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MIDDLE CLASS REBELLION IN TWO RIVER PLATE MOVIES: *UNA SOMBRA YA PRONTO SERÁS Y EL ÚLTIMO TREN*

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When addressing cinematic productions around the world, two terms are often used in opposition: Hollywood and national cinemas. Proponents of the first point to the sustained commercial success and worldwide distribution and consumption of American films, while those who focus on national cinemas stress the innovations and challenges that define cinematic production from countries other than the United States. This dichotomy not only affects cinematic production but also provides an arena to assess the impact of globalization. Theorists who study the effects of globalization on national cultures, namely anthropologists Arjun Appadurai, and in the case of Latin America, Néstor García Canclini have put forth a different angle from the above dichotomy. Contrary to the belief that globalization homogenizes cultures, Appadurai and García Canclini highlight the resistance that emerges from societies exposed to globalization. As Appadurai puts it, “the central problem of today’s global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization” (32). Appadurai particularly warns those who consider globalization a one-way process. Instead, he stresses the power of local imaginations to incorporate elements of metropolitan countries, rework them, and blend them with ingredients pertaining to peripheral societies. This process engenders cultural productions that are shaped as much by foreign ideoscapes as by domestic components. The resulting cinematic products constitute both an outlet of expression for peripheral populations as well as cultural artifacts that compete—albeit from a subaltern position—with global or more mainstream films.

The implications of globalization are crucial when analyzing Argentine and Uruguayan cinematic production of the 1990s. During this decade the state in both countries first attempted to withdraw support for their national cinema industries, but then reversed their positions. After the inauguration of President Carlos Saúl Menem in 1989 in Argentina and Luis Alberto Lacalle in Uruguay in 1990, a free market economic model was implemented in both countries. In 1992, only ten national films were released in Argentina, the lowest production since 1934, and according to film scholar Victoria Ruétalo, there were no Uruguayans films released in the 1983-1993 period (116). Hence, it soon became clear that in order to have national cinematic productions, these states needed to subsidize and protect their cinematic industry. In 1994, Law 24,377 was passed in Argentina to give incentives for its national cinema, while in Uruguay, decree 270/994 created the Instituto Nacional del Audiovisual (INA). In 1995, the Fondo del Fomento y Desarrollo de la Producción Nacional Audiovisual (FONA) was established in Uruguay to provide 10% of the budget of a feature film (for more on this, see Amparo Gea’s “Montevideo te veo”). The Argentine law only began to positively influence film production in 1995, when national film releases rose to 23, slightly doubling

the production of the previous year when only 11 films were released.¹ This data is particularly significant if we take into account the fact that since the re-democratization that took place from 1983 to 1993, Argentine films only amounted in the 1980s to 9% of the total domestic film releases—and that in the best year. Consequently, domestic audiences predominantly consumed foreign films during this period, and their cinematic preferences and tastes were shaped by many Hollywood productions.

Given this context, it is pertinent to examine the ways in which River Plate writers (in the case of writer Osvaldo Soriano, author of both the novel and the screen adaptation of *Una sombra ya pronto serás*)² and filmmakers, who are also exposed to American popular genres, adapted them and combined them with elements that belong to Argentine and Uruguayan culture and contemporary concerns. In this article I analyze two contemporary “roadies”: *Una sombra ya pronto serás* (Héctor Olivera 1994) and *El último tren* (Diego Arsuaga 2002). I will argue that American road movies provide a model that is readapted to the local circumstances of the River Plate region. Perhaps the more important feature that both American and these two River Plate road movies have in common is the portrayal of rebellion to contest narrowly-constructed models of citizenship.³ Rebelliousness is expressed through characters’ rejection of being anchored in cities and/or of exhibiting conforming identities. Interestingly, even though the two River Plate roadies that I study here are shaped by an American genre, they react against globalization and the reduction of the welfare state. The characters who take to the road in these Argentine and Uruguayan road movies belong to the middle-class and convey the destabilization brought about by the implementation of neo-liberal measures. Before expanding more on the River Plate movies I selected for my analysis, it is relevant to examine the road movie genre.

