

INTRODUCTION

In January 2000, a transparent house was erected on a central street in Santiago de Chile. The work, formally titled *Proyecto de Investigación Artística Nautilus*, was designed by the architects Arturo Torres and Jorge Christie and partly financed by the Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo de las Artes (Fondart). The house was occupied for two weeks by Daniela Tobar, a twenty-one-year-old theater student from the Universidad de Chile. Tobar carried out her normal daily routine within the single-story, glass-walled construction, cooking meals, washing, and sleeping. Sitting somewhere between the fields of architecture, theater, and performance art, this intervention caused a considerable stir in Chilean media and public discourse. Conservative commentators accused the work of upsetting normal standards of public decency, and it rapidly became clear that a key objective of the largely male crowds that gathered outside was catching a glimpse of Tobar's naked body in the shower. The glass house thus rendered visible the persistent force lines of the male gaze as well the porous boundary between private, domestic, and public spheres at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Press coverage of the project centered on questions of voyeurism and morality—but also

on money. Some questioned the wisdom or utility of devoting public funds to such an endeavor.¹ Tobar ultimately cut short her stay in the house, leaving after fifteen days in response to crude comments from her male spectators, and went on to have a career as an actress in a number of television series and films. In spite of its apparent unsettling of sociocultural norms, the glass house at Moneda 1055 was in this way at least partially reabsorbed into mainstream Chilean culture.

There is a moment in Mariano Cohn and Gastón Duprat's film *El hombre de al lado* (*The Man Next Door*) that bears comparison with the oddly normative outcomes of the Nautilus project. The wealthy designer Leonardo and his wife, Ana, live in the Le Corbusier-designed Casa Curutchet in the city of La Plata, Argentina. They are none too pleased when their neighbor Víctor, of a notably different socioeconomic background, knocks a hole through his wall to create a window with a view onto their house. Notwithstanding the fact that the Casa Curutchet is built on principles of transparency and openness to light, Leonardo views this as an attack on his private life. Yet not long into the narrative, Leonardo and Ana use Víctor's window, now a *mise-en-abyme* of the film screen itself, to spy on his nighttime dalliances with a female friend. The modernist house, its modified neighbor, and the mechanism of cinema are caught in a network of awkward visual and social relations reminiscent of those created by the house on Calle Moneda in Santiago.

Questions of collective identity are often reshaped by cinema's uneasy movement between the private and the public, between inside and outside, and in contemporary art cinema from Argentina and Chile, the contradictions of urban domestic communities are especially visible. The Nautilus project, in this context, appears as a condensation and a foreshadowing marker of concerns that characterize a significant corpus of films. I contend that this body of work paradoxically presents the domestic sphere as an experimental site for new forms of common life. This trend represents a significant change from the house's frequent position in twentieth-century Argentine and Chilean film and literature as an allegorical figure for waning violent patriarchal forms of national authority and the

imposition of states of exception. In an era when intimacy is frequently transformed into spectacle by the increasingly pervasive presence of media, the both familiar and strange nature of the domestic sphere is accentuated. Moreover, at a time when established public forms of sociability appear exhausted or broken, domestic routine and the material components of private households can be adopted, in extremis, as potential sites of commonality.²

Why the focus on “art cinema”? What might this term mean in an era that is often described as “post-cinematic” because of the proliferation of screens and images beyond the traditional circuits of cinematic production and distribution? For Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, art cinema can only be defined by its impurity: its ambivalent relation to commercial practices of production and distribution, conventional cinematic aesthetics, and local and national labels. In Galt and Schoonover’s reading, art cinema also denotes a critical practice that “thinks comparatively on topics often addressed only locally.”³ The films I analyze differ in their relation to the global mainstream (Pablo Trapero’s *El clan* [*The Clan*] is distributed by 20th Century Studios, but Rodrigo Moreno’s *Réimon* is difficult to access at all), while they share a fascination with the shifting terrain of the domestic sphere and with what is revealed by attempts to render it audiovisually. These art films are overtly aesthetic, but they are also critical. They linger over the surfaces, textures, and rhythms of domestic life, with often surprising results. Just as these works draw attention to the house’s unsteady constitution as a private sphere within the contemporary city, so they reflect on cinema’s impure constitution within contemporary media networks and practices of spectatorship. The films also address issues ranging from the lingering taint of dictatorial regimes to precarious labor practices and the development of gated communities.

Analyzing a corpus of films produced between 2005 and 2015, I trace a previously unexplored connection between deconstructive critical frameworks that have been highly influential in discussions of politics, memory, and identity in the Southern Cone, on one hand, and the projects of construction of a common world outlined by thinkers such as Bruno Latour. I argue that the notions of post-dictatorial

and neoliberal social fragmentation advanced by critics such as Nelly Richard provide a surprising framework from which to discern new forms of common life. Richard posits fragmentation and dismemberment as consequences of post-dictatorial and neoliberal consensus, but she also turns to “interrupted sequences and inconclusive fragments” as forms with which the work of political memory can be undertaken.⁴ Ultimately, she suggests that cultural critique should mobilize “los conceptos-metáforas del pliegue y del intersticio” (the concept-metaphors of the fold and the interstice) in order to find an *entre-lugar*, an “in-between space,” and a minimal point from which the de-differentiation that results from the globalized market can be resisted or at least creatively reformulated.⁵

What becomes apparent here is that even an essentially deconstructive understanding of Latin American culture demands a minimal notion of place. This much is clear in the closing passages of Gareth Williams’s *The Other Side of the Popular*, where he calls for “a notion of the social that is grounded no longer in constituted intimacy, in closure, in communion, or in the promise of a completed collective identity of all in one. Rather, [our current situation] demands a notion of commonality that is grounded in intimacy’s and communion’s dispersed and scattered interruptions, fissures, fragments, and residues.”⁶

My principal contention is that, in recent art films from Argentina and Chile, domestic environments act as the residual, plural, and heterogeneous grounds implicit here and in other deconstructive readings of Latin American culture, the *entre-lugares* from which Richard proposes that identities might be rethought. This claim matters because it offers a means of moving beyond the melancholy that, for John Beverley, often characterizes deconstructive accounts of Latin American culture. For Beverley, Alberto Moreiras’s proposed replacement of “locational thinking” with “dirty atopianism” merely reinstates the thought of Latin America as a form of the sublime and comes close to “proposing deconstruction itself as a new form of Latinamericanism.” Moreiras has responded to this criticism by arguing that what was really central to his work in *The Exhaustion of Difference* was an “attempt to move past the politics of hegemony . . .

whether on the side of the liberal criollo elite or on the side of any conceivable noncriollo, indigenous, popular, or subaltern hegemonic push." A failure to acknowledge this, Moreiras contends, means that Beverley ends up on the side of "neo-communitarian consensual authoritarianism."⁷

It is certainly difficult, at the time of writing, to maintain Beverley's optimism regarding the possibilities for inclusive, liberatory communities afforded by counterhegemonic social movements in Latin America: the *marea rosada*, at its height when Beverley was writing in 2011, is now at an ebb. Yet even though Moreiras has, by 2020, moved away from the use of the term "deconstruction" in studies of Latin American culture (preferring the concepts of posthegemony and infrapolitics), he acknowledges that *The Exhaustion of Difference*, alongside works by Williams, Brett Levinson, and others, gave rise to a swath of academic monographs between 2002 and 2014 that can be characterized as part of a broad deconstructive turn in Latin American studies.⁸ Beverley's insight remains both relevant and powerful, to the extent that deconstruction's aversion to the constitution of any figures of place or location risks eliding the constant *construction* of places, homes, and associated identities, even in the turmoil of contemporary urban Latin America. Kate Jenckes writes that Moreiras aims for a thought that "would simply refer to Latin America (and sites within the endless heterogeneity of 'Latin America') as sites of interruption to any totalizing idea of place, knowledge, or the proper." This is a vision of academic practice as the circulation of "irruptions or interruptions" that "must not be reduced to meanings of places." Yet the world is experienced every day as a series of meaningful places, and ignoring this fact risks turning Latin Americanism into a rarified intellectual paradigm practiced, often, from the non-Latin American metropolis. Moreiras's recently articulated desire to ditch the term "Latin Americanism" altogether suggests a recognition of this risk.⁹

I am nevertheless conscious that proposing the domestic sphere—the *nec plus ultra* of private property—as the potential ground for new forms of sociability might seem at best paradoxical and at worst perverse. Housing inequalities in Argentina and Chile are stark. The private home has in both countries long been seen to function as a

metonym for patriarchal power relations. Yet the fact that the domestic is a fraught arena in a sense provides the rationale for its selection as an analytical lens. As John David Rhodes has argued in relation to the cinema of the United States, “a serious reckoning with the cinematic spectacle of property will necessarily dislodge us from some of the cozy familiarity we attribute to and experience in both houses and cinema.” Rhodes’s emphasis on the inequalities within the relation between film and the domestic interior and his theorization of visual pleasure as “inherently bound up in questions of possession and dispossession” are especially pertinent when thinking of contemporary film from Argentina and Chile.¹⁰

At the same time, my argument resonates with global anxiety and curiosity about the stability of the notion of home in unequal urban environments and in an age of ever-increasing (if unevenly accessible) technological mediation. Bong Joon-ho’s Academy Award-winning *Parasite* masterfully depicts the ways in which South Korea’s social hierarchies are codified in domestic architecture, and how the position of housing within a cityscape acts as an extension of that codification. In Bong’s film, the luxuriant, airy modernist residence of the Park family quite literally rests upon a dark space of social inequality. The house in *Parasite* is the medium through which contrasting conceptions of the past, the future, labor relations, and the norms of hospitality are brought into contact. In this sense, the house can be thought of as a correlate for cinema itself, not least because it exists only as a result of the film editing process: there is no real-world referent.¹¹ Yet, by the end of the film, the Park family home fails in its mediating function, as the Kim family infiltrate the private realm of their wealthy counterparts, and bloody violence ensues.

