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# Consumption and Education in Recent Uruguayan Cinema: Between Sobriety, Joy, and Excess

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# Consumption and Education in Recent Uruguayan Cinema: Between Sobriety, Joy, and Excess

## **Abstract / Resumen**

Altering our physical and mental states through practices of consumption has formed a basis of our daily habits for hundreds of years. By the eighteenth century, consumption of stimulants such as alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea, sugar, opiates, cannabis, coca, and other substances was widespread and democratized. Drug consumption was mirrored by a new universality of leisure reading of travel accounts and maps, sentimental novels, and pornographic works. Psychotropic mechanisms transformed not only habits and economies, but also affected the fantasies of millions of people, and changed existing ecosystems over the last few centuries. (Baghdiantz 2015; Baumann 2007; Courtwright 2001; Herlinghaus 2013; Smail 2007) I propose analyzing recent Uruguayan cinema as a psychotropic practice that changes our imaginary by introducing us to their characters' dynamics of desire, consumption, and disposal, or by portraying them as objects of those same dynamics of being desired, consumed, or disposed of. Uruguayan films recreate subjects and objects within this equation of consumerism, where reducing people to instruments, bodies or body parts, becomes fundamental to understanding relationships in our time: from sobriety to compulsion to excess, from the cruelest objectification to the creation of subjects who can communicate with each other and learn in the process.

## **Keywords / Palabras clave**

Uruguayan cinema, consumption, self-objectification, education

## **Cover Page Footnote / Si quiere que su cubierta contenga una nota al pie de página...**

This article was translated into English by Wendy Gallagher, [wgallag1@msudenver.edu](mailto:wgallag1@msudenver.edu)

*Everything I like is sinful or bad for me / everything I like is expensive or illegal /  
this gets me into trouble with no way out / it gets me into dangerous and complicated situations.*

“It Does Me Good, It Does Me Bad” by El Cuarteto de Nos<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever wondered how we reached our current levels of mass consumption? It is a story that has yet to be told. Consumption studies have focused on Western Europe, overlooking other regions like Latin America and leaving major questions unanswered regarding the relationships between men, women, and goods (Baghdiantz 188). My approach “forms part of a more recent movement to see consumption as being both economic and cultural” (Sinclair and Pertierra 2).

When did mass consumption become global? Consumerism and globalization are generally considered to be recent phenomena. However, consumption studies contradict this idea by revealing the fascinating and vertiginous journey of “consuming the world,” referring to the ever-increasing exchange of goods and movement of people between Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe over several centuries (Baghdiantz 87).

As a key factor in “consuming the world,” we begin with the *psychoactive revolution*: a deliberate, profit-driven process to globally commercialize stimulants such as alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea, sugar, chocolate, opiates, cannabis, coca, and other substances, beginning in the sixteenth century (Courtwright 9). By the eighteenth century, consumption of these psychoactives was widespread and democratized. Substances used for centuries in other cultures had become standard in Europe: Yemeni coffee, consumed in the Islamic world since the fourteenth century; Asian tea and opium; New World chocolate and tobacco. Early eighteenth-century London had thousands of coffee shops, with cafés outnumbering taverns by 1739. The intensity with which these stimulants

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3yg6BqnohgM>

Original lyrics of “Me hace bien, me hace mal”: *Todo lo que me gusta es pecado o hace mal / todo lo que me gusta es muy caro o ilegal / me mete en problemas que no tienen solución / se me vuelve peligroso o trae una complicación.*

were “democratized” can be seen in the numbers: “European coffee consumption exploded in the eighteenth century, rising from an estimated 2 to 120 million pounds. Tea imports rose from 1 to 40 million pounds, cacao from 2 to 13 million” (Courtwright 20). Today, caffeine is the most commonly consumed drug, “World per capita consumption is about 70 milligrams a day” (19), with alcohol ranking in second place, followed by tobacco. Without this revolution “activating our minds and bodies,” modern society as we know it would not exist. With that in mind, an analysis of recent Uruguayan cinema provides an opportunity to reflect upon what new generations tell us about consumption in movies such as *Anina*, *25 Watts*, *Memories of Women (Memorias de mujeres)*, *The Dog Pound (La perrera)*, *The Pope’s Toilet (El baño del Papa)*, and *Wanderers (Rambleras)*.

The globalization of consumption has transformed the daily habits, economies and fantasies of millions of people (Herlinghaus 9). Why fantasies? Democratizing drug consumption in the eighteenth century was mirrored by a new universality of practices such as leisure reading of travel accounts and maps, sentimental novels and pornographic works. Smail explains by going beyond stimulants to include cultural practices and institutions, referring to them collectively as “psychotropic mechanisms,” with the word “psychotropic” coming from the Greek *psyche*, meaning “mind,” and *tropein*, meaning “to turn or change.” An example of a psychotropic cultural practice was the “epidemic” of leisure reading in the eighteenth century, accompanied by physical exhaustion, the rejection of reality and physical immobility (Smail 81), symptoms that we now associate with the addictive nature of twenty-first century cellphones, social media, videogames, and movies on Netflix. The eighteenth century, known also as a century of addictions, saw the rise of an erratic and arbitrary *psychotropic counterrevolution* in which, despite enormous financial gains, some drugs began to be restricted or prohibited – but not all of them. This was yet another colossal change in direction that we still see today, a shift towards controlling compulsive or addictive behaviors but without endangering the economy of our modern civilization, which is supported by

psychotropic mechanisms (Courtwright 2, 5). And why is this? Because altering our physical and mental states through cultural practices of consumption has clearly formed a basis of our daily habits for hundreds of years.

Therefore, I propose considering Uruguayan cinema as another psychotropic cultural practice, by analyzing how Uruguayan films change our way of thinking, transform our imaginary, and also how visual culture is, in itself, both a commodity and yet another cultural practice in the psychotropic economy and in our current liquid consumer era (Bauman 30-31). Finally, we will examine specific films and how they introduce us to their characters' dynamics of desire, consumption, and disposal, or present them as objects of those same dynamics of being desired, consumed or disposed of<sup>2</sup>, or how these characters transform themselves into objects, machines or commodities. That is to say, visual culture recreates subjects and objects within this equation of consumerism and globalization, where dehumanization, in reducing people to objects, instruments, bodies or body parts, becomes fundamental to understanding human relationships in our time. This phenomenon can be classified into seven different types of objectification<sup>3</sup> of others, as well as self-objectification (Nussbaum 256-257). Fredrickson and Roberts refine this concept as it relates to women, especially in how culture represents the feminine figure, and they delve into the psychological consequences of women's self-objectification by internalizing the objectifying gaze of the other, turning their own bodies into something that they themselves must constantly look at, monitor and evaluate (177). To be both treated as and to treat oneself as an object, a body, or body

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<sup>2</sup> Many researchers have already examined Uruguayan cinema from multiple perspectives; approaching the topic from the angle of consumption aims simply to add another facet to the discussion.

<sup>3</sup> A definition of objectification: "The dehumanizing reduction of a person (or in representation, a depiction of a person) to the status of a thing, an anonymous body, or a fetishized body part (see also fetishism; fragmentation). Feminists argue that female objectification is a primary mode of women's subjection: in art, film, literature, and life, they are the traditional objects of the gaze for heterosexual male subjects. In psychological objectification theory it is argued that as part of socialization women develop self-objectification: learning to see themselves as men see them. Since the mid 1980s, males have also been increasingly objectified in mass-media contexts such as advertising" (Oxford University Press, 2016.)

parts forms part of the experience of the girls in *Anina* and of the women in *Tricky Life* (*En la puta vida*), *The Dog Pound*, *The Pope's Toilet*, *Wanderers*, as well as in the documentaries of Virginia Martínez, which also delineate how these girls and women resolve or overcome, in their own ways, the objectifying or self-objectifying gaze focused on their bodies and their subjectivities.