The Model: American Road Movies

In *Driving Visions*, David Laderman explains that American road movies emerged in the 1960s as a way to express a cultural critique. *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *Easy Rider* (1969) helped to shape this American cinematic genre. In both movies, young anti-conformist heroes take to the road as a way to flee the monotony of American everyday life. Since then, American road movies have presented a host of characters that use their peripatetic journeys to defy the establishment. As Katie Mills asserts, “even today, road stories largely persist in romanticizing the underdog, especially the type that rose up in the civil rights and women’s liberation movements—namely, those who demanded in the postwar years not only representation but also the right of self-representation” (9). Thus, as a genre, the road movie is intimately associated with the emergence of alternatives lifestyles.

Early road movies’ commercial success contributed to the ongoing appeal of this genre that, by deploying certain conventions, validates voices other than mainstream ones. Laderman lists three elements that pertain to the iconography of American roadies: the centrality of the combustion engine, the interstate highway system, and the vastness and openness of the landscape. These three elements are inextricably linked as they express respectively the freedom of faster and new forms of

¹Octavio Getino explained that actually only five movies were made in 1994: *Convivencia* (Carlos Galettini), *Una sombra ya pronto serás* (Héctor Olivera), *Cortázar* (Tristán Bauer), *El amante de las películas mudas* (Pablo Torre) and *Fuego gris* (Pablo César) (128).

²Another Argentine writer influenced by American popular genres is Mempo Giardinelli. This is discussed in Rocha’s “Resisting Hollywood-style Globalization.”

³Another film that can be considered a road movie expressing rebellion is *Caballos salvajes* (Marcelo Piñeyro 1994). For more on this, see Rocha’s “Riding against the Wave?”

transformation—the car and the motorcycle—the expansion of American capitalist society through the grid of roads and highways, and the presence of nature that provides a departure from urban, sedentary life.⁴ These elements that inform the 1960s road movies are still found in contemporary American road movies such as *Transamerica* (2005) and *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) where the car and the voyage across America provide the opportunity to explore identity issues that propel narrative development.⁵ Consequently, in road movies as in narratives that privilege travel, the end of the journey usually coincides with the resolution of identity questions as well as contemporary society’s reception/rejection of the traveling characters and their newly found insights.

Besides travel, road movies are based on action, both thematically and stylistically. That is why one fundamental feature of this genre is the depiction of movement, both external and interior, through different takes and shots. In his study of American road movies, Laderman points to the importance of what he calls “montage”, or techniques deployed to give a sense of freedom from conventional life as well as to show how the landscape surrounding the road is used to either entrap or liberate the traveling characters. Light, sounds, colors and shots all contribute to create and emphasize either the freedom or the confinement that the road offers.

Two Contemporary River Plate Road Movies

The preceding discussion on American road movies allows me to consider this genre as an ideoscape that influences audiences worldwide. However, as I argue in the introduction, globalization allows both the dissemination of a metropolitan genre (homogeneity) and also the expansion and reworking of the model according to different contexts (heterogeneity). I have already mentioned the commonality in both American and the Argentine and Uruguayan road movies I analyze here: rebellion and socio-cultural critique. What is noteworthy to analyze now are the ways in which the American model has been adapted in these two River Plate road movies. One of the first characteristics of these two contemporary River Plate road movies that contrast with its American counterpart is the secondary status given to both roads and cars. While American road movies rely heavily on cars—a sign of the individualism and mobility of a thriving capitalist society—, *Una sombra ya pronto serás* and *El último tren* primarily deploy individual mobility by showing characters that travel on foot or use trains as means of transportation. Corresponding to societies where capitalism has had an uneven impact on the population, cars in Argentina and Uruguay are symbols of status that are only accessible for the middle and upper classes. Moreover, in both countries, roads and highways even today are precarious and were late arrivals of the modernization process of the 1960s. Conversely, trains as a means of transportation were more popular in the River Plate region until railways were declared obsolete in the early 1990s.

In Argentina and Uruguay, trains and railroads have traditionally been more potent symbols of the imagination than cars. In Argentina, railroads were planned and laid by English capitalists, technical experts and managers in the late nineteenth century. In Uruguay, the government, which rejected requests of British and French nationals to be in charge of its first railroads, authorized an Uruguayan to head the first railway, but by the early 1870s, economic problems plagued the national initiative and all railroads were transferred to English companies. Consequently, for several decades (mid 1880s to 1948 in Argentina, 1871-1949 in Uruguay) the foreign ownership and control of

⁴Curiously, the American cinematic predecessor of the road movies is the Western.

