement of anger oriented towards his sexual shame. As I discussed in the chapter on Marco Berger's *Taekwondo*, the estuaries and the country home are a heterotopia for Matías and Jerónimo's desire for one another, but it is not

utopic. This sequence elicits the shame that Matías feels and subsequently projects onto Jerónimo and the estuaries. As theorist Michel Foucault has stated and which I reiterated in the previous chapter on *Taekwondo*, heterotopias disturb, for they unsettle language and experience. The heterotopic spaces that the characters occupy in *Taekwondo*, *Esteros*, and *Como una novia sin sexo* disavow the constraints of language and experience, such as the binary of monosexuality. The binary of monosexuality is a constraint that is unsettled by films such as *Taekwondo*, *Esteros*, and *Como una novia sin sexo* inasmuch as they forgo rigidity within language and sexuality (namely, sexual experience), opting for a fluidity within these arenas.

The fluidity is not limited to linguistic and sexual formations, however. It is telling that the film's setting is based in Corrientes province in northeastern Argentina, a province that borders southeastern Brazil. This in-between space, like many geographical spaces in which two nations share a border, is the boundary that separates the relationship between Matías and Jerónimo. It disturbs the idea of nationhood, emphasizing Benedict Anderson's explication of "imagined communities" which I mentioned in my chapter on methodology. The construction of nations through invisible lines is a parallel to the structural boundaries which constitute monosexuality. Besides the mutual longing that Matías and Jerónimo share, the film's evident subtext is Matías's struggle with his sexual orientation. Again, we see the liminality that is present in *Taekwondo*, through the spaces that the characters occupy, and the liminal psychic states such as dreaming in *Taekwondo*, and the struggle with acknowledging one's nonheternormative desires, a struggle that is present in all three filmic case studies.

In an examination of spatiality and sexuality, particularly queer sexuality, it is necessary to discuss the contemporary notion of a safe space (whether the safe space in question is for

marginalized identities or is simply a space where solitude is assumed). In places that are labelled as safe spaces, there is always a risk of violence (symbolic or physical). This has led to contemporary activist discourse to use parentheses with the spelling (e.g. claiming that a space in question will be "safe(r)" rather than "safe"). In other words, one can only attempt to make a space safe; it is not unusual for a queer night at a nightclub, for example, to have incidents of queerphobic harassment or assault. In *Esteros*, it is unclear whether the swamp or marsh wherein Matías and Jerónimo spend leisure time is on land that is owned by Jerónimo's parents. If the body of water is located on private land, there is only the risk of humans (who could be queerphobic) and natural entities encroaching on their romantic leisure time. If it is a public space, there is a further risk of homophobic strangers entering their space, and creating a tentative danger. However, the body of water is treated like a sanctuary in two central ways: 1) It is revealed that Matías reminisces about the estuaries and the country home to his girlfriend Rochi; 2) Jerónimo reveals to Matías that the estuaries' water is so sacred to Jerónimo that he had not been able to revisit it, for the pain was too much to bear without Matías's presence. However, the space once again becomes mutually sacred when Matías and Jerónimo, as adults, are able to revisit the same water where they swam and spent time alone together as children.

There are three particular spaces in *Esteros*'s diegesis that fall under the description of a safe(r) space: the shower they use in a flashback of their lived experience as children at the country home, the car they drive in as adults to revisit the country home, and the bedroom they shared as children and that they once again use as adults. The estuaries can be described as a "querencia," a term borrowed from *Death in the Afternoon*, Ernest Hemingway's non-fiction book about bullfighting:

> Aside from the normal physical and mental stages the bull goes through in the ring each individual bull changes his mental state all through the fight. The most common, and to me the most interesting, thing that passes in the bull's brain is the development of querencias. A querencia is a place the bull naturally wants to go to in the ring; a preferred locality. That is a natural querencia and such are well known and fixed, but an accidental querencia is more than that. It is a place which develops in the course of the fight where the bull makes his home. It does not usually show at once, but develops in his brain as the fight goes on. In this place he feels that he has his back against the wall and in his querencia he is inestimably more dangerous and almost impossible to kill (2002).

This analogy may appear exceedingly more violent and brutal than the peaceful narratives of the filmic case studies of this paper. However, what many majoritarian and nonheteronormative people do not realize is that violence is often a constant threat for individuals who do not adhere to heteronormative social, sexual, or visual practices. For Matías and Jerónimo, the house at the estuaries is what I am calling a *queerencia*, a querencia that has been queered, and made safe(r) for their presence. In terms of safety, it is not only a safety from oppressive threats such as homophobic or queerphobic violence, but a private space for them to safely explore their own emotions. This is especially so for Matías who has not yet addressed his sexual orientation in the same way that Jerónimo has addressed his own identity. An important element that links *Taekwondo*, *Esteros*, and *Como una novia sin sexo* is the existence of a rural queerencia, and the smaller queerencias that exist within the larger spaces of the film. In *Taekwondo*, the non-judgmental house of young men is a queerencia, but the bedrooms and bathrooms are smaller queerencias. In *Esteros* and *Como una novia sin sexo*, we see similar spatial formations, which I

will discuss with the use of water and Vinodh Venkatesh's notion of the aqueous in both of these films.

The Spatial Deployment of Water

In Vinodh Venkatesh's analysis of the Peruvian filmmaker Javier Fuentes-Léon's *Contracorriente* / *Undertow* (2010)[20], Venkatesh argues that the film's use of the aqueous, the adjective of an entity containing water, is fundamental to queer structures of feeling[21]. Venkatesh acknowledges the use of water in both Argentine filmmaker Lucía Puenzo's *XXY*[22] and *Contrarriente*, which Venkatesh acknowledges as orienting us "[...] away from the urban and toward the aqueous [...] as spaces of outing and becoming" (193). I am extending Venkatesh's intervention on the aqueous, where I highlight the use of water and bodies of water in *Esteros*. The natural entity of water is a useful lens inasmuch as it is a compound that literally and figuratively can reflect our material bodies. By reflecting embodiment, I am referring to the cinematic use of the trope of water as a metaphor and conduit for sexual desire. In the Mexican

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[20] *Contracorriente* is a romance-drama where a young, married fisherman (Miguel) in Peru has an affair with a man (Santiago) who ultimately drowns. Santiago returns as a ghost to ask Miguel to give him a proper burial. The film has been compared to a queer *Ghost* (1990). Venkatesh again makes reference to metronormativity and queer cinematic images by pointing out that "[...] *Contracorriente* relocates the homosexual problematic to the nonurban and nonterritorialized seaside space, breaking with previous films that typically maintain the urban as a topological referent" (2016: 64).