Another key element of this chapter is Uruguay's recent history: reflecting on Uruguayan cinema in the light of the transition to democracy, by analyzing how the recent past has been reformulated since the dictatorship (1973-1985). During the transition, the plebiscites of 1989 and 2009 stand out as two pivotal moments in the conflict between remembering the recent past or forgetting it. While the act of forgetting is "indispensable and necessary" in life, a "normal and fecund" forgetting can only unfold gradually through the long process of "inscribing the horror" (Maren and Marcelo Viñar 15-16). In Greek tragedy, forgetting as a healthy process requires purification, *catharsis* and *peripeteia* (Remedi 351), as well as *aletheia*, the discovery of truth. In other words, forgetting should occur only after uncovering the truth about the murders, torture, detentions, disappearances, and other crimes committed in the recent past, allowing individuals and society to change through remembering (*aletheia* and *peripeteia*), and to purify themselves by externalizing the horror (*catharsis*). However, these crucial steps were never taken in Uruguayan society, as the 1989 and 2009 referendums mandated an official forgetting, born of impunity and revealing a country split in two. The 1989 Green vote (*voto Verde*) campaign lost at the ballot box, but exposed a divided nation: 54% supported the Yellow vote (*voto Amarillo*), mainly inland, while a 46% Green vote was seen in the capital. If Uruguay's interior and its capital were two separate nations, justice would have been served in the latter, while torturers and murderers could have sought refuge in the former (Miguez 2002:8). In 2009, a 53% vote against repealing "*la Ley de Caducidad*," a law granting amnesty to military and police officers involved in human rights abuses, blocked any possibility of healthy forgetting (Ros 166). With the victory of the left, the former

dictator Gregorio Álvarez, the former president, Bordaberry, his former Minister of Foreign Relations, Blanco, six military heads and two policemen all received lengthy sentences, thanks to unclear amnesty laws (172). Although the remains of many of the disappeared were found, Ros notes that Uruguay is still far behind neighboring countries in terms of achieving justice. It is tragic how certain political figures display their double standards by ignoring or even blocking the search for the truth, while they symbolically rend their garments when grandstanding against the systematic extermination by Nazi Germany (Ros 171).

In the case of Uruguay's own human rights violations, if a healthy process of remembering and forgetting was thwarted in legal and political spheres, what happened on the cultural level? Remedi (351) and the Viñars refer to the need to inscribe "the abominable." René Kaës asserts that "when there is no psychological support – either individual or collective – to singularly and collectively address horrific violence, it circles around and around, blindly and stubbornly, returning back to the original violence" (cited in Viñar and Viñar 121). Elie Wiesel, Nobel laureate and one of 105 witnesses at the trial of Klaus Barbie, the "Butcher of Lyon," wrote that "the killer kills twice, the second time in trying to obliterate the traces of his crime"; when the victimizer escapes punishment, the existence of the victim is also denied (cit. in Reati 18). Yesterday's torturers now live next door to their victims, constituting a new Freudian concept of "the sinister." During the dictatorship, the sinister lurked within apparently normal daily life as a ghost of "disappearances, prison and death," while under democracy, the sinister has become "the constant presence of these criminals, sharing public space with the citizenry" (Reati 18). In short, collective repression in Uruguay not only persists but has increased, in a society that supposedly could not know, or did not want to know, who its victimizers nor who its victims were. Thus, we can appreciate the importance of studying recent cinema as a re-presentation and a visual memory of power relationships in this post-dictatorship era. Analyzing recent cinematographic images implies not only exploring if these

visual objects have contributed to the verbalization of “the unnamable,” harnessing this repeated circle of violence, but also implies taking part in the battle for memory. To this end, it would be wise to consider the challenges posed to reconstruction by the “Vichy syndrome”: “the difficulty of recognizing, over decades, what really happened in the war, and the overwhelming desire to block memories or to turn them into something useful that will not corrode the fragile connections of postwar society” (Rouso cit. in Hudt). Furthermore, this reconstruction is happening at a critical moment when, after a century of sporadic attempts, Uruguayan cinema is finally establishing itself, with some fifteen movies per year<sup>4</sup>.

First, however, we should try to comprehend the political, economic, and cultural importance of psychoactive practices, considering the role of Latin America in this process and that of Uruguay as a part of the region; let us return to the eighteenth century, when sugar became a commodity with as much global importance as steel in the nineteenth century and oil in the twentieth (Baghdiantz 53). What evidence does Baghdiantz offer of the eighteenth-century global sugar trade? It was dominated by the British Empire, with Holland close behind, while Brazil led in production. Due to the slave trade and the unpaid labor of poor Europeans indentured on sugar cane plantations for the promise of land, the price of sugar had dropped fifty percent by the middle of the seventeenth century, and by the end of that century, consumption had quintupled from one pound to five pounds per person. Furthermore, sugar had already made a few Europeans wealthy by

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<sup>4</sup> Some years ago, Martínez del Carril and Zapiola came to the conclusion that “Uruguayans are not used to seeing images of themselves.” Uruguayan cinema was inaugurated in 1898 with Félix Oliver’s *A Bicycle Race at the Arroyo Seco Velodrome* (*Carrera de bicicletas en el velódromo de Arroyo Seco*); however, perhaps due to sporadic, inconsistent production, there were several “first” Uruguayan films: *Souls on the Coast* (*Almas de la costa*, 1923), by Juan Antonio Borges, claimed to be the first national Uruguayan film production; *Vocation* (*Vocación*, 1938), by Rina Massardi, was known as “the first lyrical South American film”; in 1979, Eva Landeck’s *The Place of Smoke* (*El lugar del humo*) was yet another “first Uruguayan film,” thereby ignoring sixteen previous full-length feature films produced between 1938 y 1979; and again, the 1994 recurrence of this memory lapse, when Pablo Dotta’s *The Dirigible* (*El dirigible*) was presented in Cannes as “the first film in the history of Uruguayan cinema.” Therefore, Martínez del Carril and Zapiola assert that “there is no memory of dozens of experiences, some truly inspired and creative. Each time, they seem to start again from zero.” Nonetheless, by the 1990s, audiences began to forget the previous intermittence of Uruguayan visual productions.



the fifteenth century, with African and European men and women planting sugar cane and dying as slaves or servants, after the indigenous Taino were decimated in the Caribbean (Baghdiantz 53). Over four centuries, sugar claimed the lives of six million people (Abbott 77). These dynamics of consumption and disposal, of drugs and of bodies, comprise a politics of death or necropolitics: an association between politics and death which, rather than emerging from Nazi or Soviet death camps, instead date back to the colonies of a more distant past, where colonizers exploited human existence and normalized the destruction of bodies, marking them as disposable or superfluous (Mbembe 13, 18, 21-22). This was done to satisfy global consumption, by then already tied to “signs of prestige, power, material riches” (Quinzá 24) and social recognition, one example being England’s Queen Elizabeth I, whose consumption of sugar eventually turned her teeth black, imitated by the women of her court blackening their own teeth (Baghdiantz 57)<sup>5</sup>. In other words, these death politics were no more than the use, consumption and disposal of Africans, Amerindians and poor Europeans to expand sugar consumption and to feed the mouths of a few emerging European empires. This has been one of Latin America’s roles in the psychoactive revolution, with its compulsive use of substances and people.