This fascination with the ways in which houses both shape and reflect social tensions is not new. Twentieth-century film history provides many examples of works that respond to global trends in urban densification. Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, for instance, is famous for its portrayal of how the dense urban fabric dissolves boundaries between private and public, inside and outside. Other films, like Jacques Tati’s *Playtime*, suggest that modernist architecture and its sought-after transparency cause confusion and dislocation in urban

life. Indeed, in the first half of the twentieth century the “glass house” became something of a motif of modern living for certain filmmakers, architects, and intellectuals. Sergei Eisenstein expended a considerable amount of time and effort in developing a film to be titled *The Glass House*, writing multiple versions of the script that changed from a “comedy based around the moving camera’s ability to perceive situations which remain invisible to the inhabitants of a glass high-rise building” to a “psycho-social drama.”¹² Walter Benjamin, meanwhile, in his essay on surrealism, makes the claim that “to live in a glass house is a revolutionary virtue par excellence. It is also an intoxication, a moral exhibitionism, that we badly need.” Benjamin here affirms his faith in the ability of modern architecture to abolish boundaries between public and private spheres. Yet his metaphor of intoxication suggests that this may not be a comfortable process.¹³

In this context, and given that confusion and dislocation are frequent tropes in critical writing on contemporary Latin American culture, it is a little surprising that some contemporary Latin American thinkers have nonetheless turned to the realm of the private and the intimate in their search for responses to the fragmentation of the public sphere. Argentine critic Leonor Arfuch develops a theory of intimacy and community in early twenty-first century Latin America that draws on Hannah Arendt’s positing of art’s capacity to transpose individual experience.¹⁴ Arfuch’s thesis is that transformations in media (the presence of television and the Internet in the domestic sphere, for instance) make classical divisions between private and public spheres impossible to maintain. Insisting on plurality, Arfuch looks for positive, community-building effects of the rise of “microrrelatos” (micro-stories) and life writing. She argues for a model of subjectivity that is co-constituted between the individual and the collective: “es a partir del nosotros que se amplía la potencialidad del yo” (it is from “us” that the potentiality of “I” is increased).¹⁵ In this vein, she offers the following speculation: “quizá la escalada de lo íntimo/privado, que pone en juego una audiencia global, pueda leerse también como respuesta a los desencantos de la política, al desamparo de la escena pública, a los fracasos del ideal de igualdad, a la monotonía de las vidas ‘reales’ ofrecidas a la oportunidad.”¹⁶

Arfuch's argument accords local political contexts surprisingly little room: she claims that Argentina's specific circumstances in its post-dictatorship period do not significantly differentiate it from the rest of the world as far as the public management of intimacy is concerned.¹⁷ In other words, she makes no distinction between Argentina's experience of postmodernity in the 1980s and 1990s and beyond and that of other countries. This position runs counter both to much work on changing modes of citizenship in Latin America and, closer to home, to Beatriz Sarlo's studies of Argentine urban life.¹⁸ In concrete terms, Arfuch's argument appears to neglect the extent to which new modes of subjectivity, national belonging, or citizenship are formed in response to neoliberal economic models developed in the aftermath of dictatorship. The market, Sarlo claims, encourages citizen consumers to build their identities through the accumulation of objects, and to that end, shopping malls re-create "la dulzura del hogar donde se borran las contratiempos de la diferencia y del malentendido" (the sweetness of home, where the obstacles of difference and misunderstanding are erased).¹⁹

A more localized version of Arfuch's proposal that cultural interest in intimacy and daily life responds to a disenchantment with conventional political structures can be found in Norbert Lechner's work on Chilean society after dictatorship. Lechner suggests that discontent with habitual forms of politics in post-dictatorship Chile leads to an investigation into the political potential of daily life.²⁰ Unlike Arfuch, he makes no claim as to the value of this development and, instead, insists on ideas of community and the collective as an unresolved question: "¿cómo instituir lo colectivo en sociedades que se caracterizan por una profunda heterogeneidad estructural?" (how can collectivity be instituted in societies characterized by a profound structural heterogeneity?). For Lechner, despite the household's historic association in Argentina and Chile with authoritarian modes of government and with the imposition of a state of exception, it would be an oversimplification to oppose the domestic sphere to that of democratic debate. He offers instead a more nuanced relation between public and intimate space: "también la democracia, tan necesitada de la luz pública para su desarrollo, esconde patios traseros, algunos

sórdidos, otros simplemente olvidados" (even democracy, which so needs public light in order to develop, has back yards, some of them sordid, some simply forgotten).²¹

This thinking of space as neither wholly public nor wholly private resonates with a more global argument put forward by the geographer Doreen Massey, who memorably contests the notion that all local places (and ideas of home as bounded and secure) have recently been subsumed into a homogenized global space. Massey points to the advent of new urban enclosures and the many different conditions of postmodernity across the globe, arguing that in much of the world, "the security of the boundaries of the place one called home must have dissolved long ago," due, for instance, to movements of colonization.²² Massey's approach is useful in that it complicates the link between home and identity, by understanding every place as a node in a network of social relations. Home, Massey writes, has always been "constructed out of movement, communication, social relations which always stretched beyond it." As David Morley and others have argued, this is ever more the case when the presence of media in the domestic sphere uncannily brings the outside in.²³

Massey's thought is important in another way. Her conception of space as a "simultaneity of stories-so-far," as "always under construction" and inherently multiple, aids the expression of the limitations of a deconstructive critical approach.²⁴ She recognizes the usefulness of deconstruction's privileging of the interval and the gap over "presumed horizontal integrities" in developing her open model of space. She argues that it also presents several problematic aspects: "the focus is on rupture, dislocation, fragmentation and the co-constitution of identity/difference. Conceptualising things in this manner produces a relation to those who are other which is in fact endlessly the same."²⁵

It is precisely the "process of invention" that is constrained by deconstruction's "horizontality and negativity." Massey's desire to think of space beyond representation and fixity, and instead as process, is an apt starting point for discussion, though one might reasonably object that cinematic space is not restricted by this binary, being both representation and process.²⁶ Moving beyond

deconstruction means not simply rejecting all figures of dwelling and domestic architecture as inevitably conservative or restrictive but, rather, investigating what a new and more open understanding of these figures might permit, in political, social, and cultural terms.

My argument has two key claims. The first is that the presentation of the private home as a contested creative space in contemporary art cinema from Argentina and Chile allows for a new understanding of collective identities, especially in urban environments. The second is that, in order for this claim to hold, the political agency of art cinema must be considered a node in contemporary media networks.

Representing “The House” and Housing in Argentina and Chile

Houses and apartments have proved remarkably persistent not just as background but as a topic of concern in the Latin American cinema of the twenty-first century. This persistence responds both to the growth of portable digital video technologies, ever more closely linked to the fabric of the house itself, and to a diminishing faith in public forms of sociability. Critical interest in this area has grown accordingly, and it would be impossible to do justice to regional production in a single monograph.²⁷ I study films produced in Argentina and Chile, and especially those set in the capital cities of Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile. I examine the dynamics of urban housing, in particular, with occasional forays into the countryside. The focus is on houses, whether detached, semi-detached, or terraced (*casas de fachada continua*), rather than newer apartment blocks. This might seem odd, given that in both capitals the large majority of residents live in apartments, and there are, of course, a number of recent films that deal with life in these spaces—Nayra Ilic’s *Metro cuadrado* and Juan Schnitman’s *El incendio* are prominent examples. But houses remain surprisingly prominent in much twenty-first-century cinema, and the films I study reflect the uneasy persistence of (semi-)detached domestic spheres in the urban environment. I begin with a brief literary and cinematic history of houses in both Argentina and Chile. A comparative view of sociocultural attitudes to housing and the domestic sphere in these two Southern Cone countries allows us to discern not only key differences between these two national con-

texts (such as the much earlier concern with financialization in Chile) but also the shared process of defamiliarization of this most apparently familiar of spaces. We need new perspectives on the countries' post-dictatorial histories, and on the contexts of new developments in collective political action.

Before we start, there is a linguistic point that has important conceptual implications. I write about *houses*, *housing*, and the idea of *home*. I am particularly concerned with the persistence of (semi-) detached or terraced domestic dwellings in city centers rather than with apartment blocks. If the house is the physical space, then, what is "home"? This is a much harder question, which has generated a whole field of study in the humanities and social sciences, and I hope to provide a partial, located answer.²⁸ The films I analyze resist, in varying ways, a bourgeois conception of home as a private domestic sphere invested with symbolic meaning, inviting instead a consideration of the relations constituted between humans (and nonhumans) in the domestic environment. There is much more to say here, and later on I will elaborate on how "home" might be rethought. For now, let us observe that, in Spanish, there is a related distinction to be made between *casa* and *hogar*. The latter term has historically been caught up in conservative visions of a model, gender-normative society: the fact that *El Hogar* was the name of an Argentine magazine that promoted the work of maintaining traditional family structures and an idealized image of the home as a woman's duty in the early twentieth century provides clear evidence of this trend.²⁹

Jorge Francisco Liernur has outlined how social reformers in Argentina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from Domingo Faustino Sarmiento onward, took an interest in the order and "health" of households, seeing in them an indicator of the health of the nation. In this view, "la morada . . . cumple una doble función reguladora: de los sentimientos y de los recursos" (the dwelling . . . performs a double regulatory function: with regard to feelings and to resources). In Liernur's account, Catholic conservatives and socialists both considered the house and the family as "las células básicas del tejido social" (the basic cells of the social fabric).³⁰ These approaches to politics endow the house with both a biopolitical regulatory function

and a capacity to represent broader society. This is an idea that finds an echo in literature of the period, especially in Chile. Alberto Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas*, which is taken by Doris Sommer as one of Latin America's "foundational fictions," is a portrait of an upper-class Santiago family and makes significant use of domestic settings while addressing a range of issues in national politics.³¹ Some years later, Luis Orrego Luco's novel *Casa grande* was read as a denunciation of the excesses of Santiago society, presented through the depiction of an aristocratic family. These allegorical narratives take on new forms throughout the twentieth century.

There is in fact a double sense in which houses are separated from this figurative role and defamiliarized over the course of the twentieth century in Argentine and Chilean culture: on the one hand by their progressive conversion into commodities and, on the other, by a growing attentiveness to their political agency, frequently expressed as a sense that houses have their own existence, their own temporalities. To these might be added a diminishing faith in the ability of the domestic sphere to act as a refuge against the storms of urban modernity.³² Houses have nonetheless remained an insistent presence in debates about belonging, identity, and society in literature, film, and other spheres of culture, even as the transformations of Santiago and Buenos Aires have led to significant changes in the character of housing stock, and in the visibility of lower-class dwellings.