[21] Cultural critic Raymond Williams proposed the term "structures of feeling" to express the intangible notions and beliefs that can be held in a particular historical moment by a particular demographic (2005: 22, 25, 155). Currently, there is a queer structure of feeling wherein fluidity of gender identity and sexual orientation is privileged over static conceptions of these modalities. I would also argue that there is a queer structure of feeling among the three filmic case studies of these project, for they advocate for a rural counter-space that is not an urban, city space.

[22] In 2007, the drama film *XXY* was released to critical and commercial acclaim. Directed by Lucía Puenzo, daughter of acclaimed Argentine filmmaker Luis Puenzo, the film stars the renowned Argentine actress Inés Efron as a 15 year old with an intersex identity (whose gender expression passes as "female"*). In *XXY*, Alex Kraken's (Efron) family moves to a remote town in Uruguay in order for them to experience life with less oppression.

film *Y tu mamá también*, famed for its titillating yet dignified male-male-female sex scenes, the film's telos is predicated on reaching a nonexistent beach on water. *Y tu mamá también*'s two male characters, Tenoch (Diego Luna) and Julio (Gael García Bernal), are in the physical and psychic liminal stage in their lives[23], the latter which I have elaborated upon vis-à-vis Victor's Turner's ruminations in my chapter on Marco Berger and Martín Farina's *Taekwondo* (2016). Their physical liminality manifests through the road trip that they take with the magnetic Luisa (Maribel Verdú) in their quest for the fictitious Boca del Cielo (Heaven's Mouth) beach. On a psychic level, they are young men who are post-adolescent but pre-domestic; they have girlfriends for whom they appear to at least have an insatiable lust, love, or both, but they both have yet to be married and enter the symbolic order[24] of heteronormativity.[25]

Esteros shares similarities with *Y tu mamá también* in its characterization, setting, and narrative. The film title *Esteros* refers to a geographical space in Argentina's Corrientes province —*Esteros* is the Spanish designation for wetlands, and the setting in particular is (at least diegetically) in the Iberá Wetlands (*Esteros del Iberá*). These bodies of water are the location of Matías and Jerónimo's formative summers as children, where they played in the water and

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[23] I am not suggesting a rigid dichotomy or binary that cannot be transgressed or ruptured, but for the sake of brevity, I am using two temporal and spatial qualifiers. That said, I acknowledge that these are loose oppositions, and are certainly malleable, and would ideally exist on a vast spectrum of possibilities.

[24] By symbolic order I am evoking Jacques Lacan's triad of "The Real," "The Imaginary," and "The Symbolic". The symbolic order is thus the combination of abstract and material formations that put forth institutions, values, norms, and mores (1981: 161, 262, 270). Right now, heteronormativity is a dominant matrix in the symbolic order.

[25] Gay marriage has been challenged as being heteronormative and homonormative, by both heterosexual and queer people. Interviewing gay couples who do not wish to marry, Tom Geoghehan wrote that some gay men and women view the legalization of gay marriage as "[...] a victory for a patriarchal institution that bears no historical relevance to them." One of the sources Geoghehan interviewed was Legba Carrefour, a self-described "radical queer" who said that marriage is a "destructive way of life," and that efforts should be focused on protecting the safety of transgender people who face daily violence (2013).

developed erotic and romantic feelings for one another. The fluidity of erotic affect and water is a metaphor that has been documented in literary and film studies, which Venkatesh has explored in his book, *New Maricón Cinema*. In *Taekwondo* and *Como una novia sin sexo*, this spatial metaphor is also deployed, making use the waterfront as metaphor, where the two friends (and ultimately lovers) Daniel and Santiago could covertly kiss, as demonstrated in a scene in the film's first act. *Taekwondo*'s aqueous functions are made evident by the vacation house's pool and the recurring shower scenes. The aqueous and the symbolism of water point to the liminal space that water represents in not only *Esteros* and *Como una novia sin sexo*, but in *Esteros*. The term fluidity as used in sexual fluidity is derivative of the condition of water. Sexual fluidity is metaphorically akin to water; it does not have a definite shape, and it is in constant movement.

In the critically-lauded and landmark film *Moonlight*, water is a metaphor amid the queer images between queer men of colour. Sophie Gilbert (2016) argues that *Moonlight* is a film about metamorphosis, underscored by the presence of water in its three acts which chronicles the childhood, adolescence, and adulthood of its black male protagonist Chiron (Ashton Sanders) as he grapples with his queer sexuality. Chiron, however, he must confront his sexuality in a heteronormative society in addition to the masculinity issues which black men uniquely struggle with in the United States, and elsewhere, due to being a minority within an already marginalized identity (Lee, 2017)[26]. Referring to an interview with Tony-award winning director Mary

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[26] In an op-ed for *The Guardian* written in February before the Academy Awards where *Moonlight* was nominated for several awards and ultimately won three Academy Awards (including Best Picture), Josh Lee wrote that *Moonlight* presents some issues that are "[...] specific to the poor black American experience, but issues of hypermasculinity, poverty and the experience of being made to feel like a second-class citizen are found in black communities all over the world. The weight of being a minority within a marginalised community presses heavily on every frame in *Moonlight*, providing the most complete reflection for black gay youth that the mainstream has ever offered" (2017). I would argue further that these intersections of difficulty also impact queers in Argentina, a country which has suffered —and continues to suffer—amid American imperialism and its ongoing repercussions.

Zimmerman, Gilbert brought up Zimmerman's claims about the importance of water not only in *Metamorphoses*, but in Shakespeare, for example:

> Water has everything to do with change—in virtually every culture it's a symbol of change," she said. In Shakespeare … water is symbolic in terms of crossing a rubicon [sic], and of transformation. In a lot of cultures it's where you go to meet the gods, because they come out of water (Gilbert, 2016 citing Zimmerman, 2013).

Indeed, Matías's journey in *Esteros* does feel like a crossing of a Rubicon and a transformation. In the first act, he briefly leaves a Halloween party to gaze at the water, having had his makeup done by Jerónimo. He is uncomfortable at the party, and seems to contemplate his encounter with his childhood friend. Before going further, I do not want to suggest that Matías was living a lie, or living with a sexuality he did not wish to have. These claims that one is always "in the closet" are problematic, for they engage in bisexual or pansexual erasure. Thus, I want to highlight the sexual fluidity of his characterization, a sexual fluidity that is also present in *Taekwondo* and *Como una novia sin sexo*. As opposed to monosexual interpretations where one can only be heterosexual or homosexual or bisexual, sexual fluidity encompasses the possibility to become attracted to or have sexual relations with a person irrespective of their gender. This is not to erase difference, but to acknowledge that one's sexual orientation can indeed orient itself in different directions.[27]

Writing about Annie Proulx's novella *Brokeback Mountain*, Mark John Isola reminds us that the water as a metaphor for queer male desire, sexual fluidity, and general depictions of sexuality is not a new cultural phenomenon:

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[27] For more on sexual fluidity, see feminist psychologist Lisa Diamond's work, particularly her watershed 2008 book *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire*.