In analyzing cinema as a psychoactive practice, I propose that Latin America has not only provided raw materials, narcotics, and cheap labor, but that it has also been a source of culture ever since the discovery of America, creating an imaginary of fantasies and experiences both desired and consumed by Europe. It was first imagined as a continent of freedom and utopian innocence, or of excessive and violent revolution, followed in the twentieth century by European and North

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<sup>5</sup> A surprising element in the history of sugar is that, despite being ten times more addictive than cocaine, any discussions about this psychoactive substance have been stripped of the adjectives used to describe other drugs. Those of us who research the historical narrative of sugar find this perplexing, since this substance shares many characteristics with other neurochemical stimulants of the psychoactive revolution. Nevertheless, the sugar trade has not been subjected to the prohibition or criminalization befalling every other drug with known addictive effects, such as tobacco, amphetamines, LSD, heroin or cocaine. Sugar, by contrast, continues to hold its strong lead in the consumption race and is criticized only rarely, such as in the documentary *Fed Up*.

American dream imagery of sensual dance, alcohol, and women on idyllic beaches, or nostalgic images involving traditional social and family constructs so quickly vanishing in First World countries. These created an imaginary based on experiences that, for a variety of reasons, are missing or are prohibited in the daily life of First World countries (Sinclair and Pertierra). Hollywood is certainly not the only one selling fantasies; Latin America has been a sort of “Latinowood” for quite some time.

As long ago as the sixteenth century, in engravings published in *America* (1594), Theodor de



Bry “imagined” the first encounter between Europeans and Americans, depicting natives fearfully offering gifts to Christopher Columbus. I emphasize that de Bry “imagined” this event, since the Belgian protestant, escaping the Spanish Inquisition in the Netherlands, never actually crossed the Atlantic. In Figure 1, the

indigenous Tainos offer their material goods to the Europeans, and at the same time these illustrations became material goods themselves, gaining popularity in Europe as the *imagined* New World transformed into an object of desire and consumption<sup>6</sup> (Campbell 30). *America* is an example of an ethnographic text, “in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others)” (Pratt 3). Figure 2 is another ethnographic text, illustrating a frightening image of American savages pouring molten gold into the mouths of Europeans to satisfy their obsession with precious metals<sup>7</sup>.



<sup>6</sup> In that regard, *Even the Rain* (*También la lluvia*, 2011) is a polemical auto-ethnographic text, with a film producer from Spain redeeming himself by saving the life of a “savage” indigenous Bolivian militant’s daughter during the 2000 Cochabamba Water War.

<sup>7</sup> See Bry, Theodor de. *America*. University of Houston Libraries. 1594. <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/p15195coll39>

In the first image, the noble savage is represented as part of a generous and egalitarian society, approaching the visitors with no weapons, although leaning back apprehensively. The gift-bearing Amerindians are shown as lacking an organized, hierarchical society like that of the Europeans, and in the background, natives leisurely run and play, indifferent to the grand encounter. In the second image, the noble savage becomes a ferocious savage, seeking vengeance against the ambitious Spaniards seeking riches at any cost. This critique by the Belgian de Bry obviously justifies, rather than eliminates, the European belief that these savages ought to be conquered and converted to Christianity by the “civilized” Europeans.

I have included these two clearly ethnographic depictions to reflect upon the international response to Uruguayan cinema: on the one hand, the friendly noble savage in a carefree, egalitarian society, and on the other, a vicious vigilante capable of torturing and killing the ambitious invader<sup>8</sup>. I would also suggest that Uruguayan films can be seen as auto-ethnographic texts, representing themselves<sup>9</sup>. This approach requires viewing recent visual productions in two different ways, in

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<sup>8</sup> Another example is the “savage” Mexican prosecutor played by Benicio del Toro in *Sicario* (2015), within the framework of the “war on drugs.”

<sup>9</sup> This theory is taken from the Uruguayan film histories of Ronald Melzer, Manuel Martínez Carril and Guillermo Zapiola, as well as from articles by David Martin-Jones and Soledad Montañez. Martin-Jones and Montañez explore the idea that emerging Uruguayan cinema attracts international audiences by reaffirming preconceptions about Latin America. Turning oneself into an object of consumption, intentionally or not, can provide a way for a small country like Uruguay to make films, since it can be challenging for a country that is dependent upon international markets for financing to procure needed funding at home, due as much to insufficient government capital as to a reduced local audience, with a total national population of only three million people. This is not to say that Uruguayan cinema simply responds to the preconceptions of international festivals, which would not only be an unfair assessment, but I also believe it to be untrue. In this sense, Uruguayan films have much more to do with what Pratt calls auto-ethnographic texts, as they intervene in, question, and infiltrate international film circuits and platforms such as Netflix and HBO, to contradict or modify ethnographic texts which, like *America* in the sixteenth century or series and films produced in the First World, continue to “represent” present-day Latin America. A hilarious example of a contemporary ethnographic text is a scene in which Homer Simpson points at a map of South America and mispronounces the name of Uruguay, saying, “Look at this country! You are gay.” In the imaginary of a person from the United States who has only visited Mexico or never traveled at all, any foreign country may seem completely “gay,” that is, completely happy or completely homosexual, or both. In their article, “*Bicycle Thieves* or Thieves on Bicycles? *El Baño del Papa* (2007),” Martin-Jones and Montañez analyze *The Pope’s Toilet* (*El baño del Papa*) as an auto-ethnographic film, appealing to and attracting both international and local film audiences by reaffirming general preconceptions about Uruguay and Latin America. The authors find a balance between national and international themes in this realistic film portraying poverty in a manner accessible to foreign audiences familiar with *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladrón de bicicletas*, De Sica, 1948), and at the same time providing a story for the local audience about a family fighting for survival on the border, which is another aspect in *Bicycle Thieves*.

observing how these filmmakers represent their current reality and, at the same time, how they reinvent the past, which is like “an open sore” or “a powerful ghost” (Tejeira). Finally, we should keep in mind that these films perpetuate or modify those imagined New World fantasies, depending upon how they are “read” internationally, in this liquid era of consumers becoming part of the long history of “consuming the New World.”

***Anina* (2013): Teaching with ~~blood, sweat, and tears~~ love and humor**

Anina is an adorable little girl who can be as kind and sweet as she can be rebellious, even aggressive, when faced with anything that she considers to be unfair. The film opens with the protagonist coming home from school on a rainy day, bringing her parents a note from the principal regarding a fight at recess with her classmate, Yisel. We hear a voice-over say, “My name is Anina Yatay Salas, I’m ten years old and I’m in deep trouble.”

From the outset, the movie presents us with seemingly simple concepts, such as two little girls who seem to hate each other. This simplicity, however, begins to reveal innumerable layers, gradually building a house of dreams and nightmares in our imaginary, as we set out on an adventure where Anina learns to understand and accept the other.