⁵Here my reference to narrative development is intended to relate road movies to literary narratives that use the motif of the journey as a means to sort out and answer the questions involving identity—who I am?—and direction—where am I going?

railroads constantly reminded Argentine and Uruguayan nationalists of their country's subordinate status and dependence. At the same time, however, trains and railroads also embodied a sign of the country's modernization and expansion during the early decades of the twentieth century.

In the River Plate area, trains opened—albeit in an irregular form—the national territory to foreign interests, but also and more crucially, the railroad grid was laid out to conform to the demands of a neo-colonial world order in which both Argentina and Uruguay found an advantageous niche as agricultural and cattle producers. Trains facilitated the functioning of an export-oriented economy by taking Argentina's and Uruguay's agricultural products to the port cities. This well-oiled cargo system contributed to Argentina's ranking among the richest nations in the world, on par with Canada, Australia, and the United States, in the first decades of the twentieth-century. On the other hand, the railroad system did not link the disparate and vast peripheral areas of the national territory as the main concern was cargo transportation, not passenger mobility. Hence, in the River Plate region trains are paradoxically associated with dependence and modernization, as well as prosperity and the emergence of the middle class made possible by the modernizing push. The fact that trains represent both subalternity and progress reminds local audiences of the dependent type of modernization of the 1880-1930 period. This reminder provides a subtext to compare the more contemporary pressure brought about by neo-liberal tenets to adapt to global standards of production and consumption. As I will discuss in more detail when I analyze each film, it is not a coincidence that both *Una sombra ya pronto serás* and *El último tren* are constructed around the imagery of the train.

Another characteristic of the River Plate movies is the cultural critique against neo-liberalism and free trade. The predominant point of view in *Una sombra ya pronto serás* and *El último tren* is that of the underdogs—that is to say “defeated” characters who represent sectors of the population that have suffered as a result of the opening of the national economies: the elderly, the lower middle class and rural inhabitants. Globalization implemented through an open economy is associated with both the centralized decision-making that takes place in the cities and the contradictions of late capitalism. Contrary to this, the imagined place where the national resides is the rural areas. Thus, the landscapes shown in these movies depict places where liberation (or annihilation) from foreign models is possible; natural scenarios appear as less constraining and more authentic than life in the cities, which most characters abandon to hit the road. It should be noted, though, that the flight from urban modern life and the quest for authenticity corresponds to the search for utopia. That, as Jessie Gibbs has observed, constitutes an important element of road movies (3).

Nonetheless, it is fundamental to distinguish that though the narratives of these road movies seem to condemn neo-liberalism, the push to adjust to the demands of a free market economy also shapes the production of these films, particularly *El último tren*. This film was produced to conform to the expectation of attracting large audiences and generating substantial box office returns—a demand to produce in accordance with market laws. This is especially evident in the financing of *El último tren* / *Corazón de fuego*, which was a Uruguayan-Argentine-Spanish co-production that received funding through the Ibermedia program (for more on recent Uruguayan filmmakers, see Keith Richards's “Born at Last?”). My analysis will show similarities between *Una sombra ya pronto serás* and *El último tren* based on contemporary sociopolitical life, which these films reference and critique.⁶ More importantly, thematically *Una sombra ya pronto serás* acts as a predecessor to *El último tren* as it articulates middle-class disorientation by using the road/railroads as the means to flee contemporary society and to comment on rebellion and conformity in the age of globalization.

⁶It is important to emphasize that Soriano's novel, on which the script for this film was based, shares with his other literary works the inclusion of elements of popular culture. Hugo Hortiguera has analyzed the importance of the epigraphs that used well-known lyrics of one of Argentina's most famous tangos. Fernando Reati also has judiciously noticed the influence of road movies in the plot and structure of the novel.

Staging the Middle-class Dilemma: *A Shadow You Will Soon Be* (1994)

Una sombra ya pronto serás opens with different shots of a train, its locomotive, and its modern, though deserted cars. The train, stopped in the middle of the desert, prevents the unnamed protagonist, an engineer (Miguel Angel Solá) from reaching his desired destination. Quite soon, audiences have the indication that his journey is based as much on internal reflection as on external mobility as his voiceover admits that, “Era indiferente al paisaje. No sabía adonde iba pero al menos trataba de entender mi forma de viajar.” Left alone to devise his own route, the engineer begins his road trip by walking through barren plains and hitchhiking on empty roads.