> [...] there is a significant tradition of nineteenth-century American male writers deploying water to express homoeroticism, if not something akin to homosexuality. This tradition runs from Herman Melville through Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, and Charles Warren Stoddard—not to mention the tradition's intertextual appearance, for instance in the paintings of Thomas Eakins (33).

In all three filmic case studies that I am presenting in their own chapter, there is indeed what Isola refers to as a "[...] fluid textuality, which can be productively interpreted as delineating the flux of homosexual desire" (38). I would add that this fluid textuality extends into an expression of sexual fluidity among the characterization, a phenomenon which we are witnessing in modern culture, such as announcements of sexual fluidity from actors and sexually fluid characters in contemporary film, television, and moving image media.[28]

In *Esteros*, however, neither character openly identifies as gay, queer, or as sexually fluid. It is made apparent that Jerónimo identifies as gay, for he says he is "gay" in a scene in the where he and Matías are at Jerónimo's parents' summer house in the estuaries. The moderately deep level of intimacy that Matías shares with his girlfriend Rochi leads to a wariness of dismissing Matías's attraction to women or to Rochi. The film subtextually renders Matías's characterization as someone who embodies a sexually fluid orientation, rather than as a person who was always only attracted to men and was simply "in the closet".

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[28] Actors such as Kristen Stewart and Cara Delevingne, among others, have spoken publicly and been public about their non-static sexualities. In an interview with *NYLON* magazine, Stewart said "If you feel like you really want to define yourself, and you have the ability to articulate those parameters and that in itself defines you, then do it" (2015). *The Guardian* reported on this contemporary phenomenon and queer structure of feeling, with Sarah Hughes writing that "Twenty years ago these stories would have been accompanied by prurient 'oohs' and much vivid speculation over what message these women were trying to send. Today such moments are everywhere, a sign that increasingly we define ourselves in less structured, more mutable ways" (2016).

Conclusion

I often think about *Matías y Jerónimo* and *Esteros*, and how powerful the depiction of children is in these films. We are socialized to believe that two same-sex (a problematic term since gender identity is not necessarily visible) individuals are only engaging in a platonic relationship. It is even more surprising when we examine historical relationships where heteronormativity and the separation of heterosocial pairings is precisely what leads to queer eroticism, romance, and sexual relationships. While I consider myself to be unsurprised by most images, I was surprised to see two child actors engaging in physical sexual contact on-screen. Beyond the tackling of a taboo subject such as childhood—and queer childhood—sexuality, Matías and Jerónimo's intimate and sexual relationship as children uses the optic of heteronormativity to highlight how we relate to one another. This optic accentuates who is allowed to spend time with whom, particularly among children when there are rules and prohibitions set by adults. It calls attention to the ways in which heteronormativity informs the assumption that sexual conduct would not be occurring between two children of the same sex. In *Esteros*, it is the estuaries that disrupt the assumed heteronormativity, heterosexuality, and perceived sexual innocence of children. It is a space of desire, a querencia, both in the sense of the Spanish verb "querer" which simultaneously means "to want" and "to love." Hemingway's notion of the querencia, and my extension of this, the queerencia, is the spatial formation in which nonheteronormative desires can be consummated, whether that consummation is emotional or physical.

In the three films that I examine in this dissertation, depictions of water and references to bodies of water are paramount to the rendering of queer desire and its consummation. It is in *Esteros*, however, where water is the most central. The film title itself refers to a body of water, the wetlands of Corrientes province in Argentina. It also refers to the land that Jerónimo's parents own, where their secondary country home is located. The heterotopic space of the estuaries and its meeting of sexualities (the assumed heterosexuality, the heterosexuality of Matías and Jerónimo's families, Jerónimo's homosexuality, and Matías's sexual fluidity) reminds us of the heterogeneous properties of water in its fluidity and in its mutability. Its mutability is rendered through the temporality of the film in which the narrative oscillates between Matías' and Jerónimo's childhood and adulthood, where their bodies change but their desire for one another does not.

Chapter 4: Lucas Santa Ana's *Como una novia sin sexo* / *Bromance*

Introduction

I first watched Lucas Santa Ana's *Como una novia sin sexo* / *Bromance* at the Asterisco Queer Film Festival in Buenos Aires in November 2016, and then again at the prestigious Mar del Plata Film Festival later that same month. Besides these screenings, film has had several international film festival screenings: it screened in October 2016 at the queer film festival Filmfest homochrom in Cologne, Germany in October of 2016; at the Reelout Queer Film Festival in Kingston, Ontario, the small city where I am currently completing my M.A. degree in Cultural Studies. Thus, this film has traversed international borders, in addition to earning Agustín Pardella (who plays Adrián in the film) a nomination for the Silver Condor Award for Best New Actor (*Premio Cóndor de Plata a la Mejor Revelación Masculina*)[29], which ultimately went to Lucas Papa, the protagonist of Marco Berger's *Taekwondo*. This is an award which Argentina's arguably most internationally famous actor, Ricardo Darín, has received several times.

The title *Como una novia sin sexo* can be literally translated as "Like a girlfriend without sex." Meanwhile, the film's English title is "*Bromance"*. The translation, however, is not arbitrary. Like *Taekwondo* and *Esteros*, the film illustrates a queering of the heteronormative and heterosexual notion of the bromance. In *Reading the Bromance*, Michael De Angelis examines the mid-2000s onset of the notion of the bromance:

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[29] This award was conferred through the Argentine Film Critics Association's (*Asociación de Cronistas Cinematográficos de la Argentina*) award ceremony. This is Argentina's national award ceremony that can be compared to the United States' Academy Awards.

> "Bromance" has come to denote an emotionally intense bond between presumably straight males who demonstrate an openness to intimacy that they neither regard, acknowledge, avow, nor express sexually, and this definition already begins to point to some of the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in the phenomenon: bromance involves something that must happen (the demonstration of intimacy itself) on the condition that other things not happen (the avowal or expression of sexual desire between straight males) (2014, 1).