A good starting point for an exposition of the complexities of the relation between house and nation in the Southern Cone lies in a text typically regarded as a foundational work of Argentine literature: Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845), in which he establishes the classic dichotomy of *civilización* and *barbarie*. Sarmiento describes the virtues of the "colonia alemana o escocesa del sur de Buenos Aires" (the German or Scottish settlements to the south of Buenos Aires): "las casitas son pintadas; el frente de la casa, siempre aseado, adornado de flores y arbustillos graciosos; el amueblado, sencillito, pero completo" (the little houses are painted; the front of the house, always tidy, is adorned with flowers and attractive bushes; the furniture is simple but complete). Here, a domesticated nature is mirrored by the plenitude of the home's material contents. By contrast, the dwellings of

the “villa nacional” (national settlement), characterized by “desaseo” (untidiness), are not even accorded the status of “casa” or “casita.” Sarmiento’s brief sketch reveals the ways in which the house processes distinctions between nature and culture and between civilized and barbaric. It is telling (and unsurprising, given the text’s author) that the sphere of cultured and civilized is resolutely European in character. The postcolonial and hybrid aspects of Argentine culture become evident here: what Sarmiento depicts as homely, civilized, and welcoming is the culture of the colonizer (or, more strictly speaking, of the neocolonial migrant). The national is thus configured as a barbaric exterior to the domestic sphere.³³

This example should act as a caveat against facile assumptions that domestic narratives in Argentina and Chile can be read straightforwardly as national allegories. There is, more often than not, a dense and multivalent web of associations at work. This is not to deny the continued existence of allegorical structures: in Chile, in particular, there is a rich vein of writing that explores the potential of the house to act as a conduit for ideas about the nation. Pilar Álvarez-Rubio points to José Donoso, Diamela Eltit, Antonio Skármeta, and Isabel Allende as key exponents of this trend. Yet she is careful to note that the house functions as a literary topos not merely for the *construction* of Chilean and Latin American identity but also for the *questioning* of it. Álvarez-Rubio’s reading of Donoso’s novel *Casa de campo* exemplifies her approach. She finds in Donoso’s work a large, upper-class, rural house that functions as a microcosm of the nation, but she also finds a literary style that shows up the limits and exclusions of that model.³⁴ Alessandro Fornazzari has conducted an in-depth analysis of the workings of allegory in Donoso’s novel. For him, the narrative allegorizes the events of the Unidad Popular period and the subsequent military coup in 1973 but also depicts the triumph of “commodity abstraction,” which renders allegory obsolete. Fornazzari draws on the work of Benjamin to propose that “allegorization and commodification are both processes of debasing the ‘thingliness’ of things,” with the latter being an intensified, globalized version of the former.³⁵

The disappearance of the Ventura family’s gold reserves in *Casa de campo*, when understood as representing the new hegemony of

(foreign) finance capital after 1973, thus appears to mark the end of a literary tradition that cast a critical eye on the nation through domestic narratives. The novel, in Fornazzari's reading, anticipates the commoditization of all spheres of life, including the domestic, enacted by the neoliberal transformation of Chile begun under Pinochet.³⁶ In subsequent texts the construction of allegory—and with it, literary form—is more severely disrupted. Indeed, the house itself, cast in Donoso's novel as the result of the appropriation of indigenous territory, is revealed to be as vulnerable to new economic arrangements as the Venturas' gold.³⁷

In a much more recent novel, *Casa chilena*, Roberto Brodsky adopts an unusual second-person narrative voice to recount the story of a Chilean writer who returns to Santiago from the United States to sell his family home. Although the title of *Casa chilena* and the melancholic focus on small objects suggest an allegorizing of the nation, the distancing effect of the narrative perspective and the prominence of abstract financial concerns limit the scope of any such reading. Brodsky's brooding narrator muses that, when it comes to real estate property, the market has triumphed over memory in contemporary Chile.³⁸ The text from which my epigraph to this book is taken—Alejandro Zambra's *Facsimil*—takes the form of the university entrance exam in force in Chile from 1967 to 2002. In the epigraph, the parody of a multiple-choice question demonstrates how the subordination of the house to consumer credit does not negate its affective dimension ("Pero amas esta casa").³⁹ Instead, the parody confuses it: hence the multiple possible orderings of the five statements. The house remains a marker of identity, but its position as just another good on the market makes the process of allegorization unworkable.

It seems that, in Chilean literature at least, houses provoke an increasingly anti-essentialist, fluid, and heterogeneous understanding of identity. To adopt this critical position is to endow houses themselves, as (represented) material environments, with a kind of social and political agency. This much is implied in a phrase of Donoso's that Álvarez-Rubio uses as the epigraph to her discussion of *Casa de campo*: "Una casa puede ser un mundo de atmósferas. Uno las crea, las maneja, yuxtapone, las cambia, las reconstruye. *Las casas tienen*

infinitas vidas" (A house can be a world of atmospheres. One creates them, manipulates them, juxtaposes, changes and reconstructs them. *Houses have infinite lives*).⁴⁰ The strongest echo in Chilean literature of this notion that houses might have lives of their own, lives that do not correspond to the temporalities of human residence, is found in works that deal with the legacies of dictatorship. In Germán Marín's *El palacio de la risa*, for instance, the narrator reflects on the changing uses of the Villa Grimaldi, an aristocratic estate in the Santiago suburb of Peñalolén, which went from being a hub for artists and intellectuals in the early twentieth century to a torture center under Pinochet's dictatorship.⁴¹ The demolition of the building in order to make way for a new housing development makes clear the collective dimension of the anxiety over the loss of memory and history implied by such destruction, which when expressed by the protagonist of Brodsky's novel might seem irremediably solipsistic. Meanwhile, in Carlos Cerda's *Una casa vacía*, a couple buying a house in Santiago slowly become aware of the horrific abuses committed there during the dictatorship. The last line of the novel—"¿Habrà un corazón abierto a las voces de la casa?" (Will there be a heart open to the voices of the house?)—casts this scenario in terms of the life of the house.⁴² A recent experimental theater production, *Proyecto Villa*, takes up many of these concerns. The piece enlists the audience as explorers of a domestic environment where the two actor-guides issue instructions, call out names of audience members to remove them for a time, and enact disturbing scenes related to the history of Santiago's domestic torture centers.⁴³ Here, as in the films discussed in chapter 1 (and *Proyecto Villa* itself incorporates filmic material), questions of memory and history in the domestic sphere emerge as a kind of uncanny or spectral performance.

Such performances ultimately provoke the question as to whether memory can be considered human property. An interest in the independent lives of houses, and in the ways in which they condition and/or transcend human agency, is of long standing in the Southern Cone. Manuel Mujica Láinez's novel *La casa*, for example, has the unusual distinction of being narrated by the house of its title. Julio Cortázar's famed short story "Casa tomada" locates its protagonists in a house

that is increasingly filled by a mysterious hostile presence. Marcelo Cohen's *Casa de Ottro* takes up a similar idea: the novel's protagonist views the house of the title as suffused with the consciousness of its late owner. Edward King writes that in this work the metaphors of house as museum and house as artificial intelligence are merged so that domestic space no longer offers a logical narrativization of past events, an "official house of memory."⁴⁴ King argues that the increasingly vitalistic descriptions of objects and Cohen's disregard for the proprieties of language, evidenced by his abundant neologisms, serve as the basis for a reflection on the possibility of a "*vida en común*" (*life in common*) that incorporates nonhuman objects and machines.⁴⁵ This proposal provides an analogy for my own project, where I aim in part to explore how a reconfiguration of cinematic space might allow new conceptions of life in common.

Domestic spaces in Argentine and Chilean film first appeared in apparently innocuous form. In both countries, albeit with vastly differing degrees of success, a film studio system modeled on that of the United States privileged domestic narratives, most often family melodramas. In Argentina, a film like Francisco Múgica's *Así es la vida* (*Such Is Life*), with its insistent focus on a bourgeois domestic sphere, seems to do little to explore broader urban social life. The early productions of Chile Films, the unstable government-backed enterprise on the other side of the Andes, demonstrated a similar imitation of Hollywood models. Carlos Schlieper's *La casa está vacía* (*The House Is Empty*), for instance, foregrounds its somber rural domestic setting as symbolic of the travails of the bourgeois family whose story it narrates. Yet even in a film like *Así es la vida* there exist possibilities for alternative political readings, via the short sequences that venture outside, placing the house in its urban context and showing contact, however fleeting, across class boundaries. Moreover, the diegetic length of the narrative—from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1930s—spans several generations: characters come and go, but the house remains.⁴⁶

In the Argentine cinema of the first Peronist era (1946–1955), according to Clara Kriger, the domestic sphere is frequently an arena in which the state intervenes in order to mediate, organize, and

resolve conflicts. In Lucas Demare's *La calle grita* (*The Street Calls*), a resident of a large mansion, complete with domestic staff, is brought face-to-face with the reality of home life for those living in urban apartment blocks. In works such as Schlieper's *Cosas de mujer* (*Feminine Wiles*), Kriger identifies a change in representations of women, in that they successfully pursue work outside the home. These films do, however, maintain a fundamental connection between a woman's happiness and her home life and present a vision of harmonious social life aligned with the goals of the state.⁴⁷

The films of the Argentine director Leopoldo Torre Nilsson are much less evidently aligned with a particular political project, but here too the domestic sphere is heavily invested with meaning, and the ideological contradictions and sexual frustration that characterize the domestic space in melodrama are rendered visible through increased formal experimentation.⁴⁸ For Laura Podalsky, in Torre Nilsson's *La casa del ángel* (*The House of the Angel*) the house and the city street are juxtaposed as spaces in which the female protagonist is, respectively, repressed and at risk: "while . . . Torre Nilsson foregrounded the decadence of the oligarchic house, [he] rejected the street as a site of liberation."⁴⁹