The desolation that surrounds him illustrates his own sense of loss and his inability to act. As Rosana Díaz noted about another Latin American road movie, *Y tu mamá también*, in this film as well, the disintegration of the subject “se caracteriza por pequeñas muertes simbólicas mediante la composición de escenas (funerales, cruces, accidentes) donde la carretera se revela como conjunción de vitalismo y aniquilación.” Indeed, the pessimistic tone is announced by the admonition in the title that intimates death, oblivion and disappearance. Another clue that suggests the idea of loss is the lack of road signs. The protagonist finds several of them piled together, yet they do not serve to orient him. Without clear indications as to where the road leads, he is bound to lose himself or to wander aimlessly, as he does without finding a way out. Another sign of pessimism are the two deaths that take place in the film which mark the failure of these characters to survive their journeys. Consequently, in *Una sombra ya pronto serás* the trip is not redemptive. Instead, it stresses the frailty of isolated and lonely middle-class characters who take to the road.

In this sense, *Una sombra ya pronto serás* stages the dissolution of a national community. Middle-class characters appear alone, without families or places of residences. They are all on the road, both literally and symbolically as they move from one place to another, without ever arriving. Except the engineer who has migrated and is now returning “home”, all of them long for realizing their dreams abroad: the circus owner (Pepe Soriano) wants to go to Bolivia, a young couple (Gloria Carrá and Diego Torres) heads for Cleveland, Ohio, the priest (Roberto Carnaghi) hopes to reach Italy, and Nadia (Alicia Bruzzo), the fortune-teller, has her mind set on going to Brazil. Hence, Argentina is portrayed as the place where most characters do not want to be and the starting point for migration. For the engineer, however, Argentina stands as a space of confinement and decadence that deprives him of his illusions. In spite of this, he continues to travel and be on the road while persistently staying inside the boundaries of the national territory. The pessimism stemming from the breakdown of a national community informs the cultural critique of *Una sombra ya pronto serás*. The present and the future have no real place or use in Argentina. A case in point is the engineer whose area of expertise is computer programming. As someone recently-arrived from Europe, it is understood that he has kept up to date with the advances of technology, yet, in Argentina, he carries out *changas* [minor jobs] such as trying to predict the numbers of a roulette table, fixing a car or playing cards to make some money. The protagonist combines temporary work with superficial and brief encounters with characters, who are also lost and looking for a way out. Interestingly, these characters all have a past to which they allude with fondness. But those personal pasts only materialize through unmarked remnants: abandoned houses, empty warehouses, and run-down gas stations. These decaying and solitary places serve as short-term refuges and stress how inhospitable they are for more permanent settlement. Thus, these places spur on the engineer to continue his voyage in search of more comfortable areas.

In his journey, the engineer alternates between walking and hitchhiking. The cars that stop for him also belong to a past time and seem to be pieces pertaining to a museum. They are old cars that get stuck in the middle of rivers or break down by the road. However, these cars allow a certain degree of intimacy among traveling characters. For example, Coluccini, the owner of a circus, shares with the engineer his days of glory and the personal tragedy that ensued when a member of his circus

seduced his wife and broke up his family. Ironically, Lem (Eusebio Poncela), an enigmatic traveler also confides his passion for both a married woman and gambling in the interior of a car. On another leg of his journey, the engineer shares a car with a fortune-teller. All of these encounters trigger anecdotes that do not allow the protagonist to reach his destination. They are detours and distractions that delay his journey and represent his sense of loss or lack of direction.

Other barriers that postpone the engineer's arrival are the stops that occur by the roadside. He is twice abandoned along the road. These scenes showcase his inability to move towards a concrete goal and convey a sense of unspoken frustration and impotence to literally move ahead. The purpose of other stops is to re-provision by using tricks or carrying out pranks. The picaresque nature of the stops during which the engineer and Coluccini cheat in a game of cards reinforces their isolation and alienation from a more stable community. Here it is important to mention Rowland A. Sherill's observation on the function of the picaresque as a figure that "trespasses social boundaries" (4). For a short time, the cheating partners have access to a small-town establishment made up of military officers, farm owners and local authorities. As they glimpse into settled life, they realize the behind-the-scenes deals that influence the dynamics of established, nomad individuals and bear larger implications than their inoffensive games.