The colloquial use of the term bromance is an expression of homosociality with explicit affection and intimacy. The intimacies it elicits can often become homoerotic, which can be viewed comically and as crossing personal boundaries (e.g. sexual assault during initiation ceremonies, or "hazing" in university clubs and societies). Similar to quintessential bromantic films such as Judd Apatow's *Knocked Up* (2007) and Greg Mottola's *Superbad* (2007), the characterization and relationship between the three men in *Como una novia sin sexo* is situated in a heteronormativity that is entrenched by their emotional and physical proximity. Framing this queering of the heteronormative bromance in *Como una novia sin sexo* are the intersections between the rural setting of the film, a setting it shares with *Taekwondo* and *Esteros*. However, *Como una novia sin sexo* is the most rural of the three films—*Taekwondo* is set amid a more suburban rural space, while *Esteros* oscillates from an urban space to a country home. In *Como una nova sin sexo*, the characters sleep in tents in a forest. The forest is situated next to a beach, and simultaneously, the forest, the beach, and the water provide spaces for the characters' queer desire.

After summarizing the film, I examine four thematic areas of the film which I support with close readings from the film's scenes. First, I look at the spatial formations of the characters' vacation and how recurring natural entities in the mise-en-scène parallel what I have elaborated in the previous chapters on *Taekwondo* and *Esteros*, again drawing upon the social and sexual symbolism from Walt Whitman's poem "Song of Myself." In this chapter, I dwell on scopophilia and haptic visuality, which are not only relevant to the rural spatial formations in *Como una novia sin sexo* (and in *Taekwondo* and *Esteros*), but to Whitman's poem. The scopophilic imagery of "Song of Myself" is evident, whether the reader is imagining oneself as Whitman watching the people he writes about, or whether we are engaging in the voyeurism as a reader where Whitman describes his bodily and sensorial experiences. Whitman's experiences in a natural setting dovetail with the experiences of the characters in *Como una novia sin sexo*. For example, I will elaborate upon the sequence where the character Daniel masturbates in the forest without anyone present. Just as the study of queer rural representation and experiences have been overlooked in intellectual, social, and cultural histories, the phenomenon of masturbation is understudied in academic and non-academic literature. Its presentation in the film is uniquely situated in the history of masturbation's representation in moving image media, and I address this topic within the context of the film's rural space. Following this, I draw attention to the use of the videotape camcorder and its relationship with what theorist Laura U. Marks calls haptic visuality, and how haptic images bear a tremendous importance in the study of queer cinema, which Vinodh Venkatesh has demonstrated with his elaborations on New Maricón Cinema. In *Como una novia sin sexo*, the sensorial quality of haptic visuality is heightened by the natural, rural setting, particularly by the bright green foliage of the forest, the golden beach, and the water

which, as I discussed in the chapter on *Esteros*, provides a rich metaphorical venue for thinking about sexuality—and in this case, queer sexuality. Lastly, I discuss the intrinsic presence of scopophilia in cinematic images, and how this relates to queer lived experiences in both urban and rural spaces. This comparative analysis demonstrates the ubiquity of scopophilia and objectification, which *Taekwondo*, *Esteros*, and *Como una novia sin sexo* reveal in their orientation towards queer lived experience in rural spaces.

Film Summary

In 1996, three male friends take a vacation to a campsite within a green, luscious forest situated on a beach. As young men, presumably in their late teens or early twenties, Daniel (Javier De Pietro), Santiago (Marcos Ribas), and Adrián (Agustín Pardella) indeed encapsulate the notion of the bromance. They are physically affectionate, they light-heartedly mock each other, criticize each other, and speak crudely about their past relationships with women. Not far into the first act, they meet a young woman named Julieta (Luana Pascal) who oscillates between coy and flirtatious with the group of men. The film follows the erotic connection between Daniel and Santiago, but the first and second act are marked by Santiago's pursuit of Julieta, who readily accepts Santiago's invitations. While Santiago and Daniel share a kiss while skinny dipping alone in the water on the deserted beach, Santiago continues to actively pursue Julieta, to Daniel's obvious but verbally unexpressed disappointment. Upon discovering Santiago and Julieta having sex in the campsite late at night, Daniel watches them, and Santiago maintains eye contact while on top of Julieta in the missionary position. Daniel leaves, weeping by himself after witnessing Santiago and Julieta having sex. In the second act, Santiago rejects Julieta, and

Julieta then pursues Adrián, who also immediately accepts the relationship. Julieta discovers that Daniel and Santiago desire each other, and outs them to Adrián, who is surprised and vaguely upset. The film's denouement is open-ended but positive, where it is assumed that Daniel and Santiago can continue their relationship.

Masturbation and the Presentation of the Bulge

In the first act, before Daniel and Santiago have taken their desire to a physical level, Daniel takes a walk to a remote space on the campsite. He sits against a tree and begins to masturbate. Masturbation is an act that exists outside of sexual orientation; masturbation at face value does not have an oriented object. However, masturbation is frequently engaged in, whether through experience or through cinematic representation, as being object-oriented. As a ubiquitous and contemporary example, pornography is an external object that stimulates and maintains arousal during masturbation. Besides pornography, one can think of the object of their desire to maintain arousal. In *Como una novia sin sexo*, this masturbation scene is queered in light of Daniel's attraction towards Santiago. The chronology of the scenes implies that Daniel is not masturbating for a singular, personal relief, but to relieve his own tension and the excess of his desire for Santiago. Thus, this masturbatory, autoerotic act is no longer neutral in how it is sexually oriented, but has an explicit orientation from a man to another man. During the masturbation scene, the shallow depth of field of the camera lens oscillates between Daniel in the foreground and the trees in the background. On my initial viewing, I misread this as clumsy camera work. Upon further viewing, however, I realized that this enables a visual analogy between the forest's tree leaves and Daniel's affective erotic deployment. This visual analogy

emphasizes the natural elements that are part of rural iconography, which highlights the space as a counter-narrative to the urban in queer cinema.

It is interesting to note how *Como una novia sin sexo*'s masturbation scene is treated with dignity and not as a gratuitous scene to titillate the audience but rather to express Daniel's subjectivity. The scene is used to fantasize about the object of his desire (Santiago) in a private space, for the act cannot be consummated under the scrutiny of the others. This prohibitive ethos is a byproduct of ingrained heteronormativity and homophobia and begs the question; if the film featured two female characters, would there been as much distress? Sexual physical relations between women, in both cinema and social relations, are commonly fetishized by the opposite sex. They are not only fetishized by men, but also by women, which has been argued to be a performance for men. However, based on my many conversations with women over the years, many heterosexual women masturbate to images of sexual physical relations between men. By contrast, sexual physical relations between men are frequently viewed as unsavoury for heterosexual men, attractive for homosexual men, and uninteresting to heterosexual woman[30]. However, the latter belief continues to be dismantled by heterosexual women in our contemporary moment who consume erotica and pornography that features male, homosexual