In Ana Amado's reading, the chiaroscuro, expressionist imagery, and unusual spatial perspectives of a film like *La casa del ángel* reveal the house as an "escenario metafórico y teatral de identidades que terminan de constituirse en relación con sus espacios, objetos y lugares" (a metaphorical and theatrical stage for identities that constitute themselves in relation to [the house's] spaces, objects, and places). This has particular force in the film's depiction of the troubled sexuality of its adolescent female protagonist. For Amado, the house becomes the point at which female desire is (not always successfully) made to coincide with the desire of the other. Rather than a homogeneous and completed family identity, the film portrays "una marcada atmósfera existencial de desencuentro, aislamiento o conflicto con el resto de los habitantes del claustro familiar" (a marked existential atmosphere of disagreement, isolation, or conflict with the other members of the familial unit).⁵⁰ Torre Nilsson's aesthetic and ideological deconstruction of domestic melodrama had significant influence

on later work. There is a powerful echo, for instance, in the black-and-white chiaroscuro, claustrophobia, and confused sexual desires of Silvio Caiozzi's *Julio comienza en Julio* (*Julio Begins in July*) in Chile.⁵¹ Podalsky argues that Torre Nilsson's work responds to the changing cityscape of Buenos Aires in the late 1950s and 1960s, which saw the reconstruction of "the public-private divide that had seemingly been breached by Peronism. Dominant groups were intent on insulating themselves from the public spaces that had so recently been the site of roily disturbances through the accelerated construction of high-rise apartment buildings, the development of arcade shopping in downtown areas, and the increased use of cars. The high-rises established private spaces removed from contact with the public streets."⁵²

For Podalsky, films like Torre Nilsson's *La mano en la trampa* (*The Hand in the Trap*) and David José Kohon's *Tres veces Ana* (*Ana three times*) try to make sense of an alienating cityscape without being able to move beyond middle-class concerns. Yet some films of this period do demonstrate a broader understanding of urban housing inequalities. Kohon's short *Buenos Aires*, for instance, effectively uses on-location shooting to contrast the city's rapidly growing *villas miseria*, or shanty-towns, with adverts for new, modern apartment buildings.⁵³ Elsewhere in Argentina, Fernando Birri's *Tire dié* (*Toss Me a Dime*) focused on the inhabitants of a marginal neighborhood of the city of Santa Fe, and in Chile, Rafael Sánchez's documentary *Las callampas* (*The shantytowns*) depicts the movement of people from informal settlements in Santiago to the *población* (legally established neighborhood) of La Victoria.⁵⁴ Both Birri's and Sánchez's films begin with aerial shots of city centers, with a voice-over expressing the stark contrasts between the wealth of these areas and the poverty of the neighborhoods that will subsequently be shown. *Las callampas* and *Tire dié* stand as examples of filmmaking that sought, often through rather didactic cinematic techniques such as explanatory voice-over, to effect political change by encouraging spectators to identify affectively with the circumstances of its subjects.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the advent of military dictatorships in both Argentina and Chile radically altered the character of depictions of domestic space. Both the Pinochet regime and the various military

juntas in Argentina made use of what Amado and Nora Domínguez term a “discurso familiarista” (familiarist discourse) in order to justify both the confiscation of property and the torture and elimination of dissident bodies.⁵⁵ Such strategies built on a longer political usage of the family as a model of patriarchal authoritarian organization of society. Amado and Domínguez suggest that the designation of the nuclear family as a regulator of order in modern Argentina “le señaló un espacio (el del hogar) y un ordenamiento económico (dado por la idea de propiedad privada y su secuela, la unidad doméstica)” (indicated for it a space [that of the home] and an economic order [given by the idea of private property and its correlate, the domestic unit]). Wolfgang Bongers notes that during the campaign for the 1970 presidential election in Chile, a leaflet distributed by a group called “acción mujeres de Chile” depicted a solitary child with the caption “¿Dónde está el papá?” (Where is the father?), suggesting that the candidacy of socialist Salvador Allende would wreak havoc with the “natural” familial order of the nation.⁵⁶ This example makes clear the extent to which the family and the household became issues of contention during this period. In 1976–1977 the military regime in Argentina ran a propaganda campaign across various media, including television, that posed the question “¿Sabe usted dónde está su hijo en este momento?” (Do you know where your child is at the moment?). The *allanamientos* (raids on the houses of suspected political opponents), conducted in both Argentina and Chile, and the notorious kidnapping of the children of the disappeared in Argentina further established the sense that the household and family were battlegrounds.⁵⁷

The censorship established by military regimes forced many filmmakers into exile, and those who remained in Argentina and Chile found themselves obliged to work in highly restrictive conditions, in both intellectual and material terms. Hence the predominance of indirect allusion and, notwithstanding the changes outlined above, some allegorical frameworks. Caiozzi’s *Julio comienza en Julio* in Chile and Adolfo Aristarain’s *Tiempo de revancha* (*Time for Revenge*) in Argentina are prominent examples of the allusive films made by those who stayed. Directors experienced constraints in terms of budgets and

freedom of movement through the city that, especially in Chile, led to the production of small-scale narratives that take place largely indoors.⁵⁸ Literature and film produced after the periods of dictatorship often also resort to the family and the household as figures through which to represent the multiple traumas of those years. For instance, Amanda Holmes argues that the house in María Luisa Bemberg's *Camila* acts as a figure for the nation. Meanwhile, Luis Puenzo's *La historia oficial* (*The Official Story*), one of the earliest and most famous examples of post-dictatorship Argentine cinema, was filmed in the director's own house, demonstrating the continued financial difficulties experienced by filmmakers, as well as suggesting slippage between the domestic space of the creator and that of his fiction.⁵⁹

In more recent Argentine cinema, the family and the home under dictatorship are often presented as a potential site of resistance, which is confronted with severe external threats.⁶⁰ In recent Argentine fiction films such as Benjamín Ávila's *Infancia clandestina* (*Clandestine Childhood*) and Paula Markovitch's *El premio* (*The Prize*), the militant home is figured as a nexus of opposition to dictatorship and an example of an alternative political reality. This is without mentioning the extensive body of documentary filmmaking and other cultural production by the children of disappeared militants in Argentina, in which "family" becomes an axis of political affiliation along which memory and postmemory can be articulated.⁶¹ Some recent Chilean documentaries have also examined the political contradictions that can arise when family and household, so often seen as commonplaces of conservative ideology, are taken as figures through which resistance to dictatorial rule might be enacted or commemorated.

Two broad conclusions might be drawn about the impact of dictatorial regimes on domestic life in the Southern Cone, at least insofar as representations of the domestic are concerned. The first is that boundaries between public and private spheres have been decisively weakened, a process that neoliberal economic transformations continue. The second is that as a consequence "family" becomes a more flexible and less predictable term, not restricted by biological relation. Indeed, Josefina Ludmer proposes the "forma-familia" (family-form) in twenty-first-century Argentina as "un mecanismo que

liga temporalidades y subjetividades en formas biológicas, afectivas, legales, económicas, políticas y simbólicas" (a mechanism that links temporalities and subjectivities within biological, affective, legal, economic, political, and symbolic forms) and as "el grado cero de la sociedad . . . el único sujeto político concebible en el 2000" (the zero degree of society . . . the only conceivable political subject in the year 2000).⁶² The idea of the family as a mechanism regulating the boundary between private and public ascribes it a disciplinary function, but its classification as a "form" suggests the possibility of change, of re-formation.⁶³ Such optimism is not as obviously on display in Chile, where Magda Sepúlveda charges that "las elites han creado una sociabilidad que define en la mesa dominguera de la casa privada los destinos públicos del país, rehusando así los derechos de ciudad de la calle" (The elites have created a sociability that defines the public destiny of the country at the Sunday lunch table of the private house, thereby refusing the street's rights to the city).⁶⁴

The opposition between family home and city will recur as an important concern throughout this book. In cinematic terms, the opposition gained prominence in both Argentina and Chile in the 1990s, when the social consequences of neoliberal economic policy drew the attention of filmmakers who turned their lenses toward those living on the margins of urban society. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the films of the *nuevo cine argentino* developed an insistent focus on marginalized people and spaces. Much of the action in their narratives occurs in the street or in public spaces that offer little prospect of stable identification or a strong sense of belonging.⁶⁵ In his influential analysis of the cinema of this period, Gonzalo Aguilar proposes *nomadism* and *sedentarism* as two opposite but complementary currents in Argentine cinema: "mientras el nomadismo es la ausencia de hogar, la falta de lazos de pertenencia poderosos (restrictivos o normativos) y una movilidad permanente e impredecible; el sedentarismo muestra la descomposición de los hogares y las familias, la ineficacia de los lazos de asociación tradicionales y modernos y la parálisis de quienes insisten en perpetuar ese orden."⁶⁶

Aguilar points to films like Pablo Trapero's *Familia rodante* and Jorge Gaggero's *Vida en Falcon*, whose characters' lives are centered

on vehicles, rather than houses, to illustrate his argument that, especially after the economic crisis of 2001–2002, the home no longer functions as a point of return from journeying. Those films that do focus on traditional households, meanwhile, depict stagnation, decay, and the absence of conventional family structures: Lucrecia Martel's *La ciénaga* is an obvious example. In these cases, Aguilar argues, "los lugares están sobrecargados y encierran y aprisionan los cuerpos" (places are overcharged with meaning, and enclose and imprison bodies).⁶⁷

Since Aguilar's crucial study, his critical framework has been taken up by many scholars of Argentine cinema who have sought to build on (and sometimes critique) his readings of domestic spaces in the *nuevo cine argentino*. Joanna Page has suggested that the apparent retreat into bourgeois domestic spheres enacted by the work of Martel and others (including Celina Murga) can be read as a reflection on the collapse of distinctions between the private and the public. Page argues that the films point to how neoliberal economic policy, in particular "the state's amorous affair with foreign creditors and its shirking of responsibilities at home," disrupts the vision of national government as "housekeeping" that had become hegemonic in many capitalist societies in the late twentieth century.⁶⁸

Jens Andermann builds on Page's conclusion that Argentine fiction film in the early twenty-first century establishes a "limited public sphere" by examining the methods employed by some directors in their efforts to reconstruct community.⁶⁹ Revisiting Aguilar's nomadism/sedentarism distinction, Andermann suggests that films depicting "sedentary" environments do not exclude the possibility of the home's recomposition, and that "nomadic" films ask us as spectators "to deposit our trust once more in the camera and let its gaze be ours: a politics of the image, then, which stakes its bets on the recomposition of a (middle-class) audience." Andermann understands cinema as one of the "prosthetic extensions" of home, a technology that "enact[s] our belonging to place as well as contesting it." He does not, however, find all attempts at the reconstruction of community entirely convincing. In Andermann's account, the films of Daniel Burman and Juan José Campanella "simultaneously

invoke and disavow the crisis of the city and the nation, which they 'resolve' through their retreat into interior spaces sheltering a core of values that are found to have remained intact."⁷⁰ The quotation marks around the "resolution" that Andermann finds in these films point to a frustrated or unfinished project of collective identity-building. It is precisely this unresolved question that I intend to investigate.