The picaresque episode of the card game in Colonia Vela marks the beginning of the end. Having to run for their lives, after their cheating is discovered, the engineer and Coluccini again take to the road. In the final scenes, Coluccini urges the engineer "no frenes, acelera" He even asks "¿Estás seguro que no es un tren?" As he utters these words, the sound of a train's whistle is heard, inviting the engineer to return to the road and to keep traveling. The fact that *Una sombra ya pronto serás* closes with the same words heard at the beginning of the film reinforces the circularity of the trip and the futility of the voyages undertaken. From the standpoint of the engineer who returns to the road, the characters and situations he encountered will soon be shadows. From the point of view of the characters who follow the engineer's unending journey, he is the one who will turn into a shadow. Whether the resistance to conformity that the engineer embodies will disappear or the artificiality of those who are sedentary will prevail, *Una sombra ya pronto serás* alludes to a type of society that is fading away and that will soon face significant transformations, such as a reduction of the state, increased unemployment due to the privatization of state-owned companies, and a reformulation of identities as globalization is introduced in Argentina and certain institutions and practices cease to exist (see the introduction to *Argentinean Cultural Production during the Neoliberal Years [1989-2001]*). Indeed, the novel from which the cinematographic version was adapted dates from the late 1980s, a tumultuous period throughout Latin America known as "the lost decade" (García Canclini 47). In Argentina, these years were also turbulent as hyperinflation was particularly damaging to the lower and middle classes. Soriano's novel and his screen adaptation metaphorically communicate the destabilization suffered by different sectors of the Argentine population, which like the engineer, seem to move in circles and travel far only to find themselves starting again.

El último tren: The National Patrimony

The opening scenes of *El último tren* present a group of elderly men carrying out a very traditional meeting of the association "Amigos del Camino." The purpose of their meeting concerns the association's decision to steal Locomotive 33 as part of an "acto libertario."⁷ Spectators are

⁷The number of the locomotive coincides with a key number in Uruguayan national history. In 1825, the Group of the 33 Orientals rebelled against Brazil's annexation of what is now Uruguay. Thus, the number comes to stand as a symbol of liberation from a powerful empire.

introduced to the material and symbolic meaning of Locomotive 33 through a news clip that informs them that Locomotive 33 is the last of its kind, and that in ten days it will be shipped to Hollywood to be used in an American movie. For the members of the Friends of the Railroad, the locomotive stands as "la última joya de la abuela," a popular saying, particularly in the Argentina of the 1990s that also applies to the Uruguayan case as it implies resistance to the globalization process through privatization of state-owned services, such as railroads and phone and mail services. As a treasured legacy, Locomotive 33 symbolizes the national patrimony. Its "kidnapping" by the a group of nationalists in *El último tren* sabotages the American cinematic project of using it in a Hollywood production. Instead, the fate of the machine is what makes this road movie possible. Hence, Locomotive 33 represents an Uruguayan symbol that provides the pretext to shoot a national film.⁸ In *El último tren*, elderly members of an old association, the protectors of tradition, steal a locomotive and flee with it. This event also provides the excuse to begin the road/railway trip.

In *El último tren*, Locomotive 33 erupts with a spectacular explosion as it breaks into pieces the door of the warehouse where it was refurbished. This powerful scene sets into motion the travel narrative that will make up this road story. Three adult members of the association and their young accomplice Guito, embark on a daring adventure aboard Locomotive 33, leaving the city in the hours just prior to dawn. The darkness that surrounds them could convey the fact that what these characters are abandoning are the gloomy times of neo-liberalism. The travelers share the locomotive's cabin during their libertarian journey away from Montevideo. Different from American road movies, where characters can escape using back roads, the journey of *El último tren* makes use of a fixed exit route that makes the outlaws' location known, and thus, renders their flight somewhat predictable. They cannot leave the railways, nor take alternative roads to escape from those who follow them.