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[30] My statement here is anecdotal, but it has been academically investigated. In the paper "Male gays in the female gaze: women who watch m/m pornography," Lucy Neville (2015) provides contemporary examples of female demand for scenes of gay pornography in literature and moving image media: "At the Edinburgh Literary Festival in August 2014, the author G. R. R. Martin stated that he had received numerous letters from fans asking for more explicit gay male sex scenes in his *Game of Thrones* novels (and the associated television series), and that 'most of the[se] letters come from women' (in Furness 2014). The idea that women might be interested in watching men have sex with each other is certainly not new within popular discourses – there was much discussion of this issue after the success of *Brokeback Mountain* with female audiences (see Taormino 2008), and there has been an increasing inclusion of gay male love scenes in television shows with a large female viewership (e.g. *The Carrie Diaries*, *The Following*, *Teen Wolf*)" (192-193). Neville supports this claim with a mixed-method approach that used focus groups, interviews, and an online questionnaire to illustrate how "gay porn subverts the patriarchal order by challenging masculinist values, providing a protected space for non-conformist, non-reproductive and non-familial sexuality, and encouraging many sex-positive values" (204).

physical relations. Despite this nuanced reality of masturbation, cinematic representation of masturbation has been historically limited, as Lauren Rosewarne (2014) explains:

> Whereas female masturbation tends to be sensuous and included to arouse the audience, the self-stimulation of men is generally treated vastly differently. It is commonly situated in sophomoric comedies for example, where the act is hurried and inevitably gets sprung leading to embarrassment, if not grotesque displays of semen splatter [...] (2)

The images of masturbation in *Como una novia sin sexo* do not follow this trope of embarrassment, nor do they portray semen in the way Rosewarne has described. Rather, it brings us back to the Whitman-esque imagery in *Taekwondo* and *Esteros*, and an argument that literary critic Harold Bloom has made in an analysis of Whitman's poem "Song of Myself". In his book *Walt Whitman*, Bloom claims that "Song of Myself" is autoerotic rather than homoerotic:

> [...] Whitman overtly celebrates masturbation, and his most authentic sexual passion is always for himself. One would hardly know this from reading many of Whitman's critics, but one certainly knows it by closely reading Whitman's major poems. Here is a crucial crisis-passage from "Song of Myself," resolved through successful masturbation:
>
> I merely stir, press, feel with my fingers, and am happy,
> To touch my person to some one else's is about as much as I can
> Stand [sic].
>
> Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity,
> Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,

> Treacherous tip of me reaching and crowding to help them,
> My flesh and blood playing out lightning to strike what is hardly
> different from myself….
>
> I went myself first to the headland, my own hands carried me there.
>
> You villain touch! what are you doing? my breath is tight in its
> throat,
> Unclench your floodgates, you are too much for me. [...] (Bloom, 2009: 6 citing Whitman, 617-622, 639-641)

Arguably, Whitman is preoccupied with both autoeroticism, homoeroticism, and heteroeroticism in "Song of Myself". The final verse of this excerpt, "Unclench your floodgates, you are too much for me," recalls the symbol of water in *Como una novia sin sexo*. It is amid the watery waves that Santiago and Daniel first kiss, eliciting the discomfort that both characters now face, presumably as a result of heteronormativity and homophobia (whether this is internalized homophobia, fear of homophobia from others, or a combination of both). The suggestion of excess, "you are too much for me," parallels Daniel and Santiago's responses to their physical manifestations of their desire for each other. Sexual fluidity is intrinsically an orientation of excess—it exceeds the constraints of not only heteronormativity and heterosexuality, but monosexuality, since it does not submit to the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Nature's elements are also predicated upon an excess that humans have attempted to diminish. The urban spatial formations of modernity, and other historic attempts to "civilize" nature, have been

responses to ideas of excess, of anything that disrupts or goes beyond what has been artificially mandated and constructed by humans (whether we are talking about language or buildings). The masturbation scene, situated in a space that is surrounded by abundant foliage, is significant; it emphasizes the ways in which humans have attempted to limit the fluidity of desire, nature, and where desire can be consummated.

The Camcorder and Haptic Visuality

To emphasize the non-contemporary use of time and space, *Como una novia sin sexo*'s cinematography oscillates from a contemporary digital camera to a camcorder that would have been used in the 1990s when the film is set. The film's hybrid use of modern digital videographic equipment and the placement of a dated camcorder offer some insight into Laura U. Marks' meditations on haptic visuality. Marks argues that the the medium used for the cinematographic production indeed relates to the possibilities of viewer reception:

> Haptic cinema does not invite identification with a figure so much as it encourages a bodily relationship between the viewer and the video image. Thus it is not proper to speak of the *object* of a haptic look so much as to speak of a dynamic subjectivity between looker and image. Because haptic visuality tends less to isolate and focus upon objects than simply to be in their presence [...] (Marks, 1998: 332).

In the vein of transnational cinema, the umbrella term that has appropriately succeeded notions of a national cinema and of (post)colonial cinema, the three filmic case studies I analyze textually are intercultural. It can be successfully argued that any film is intercultural, when our contemporary human condition is predicated on consistent flows of global processes to do with

ideology, social relations, and technology. Marks has argued that haptic visuality occurs within intercultural cinema, where power is particularly exercised in diasporic cinema, (post)- and (neo)-colonial cinema, and cinema that explores cultural apartheid. While *Taekwondo*, *Esteros*, and *Como una novia sin sexo* do not tread the terrain of diasporic cinema due to their setting in Argentina, they are certainly intertwined with their (post)colonial milieu (especially with middle-class characters who are "white" passing, or European settlers) and in light of the historical trauma of violent dictatorships and recurring economic crises in Argentina. For Marks, these films address embodiment and sense perception (Ross, 2015: 18 citing Marks, 2000: 1). In Marks' essay "Video Haptics and Erotics," she describes Sadie Benning's Pixelvision videotape *It Wasn't Love* (1992). Unlike the narratological lens I undertake with the three films I assess, Marks draws our attention to the medium itself, the low-resolution videotape that renders the narrative of *It Wasn't Love*. Marks describes her viewing experience with emphasis on the tape itself, explaining that "it feels like going on a journey into states of erotic being: the longing for intimacy with the another; the painful and arousing awareness that she is so close to me yet distinct; being drawn into a rapport with the other where I lose the sense of my own boundaries; and the uncanny loss of proportion in which big things slip beyond the horizon of my awareness while small events are arenas for a universe of feeling" (1998: 331). This description encapsulates the sensation that I have felt watching the three abovementioned films, a sensation I detected among audience members at both Asterisco and the Mar del Plata Film Festival where audience members conveyed physical and verbal enthusiasm for the films they watched. Were all of the audience members I sat with in screening rooms also queer? It is likely that they were not. These films feature characters who are young, queer males, and the screenings' audience

members were not all male either (I cannot assume whether the men in the room were queer). How could I, a sexually fluid woman in my twenties, a person from Canada visiting Argentina, also feel a strong identification with these characters, whose personal and cultural history are undoubtedly so different from mine?