The crisis of belonging also looms large in the Chilean cinema of the 1990s and early 2000s. Chilean productions from this period have not attracted as much critical attention as the *nuevo cine argentino*, and indeed Chile produced far fewer films than Argentina in these years.⁷¹ It is, however, possible to discern a turn toward the everyday lives of those on the margins of urban society—in films such as Justiniano's *Caluga o menta* (Toffee or mint) and Graef Marino's *Johnny 100 pesos*, for instance. In broad terms, critics nonetheless ascribe greater continued importance to the family as an organizing political figure in Chile than in Argentina. It is certainly the case that a high proportion of Chilean films released in this period take the family as a key lens through which to focus their narrative.⁷² Ascanio Cavallo, Pablo Douzet, and Cecilia Rodríguez claim that the latter part of the twentieth century in Chile is most easily viewed as a succession of symbolic father-son relationships: "el padre benevolente (y caótico) de la Unidad Popular, el padre duro (y ordenado) del régimen militar y el padre reconciliatorio (y gradualista) de la restauración democrática" (the benevolent [and chaotic] father of Popular Unity, the tough [and orderly] father of the military regime, and the reconciliatory [and gradualist] father of the restoration of democracy).⁷³ In this reading, the figures of Salvador Allende, Augusto Pinochet, and Patricio Aylwin act as anchor-signifiers for the interpretation of filmic narratives. I am more concerned with the aspects of cinema that elude symbolic interpretation. Nonetheless, the disintegration of traditional family structures that Cavallo, Douzet, and Rodríguez identify as a principal current in Chilean cinema in this period is an important antecedent to the tentative new forms of domestic sociability presented by the films in my corpus. The same critics assert that "el cine es un oficio altamente endogámico, que construye con enorme facilidad comunidades cerradas, autorreferentes y elitizadas"

(cinema is a highly endogamic profession, which constructs closed, self-referential, and elite communities with tremendous ease).⁷⁴

My aim, in part, is to question this subtle assertion that formal and material properties of film dispose it to the construction of closed communities. Chilean film scholarship in particular has demonstrated a tendency to view cinema as irredeemably bound to bourgeois private space, and many assessments of the country's film productions post-2005 begin from this assumption. The picture in Argentina is perhaps less clear-cut, though the filmmaker and critic Nicolás Prividera has provocatively claimed that the *nuevo cine argentino*, for all its purported engagement with the everyday and the marginalized, transmits "una visión del mundo que traduce sin distancia crítica el encierro de los hijos de la burguesía" (a vision of the world that translates, without critical distance, the confinement felt by the children of the bourgeoisie).⁷⁵ Before analyzing the most immediate historical and cultural contexts of my corpus, however, it is worth taking a longer view on the changing urban fabric of Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile, the cities that in one way or another form the backdrop of these films. Examining the political and social agency of houses on film becomes meaningless without due reference to such contexts.

Anahí Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, in their wide-ranging study of housing in modern Argentina titled *La casa y la multitud*, argue that the twentieth century saw a shift from "el imperio de la casa" (the political dominance of the traditionally constituted household) to "la primacía de la vivienda" (the primacy of housing)—the incorporation of housing for all, irrespective of social status, into state agendas. Ballent and Liernur point to the creation of the Comisión Nacional de Casas Baratas in 1915 as a key moment in this transformation.⁷⁶ In the first half of the twentieth century, housing was seen as a mechanism through which to achieve social reform, and institutions such as the cooperative El Hogar Obrero, the Catholic Church, and the Banco Hipotecario Nacional encouraged the construction of affordable housing for the lower classes.⁷⁷ The cityscape of Buenos Aires began to change radically as discussions over what would constitute "modern" housing led to a move from the traditional *casa*

chorizo (a small, low-rise dwelling organized around a courtyard) to large residential blocks of apartments. The “modernization” of housing and the utopian visions of collective living outlined, for instance, by Le Corbusier in his plan for Buenos Aires were never fully realized and have left somewhat surprising legacies in terms of the architectural constitution of private and public spheres. Nonetheless, the conversion of dwellings into reproducible units (particularly in the profusion of apartment building under Peronism) would seem only to confirm Liernur’s assertion that “con la modernización, la estructura de ideas en la arquitectura sufrió una conmoción de la que aún no se ha recuperado” (with the advent of modernism, the structure of ideas in architecture suffered a commotion from which it has not yet recovered).⁷⁸ The multifamily dwellings of the 1960s differed from their Peronist predecessors not simply in their private financing but also in their tendency to segregate workers in “satellite cities,” thereby prefiguring the more violent fragmentation of the urban environment undertaken by the military regime of 1976–1983.⁷⁹

The end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first saw the state retreat from housing debates, so that the construction of new dwellings was left to respond only to market imperatives. This led, Ballent and Liernur argue, to a splintering of the urban fabric, most visible in the development of upper- and middle-class gated neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city. Economic and class differentials in dwelling grew sharply after the crisis of 2001–2002, and the persistent presence of the *villas miseria* in Buenos Aires was supplemented by further modes of precarious dwelling: “formas de la autoconstrucción popular en terrenos tomados, la adaptación a las condiciones existentes—ocupaciones de edificios urbanos—o la apropiación de espacios libres intersticiales mediante materiales precarios—microvillas” (forms of self-construction, which were popular on seized land, the adaptation to existing conditions—the occupation of urban buildings—or the appropriation of unoccupied interstitial spaces through the use of precarious materials—*microvillas*).⁸⁰

Some of these novel and unstable forms of habitation are considered in chapter 3, alongside a consideration of the politics of domestic

labor. If we turn our gaze to Santiago de Chile, the broad shape of developments across the twentieth century is similar. The Ley de Habitaciones Obreras of 1906 is generally regarded as the point from which housing became an issue of mass politics; the law was followed by multiple other government initiatives in the following decades, though according to Rodrigo Hidalgo Dattwyler, this work often privileged quantity over quality.⁸¹ Indeed, state housing policies in the early twentieth century in Chile often made ideal (e.g., hygienist or patriarchal) images of family and home harder to live up to. The result, as in Buenos Aires, is “una ciudad muchas veces fragmentada y separada del resto de la urbe tradicional, bien equipada y servida” (a city that has been fragmented many times, and separated from the traditional metropolis, which is well equipped and served). Axel Bosdorf and Hidalgo Dattwyler argue that the increase of gated communities (*condominios*) in Santiago in the 1990s can be understood as part of a long trend of social exclusion stretching back to the architectural layout of the colonial *casa de fachada continua* and the construction of “company towns” on the edge of the metropolis in the nineteenth century.⁸²

Yet there is no doubt that actions by government and society in the twentieth century contributed to these trends. During Pinochet’s rule, for instance, informal settlements such as the *callampas* were eradicated and their inhabitants forcibly moved to peripheral areas.⁸³ The upper classes also contributed to this fragmentation. There is a body of Chilean films from the 1960s and 1970s, of which the most famous is Raúl Ruiz’s *Tres tristes tigres* (*Three Sad Tigers*), that depict the movement of the intellectual elite, the wealthy, and civil servants to the suburbs, and to “viviendas aisladas provistas de ante-jardín, jardín y, en no pocas oportunidades, pileta de natación” (isolated dwellings equipped with a front yard, garden, and in a number of cases, a swimming pool).⁸⁴

The changes occasioned by developmentalist housing policies in the twentieth century may radically alter the conditions of urban dwelling, but what emerges from each of these studies is a sense that housing persists as a nexus at which multiple social concerns meet. Edward Murphy names these as “the making of personhood, elements

of citizenship, political economic relations, and the formation of the state” and draws attention to how the political prominence of housing has allowed Chilean women to overcome traditionally restrictive gender roles and step, as housewives, into the public sphere. Ballent and Liernur, meanwhile, suggest that experiments in collective housing and urban planning have not resolved the tension between “house” and “multitude,” between “la construcción del sujeto libre y autónomo, y el despliegue de nuevas formas para la articulación de una multiplicidad de seres ya no unidos por valores esenciales heredados” (the construction of the free, autonomous subject, and the deployment of new forms for the articulation of a multiplicity of beings no longer united by fundamental inherited values).⁸⁵ In the metropolis, Liernur writes, “la casa constituye la sede de dos momentos clave del sistema global: la reproducción de la fuerza de trabajo y la realización por el consumo del ciclo de producción” (the house constitutes the site of two key moments of the global system: the reproduction of the labor force, and the realization of the cycle of production in consumption).⁸⁶ This understanding of the cultural importance of housing is a valuable frame for this study. Both housing and film can be understood as able to *construct* personal and collective identities, while simultaneously being themselves *products* of a given social and economic order.

Commodification and Construction

Just before the period examined here, a number of films insist on the damaging consequences of the commodification of housing on any stable link between domestic space and identity. In Argentina, Martín Rejtman’s *Silvia Prieto* and especially his *Los guantes mágicos* (*The Magic Gloves*) show how the language of belonging and family is pressed into the service of business. In *Los guantes mágicos*, domestic spaces are commercialized whenever possible (including for film production), and there are several points at which domestic analogies for collective identity are revealed to be hopelessly inadequate in an era of liberalized international markets. For instance, an optician likens a forty-year-old body to a house with a rotten structure but then notes that he was able to get rid of the house by selling it.

Likewise, an assertion that Argentina's lack of industry is due to the country's familial character—"acá somos todos hermanos" (here we are all siblings)—rings hollow in a narrative in which family members are entirely dedicated to money-making.