The specter of the authoritarian past and its effect on human relationships looms large over the conflict between these girls: first, in the ways that parents used to raise their children; second, in the ways that teachers used to educate students through “blood, sweat, and tears,” based on the old saying, “Spare the rod, spoil the child”; and finally, in the ways that children bully each other. Running counter to these hierarchical, oppressive expressions of authority, Anina and Yisel’s story opens new paths of communication between children, between parents and children, and between teachers and students: with love, understanding and, above all, with the dreamy and playful humor

promoted by this creative group of Uruguayans spanning at least two generations. Sergio López Suárez (1945), schoolteacher, writer, and illustrator of children's books, wrote the novel *Anina Yatay Salas* (2003). Already in his sixties, the creator worked with a group of artists half his age for nine years to create the movie *Anina* (2013), outlining this new pedagogy or life philosophy that I refer to as “teaching with love and humor.” This new form of communication builds upon a tension with the previous one, since in both Anina's daily life and in her nightmares, the film seems to tell us that the ghost of the past still lingers.

In the principal's office the next day, Anina and her “enemy” Yisel are each given a sealed black envelope containing their punishment, and are told not to open it for one week. The movie takes place over that week, with Anina and her classmates unsuccessfully attempting to discover what the punishment might be. In the end, Anina instead gets to know the other girl, begins to discover her own true self, and puts herself in the shoes of her “enemy.”

### ***Anina*, or how to exorcise the seduction of visual violence**

*The horrors of power  
Are so many, so many, so many:  
Against them I sing.*  
“For Them I Sing” by Daniel Viglietti<sup>10</sup>

We have been taught that Hitler and the Axis countries lost the war, but Virilio wonders if they won the peace. He notes that when art historian Jacqueline Lichtenstein visited the museum at Auschwitz, viewing displays of suitcases, prosthetics and children's toys, she did not feel overcome or frightened. Instead, she had the impression that these could have been images exhibited in any contemporary art museum, and that was what frightened her, as she realized that the Nazis had won:

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GX0gcNLxT2w>

Original lyrics of “Por ellos canto”: *Los horrores del poder / Son tantos, tantos y tantos: / Contra ellos canto*

they may have lost the war, but the forms of perception they produced had triumphed (cit. in Virilio 28).

What effect could fascist Nazi perceptions possibly have on an animated film like *Anina*? Despite its enchanting and playful packaging, the dark past seeps through in various ways: the cruel teacher, Águeda, with her tubular robot body, devoid of feminine form; the neighbor, a retired teacher who gives Anina's mother a terrifying handbook on how to educate children; the fantasies about the girls' possible punishments as imagined by their classmates; and, finally, the protagonist's nightmares about the school principal, her imminent punishment, and Águeda, compulsively magnified and serialized, reflecting fascist aesthetic and the fascination with violence of the "third visual modernity" (Sontag; Valencia and Sepúlveda).

The imaginary of Anina and her classmates' horror is meted out in small doses, by interspersing it or transforming it into scenes and fantasies featuring elements of the new pedagogy and coexistence, embodied in the kind teacher named Aurora, in Anina's parents, and in the friendly neighborhood grocer. I will use the same approach to guide the reader through this analysis of *Anina* and other contemporary Uruguayan films. Of all the images relating to what I refer to as "the past," the nightmare about learning "through blood, sweat, and tears" is perhaps the most pertinent to the fascist imaginary of recent cinema. In this sequence, the principal appears as a monstrous giant, declaring, "Quiet, it's time for your punishment." She presides over a military parade of sorts, consisting of infinite "Águedas" marching in two rows and hypnotically repeating the phrases "learning through blood, sweat, and tears," "discipline and punish," "there is only one way to learn," and "knowledge only through suffering" (Figure 3). The neighborhood gossips then appear and break the seal on the envelope, and two



Águedas grab Anina by the arms cackling like harpies. Anina defends herself, shouting, “No, no, let me go! You can’t do this to me. I’m Anina Yatay Salas, the only palindrome girl!”

Fascist aesthetics “flow from (and justify) a preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behavior, extravagant effort, and the endurance of pain; they endorse two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude.” (Sontag 94) On the one hand, we have the principal’s egomania in the dream, and on the other, the servitude of the cruel teachers and Anina’s meddling neighbors. Control is exerted through the “extravagant effort” of all involved in this choreography. Sontag goes on to say:

The relations of domination and enslavement take the form of a characteristic pageantry: the massing of groups of people; *the turning of people into things; the multiplication or replication of things; and the grouping of people/ things around an all-powerful, hypnotic leader-figure or force. The fascist dramaturgy centers on the orgiastic transactions between mighty forces and their puppets, uniformly garbed and shown in ever swelling numbers. Its choreography alternates between ceaseless motion and a congealed, static, "virile" posing. Fascist art glorifies surrender, it exalts mindlessness, it glamorizes death* (94, emphasis mine).

This citation fits Anina’s fears like a glove, and is also a nod to movies like *Pink Floyd: The Wall* (1982) or *The Matrix* (1999), among others. The protagonist defends herself in the face of an oppressive old-school regimen by using the unique character of her names, which read the same both forward and back.

The visual seduction of control resulting in mental or physical death comes from twentieth-century European fascism (Virilio), but the politics of death were already present in New World plantations (Mbembe), essential to the rise of the psychoactive revolution. The compulsive behavior of a fascist leader and his puppets can also be traced back to the eighteenth-century spread of

psychotropic mechanisms, as well as to the opposite phenomenon: the psychoactive counterrevolution's efforts to restrict and prohibit particular substances, as previously mentioned, in an attempt to control compulsive behaviors without destroying the proverbial goose laying the golden egg that is supporting modern civilization.

What makes the psychoactive revolution equivalent to the goose that lays the golden egg? The *psychoactive revolution* not only transformed the habits and conscience of millions of people, but it also contributed to the rise of European empires and modern life between 1500 and 1789 (Courtwright 9). This revolution in the consumption of stimulants is at the core of Western expansion and colonization from the mid-seventeenth century to the late nineteenth century, when production and taxation of these substances was not only common practice, but was also the mainstay of European imperial colonies (Courtwright 5). One example is that almost half of the British government's income in 1885 came from taxes on alcohol, tobacco, and tea (4-5). Over the last century, however, "policies regarding taxation and legal trade of psychoactives" have shifted to "restriction or prohibition": a *psychoactive counterrevolution*, extremely selective regarding exactly which substances are restricted or prohibited. Alcohol, tobacco, caffeine and sugar have been the most difficult to control, due to their worldwide acceptance as both neurochemical stimulants and psychocultural factors: the globalization of these commodities and their psychoactive power have been essential to colonization, domination and, later, to industrialized civilization (Herlinghaus 9). In sum, the expansion of psychotropic mechanisms did not follow a linear path, but instead had breakthroughs and setbacks much like the psychoactive revolution, until finally reaching today's liquid era of consumers (Bauman).

What prompted the rise of this psychotropic counterrevolution? As the consumption of caffeine, tobacco and sugar expanded during the eighteenth century, so did other practices such as the aforementioned epidemic of leisure reading, as well as pornography. This is why the eighteenth



century can also be called the century of “the discovery of addiction.” The word “addiction” had previously referred to an obligation or debt owed to someone; specifically, during the Roman Empire, slaves were referred to as *addictus*. The concept of addiction was reinvented in the eighteenth century, in the sense that one could be considered dependent upon alcohol, whereas previously it was thought that a person only drank because he or she wished to (Levine 493). That is to say, a person could be seen as having become a slave to alcohol. This concept of alcohol addiction as a form of compulsive dependency eventually came to also include caffeine, cigarettes, and illegal drugs, such as cocaine, heroin, and amphetamines, as well as watching television, reading novels, listening to music, and engaging in exercise, shopping or sex. In the same way, addiction is established as a trait of the fascist aesthetic and of the children’s imaginary in *Anina*, in its way of exercising control and spreading terror, thereby hindering singularities like those of Anina and Yisel<sup>11</sup>. In sum, the psychotropic counterrevolution continues to attempt to control compulsive behaviors and addictions to psychotropic practices without completely eliminating them, as they form the basis and support of the psychotropic economy in which we live.