In *New Maricón Cinema*, Vinodh Venkatesh takes note of the formations of empathy that occur from the diegesis of new queer (or New Maricón) films in Latin America. Through spatial, natural elements such as depictions of water—in other words, natural entities that constitute the elements of "nature"—processes of empathy are forged through haptic visuality. The bodies of viewers are stimulated through the erotics, the romance, and other affective formations that invite us to share what Marks identifies as this "universe of feeling" (1998: 331). Unlike *Taekwondo* and *Esteros*, *Como una novia sin sexo*'s hybrid use of a modern digital camera and a dated camcorder that resembles the medium used in camcorder recordings of the 1990s. Indeed, this camcorder is used to demonstrate the temporality of the narrative, where the characters are living in November 1996. Beyond this statement of temporality, or of the setting's time period, one of the results is the significant process of haptic visuality. With this exhibition of a low-resolution camcorder, we observe a unique capturing of the objects in the frame. *Taekwondo* makes frequent use of deep focus, which disembodies the human form, emphasizing areas such as an arm, a mouth, the groin area, or a leg. This description is similar but not exactly like Marco Berger's method, the latter whom creates an intimate visuality with lingering close-ups which occur while dialogue continues out of the frame in *Taekwondo* and in other films from his oeuvre. This act of scopophilia, or the "love of looking"—which I will later explain in more detail in this chapter—enables an empathic visuality that coalesces with the counter-narrative of

the underrepresented rural or non-urban locale which ties these films together in both setting, "nation," and time (the wider theatrical exhibitions of these films all occurring in 2016). *Como una novia sin sexo*'s use of the camcorder that intercuts the use of high resolution digital video is a reflection of Marks' rumination on one of the outcomes of low resolution videotape's marriage with haptic visuality:

> Haptic looking tends to rest on the surface of its object rather than plunge into depth, tends not to distinguish form so much as discern texture. It is a labile, plastic sort of look, more inclined to move than to focus. [...] Haptic video resolves into figuration only gradually, if at all, inviting instead the caressing look I have described. (1998: 338)

An organic result of the handheld camcorder is its movement, which can shake, jerk, and move in unexpected ways with the kinaesthetic movement of the body and subject who holds the camera. We are complicit in the scopophilic, love of looking exerted through the character who holds the camera (Daniel), who is on vacation with the object of his desire (Santiago). While the camcorder's visuality lacks the particular intimacy of *Taekwondo* filmmaker Marco Berger's lingering close-ups on parts of the male human form (since these films are from the perspective of male characters), the camcorder in *Como una novia sin sexo* offers a different perception that moves in tandem with the character who performs the gaze.

The gaze of both the camcorder and the non-diegetic camera provide more representation of the natural entities of nature; the foliage of the trees, the water and its waves, the sandy beach, and the paths wherein the characters navigate the liminal spaces between play and sleeping. These formations of mise-en-scène remind us of the counter-narratives that the films provide to the presumed progress and freedom for queer identities within the city or the urban. I am not

suggesting that urban settings provide less opportunity for haptic visuality. Rather, I want to highlight the way in which representations of nature and natural elements foreground a milieu that goes beyond the myth of the city as the only site of progress. The assumption that a city provides anonymity, for example, is a myth that has circulated through our cultural fabric. In cities, people are expected to be "out" and proud. But the notion of being out is one that not everyone wishes to express and reiterate, for it can reproduce the identification of a subjectivity that is marked as an "other", or as abnormal. Adrienne Rich's articulation of compulsory heterosexuality and Judith Butler's notion of the heterosexual matrix aptly illustrate this dilemma[31]. It begs the question of why those who would fall under the queer umbrella must announce or identify themselves in terms of who they are attracted to (e.g. erotically, romantically, or sexually, etc.). The notion of pride was expanded to counteract the shame that was imposed on nonheterosexual and non-cisgender people throughout history, particularly during periods where queer identities were seen as a disturbance to social order or even to the political order. However, the implied notion that one must be "out" is counter to the alleged privacy that we are told we are entitled to (but which is currently a matter of debate in our contemporary moment when government bodies can access our data and demand information on our gender identity and sexual orientation). *Como una novia sin sexo* addresses this conundrum, where to be gay, queer, sexually fluid, or simply nonheterosexual does not require a statement of

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[31] Adrienne Rich's original articulation of compulsory sexuality outlines the patriarchal insistence that women are always and only attracted to men, but I use it broadly here in light of its connotation that heterosexuality is a social obligation. This notion of compulsory heterosexuality dovetails with Judith Butler's notion of the heterosexual matrix, which has helped me locate (both in my life experience and in my research) how we operate in environments—or matrices—wherein heterosexuality is privileged. This may seem obvious, but even among progressive liberals, there is inevitably a scrutiny when one identifies as gay, bisexual, queer, and so on. For further reading, see Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) and Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2011).

identification. *Taekwondo* also dismantles this requirement, while *Esteros* represents it with one character's (Jerónimo) comfort about his openly acknowledged queer identity (he refers to himself as "gay"), while Matías struggles to address and name his sexuality.

Cinematic Scopophilia: Inside and Outside the Diegesis

Scopophilia is the act of deriving pleasure by looking at something, by re-emphasizing its state of being an object, whether it is a human or natural entity. There is an established intellectual history between cinema and scopophilia. Laura Mulvey's theorizing on an active male gaze and a passive female gaze has been formative in this intellectual history, but the active and passive binary continues to be problematic, particularly in our contemporary moment where gender and sexual fluidity are becoming more widely accepted. As Christian Metz explained, "Cinema practice is only possible through the perceptual passions: the desire to see"; Metz equates this desire to see with the scopic drive (the impulse for scopophilia) and voyeurism (Soukup, 2009: 22 citing Metz, 1977: 58). Within Lucas Santa Ana's *Como una novia sin sexo* is another cinema practice, at an amateur level, with the inclusion of a camcorder in the narrative. Santa Ana's directorial camera and the intra-diegetic camera of the character is related to the scopic drive of both the viewer and the characters, bridging the scopophilia and voyeurism of the fictional characters, the chemistry between the actors, and the viewers who gaze upon the film's images. While mediation between the cinematic apparatus (the camera) and the subject matter is always already scopophilic, there are a number of sequences in *Como una novia sin sexo* with discernible scopophilic actions, both in cinematography and through narrative strategies. The diegetic acknowledgement of the camcorder camera—the secondary camera—alludes to the

scopophilia and the objectification of the characters and actors. The claim of objectification is not a negative criticism, but a reminder that they become objects once they are framed by the camera lens. In the first act, Daniel uses the camcorder to pan over Santiago's body as he rests on a towel at the campsite, when their friend Adrián is off-scene.