In Chile, Alberto Fuguet's *Se arrienda* (*For Rent*) addresses similar concerns. The film's title immediately points to a weakening of property ownership as a method of asserting personal identity. The film's protagonist, Gastón, returns to Chile after six years spent living in New York and begins working as a real estate agent for his father's company. As in *Los guantes mágicos*, scorn is poured on the notion that a house might function as an effective or truthful representation of human identity. A colleague tells Gastón, "Cuando la gente piensa en una casa, en el fondo piensa en su futuro. Y allí empieza la psicopatía" (When people think about a house, at heart they're thinking about their future. And that's where the psychopathy begins). A sequence near the end of Fuguet's film further questions this idea: a client tells Gastón that he prefers to rent out his old family home instead of living there because of a history of family violence. This admission can be read as a suggestion that, behind the free market economics of contemporary Chile, there lies the specter of (dictatorial) violence perpetrated at home.

An understanding of housing as commodity means that economic growth has been accompanied by a boom in construction, especially in Chile.⁸⁷ Several twenty-first-century films (including those analyzed in the first chapter) investigate how this boom places a strain on existing forms of social interaction.⁸⁸ The contiguity of urban residential property and the closeness of others will be recurrent themes throughout this book. It is partly in response to this development, as well as following a desire to move beyond deconstructive thinking, that I adopt the term *construction* to describe film's activity in relation to the home. I do so not simply to describe its depiction of physical processes (e.g., the building of real estate) but also to think through the elaboration of cinematic space and the development of new social identities.

This privileging of construction takes a cue from the work of Bruno Latour. Where Moreiras proposes a "postmodern epistemic

constructivism” for Latin American studies, I follow Latour in arguing that, in the films in my corpus, “persons, objects and worlds are taken to be ‘constructed’ entities, that is, entities that could fail (and the notion of construction implies nothing else).”⁸⁹ In Latour’s terms, this constructivism, applied not just to human practices but to all elements of the world, is not *postmodern* but *nonmodern*, in that it rejects the culture-nature division he ascribes to the “modern constitution.” In these terms, “home,” understood as an unsteady web of connections among people, objects, the built environment, and the camera itself, can be viewed as a construction. The films examined here, however, diverge from Latour’s model when he envisions the tracing of connections between unexpected actors as leading to the “*progressive composition of one common world*.”⁹⁰ The frequently reflexive aesthetics of these films unsettle the home’s traditional role as the marker of a unifying, singular cinematic realism; they point, instead, to multiple incommensurable realities.

Recent film scholarship from both Argentina and Chile lays the foundations for this approach. Chilean critic Carolina Urrutia Neno uses the term “*cine de construcción*” (cinema of construction) to refer to a body of films made between 2005 and 2011 that use sensory techniques such as haptic imagery and acousmatic sound to disrupt the visual field.⁹¹ My own understanding of construction will expand on this and on the concept of “*cine centrífugo*” (centrifugal cinema), which Urrutia Neno defines as “un cine que parece no creer en nada y que se entrega al despliegue de unas imágenes (movimiento, paisaje, cuerpo, luz) vaciadas de contenido (en tanto discurso y alegoría), expresivamente ambiguas. Narraciones que se instalan en el marco de un espacio que se torna protagónico, donde lo que se fuga es la figura del pueblo, de la comunidad, de la masa (que sale del cuadro) y lo que se queda es el paisaje.”⁹²

I do not wholly agree that all figures of community are expelled from contemporary Chilean film, but the turn toward space (as landscape or architecture) is nonetheless a central element of my argument. Bongers suggests an affinity between this Chilean “*cine centrífugo*” and what Aguilar terms “*cine anómalo*” (anomalous cinema) in Argentina: “un cine fuera de sí, un cine que crea nuevos

circuitos a medida que se exhibe” (a cinema outside itself, a cinema that creates new circuits as it is exhibited).⁹³ The phrase “outside itself,” denoting aesthetic strategies that respond to the proliferation of images and convergence of media in our digital age, is a helpful shorthand for many of the operations undertaken by these works, in which the home is, paradoxically, a place where human subjectivity is decentered. Indeed, one of the directors Aguilar identifies as an exponent of this “anomalous cinema,” is Gustavo Fontán (see chapter 1).

Filmed Houses as Figure or Network?

Cinema, whether it can reasonably be termed “anomalous” or not, has long been interested in the domestic environment. In this case, it is worth looking beyond the immediate contexts of Chile and Argentina to consider the varied ways in which thinking on film and on representation more broadly has appropriated or has sought to take apart the figure of the house. Rhodes has argued that there is an ontological link (or *communication*) between the cinema and real estate property. Rhodes posits the cabinet of curiosities and the country house visit as cinematic forerunners in their conversion of the deepest recesses of private property into (paid-for) spectacle. Houses, Rhodes claims, often serve as both “figure and ground” of cinematic representation, but he cautions against overidentifying the “two rooms” of cinema and architecture (pointing here toward the roots of the film camera in the camera obscura). A rush to make that analogy, he claims, risks obscuring the hierarchies, alienation, and (gendered) repression that are inscribed in real estate property.⁹⁴

The notion of property provides a valuable analytical lens in that it allows an analysis of domestic space in film that does not simply conflate two of the key terms under discussion: *house* and *home*. The films analyzed here resist a bourgeois conception of home as a private domestic sphere invested with symbolic meaning, an understanding made universal in the work of thinkers such as Gaston Bachelard. Human identity is, Bachelard suggests, always *housed*: his concept of “topoanalysis” seeks to explore the interrelation of the psyche with distinct parts of the domestic interior (cellar, attic, etc.).⁹⁵ This fusion of subject and environment is what he (and many after

him) understand as *home*. As Rhodes notes, Bachelard takes a large bourgeois house and gives it universal validity: the size and the “verticality” of the dwelling are essential to its ability to function as “a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.”⁹⁶

Bachelard’s vision is undoubtedly more partial and situated than his poetic style lets on. Yet there is a longer tradition at play: the house has functioned as a crucial figure of identity, and indeed of human imagination, in Western philosophy. Mark Wigley, in his book on the relation between architecture and deconstructive thought, makes a striking claim in this regard. Since the time of Plato, he writes, the house has always been the “exemplar of presentation” for the philosophical tradition that Jacques Derrida termed the “metaphysics of presence.” Wigley adds that “the governing concept of ‘Idea’ as presence, and of the visible world as informed matter, *the material presentation of immaterial ideas*, is traditionally established with the metaphor of the house produced by an architect.”⁹⁷

In this schema, the house “is not simply the paradigm of the operations of the idea. Rather, the idea is itself understood as a paradigm . . . or architectural model.” All thought, in other words, is a domestic practice and a reassertion of the logic of property. This is a point that Derrida makes forcefully when reading Hegel: “the general form of philosophy is properly familial and produces itself as *oikos*: home, habitation . . . the guarding of the proper, of property, propriety, of one’s own.”⁹⁸

Much of the existing critical work that seeks to complicate the relation between house and identity seeks to deconstruct this sense of the proper. Derrida himself unsettles the terms of Sigmund Freud’s and Martin Heidegger’s engagements with the house by examining the question of metaphor. At stake is the form and function of representation in language, which in Derrida’s view rests on an implied domestic interior. In “White Mythology” and “The *Retrait* of Metaphor,” he suggests that metaphor follows the “law of the *oikos*,” and cites César Chesneau Du Marsais’s metaphorical definition of metaphor as a “borrowed home.”⁹⁹ Derrida calls this borrowed house “quasi metaphoric.”¹⁰⁰ Susan Bernstein elucidates this term as follows:

We could equally say it [the borrowed house] both is and is not metaphorical; it is both figurative and literal. Like “das Unheimliche,” the uncanny, the borrowed house can be reappropriated as what is most familiar and can remain resistant as that which is strange, outside, exterior. The house is thus located on unstable ground. Yet is it possible to get outside the house without establishing another house, even by another name?

This problem of the house is really the problem of deconstruction “itself,” if there is such a thing, and its relationship to architecture, which is, after all, the art of housing.¹⁰¹

Bernstein here picks up on Derrida’s observation that Heidegger’s metaphor of the “house of Being,” unlike most metaphors, “transports a familiar predicate . . . toward a less familiar, more remote, *unheimlich* subject.” Yet in stating that the “problem of the house is really the problem of deconstruction itself,” she also points to a tension within deconstruction that may be irresolvable: as a philosophical approach it is dependent on the very (quasi) metaphorical images it seeks to take apart. Bernstein resumes this conundrum thus: “one risks finding oneself in a borrowed dwelling as one deconstructs the house of being.”¹⁰²

This leads toward why we have to leave Derridean deconstruction behind. The complex negotiation of space, identity, and representation that deconstruction undertakes can all too easily become an affirmative feedback loop. As Wigley puts it: “secure housing is the greatest risk of deconstructive discourse.” The emphasis placed on metaphor sits uneasily in relation to film, a medium whose “language” does not operate via the division between signifier and signified essential to writing and speech. Bernstein indicates these risks when she asserts that “the facticity of the house points to a limit of thinking, an undercurrent of the untheorized and excluded materiality that is a condition of possibility of architecture, or writing.” Filmmaking is, I suggest, an ideal tool for excavating this denied relation. In a way that literature cannot, it remits us to that which evades and circumscribes language. A film, unlike writing, cannot “exclude” materiality.¹⁰³

It is for these reasons that my efforts to understand new domestic arrangements in Argentine and Chilean cinema respond less to a deconstructive impulse than to a long-standing (if newly invigorated) critical fascination with film's *material* qualities, with its ability as medium, technology, and industry to expose or alter the conditions of everyday life. My argument is that, as it has become harder to maintain an optimistic view of the co-constitution of the cinema and the city as public spaces in which collective identities might be forged, so it becomes ever more important to consider how domestic spaces are constructed in contemporary film as a network of "micro publics" that represent a more achievable form of cohabitation than a singular utopian public sphere.¹⁰⁴ Crucially, this also serves as an argument for the political agency of art cinema, a mode of filmmaking and film spectatorship whose slow tempo and tendency to linger over the material fabric of the world lead it to construct "micro publics" more easily than a grand public sphere.

It should be noted at this point that, although my approach is materialist, it is not strictly Marxist. The pessimism and melancholy often engendered by Marxist historical materialism—at least as it has interacted with Latin American studies—might be avoided through an engagement with the perspectives often associated with "new materialism" and ideas of nonhuman agency. In thinking of the realm of the social as a constantly shifting assemblage of both human and nonhuman actors, I return to Latour, for whom "the task of cohabitation" is urgent and complex in the early twenty-first century. I share Jane Bennett's desire to develop a less deterministic and "more subtle awareness of the complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies," animate or inanimate, and Rosi Braidotti's conviction that "matter is not dialectically opposed to culture, nor to technological mediation, but continuous with them."¹⁰⁵ Film is particularly well placed as a medium to point out this continuity, and reading contemporary Argentine and Chilean cinema in this way can allow a fresh assessment of the political and social functions of houses in the two national contexts.