Why do we resort to psychotropic mechanisms? In this global consumer society, happiness is no longer associated with the satisfaction of basic needs, as it was in the previous “solid era of producers,” but instead has transformed to focus on desires, ever growing in volume and intensity, that entail the rapid use and replacement of objects, with the intention and hope of satisfying those desires in the present liquid era of consumers (Bauman 31). Furthermore, the defining trait of these consumers is their transformation into commodities (12). How is this possible? Dream studies reveal that the subject has been colonized by consumerism: a massive production of commodity-subjects desiring, consuming and discarding, or being desired, consumed and discarded as commodity-

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<sup>11</sup> Regarding this topic, Valencia and Sepúlveda’s article about the third visual modernity, gore capitalism, and the fascination with violence in visual culture is captivating.

objects (Xavier 290). Ronell speaks of “narcocism,” a narcissism requiring psychotropic practices to inflate the ego. From where does this “narcocist” need arise? The importance of wealth and status in consumer capitalism tends to create fragile egos, which must be regularly inflated by means of psychotropic mechanisms. Consumer society’s perpetual dissatisfaction implies a social order that does not operate on control and vigilance but instead goes directly through the nervous system: a dynamic of global and local intoxication (Patteson 233). Production of dopamine, serotonin, endorphins and other neurotransmitters lowers stress and produces feelings of pleasure<sup>12</sup>. This is how chocolate and shopping stimulate dopamine production, spicy chiles boost serotonin, and running charges up endorphins. It is therefore quite reasonable to suggest that the rise of stimulant consumption since the eighteenth century goes hand in hand with a drop in attendance at religious services and confession, rituals that would have served to increase dopamine and other neurotransmitters in the past (Smail 184-185)<sup>13</sup>.

What does recent Uruguayan cinema tell us about the possibility of changing or curing compulsive and addictive behavior in cultural practices? Following the aforementioned plan, we will now examine how *Anina* transforms one of these behaviors, school bullying.

To this end, Virilio’s question regarding European fascism can be applied to Uruguay: the dictatorship ended in 1985, but what kind of democracy actually won? In *Anina*, as well as in other Uruguayan films, it is clear that past forms of coexistence still linger, and that we are learning new ones.

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<sup>12</sup> According to a 2005 study, anxiety is the second most common preexisting condition in the United States. Specifically, over 39 million adults in this country suffer from anxiety, while almost 21 million fight depression.

<sup>13</sup> Smail’s study is enthralling, showing ample evidence of ritual drug use dating back to the Paleolithic era. With the neolithic or agricultural revolution, the range of psychotropic substances and practices continued to grow, exponentially expanding to more and more sectors of the population over the last few centuries. At today’s pace of consumption, Smail asserts that we are surrounded by a dizzying collection of practices that stimulate production and circulation of our own chemical messengers, as the desire to alter our body chemistry is at the core of the modern consumer economy (161 and 185). Nevertheless, the eighteenth century was undoubtedly fundamental to understanding the acceleration of human neurobiological transformation.

## **Bullying and education**

After recess one afternoon, some children write on the board that Anina and Yisel are bad classmates for not revealing the details of their punishment. The chalkboard message is signed by the justice-seekers of class 5B.

This subtle case of bullying is humorous because the message written by the “justice-seekers” had several spelling errors, corrected immediately by the teacher. She tells the class that the most important lesson is learning to not bully their classmates; therefore, although she didn’t plan to give them homework over the weekend, she declares that she has changed her mind because they all need to learn and practice; all of them, except Anina and Yisel. The teacher does not get angry, but instead turns the experience of being bullied into an opportunity to bring the two girls together, and they glance at each other, surprised by this educational measure taken by the good teacher, Aurora. This pedagogy teaches by explaining and understanding the needs of each student.

Aurora continues to help the girls get to know each other, by telling the class about the school’s need for first aid and then kindly assigning the two girls to take an inventory of supplies. In this way, she facilitates the girls’ communication and acceptance of their differences.

## **Sobriety and family relationships**

This film also revives the past through family relationships and sobriety in consumption. *Anina* recreates a society where various modes of communication, now so ubiquitous in our daily lives, hardly even existed. There are no cell phones, no computers, no modern televisions, nor the insane number of cars on the road in today’s Montevideo (Tejeira). The film seems to take place in the 1980s, although production actually began after the crisis of 2002, perhaps Uruguay’s worst crisis

in decades. This social imaginary recreates past sobriety in consumption as a “silent resistance” against the politics of consumption after the crisis (Tejeira), depicting the childhood world of this generation, back when children did not have the distractions of current technology and were able to play in the street with their neighbors.

In terms of family life, *Anina* depicts two families. Anina’s family is functional and breaks with the past by bringing in the new pedagogy. Yisel’s family lost its functionality when her father emigrated to Australia and her mother began working, often leaving the little girl completely alone in situations such as the meeting with the school principal or going to the grocery store and having to ask for credit because she cannot pay.

In Anina’s family, the parents are present, making this movie different from other recent films<sup>14</sup>. We see this when Anina and her parents cook meals together or celebrate birthdays with music and lights. Her grandfather, like the grandmother in *25 Watts*, almost never moves, but the family deals with this situation with love and humor, like in Rebella and Stoll’s film. Anina’s grandfather is immobile until the curious children draw close; he then startles them and laughs quietly. This ideal family discusses problems like the principal’s letter, with Anina then explaining that the fight was due to the palindrome name her father gave her. Her “difference” does not give her the good luck that her father had predicted, but instead makes her a victim of bullying by her classmates, who call her “palindrome girl.”

Anina’s mother seems to be a traditional housewife, frying up cakes on a rainy day.

Nonetheless, after the nightmare with multiple Águedas, she gets involved with Anina’s education in

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<sup>14</sup> Parents are almost completely absent in *25 Watts*, aside from a grandmother and a note from the mother; or in the powerful critique of patriarchal family dysfunction in *The Almost True Story of Pepita the Pistol-Toter* (*Pepita, la pistolera*) and *Tricky Life* (*En la puta vida*), directed by Flores Silva; or in the documentaries of Virginia Martínez, *Through Those Eyes* (*Por esos ojos*), *Anarchists* (*Ácratas*), and *Memories of Women* (*Memorias de mujeres*), where the police state of two dictatorships, that of *Anarchists* in the 1930s and another in the 1970s, separated parents and grandparents from their children and grandchildren, whether by kidnapping, murder or disappearance in *Through Those Eyes* or through imprisonment, as seen in *Memories of Women*.

a fun and loving way. When the neighbor ladies stop by with an old book from when one of them was a teacher, the mother hesitates. Anina mischievously asks about the book and her mother says that it might help her learn. The neighbors had claimed that the book was “indispensable” in terms of maintaining the values, morals and discipline that were quickly disappearing in modern times. The illustrations of possible punishments for children undoubtedly belong to an era incorporating the horrors of Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. As Anina tries to snatch the book from her mother, the pages fly into the air, turning into a game for the mother and daughter. The retired teacher spies this through the window and reproaches them with the proverb “to cast pearls before swine.” The teacher’s insult then leads to a new game, as Anina and her mother transform into two pigs eating precious pearls, playing with the book pages and communicating in onomatopoeias appropriate to their current condition, “oink, oink.” Finally, the parents and daughter put the book back together, gluing the pages in order and returning it in perfect condition to the former teacher. In sum, Anina’s parents teach her not only to play and have fun, but also to appreciate and show respect to someone different from them, like the teacher, whose pedagogy belongs to another time.