The greater impulse of this work is to highlight the counter-narrative of queer urbanism to queer rurality, and these spatial formations do indeed intersect with voyeurism, scopophilia, and surveillance. The typical assumption of the urban versus rural dichotomy is that a city will provide anonymity, while people in rural spaces will have a lack of privacy, for everyone knows each other (with the exception of a rural space that is not inhabited by anyone else). However, the assumption that the city is a space for privacy and anonymity is enormously flawed, particularly if one is migrating from a rural space to the city to be part of a particular "scene." Scenes can be related to aspects of culture, such as art and music scenes and their ensuing subgenre scenes (e.g. a punk scene, or a feminist electronic music scene). Within these scenes, one is more likely to be seen, due to the repetition of individuals who return to the spaces of these scenes. Unfortunately, being queer is still to be situated on the margins, and this allows for speculation and self-surveillance to occur. I do not mean this with a value judgment, but gossip is rife. We wonder who is part of our in-group, and we wonder if a new person who has entered our social circle could have queerphobic or racist beliefs, among other examples. We want to know if someone can be trusted, particularly if we embody identities where there is a risk of social ostracization or violence, both symbolic and physical. Thus, the scopophilia, voyeurism, and surveillance of everyday life in subcultures and scenes is inherent, which challenges the assumption that one will escape surveillance and scrutiny that leads to danger, a premise

associated with being queer in rural spaces. Of course, many do cities contain a pluralism in its inhabitants who generally view violence upon marginal identities as morally corrupt and incompatible with a general liberal ideology. *Taekwondo*, *Esteros*, and *Como una novia sin sexo* illustrate a coherent cinematic narrative that does not shun the the urban for a utopic return to the countryside, but it acknowledges the heterogeneity of both spaces.

Conclusion

In the history of films with themes of homosociality, such as the buddy film and bromance, *Como una novia sin sexo* is an addition that disrupts the compulsory heterosexuality of the genre. It is clear that Lucas Santa Ana is acutely aware of this, as he demonstrates with the English-language translation of "*Bromance*". The queered bromance presents similar spatial patterns as *Taekwondo* and *Esteros* in their movement to a space where their desires are explicitly consummated. These spaces are also on the spectrum of rurality in their position outside of the city, offering counter-narratives to the hegemony of the city as the only site for queer desire.

Like *Taekwondo*, *Como una novia sin sexo* includes images of the bulge, or the penis below pants. In some scenes, the bulge is seemingly used to titillate the viewer, but in other scenes, it has a tongue-in-cheek quality. In other words, it seems to be flaunting itself at the viewer, for it is also a counter-narrative to the historic flaunting of breasts in cinematic images. It is an image that can excite, whether the excitement derives from a sexual attraction or from an anger that is often elicited out of homophobia. The masturbation scene in *Como una novia sin sexo* is nuanced, presenting the intimate, perennially private act with an eroticism and excitement which evades gratuity, whether that gratuity is comical or pornographic. While I am not

criticizing gratuity, these kinds of gratuitous images are what have dominated moving image representations of masturbation. As Harold Bloom demonstrated, Walt Whitman was also concerned with autoeroticism, or masturbation, an element I wish to draw attention to in light of its lack of presence in cinema as a dignified yet mundane act. Under patriarchal and Judeo-Christian paradigms, masturbation has historically been viewed as forbidden, and films have addressed this through images that elicit polarized feelings with their gratuity. *Como una novia sin sexo* disrupts this view, rendering it banal, and creating a counter-narrative, like the queered rurality and natural setting of the film.

The masturbation scene is also relevant as a subversive means to a highlight the scopophilia inherent not only in cinema with sexual themes (which is arguably any film, especially if we are viewing our subjectivity with psychoanalytic frameworks), but specifically in *Como una novia sin sexo* as a film that queers the rural. The use of the camcorder in the diegesis and in the cinematography draws our attention to its haptic visuality, where a sensorial link is created between the film's images, our bodies, and its rural and natural iconography. With an experimental medium such as a camcorder, the haptic visuality is strengthened, and an empathic impulse is made more explicit, demonstrating the symbiotic relationship between queer desire in a counter-space such as the film's setting among the forest, beach, and water.

Conclusion

We live in both an exciting and an uncertain time to be watching films that address phenomena related gender and sexuality, particularly when it intersects with queer issues. While film executives threaten to stop making films like unconventional, AIDS-themed *Dallas Buyers Club* if people do not stop pirating films (something I heard at a Toronto International Film Festival industry conference), we cannot deny how the platforms ushered in by the internet are drawing our attention to more queer films. And not only queer films, but queer films made outside of Hollywood. It is amazing that someone in a rural part of Canada will be able to watch a love story like *Esteros*, or come across Marco Berger's body of work from YouTube's algorithms. One of the spectacular modalities of these films is that they map the struggle of facing one's desires in a world where we are told that we could be ostracized and rejected for being gay, bisexual, or transgender, among other identities and orientations. The films I examined here are not films with characters who all already identify as gay, nor are they absolute or determinist in telling us that we are either heterosexual or homosexual. These films demonstrate that things can change, but that change does not negate the past. Through their characters and transitions from one space to another, these films underscore the rejection of black and white thinking that is ever so pervasive in this world. In politics, whether it is governmental or social, nuance is often rejected. The films I have examined here are works that offer nuance, with diegetic and visual strategies that remind us of the mutability of gender and sexuality. Sexuality cannot be limited to monosexuality, for example. Sexual fluidity has been recognized, and these films play a large role in reflecting this counter-narrative to monosexuality.

It is unfortunate to have to admit that I am surprised that three feature-length films I examine in this project have happy conclusions, devoid of queerphobic violence or death as a result of being queer. There are indeed heteronormative films where two characters who find love ultimately face death, but there has historically been a disturbing trend of queer characters dying. However, a number of Argentine films have resisted this trope and created compelling films with stories that forge empathy between audiences, whether those audiences are queer or not. It is interesting, then, that three films from different filmmakers would have similar characterization and settings, and all be released in 2016. The filmmakers of *Taekwondo*, *Esteros*, and *Como una novia sin sexo* deserve credit and attention for their films that not only employ positive images without sacrificing the integrity of their films, but through the spatial counter-narratives that they offer. In choosing the spatial formations such as the country home in *Taekwondo*, the watery estuaries in *Esteros*, and the forest by the beach in *Como una novia sin sexo*, the filmmakers tackle the hegemony of urban space as the only possible site for queer desire to be consummated. Of course, queer desire can be consummated virtually anywhere, and the ways in which queer desire can be consummated are infinite, but the three films I have examined do not contain immediate threats to one's existence and body. They are existential, but in the psychic sense (rather than the physical), for they are chiefly concerned with the psychic, in the same way that heterosexual identities and lives are chronicled in cultural texts.