The road movie genre provides a formula for the cultural critique that in *El último tren* is based on the resistance to neo-liberalism and to the optimistic discourse of entrepreneurs who benefit from an open-market economy. Their links with foreign capital cast these businessmen as spurious representatives of the national patrimony. This particular group of citizens is represented by the character of Uruguayan entrepreneur, Jaime Ferreira Link (Gastón Pauls). His nickname, Jimmy, alludes to his cooptation by foreign customs and culture. His use of mobile technology, his clothes, and his self-confident demeanor indicate his belonging to a global class of businessmen. It is not a coincidence that during the march of the locomotive and the police chase, Jimmy is called "un traidor uruguayo que está en tratos con el imperio norteamericano." As a character that stands for the tenets of free-trade, Jimmy has the protection of important—though not visible on the screen figures—who, from the very beginning, influence the police investigation of the stolen locomotive, and very clearly signal who is in charge of recovering the machine.

Consequently, business stands for economic power that leads to a new group of decision-makers in the place of public service professionals. Jimmy begins his relationship with the police by disregarding the authority of the police chief who is assigned to help him recover the locomotive and causing a friction that will lead to his sabotaging the rescue of Locomotive 33. In spite of their disagreements and power struggles, Jimmy and the police chief stand on one side. Film critic Emilio Martínez-Borso has pointed out that, "este bando representa la realidad actual, el punto de vista terrenal con los pies en la tierra haciéndonos ver que estamos en un conflicto utópico bajo un prisma real." This premise is advanced by Jimmy who, upon establishing contact with the outlaws, asserts

⁸A similar theme is used in the film *Bar El Chino* with a traditional tango-bar. The Argentine characters decided to shoot the film before foreigners can take advantage of one of the last typical and exotic tanguerías. For more on this, see Rocha's "Cine despolitizado de principio de siglo: *Bar El Chino* (2003) y *El abrazo partido* (2004)."

that, "el reloj de la historia no puede volver atrás," thus implying that these are times for business and profit-making and nostalgia is out of place.

Contrary to this side, the nationalist outlaws constitute a heterogeneous group made up by a sick professor, Antonio López (Héctor Alterio), a passionate Spanish train engineer, José Avilés (Federico Luppi), and an elderly and forgetful Italian descendant, Dante Minetti (Pepe Soriano). These men have different personalities and they often disagree, but in general, they display their solidarity and affection towards each other and are more respectful of each other's ideas, rights and needs than the legal/rational side. Two of them act in consonance with their past experiences: the professor, the master-mind of the "kidnapping" of the locomotive and the more pragmatic and blue collar Avilés share socialist and communist ideals. They seem to have taken part in the resistance to Francoism during the Spanish Civil War. Though Avilés relates his heroic deeds attacking Francoist lines, as the film develops, the audience learns that it was his older brother who performed these actions. Perhaps Avilés' most daring initiative was taking part in a strike of railroad workers in 1949.⁹ Nonetheless, their surnames are Spanish and their accents, with a trace of Peninsular influence, show their long (self-imposed?) exile or stay in Uruguay.

Accompanying the three older outlaws is Guito, Avilés' friend, whose explicit mission is to feed coal to the machine. However, though he is not shown doing much labor, but he is, as Martínez-Borso has rightfully identified, the hope of the older generation, as he receives their collective wisdom and teachings. Even if Guito joins the adventure as a prank, he is the only character that experiences real change. The trip aboard Locomotive 33 is an opportunity for his inner journey of development. When he abandons the machine, he becomes the voice of his older accomplices. Avilés instructs him to "decir todo lo que no pudimos decir." Entrusted with this important responsibility, Guito also triggers the most emotional moment of the film when, conscious of the frailty and age of his accomplices, he asks Avilés to "cuidar a los viejos." This gesture speaks of the sense of community that was developed in the train and the tight bonds created during this exciting trip.

Though the escape in Locomotive 33 proceeds along the straight path of the railways, there are many stops that add meaning and complexity to this disparate journey. The first one takes place at a meeting place, when another Friend of the Railroad awaits the outlaws to re-provision them with water. This stop shows the solidarity and shared goals of the group. It is contrasted with Jimmy's and the chief police's decision to empty the water tanks along the railways so as to deny the outlaws of their means to continue fleeing. Another stop allows communication between the professor and his nephew, the former persuading the latter to begin a public relations campaign and spread the vindications of the fleeing characters using mass media. The outlaws conceive their flight aboard Locomotive 33 as an act of violence necessary to make several political statements, among which the most fundamental is the resistance to sell the national patrimony. This is what the professor communicates in one of the early stops made to speak with two children and a peasant woman. The small audience that receives the outlaws' message will grow as the outlaws' deeds garner increasing attention from the media.