Anina’s father is not exactly a traditional father. He works at home, washes dishes and cooks, but has trouble “seeing” his daughter due to his obsession with palindromes, which he creates for her birthday or to give her after school. When Anina finally tells him that she is fed up with him, instead of getting angry or reprimanding her, he writes her a rock song as a gift. However, the song is about his own love of rock music, so it is not exactly a song for Anina, but rather for himself. Nonetheless, much like the father in *The Pope’s Toilet*, this modern father shows the capacity to learn, to stop self-obsessing and objectifying his daughter, and to begin getting to know her, and himself. These characters represent two ways that children may be objectified by their parents. The first way is by turning children into instruments of the parents’ own objectives. The second way is by negating children’s subjectivity by treating them as if their feelings and experiences should not be taken into

account (Nussbaum 257). This issue is brilliantly and brutally critiqued in *The Dog Pound (La perrera)*, where the father is unable to talk to his son about his compulsive behaviors involving drugs, pornography, and masturbation. Instead of talking to him, suggesting professional help, or “educating” him, the father denigrates his son with long lectures, keeps him from returning to his studies in the city, and makes him build a house, as something “productive” for him to do, yet also self-serving, since he plans to rent the house in the summer and, with that money, build another house. Such criticism of the obsessive-compulsive ethic of “productivity” is reiterated in the character named Juanca, the candy-store owner in *Wanderers (Rambleras)*, who objectifies his wife Jacqueline in much the same way, until she finally leaves him to lead her own life.

Anina’s father later comes to recognize that she is a subject with her own feelings and experiences and he guides her with the same humor, creativity and love as her mother and as her teacher, Aurora. He specifically shows his creativity and playfulness when Anina claims to be sick on the day that she will be opening the envelope with the school principal and Yisel, and the father sadly comments that, since she’s feeling ill, she won’t be able to eat her favorite meal of fried cutlets, potatoes and eggs that he was planning to make, and that instead she’ll be stuck with plain noodles. Anina then changes her story and says that it is only her head that hurts, not her stomach. The father and daughter end up deciding to cook together, and Anina goes to buy eggs and breadcrumbs for the meal. That is to say, the father understands her fear of going to school and, like Anina, he reciprocates with a manipulation of his own, in offering to cook her favorite meal; he not only provides the distraction of shopping, cooking and eating together, but also to helps her accept the consequences of her actions, in opening the envelope with Yisel and the principal and consenting to the punishment for fighting with a classmate at recess.

To sum up, the cinema of the new generation sinks its teeth into familial relationships and their consumerist behaviors, from sobriety to compulsion to excess, from the cruelest objectification to the creation of subjects who can communicate with each other and learn in the process.

### Female characters in current Uruguayan cinema

*You'll leave me with my soul / twisted and broken / enslaving my dreams / [...]  
The time has come to put an end to this lie / I've been feeling bad for so long now  
"It Doesn't Work Anymore" by Tabaré Leyton and Max Masri<sup>15</sup>*

Anina Yatay Salas, the triple palindrome girl, goes to her parents for help when her classmates make fun of her name because it reads the same both forward and back. Her father tries to help by telling her that the Spanish word for palindrome, “*capicúa*,” comes from the Catalan phrase “*cap i cua*,” meaning “head and tail.” When Anina gives this linguistic explanation to her classmates, it only leads to further teasing, now about her body. Her classmates look at her and say that she is “just a head and a tail.” Her father reminds her repeatedly that she shouldn’t be ashamed of her body and that her proportions are fine, but the damage is done. The children, without truly being conscious of the fact, have reduced her to two disproportionate parts: an oversized head and an oversized bottom. In reality, her classmates are doing nothing more than repeating a common everyday practice, which the film illustrates through Anina’s large head and bottom and Yisel’s weight. Despite being a female character, Yisel doesn’t have the same feminine curves as the other girls and the good teacher, Aurora, and she always wears a large overcoat that covers her white tunic. Anina calls her an “elephant” in the film, while in the book, she was called a “hippopotamus.” By

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ow4gHsqJak>

Original lyrics of “No va más”: *Me dejarás con mi alma / entrelazada y partida / esclavizando mis sueños / [...]  
Llegó el tiempo de frenar esta mentira / hace bastante que la estoy pasando bastante mal*

equating her enemy with gigantic animals, Anina shifts the evaluative attention of her classmates over to the girl whom “she cannot stand to look at.” Girls and women internalize how others look at them and, in turn, treat themselves as objects upon being looked at and evaluated (Fredrickson and Roberts 178), a self-objectification that incites women to treat other women in the same way. “We also add that the cultural milieu of objectification encourages girls and women to treat *other girls and women* as objects to be looked at and evaluated.” (198)

When Yisel repeatedly calls her “palindrome girl,” Anina counters with “at least I’m not an elephant.” She bases her superiority on not being overweight like Yisel, who then pushes Anina down. Yisel has not learned how to verbally defend herself against this sort of objectification. Verbal defense, although no less violent, is seen in *The Dog Pound* when a group of men, called “Cro-Magnons” by the protagonist and his friend, stare fixedly at the body of a woman who getting off the bus to look for her bicycle. They engage in the usual public harassment of long gazes and so-called “compliments,” a phenomenon of objectification that Uruguayan society has hardly begun to discuss or combat. The male characters of *The Dog Pound* are not the only representatives of female objectification; the villain of *The Pope’s Toilet*, Meleyo, is an official at the border between Uruguay and Brazil who threatens small-time smugglers bringing contraband from Brazil to stock local businesses in the village of Aceguá. Meleyo threatens them by describing the bodies of their daughters in great detail, right in their faces, and the fathers must repress their rage, for fear of what the official could do to them and their way of life.

In these initial attempts to bring to light the sexual objectification of girls and women in recent cinema, it is important to examine the psychological consequences of this phenomenon. As I write these words, Uruguayan society is currently mourning the rape and murder of a twelve-year-old girl, Brissa González. During the same week, a man killed his daughter and his wife, bringing the number of murdered girls and women to 27 for the year 2017. Society expresses its indignation at



such brutal acts of violence towards girls and women through the media, social networks and street protests. I have to wonder if, in addition to studying this sort of predation and imposing stiffer legal penalties, we should dig deeper and discuss the sexual objectification of girls and women in daily life and in our culture, as one of the silent, unseen causes of the most radical forms of violence, such as rape and femicide.