The relationship between the rural, the natural, and queer desire compelled me to include Walt Whitman's poetry in my ruminations on the films and rural spatiality. Writing in the 19th century when what now constitutes the United States was in a crisis over division of the states, Whitman wanted those who dwelled on the land to also unite on a more personal plane. I believe

that Whitman also wanted people to unite through intimate and sexual communion. The divisions driven by gender and sexuality are still prominent, and this sense of unity (while acknowledging difference and the power differentials), is the same hope that the filmmakers of these films also embody. The leaves of grass will continue to grow, but the cement of the city blocks and buildings will decay and perish. There is a hope in the natural entities of nature, which we must cherish and care for, as we must also continue to defend human rights such as the right to be queer without discrimination nor violence. The spatiality of the city, with its modernist promises of progress and intellectualism are not utopic, and it is the heterotopic spaces of rurality and non-urban spaces in which we must also pay attention.

We could not chronicle these rural spaces without the medium (and media) which we use (as both producers and viewers) in cinematic production and reception. The close-ups that Marco Berger uses so aptly are also forms of dismantling dominant narratives. The camera lingers for moments too long on parts of his characters' bodies, and this is not a negative value judgment, but an acknowledgement that Berger and Farina have disrupted our temporal understanding of bodies. In other words, we become aware of cinematic time when these takes elapse for longer than we are accustomed to. This method involves Marks' notion of haptic visuality, where the film's images become intertwined within our bodily senses. The sensorial experience occurs inside and outside of our conscious awareness. The films' haptic visuality is also made emphatic with the use of the camcorder in *Como una novia sin sexo*, and its temporal state—its setting in November 1996—brings us to a time where social and sexual progress was not nearly as ubiquitous. With the advent of the internet, social media, and wider access to both, we can find comfort in recognition of people with similar identities and lives to our own. *Esteros* and *Como*

una novia sin sexo both have temporal settings in the 1990s (a partial setting in the case of *Esteros*), indicating that the characters lived in a time where they could have felt very alone. The films' iteration of time periods is not arbitrary; they helpfully orient us to the structures of feeling of men with queer desires in the 1990s.

The irony of using a notion from a historically macho figure like Ernest Hemingway is not lost on me. In fact, it brings me a kind of joy to take something as macho as the bullring and Hemingway's hegemonically masculine life experiences and personality and subvert it, queering it. There is an unfortunate rejection of anything that appears "nonheterosexual" in macho masculinity, and this is embodied in Latin American machismo. A close Chilean friend of mine once took one of my earrings and put it on, posing in the mirror with it and dancing, telling me that growing up in Chile, the frequency in which he was told "no seas maricón" (which can be translated as "don't be a fairy" or "don't be a faggot") compelled him to want to subvert his own heterosexual masculinity. Masculinity and homosexuality are often thrown into a dialectic, and the femmephobia that has been inherent to male homosexual social relations is still rife, from common requests in queer male hookup culture that asks for "MASC4MASC" (masculine for masculine), or the desire from a queer man that his queer male partner not "appear gay," which is short form for appearing "feminine. My portmanteau of the queerencia is a notion I would like to explore in my forthcoming research that will examine films where characters outside of the queer, cisgender male identity spend time in rural spaces that are queerencias.

Implications for Further Research

There is much more research to be done on Argentine cinema with queer images, particularly in light of the powerhouse that is the Argentine film industry. In my forthcoming research, I will be focusing on a broader intellectual history of films that do not solely address the male, cisgender, and European settler identity within queer cinematic images. I saw many films and moving image texts in Argentina that represented stories on women, trans people, and gender nonconforming people whose works deserve attention, whether this attention is from cinephiles, academics, critics, or general audiences. Streaming services such as YouTube and Netflix make the viewing of these films possible for a global queer audience, and it is my hope that more films will be made by indigenous queer voices not only in Argentina but in Canada and in other (post)colonial countries. Due to the ubiquity of digital cameras, it is very likely that indigenous queers are creating ground with films that represent their experiences or even films that do not represent their experiences, but that are simply made by indigenous queers. Marginalized voices do not need to necessarily and always make films about their marginalization. In September 2016, the Toronto Film Festival screened the watershed film *Fire Song* by Cree and Métis filmmaker Adam Garnet Jones. The feature fiction film was heralded for its representation of a two-spirited, Anishinaabe teenager who grapples with his identity and sexual orientation. Argentina is seen as a country that has a significant Italian influence (alongside many other non-indigenous cultures), but like Canada, we must address the erasure of indigenous voices and acknowledge our complicity in this erasure.

There is also a need to examine and provide space for films that address the queer Argentine (and queer Latin American) diaspora. Julia Solomonoff, director of *El último verano*

de la boyita (the film I discussed in the introduction of this dissertation in light of its narrative that represents a character with an intersex identity), had her film *Nadie Nos Mira* (*Nobody's Watching*) on the Tribeca Film Festival's programming. The film once again draws our attention to Solomonoff's excellent cinematic eye, but also to the issue of being queer in addition to the challenges of living in the diaspora. In the city where I am currently living, there is a large Latin American diaspora, including a large Argentine population. It will be important to pay attention to and make space for these cinematic voices in our theorizing and practice.

The aforementioned problem of erasure also exists in discussions on and screenings of queer cinema, for it has historically privileged white, cisgender, and male identities on the queer spectrum. Progress has been made, but progress cannot lead to complacency. It is my hope that queer cinema outside of the Hollywood hegemon will continue to be discussed and screened, as David William Foster and Vinodh Venkatesh are currently doing with queer Latin American cinema in the United States. Indeed, over the course of my graduate studies and at conferences, I have been meeting graduate researchers who are prolifically studying and writing about transnational queer cinema. Going forward, I would urge scholars to continue trying to reach members of the public who are outside of the academy, whether this is through writing op-eds and think pieces in the press, or making film screenings at universities more accessible (which could be done with basic publicity and advertising through things like postering and social media). I would also urge anyone reading this who is thinking of becoming a programmer, at cinema houses, film festivals, or otherwise, to try and ensure that there is a plurality in the international, queer films that are shown. This is what can lead to scholarship and research on films such as the films I have examined in this dissertation. The theorizing, as I am doing here,

must continue in practice, where accessible film screenings will provide evidence of the excellent queer filmmaking that is occurring outside of our Hollywood-centric consciousness.

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