My approach also owes something, inevitably, to the remarkable body of scholarship on cinema and the urban environment that

extends back to the writings of Benjamin and of Siegfried Kracauer. Recent work in this vein, from David Clarke's *The Cinematic City* to Stephen Barber's *Projected Cities* and Giuliana Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion*, has done much to inform critical understandings of the relation between space, place, and subjectivity in film. Bruno suggests that, through the movement of urban film, the spectator realizes "home itself is made up of layers of passages that are voyages of habitation," and this chimes with the unsettling of binary distinctions between sedentary and mobile existence. Nonetheless, I am conscious of Rhodes's call for attention to the particularities of urban histories. I share his belief that "each instance of interaction between a city and a cinematic practice is entirely specific and unique unto itself."¹⁰⁶

Urban homes in Buenos Aires and Santiago have their own unique histories. In this book I both insist on local specificity and argue that a comparative approach can both highlight otherwise veiled aspects of national culture and reveal conditions and practices that are common across the region. My argument tracks two developments: the first is the dissolution (or at least complication) of the relation between house and identity in Argentine and Chilean film and the second is a change in cinematic images of the city that might be described as a retreat into local spaces and neighborhoods, or a loss of faith in film's capacity to represent urban space as a unity or a whole. Housing emerges in these films as a key arena in which fraught relations between the individual and the collective are reworked.

This function of housing has been recognized by cultural critics writing in and about the Southern Cone. Sarlo's writing on the Argentine capital in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries demonstrates a concern for the dissolution of shared urban space into private, technological spaces, and a recent special issue of the *Journal of Romance Studies* claims that, in contemporary Latin American cinema, "the private, domestic, or familial domain frequently threatens to subsume the public or political sphere."¹⁰⁷ Yet some recent scholarship on Argentine and Chilean film reveals a cautious optimism about film's agency in the urban environment. Valeria de los Ríos, for instance, sees in Ignacio Agüero's documentary *Aquí se construye* (Construction here) an attempt to provide a

cognitive map of the Chilean capital.¹⁰⁸ Andermann has identified a current in recent Argentine cinema that aims to reconstruct community in a fragmented neoliberal city, by relating to place “as a sphere of belonging that must be defended against a hostile exterior, and around which a community can assemble with regained strength.” One of my objectives in this book is to interrogate the reach, and the limits, of such cinematic communities. James Scorer has intelligently nuanced this perspective in relation to Argentine cinema, suggesting that it is often a case of “communities based on exclusionary commons.”¹⁰⁹ In the analysis that follows, I ask what specificities of the cinematic medium might create the limitations toward which Scorer points.

In order to understand why film may face particular challenges in constructing urban communities, it is important to think through cinema’s relation to private space—and domestic space in particular. An obvious starting point here is the etymological root of the film camera in the camera obscura, literally a darkened room. Cinema and architecture can be seen to *communicate*, as do two rooms in a house, but it is important to point out that much early cinema depicts exterior urban spaces such as the street or, famously, the train station. As Maite Conde has shown, the “city symphony genre,” so prevalent in early cinema as a showcase of urban capitalism, found its way to South America in films such as Adalberto Kemeny and Rudolf Rex Lustig’s *São Paulo, a sinfonia da metrópole* (*São Paulo, a Metropolitan Symphony*), which emphasizes the unity of the city, as seen from the streets: “Within the city-film itself there is no place of home, as in interior family settings. Residences are shot only from the outside, adding to the sense of perpetual motion.”¹¹⁰ Only with the development of the studio system, it might be argued, did the home assume its subsequent prominence. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that, insofar as twentieth-century film scholarship dealt with domestic space, it often did so through the lens of genre. I am thinking here of the paradigmatic work on melodrama done by Thomas Elsaesser and Laura Mulvey, as well as, for instance, more recent studies of domestic space in genres such as science fiction.¹¹¹ Rhodes asserts that “it is difficult to think about genre without thinking about the way almost

every genre embodies a mode of meditation on and use of the house and domestic space."¹¹² If we consider the frequency with which home comes to act as a point of narrative closure, this perspective seems all the more convincing. My analysis, however, will not take genre as an overarching frame, for the principal reason that the films I examine here frequently challenge typical classifications: between melodrama and black comedy (as in chapter 2) or even between documentary and fiction (as in chapters 1 and 3).

It is only more recently that the apparently co-constitutive relationship between architecture and cinema (and the media more broadly) has received more detailed study. Emblematic of this trend is the work of Beatriz Colomina and Giuliana Bruno. This understanding of architecture *as* medium will be fundamental to my argument, though I contest certain critical narratives that risk overidentifying the operations of architecture and those of cinema (e.g., cutting, montage) and, thereby, eliding potentially productive differences. Rhodes warns against this overidentification, in part by highlighting the economics of the film-spectator relation: when we go to watch a film, he suggests, we "must pay to occupy a space in order to look at a space [we] cannot occupy."¹¹³ Spectatorship is thus a peculiarly unfulfilling sort of consumption, as well as a form of affective labor.

Rhodes's argument, advanced in relation to North American cinema, needs nuancing in this context. The limited commercial distribution circuits for nationally produced films in Argentina and Chile mean that the works analyzed here are not all that often watched by paying spectators gathered in a darkened theater in Buenos Aires or Santiago. The room with which their cinematic houses communicate might just as well be at a European film festival, or indeed the private home of a spectator watching online via legal or illegal means. In the latter case, film can increasingly appear, if only in an illusory sense, as common property.

The economic conditions of film production and spectatorship thus differentiate my corpus from that of similar studies that focus on the global North. This book also differs from much recent work in this field in that the transnational migrant and the exile are not prominent figures in the films analyzed.¹¹⁴ The European focus of

much scholarship dealing with ideas of home and belonging in film leads to an emphasis on a transnational, postcolonial encounter that is not entirely transferable to the Argentine and Chilean contexts.¹¹⁵ This becomes most evident when considering the applicability of European notions of cosmopolitanism to contemporary Latin America. There are films from Argentina and Chile that deal with the difficult incorporation of transnational migrants into the domestic sphere. Both Chile and Argentina, moreover, have strong traditions of filmmaking by political exiles that deal with questions of national belonging from a diasporic perspective.¹¹⁶ However, what is striking about the corpus of films analyzed here is that such issues—difficult encounters with an “other,” for example, or fraught attempts at sociability across class boundaries—are mostly addressed within a national framework. The question of home in these cases remains tightly bound up with what Beverley (adapting the thought of Ranajit Guha) has called the “historical failure of the nation to come to its own” in Latin America.¹¹⁷ The figure of the house has had a privileged relation to national culture in the Southern Cone. In recent cinema, the nature of that relation is placed under close examination, and the exclusions it generates are highlighted.

Cinema’s close relation to domestic space might seem to limit its potential for constructing communities beyond the private house or for modeling new forms of sociability. I claim that there is a distinctly local quality to many films dealing with Buenos Aires and Santiago in this period, an apparent lack of faith in cinema’s capacity to represent the city as a unified phenomenological space. David Harvey writes that dwellers turn to a “localized neighbourhood aesthetic” as a response to urban transformations.¹¹⁸ Yet this need not preclude attempts at the tracing of links between residents and visitors or between “insiders” and “outsiders.” In order to advance this argument, ideas of housing, dwelling, or indeed “home” that rely on fixed “existential spaces” (as Verena Andermatt Conley puts it) must be left behind, and understandings of the city as a series of networks and exchanges embraced. This new “relational space,” Scott McQuire suggests, can be “made into a space of belonging—a home.” Being at home in modernity, he argues, implies both “the loss of stable

coordinates, *and* the invention of new continuities and new processes of cultural affiliation across interlinked domains."¹¹⁹

This might seem like a tall order. After all, as Claudette Lauzon argues, "in the early years of the twenty-first century, artists have turned increasingly to the trope of home as a fractured, fragile, or otherwise unsettled space of impossible inhabitation." Yet Lauzon also seeks to intervene "in recent efforts to valorize home as a mobile concept and idealize precariousness as an aesthetic category of contingency and risk." Dwayne Avery similarly contends that the movement of cinema, the very quality that makes on-screen homes "unhomely," can in fact lead the spectator to a new and more capacious understanding of "home," one not dependent on a particular "place of settlement" but, rather, on a "set of practices, ideas and memories."¹²⁰

How, though, can the architectural space of the private house, so often invoked as a symbol of hierarchical authority and of rigid identities, remain relevant to this mobile understanding of home? One answer is offered by Hannah Arendt, who proposes that the house, as classically conceived, is "*something like a frozen thought which thinking must unfreeze.*" Only then, she claims, can a better understanding of dwelling be achieved. The films I address encourage this task through an aesthetics that defamiliarizes the private house, asking spectators to revisit or reconstruct their images of it. The films moreover tentatively suggest that this operation might have broader social consequences, though they do not assure positive effects. As Arendt writes, a rethinking of the house "by no means guarantees that you will be able to come up with an acceptable solution for your housing problems."¹²¹

Corpus and Structure

The principal films addressed here appeared between 2005 and 2015. The year 2005 was a crucial year for Chilean cinema, as it saw the release of four films that are regarded as foundational works of what has become known as the *novísimo cine chileno*: Fuguet's *Se arrienda*, Alicia Scherson's *Play*, Matías Bize's *En la cama* (*In Bed*), and Sebastián Lelio's *La Sagrada Familia* (*The Holy Family*; see chapter 2).