Gender roles appear to be determinants in the traffic of bodies, merchandise and capital in Western civilization. The female body “has been a divided body, a foreign body, a dominated and legislated body” (Torres 38). Why, and how? The body is no more than pieces of flesh and bone, but as Torres asserts, “it is culture, the symbolic connection that inscribes that body with a sense that it could be desirable, torturable, prohibited or permitted, open to pleasure or to suffering” (Torres 38). Being a man or a woman is more than just biology, “it has to do with language, a certain way of inserting oneself into the culture.” The subjects are sexual beings, but it is culture that takes them and “orders, organizes the division of the sexes, controls the relationships between them, ascribes their functions, conditioning and producing phenomena tied to the economy, to the financial economy and to the libidinal economy” (38). In regarding these two types of economy, that of money and that of desire, objectification theory can bring some clarity. Sexual objectification occurs whenever a body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated from the person, reduced to the status of instruments or regarded as if they were capable of representing that person (Fredrickson and Roberts 175). Although one of many forms of oppression, this in particular perhaps allows and even organizes other forms of oppression, from job discrimination to sexual violence, to the trivialization of women’s work and successes. All forms of sexual objectification are connected by the experience of being treated as a body (or as a collection of body parts), valued mainly for its use (or consumption) by others (Fredrickson and Roberts 174). The phenomenon of objectification is nothing new. Some time ago, Marx proposed that fetishism is a result of objectification in social

relationships that necessarily occurs in any society based on production and general commodities exchange. Feminists had already identified objective treatment as damaging to women; what is relatively new is the analysis of objectification's psychological consequences, which is relevant to interpreting gender roles in recent Uruguayan cinema.

Fredrickson and Roberts uncover the objectifying gaze in three areas. The first is in social and interpersonal encounters. Many studies have proven that women are observed more than men. Along the same lines, men tend to direct their gaze in a non-reciprocated manner more often than women, and frequently add sexually evaluative comments, which tend to be even more pejorative when directed at women of color. The second type occurs when visual media represent these social and interpersonal encounters. The third type of objectification occurs in movies, advertisements, music videos, television, art, women's magazines and sports photography, where the general emphasis is focused on the faces and heads of men, but on the bodies or body parts of women (Fredrickson and Roberts 176). "That is, the visual media portray women as though their bodies were capable of representing them" (177).

Alba Moya-Garófano and her colleagues indicate that, among Spanish female university students, the leading psychological consequences caused by sexual objectification include self-objectification and its effects: "disruptions in women's flow of consciousness, as well as emotions of shame and anxiety, depression, sexual dysfunction and eating disorders" (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997); a decline in cognitive performance (e.g., Quinn, Kallen, Twenge, and Fredrickson, 2006); and desires to undergo plastic surgery (Calogero, Pina, Park, and Rahemtulia, 2010)". (377)

Numerous studies focus on this internalization of another's gaze. Costanzo regards it as *effective socialization*, where the individual appropriates values and attitudes due to social pressures (Fredrickson and Roberts 177). External pressures to concern oneself with physical appearance can arise from the multiple benefits of being physically attractive, as opposed to the disadvantages of

lacking physical attractiveness, exemplified in Yisel's weight or Anina's disproportion. Physical beauty translates into power for women. Attractiveness serves as the prime currency for women's social and economic success (Unger, cit. in Fredrickson and Roberts 178); we can thereby assume that a lack of attractiveness implies women's failure.

Self-objectification is the most negative consequence of the sexual objectification of women and girls, since it then turns into a constant self-monitoring of the body, a self-consciousness aggravated and fed by the traditional street harassment in societies like that of Uruguay. A primary consequence of the internalization of this external view of women's bodies is the shame that we see Anina suffer when she discovers that she has a large head and bottom. The shame comes from measuring herself against an internalized or cultural ideal, resulting in a negative self-image combined with the social exposure we feel when concerning ourselves with what others may think of us. In the United States, there is a constant cultural focus on images of idealized female bodies that are invariably young, thin, and white. This is a mythical and impossible ideal for most, as only one in 40,000 women possesses these traits, leaving the rest to struggle with shame (Wolf, cit. in Fredrickson and Roberts 181). In fact, although only a minority of women are actually overweight, the majority of women feel fat and ashamed of their failure (Fallon and Rozin, 1985; Silberstein et al., 1987, cit. in Frederickson and Roberts 181). This shame leads to an intense desire to hide, to escape the view of others or disappear, accompanied by feelings of worthlessness and impotence. Intense shame can translate into an interruption of what we are doing, confusion, and inability to think, speak and act clearly. This, in turn, leads to constant efforts to change the body and appearance by means of diet, exercise, fashionable clothing, beauty products, surgery, and eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa.

A second consequence of self-objectification is seen in at least two types of anxiety: "Being female in a culture that objectifies the female body creates multiple opportunities to experience

anxiety along with its accompanying vigilance. We highlight two: appearance anxiety and safety anxiety” (182). Studies show that women suffer more appearance-based anxiety than men, which may come from negative comments or negative experiences at a young age. The fashion industry further aggravates this anxiety by modifying necklines and hem lengths, producing a constant monitoring of how much of our bodies we should show. Additionally, anxiety can arise from safety concerns. Women’s beauty has been connected to power, and studies show that rapists view attractive women as a threat that deserves reprisal. There are also those who say that the victim was “asking for it” by being provocative. This highlights the notion that objectification is a fundamental component of sexual violence, and the authors mention a list of daily precautions that women must follow to protect their safety. In sum, a culture that objectifies women’s bodies generates a continuous flow of anxiety-provoking experiences, requiring an almost chronic vigilance by women of their own physical appearance and physical safety.

A third consequence is that women do not appear to perceive or even be aware of their own bodies and bodily sensations, as shown by several studies. One explanation can be found in the fact that many begin dieting and repressing hunger from adolescence, which can result in an insensitivity to internal body cues. Another possibility is that, by internalizing culture’s objectifying gaze as the fundamental measurement of the physical state, women lose access to their own inner physical experiences.

The accumulation of these symptoms leads to other, more serious psychological disorders such as depression, sexual dysfunction and eating disorders.

Statistics indicate that women suffer from depression more than men. First of all, some theories attribute this to biology, hormonal changes, and low estrogen levels that occur in the various life stages of women: adolescence, before menstruation, post-partum, and menopause. However, the correlation between these stages and depression appears to be fairly tenuous.

Secondly, other theories point to the inferior social status of women and their lack of power, something that *The Pope's Toilet* shows in its female protagonist, Teresa, when her husband disparages her ideas or steals her money. The mother attempts to repeat this cycle by wanting her daughter to study dressmaking, a cycle that Silvia tries to break by leaving for the capital city to study journalism. Nonetheless, social inferiority serves only as a partial explanation and does not account for why afrodescendants do not suffer from depression as often as white women do. The third theory about female depression refers to required aspects of women's personalities which produce a loss of self, such as demands for sacrifice, concern about feeding others, and common relationships, characteristics that we see in Anina's mother, in the mothers of Flores Silva's films, and in the mothers and grandmothers depicted in documentaries by Virginia Martínez or in the three women of *Wanderers*.

Finally, objectification theory suggests that when women internalize the external evaluation of their bodies, it results in persistent self-monitoring, shame and anxiety over which they have no control, and constant worry and brooding. Such symptoms can lead to a condition that has been studied specifically in cases of sexual or workplace harassment, bullying or mobbing: the theory of learned helplessness. This occurs when victims reach such a state of psychological deterioration that they are no longer capable of improving their condition. They simply give up.

In recent Uruguayan cinema, female characters are far from giving up. Instead, they offer the viewer fantasies focused on the power to confront and transform the challenges that girls and women face daily in their post-dictatorship lives.