Indeed, the march of Locomotive 33 is portrayed as a glorious journey. The optimistic tone is marked by a series of cinematic strategies. The strong noise of the steam locomotive and its whistle convey the energy that is being produced and used. The music varies stressing the tempo of the action: reflective moments alternate with more tense episodes. Corresponding to the road movies genre, the color and vastness of the landscape highlight the freedom of the voyage. Conversely, darkness is used to communicate enclosure or entrapment. This is true in a sequence when the train enters a tunnel in a mountain; the darkness of the passageway and the tense, suspenseful faces of

Avilés and the professor foreground the possibility that their adventure may come to an abrupt end. Indeed, these characters' suspicions prove to be true when two policemen board the coal wagon. Avilés' quick reflexes, lighting what seems to be a bomb, divert the danger of being forced to stop and lead to the police's temporary putting off the recovery of the locomotive. Once the intruders depart, the view aboard Locomotive 33 continues to capture the openness of the landscape and the freedom that the travelers enjoy.

Another strategy, deployed to highlight the optimism of this journey is the use of light and the alternation between saturated and desaturated colors. As the old members of the association plow through the countryside, the landscape is shown in desaturated colors to communicate their firm realization of their goal to stop the Locomotive 33 from being sold to foreigners. Saturated colors are used to highlight sequences of high emotion, such as the one where the outlaws need more water and are helped by a local community. In this sense, the bright blue sky and high sun emphasize the moment of optimism that such support provides to the outlaws. White or pastel colors are also used. For example, Jimmy wears white or pastel clothes as a way to denote his lack of emotion and his rational and efficient outlook.

El último tren also ends on a high note. Once Guito has come down from the locomotive, and Dante, who suffers from amnesia, returns to the nursing home, only the professor and Avilés remain aboard the 33. As they approach the Brazilian-Uruguayan border, they are rerouted to a dead-end railway. The camera alternates between the two characters and the tense decision they have to make: whether they continue the journey at a high cost for the locomotive or give up their flight. Suddenly, the professor brakes, sparing Locomotive 33 from crashing against a cement wall. He understands that they have time to make their point and destroying the locomotive would not further their cause. Quite surprisingly, as these outlaws are arrested for stealing the machine and as Jimmy recovers his precious merchandise, an unexpected development underscores the success of the "defeated". People from different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds, who have gathered to witness the passing of the locomotive, stage a silent demonstration in support of the machine. They voluntarily sit on the rails preventing Jimmy from moving the locomotive. The triumph of these elderly resistant characters who dared to risk their fragile health and safety to save a piece of the national patrimony is made clear in the closing credits. The audience learns that Locomotive 33 was not sold to Hollywood: it stayed in Uruguay and the outlaws continued unscathed with their lives.

As a Way to Conclude

Both *Una sombra ya pronto serás* and *El último tren* present a critique of contemporary Argentine and Uruguayan societies in times of neo-liberalism. The main portion of this critique is carried out by middle class and middle-aged or elderly characters that resist the present state of affairs brought about by globalization and the liberalization of the economies of both countries. Having known better times, these characters now feel trapped and alienated within the national borders and resort to travel as a way of clarifying their perspectives and defying the imposition of new market laws.

Both films make use of elements of American road movies, but also adapt them to the conditions of River Plate societies. The characters of *Una sombra ya pronto serás* and *El último tren* travel by train, a powerful symbol of both national pride and foreign dependence, but also by cars and on foot. As they travel away from the decision-making centers, they experience alienation or liberation, feelings that are conveyed through panoramic shots of the landscape. Just as important as the reasons to travel and escape are also the detours and stops that punctuate the travel and the support or rejection of the communities that live by the road/railways. Contrary to the open-endedness of *Una sombra ya pronto serás*, *El último tren* makes explicit the rejection of neo-liberal tenets that promote selling the national patrimony and depleting the country of its resources. Another reading of *El último tren* purports that Locomotive 33 is also part of the national patrimony as part of domestic cinema that

⁹Interestingly enough, 1949 is the year when railroads changed ownership in Uruguay. Great Britain cancelled its World War II debt to Uruguay by selling the state all of its railways.

should be protected. Quite interesting is the fact that in devising a narrative to protect the national cinema, the filmmakers resorted to a commercially successful genre—one that directly competes with national productions.



El último tren (2002), Dir. Diego Arsuaga

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