Several characteristics are commonly attributed to the *novísimo cine chileno*—such as a focus on intimate spaces, a looseness of plot, and the apparent absence of politics as a mass activity—and these form an important part of my analysis.¹²² I am wary of setting too much store by the names given to apparent cinematic tendencies, however. In Argentina, on the other hand, although the year 2005 did not provide any defining event for Argentine cinema, we could argue that it marks a point after which it becomes difficult to sustain the integrity of the *nuevo cine argentino*—the body of (initially) independent, low-budget filmmaking that has received extensive critical attention. As Urrutia Neno notes, the *nuevo cine argentino* of the 1990s exhibited some of the characteristics listed above, and thus, in a sense, foreshadows recent Chilean work. Argentine film after 2005, meanwhile, appears rather more heterogeneous and difficult to categorize.¹²³ In their frequent resistance to easy categorization according to genre, the films in my corpus point toward the unsettling of forms (whether aesthetic or political) that, I argue, cinematic representations of domestic space in this period undertake.

I cannot, of course, claim to consider all films that deal with housing and domestic space in my chosen period. As Rhodes states, when we watch films “we are forever looking at and into people’s houses.”¹²⁴ This assertion rings especially true in Latin America, where recent years have seen a boom in films that focus on bourgeois domestic spaces, even as Latin American cinema seems ever less sure of the *meaning* of the middle-class home. In contemporary Latin American cinema in general, domestic spaces “condense questions of modernity, traumatic (post)memory, and relations both affective and economic.”¹²⁵ Perhaps the Southern Cone’s most famous cineastes to have dealt significantly with domestic space are Lucrecia Martel and Albertina Carri, but I do not consider them at length here, in part because of the very significant critical attention they have already received.¹²⁶ I have focused my efforts on a corpus of films made after Martel’s and Carri’s best-known critical successes, in order to suggest that their concern with the home is not merely a factor of their auteurist style. I would instead argue that many of the key concerns in Martel’s and Carri’s features, such as the subversion of family

structures in Carri's *Géminis* (*Geminis*) or the mysterious sensory environments of Martel's *La ciénaga* (*The Swamp*), respond to political, social, and aesthetic trends that find an echo in later works. Like Martel's work, but in a more marked fashion, the films I discuss concern themselves with the material fabric of the home: the house is often accorded as much attention, and on occasion agency, as the human actors or participants. Where Martel and Carri frequently concern themselves with dysfunctional, isolated bourgeois households, however, the films analyzed here think more explicitly about the place of households from a variety of social backgrounds in the urban environment.

In Martel's and Carri's work, gender is a prominent concern, and previous scholarship on the domestic sphere in Latin American cinema has foregrounded the relation of women to the home, often via an analysis of the depiction of domestic work.¹²⁷ I engage with these questions most explicitly in chapters 3 and 4, but they are implicit in much of my corpus, and my understanding of the interaction between subjectivity and space is indebted to feminist writing on how domestic architecture shapes ideas about gender roles.¹²⁸ Indeed, bell hooks's claim that home "is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference," is borne out in the formal characteristics of the films I analyze.¹²⁹ What is notable about my corpus, however, is the extent to which these changing perspectives unsettle men's traditional position in the domestic sphere (as head of household or property owner) as well as women's (see chapters 2 and 4, in particular). In other words, the films discussed here do not present home as a systematically gendered space. This is in part because socioeconomic differences, which of course intersect with gender concerns, are more obviously visible and in part because the films' reflexive attitude toward the construction of cinematic space means that human subjects are often decentered.

Accordingly, each of the book's four chapters addresses a way in which houses mediate relations between human inhabitants and their environment: as a technology of memory, as a vision of moder-

nity, as a workplace, or as a space of hospitality. In each case, the films discussed not only tug at the fraying edges of existing social structures but also tentatively offer elements of new social configurations. The final chapter brings together the concerns of the preceding ones in order to offer a new theorization of domestic hospitality on film. In this way, the book's structure reflects its proposed shift from a deconstructive critical approach to culture toward an understanding of houses on film as provisional assemblages of new collective identities.

The opening chapter critiques the hegemony of the figures of the archive and the fragment in many recent studies of Latin American cultural memory by analyzing Agüero's documentary *El otro día* (The other day) and Fontán's cycle of essay films *El árbol* (The tree), *Elegía de abril* (April elegy), and *La casa* (The house). What these films demonstrate, through their strikingly reflexive techniques, are the limitations of any project of memory articulated through the logic of private property. In this chapter I engage with Derridean deconstruction and the figure of the specter in its challenge to the terms of memory politics in Latin American cultural studies. I suggest that these films encourage a turn toward a conception of the domestic archive as an assemblage of media: a poetic and somewhat tenuous body of connections between human subjectivity and nonhuman actors. In concluding, an analysis of Niles Atallah's *Lucía* links these concerns to those that follow in subsequent chapters: the transformation of the urban fabric, visions of modernity, domestic labor, and the possibility of meaningful hospitality.

In the next chapter I move from a discussion of how houses on film mediate the past to examine two fiction films—Cohn and Duprat's *El hombre de al lado* and Lelio's *La Sagrada Familia*—that set their narratives in modernist houses, constructions that implicitly project conceptions of "modern" domestic life. Both films offer a critique of architectural modernism, suggesting that its apparent transparency and openness belie a contradictory movement toward individualism and suspicion of the outsider. I argue that the strength of the films' critique lies in their conception of the relation between cinema and architecture. The houses presented here mediate the visual experience of their

inhabitants, as cinema does for its spectators. I suggest that Latin America's uneven experience of modernity presents particular challenges to modernism's stated commitment to equality and inclusion. These films call into question that commitment. They offer a vision of modernism as a guardian of privileged private space and an obstacle to social relations. They imply that the apparent attempt in modernist architecture to subject lived experience to geometric order cannot help but reveal those aspects of life (such as personal relationships, or the making of art) that exceed normative organization. I argue that these films should prompt a reassessment of globalizing theories about the effects of modernity on the domestic sphere and suggest that local "outsides"—whether bodily practices or material constructions—can exercise a high degree of agency. In doing so, I draw on Jorge Dubatti's conception of *convivio* as a performative practice of sociability and on Latour's work on modernity. I also pursue the interrogation of ecological understandings of architecture and media from the previous chapter.

In the third chapter I examine unorthodox presentations of domestic labor in José Luis Sepúlveda and Carolina Adriazola's *Mitómana* (Mythomaniac) and Rodrigo Moreno's *Réimon*. The figure of the maid has been a frequent presence in Argentine and Chilean cinema, yet most productions (typically melodramas or comedies) fail to provide sustained critical reflection on the position of domestic workers in these societies. Conversely, the films analyzed here suggest cinema that provides its spectators with a comfortable, "homely" vision of domestic work is merely acting to reinforce structures of exploitation. Contrasting *Mitómana* and *Réimon* with the more conventional productions, Sebastián Silva's *La nana* (*The Maid*) and Jorge Gaggero's *Cama adentro* (*Live-In Maid*), I argue that this sense of unhomeliness is achieved via experimentation with cinematic form (adopting non-linear narratives and unsteady camera work) and by questioning the divisions often articulated between urban center and periphery or between workplace and home. I contend that this spatial confusion leads to a collapse of the categories of labor offered by Marxist analysis: industrial/Fordist, on the one hand, and post-Fordist "immaterial" labor (which relies on the instrumental deployment of emotions) on

the other. These films reflect on their own status as products of labor, and on how they might be complicit in the propagation of precarious working practices. With this reflexive emphasis on creative production I challenge established depictions of the urban margins as spaces of violence and despair and suggest the possibility of political solidarity beyond class identification. In this chapter I engage critically with scholarship on immaterial labor and suggest that new materialist perspectives on culture can help construct a fuller view of the political agency of art cinema, considering not just its diegetic content but also its conditions of production, distribution, and spectatorship.

In the final chapter I directly address a concern that is implicit in the preceding sections. To what extent might unexpected encounters across social boundaries make domestic space a fruitful ground for more inclusive forms of community? I analyze fiction films that deal with unexpected guests or intruders—Celina Murga's *Una semana solos* (*A Week Alone*) and Fernando Lavanderos's *Las cosas como son* (*Things as they are*)—in light of the recent turn toward hospitality as an ethical paradigm in North American and European critical theory. I argue that these films point to some limitations of this (often deconstructive) framework in a Latin American context and also suggest some important nuances to recent theoretical articulations of "domestic cosmopolitanism." Such limitations and nuances are suggested by urban developments in Buenos Aires and Santiago: for instance, the growth of gated suburban neighborhoods in Buenos Aires and the persistence of detached, walled-off houses in the central zones of Santiago. Pablo Trapero's *El clan* and Pablo Larraín's *El club* (*The Club*) are invoked as examples of how the legacy of dictatorial violence and oppression informs the representation of domestic guests and intruders in contemporary film. The disruptive effects of the increased presence of media in the home are considered throughout. I end the chapter by considering how changing practices of film production and distribution (in particular via the Internet) might help to create, if not a single virtual public sphere, then at least a series of temporary spaces in which alternative modes of sociability can be played out. The precariousness of such arrangements within the narratives, I argue, reflects both cinema's diffident interaction with

other media and the domestic sphere's precarious autonomy from its urban environment.

My argument eventually leads me to propose that, if houses in contemporary Argentine and Chilean film can be understood as sites of community and belonging, it can only be in a provisional sense, without any secure foundation in identity. With this apparently paradoxical formulation, I hope to indicate how, as cinema reflects the household's uneasy relation to the urban outside, it also reflects on its own unstable identity as a medium, on how it is never entirely free from mediation by other forms. In so doing, I hope to challenge previous distinctions between the home as the sphere of affect, intimacy, and privacy and the city as polis, the location of public affairs, protest, and debate. Scorer argues that the neoliberal transformations of Buenos Aires make the use of "traditional markers of identity construction and belonging" problematic.¹³⁰ I argue that this difficulty is found in Chile as well as in Argentina, but it is frequently framed in different terms. In the Chilean films I analyze, the question of national belonging, and with it the legacies of dictatorship, looms larger in the domestic environment, while economic concerns are perhaps more prominent in the Argentine works. But there are shared anxieties, too, not least around the possibility of constructing cohesive urban communities. I suggest that, in both countries, contemporary filmmaking allows a rethinking of identity construction in the domestic sphere and a remaking of home as a productive node in contemporary social and media networks. Francine Masiello's description of the "poetic house" in the writing of Argentine poet Tamara Kamenszain finds new meaning in many of the cinematic houses I discuss: "this house is not a space for reflection on sentiment, but for realignment of those spatial parameters basic to our vision. The home is a medium for the art of seeing."¹³¹