## Documentaries about the recent past: *Memories of Women (Memorias de mujeres)*

*Gallop, white-footed horse, / village rider / the land is yours /*

*Galloping, galloping, until they are buried at sea*

“Galloping” by Paco Ibañez and Rafael Alberti<sup>16</sup>

*The night trapped you /*

*Darkness swallows, uninviting /*

*I was left adrift*

“I Embraced You in the Night” by Fernando Cabrera<sup>17</sup>

These two epigraphs sum up the bright spots and the shadowy recesses of the documentary *Memories of Women (Memorias de mujeres)*. On the one hand, the song “Galloping” pays tribute to the last remaining Uruguayan political prisoners after their release on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1984, which is where the documentary begins. On the other hand, Cabrera’s “night” refers to the Punta de Rieles prison, where 600 women were meant to be destroyed, both physically and, more importantly, psychologically. This documentary brings the former prisoners’ testimony to the forefront by using close-ups. As a counterpoint, black-and-white photos taken outside of the prison are shown as an off-screen narrator gives historical context.

It is as difficult to choose one Uruguayan documentary that represents the recent past as it is to briefly analyze all of them in these pages. Since 1959, we have had pioneers such as Mario Handler, Mario Jacob, Carlos Álvarez, and Ugo Ulive; we have seen Walter Tournier’s animation, various documentaries about the Tupamaros, and more recently, films by Virginia Martínez, Gonzalo Arijón, *H.I.J.O.S Uruguay* by Lucas Silva and Víctor Burgos, and *The Cultivation of the Invisible*

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTwyoNqTJ9A>

Original lyrics of “A galopar”: *Galopa caballo cuatralbo, / jinete del pueblo / que la tierra es tuya / A galopar, a galopar, hasta enterrarlos en el mar*

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bj-exZc6mjI>

Original lyrics of “Te abracé en la noche”: *Te atrapó la noche / La oscuridad traga y no convida / Quedé a la deriva*

*Flower (El cultivo de la flor invisible)*, a wonderful film bringing us into the daily lives of the families of the disappeared, seeking the truth for five years after the victory of the Left.

I selected *Memories of Women* because this film offers any viewer, male or female, the fantasy of the power and resistance of horizontal alliances: “Weaving such a strong framework from our friendship, from our caring for each other, right? Because we shared everything, our packages, our clothes, our letters, our visits [...] Our sisterhood still exists,” says one of the former political prisoners. The sister, the mother, the nun, and the prostitute are traditional feminine figures that have been devalued by feminism. Nonetheless, in Latin America these sacred symbols of refuge have proven to be powerful rivals in resistance against the State and against capitalism (Franco “Killing” 416), precisely because of their loyalty to family, as in the myth of Antigone (Franco *Conspirators (Conspiradoras)* 171). Such forms of horizontal power are reproduced in the female thieves and prostitutes of Flores Silva, and in documentaries about the Tupamaros; whether their representations of the recent past are realistic or not, their power fantasies stand as a promise for the audience.

### **Anina’s learning process**

*A voyage that begins, a voyage that ends, / on this stage of humanity; /  
Catalina’s voyage is ending, / and another is about to begin.*

“Retreat” by Uruguayan Murga group Agarrate Catalina 2008<sup>18</sup>

Anina mischievously conspires with her friend Florencia to open Yisel’s envelope, since she cannot open her own. When she looks for the principal’s letter in Yisel’s notebook, she finds instead Australian postcards from her father, who writes, “Yise: I miss you so much.” Soft, sweet music

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLEhSYFPiwU>

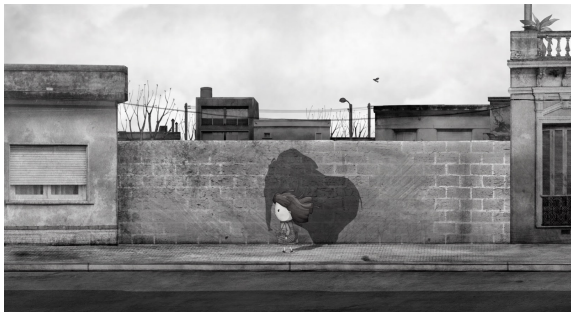
Original lyrics of “Retirada”: *Viaje que comienza, viaje que termina, / en este tablado de la humanidad; / se termina el viaje de la Catalina / y otro está por comenzar.*

plays as Anina returns home to both of her parents, as a girl learning to put herself in another's shoes.

In another sequence, Pablo, one of Anina's classmates, falls from a tree after her loud shout startles him. Yisel tells the kind teacher that he fell and it was only an accident, thus inverting the first confrontation when Anina, walking backwards to admire handsome Jonathan, trips and falls into Yisel's lunch, sending it flying through the air. At the beginning, the "elephant" refused to accept that Anina didn't do this on purpose. Now, the tables have turned and she defends Anina with certainty, asking her, "Will you help me?" The girls take care of Pablo, while the cruel teacher terrorizes him, telling him it is all his fault. The montage ends with Anina tenderly assuring Pablo that he'll feel better soon.

Finally, when Anina leaves the grocery store carrying eggs and breadcrumbs to make her favorite meal with her father, she bumps into Yisel, breaking all the eggs. The shopkeeper calms the girls, telling them that he will clean up the mess and replacing the broken eggs with new ones. Yisel apologizes, saying that she didn't see her, and Anina tells her, "it's okay." Yisel reaches for a package of pasta, apologizing to the shopkeeper because she cannot pay, and he says, "Go on, Yisel, don't worry," and jots it down in her account.

A neighbor then comments on Yisel's family's situation, with her father in Australia and her mother working. Anina is seen reflected in a window, while the shopkeeper replies to the neighbor, "The biggest problem there, ma'am, is being separated."



Anina watches Yisel leave and concludes in a voice-over, "That was when I realized what deep trouble I was in. Suddenly, my punishment didn't matter anymore, or that Jonathan wasn't crazy about me, or that I had an open, empty envelope. Maybe



Yisel wasn't really the elephant after all." As she heads home, her body casts an elephant's shadow (Figure 4), as if she herself were the gigantic animal, after transferring so many negative emotions onto Yisel and believing her to be the "enemy."

At the end of the film, Anina gives Yisel a round-trip bus ticket because, as the protagonist says, "I learned that, like my name, important things come and go." Jonathan then runs over, playfully pokes her, and shouts, "You're it!" Surprised, Anina chases after him, laughing.

Going and coming back, giving and taking, playing, loving, communicating to break the hypnosis of obsessions, whether these involve an "enemy," a crush, or any type of compulsive behavior. These are only some of the psychotropic effects sought out by these young filmmakers during the transition to democracy.

I often find it difficult to be optimistic, perhaps because I am part of the generation of silence raised under dictatorship, with only a brief stay in the tropical Caribbean democracy of Venezuela. But the clarity of critique in recent Uruguayan cinema, in Juan Pablo Rebella's "tiny stories" or the "honest, personal stories" of Pablo Stoll, where "creating film is a game," a "very collective," "very participatory" profession backed by "a collective, creative sense," as declared by Germán Tejeira, in the battle for memory led by Virginia Martínez, *Wanderers'* "little conflicts" followed by "big decisions," or in the tragicomic stories of Flores Silva, all of these can inspire us to encourage ourselves and, like the protagonist of Álvaro Buela's film *A Way of Dancing (Una forma de bailar)*, find a way to dance. Therefore, it seems that we ought to reconsider the idea proposed by Martínez Carril and Zapiola, to believe that Uruguayans could perhaps get used to seeing themselves in images after all, transform their imaginary and – why not? – even slip through into the fantasies of the imagined New World.

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## Filmography

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