

**Conflicting Conceptions of Domestic Space,
Shantytowns and State Housing in Contemporary Argentine Cinema**

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Abstract

This article analyses the ways in which two contemporary Argentine films, *Villa* (Ezio Massa, 2013) and *Diagnóstico esperanza* (César González, 2013), portray domestic space. It argues that both films, in different ways, challenge the state notion of home as a cell of a larger, normalised, social system. *Villa*, which takes place in the shantytown Villa 21, emphasises the dynamism and liveliness of public spaces, and refers to residents' solidarity. In contrast, *Diagnóstico esperanza* takes place in the social housing complex Carlos Gardel and focuses on a verbally violent single-parent household. Even though both films denounce the marginalisation of the urban poor, *Villa* ultimately celebrates the qualities of shantytown space, while *Diagnóstico esperanza* complicates the relationship between people and their lived environment, radically questioning the idea of what constitutes a functional society. Thus, both films are revealed to be antithetical to the very notion of 'home' that the state once intended to impose.

Keywords

César González, determinism, *Diagnóstico esperanza*, space, shantytowns, social housing, *Villa*, Ezio Massa

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Space and society

Throughout the centuries humans have reflected upon their own relationship with space and the environment. During the European Enlightenment, in particular, and following antecedents in Ancient Greece, environmental determinism reflected the conviction that not only geographies but also lived environments, such as urban and domestic spaces, can have an effect on human mindsets, and the actions that unfold within them. Based on these conceptions, nineteenth-century ideas of social reform conceived of architecture as able to influence human behaviour, as can be seen in the work of thinkers such as Charles Fourier or Jeremy Bentham. Conversely, built environments and inhabited spaces were read as the materialisation or the embodiment of social structure and practice (Ernste and Philo, 2009; Tatham, 1957; Foucault, 2003 [1976]: 250-251).

These approaches had a crucial influence on public policy and built environment design. In nineteenth century Britain, for example, public parks were considered a moralising instrument which would simultaneously bring fresh air, leisure activities and a normalised lifestyle to the expanding working classes, keeping them away from vice and wasteful spending, and thus preserving the labour force ('Report...', 1833; Gorelik, 1998, 61–62). In Argentina, this tradition of social reform was materialised, amongst others, in urban programmes such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's educational parks on the urban fringe of Buenos Aires (Gorelik, 1998: 35–74). The conviction that space could and should be used to influence behaviour continued throughout the twentieth century, and was in fact at the core of influential modern projects such as Ebenezer Howard's garden cities or the discussions

provoked by Modern architecture and its critics (Howard, [1898]; Aboy, 2005; Richards, 2012).

It was, however, in the field of housing that social reform discussions more deeply influenced architectural design. Charitable bodies such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (founded Paris 1833, and including one branch in Argentina) or the Peabody Trust (founded London 1862) offered housing to working families not only for humanitarian reasons but also under the general conviction that these would lead to a reformed society ('The Peabody Trust and the Poor', 1885). Ideas of social reform stood at the core of housing debates in early twentieth-century Latin America as well (Rigotti, 1991; Aboy, 2005). In 1939 deputy Juan Félix Cafferata, promoter of the publicly-funded Comisión Nacional de Casas Baratas ['National Commission of Affordable Houses'], opened the First Pan-American Low-Cost Housing Congress by celebrating and explaining the initiative:

Sin viviendas sanas no hay hogar, sin hogar no hay familia y sin familia no hay nación fuerte, próspera y grande [...] porque la promiscuidad, el hacinamiento, la inestabilidad, dispersan la familia, siembran en los espíritus ideas de rebelión, incitan al alcoholismo, depravan la juventud y corrompen la niñez. [Without healthy houses there is no home, without home there is no family and without family there is no strong, prosperous and big nation [...] because promiscuity, overcrowding, instability, disperse the family, spread rebellious ideas, instigate alcoholism, deprave youth and corrupt childhood.]¹ (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto, 1940: 50–51)

The aforementioned positions towards social housing became particularly relevant when applied to public policy on shantytowns a few decades later in Argentina. These policies

¹ All the English translations throughout the article, including the film dialogues, have been provided by the author.

included the clearing of shantytowns and the forceful relocation of their residents into purpose-built modern housing. To be sure, many Latin American countries implemented similar programmes around the mid-twentieth century. Examples include, though are not limited to, the Plan Nacional de la Vivienda (Venezuela, 1951-1955), the housing complexes designed by Mario Pani in twentieth-century Mexico and the *callampa* clearance programmes implemented in Chile under the government of Jorge Alessandri (Meza Suinaga, 2014; O'Sullivan, forthcoming; Nicholls, 2011). However, what was especially striking in the Argentine case was that the main focus of the programmes was not housing provision but the normalisation of one part of the population: shantytown residents, who were considered unsuited to modern times. Thus, in programmes such as the Plan de Emergencia (1956) ['Emergency Plan'] or the Plan de Erradicación de Villas y Barrios de Emergencia (PEVE, 1968) ['Shantytowns and Emergency Neighborhoods' Eradication Plan'], reformism went beyond a conceptual and discursive practice; it was materialised in the form of 'adaptation' housing units for the re-education of shantytown families (Comisión Nacional de la Vivienda, 1956).

Shantytowns were seen as hotbeds of vice and moral degradation, and as the reflection of residents' idleness. State departments were particularly shocked by extended families (not only parents and children, but also grandparents, cousins, and aunts or uncles) living in the same dwelling, and by couples sharing rooms with their children, or family members of different genders sleeping alongside each other. Eradication programmes considered instead that only nuclear families (father, mother and children) fitted the bill of modern urban living. Thus, the Plan de Emergencia equipped the new houses with fixed concrete and steel furniture to make sure that the house would only host the family members it was intended for. Six neighbourhoods were completed under this scheme, hosting a total of 31,000 families when opened (Banco Hipotecario Nacional, 1958).

The PEVE took a similar approach, adding to it the idea of temporary housing: evicted shantytown residents would first be accommodated in transitory units, where they would experiment a ‘cambio en las pautas habitacionales’ [change in their dwelling patterns] (Ministerio de Bienestar Social, 1968, p. 08), to be later offered permanent houses. The domestic units were designed to be small and uncomfortable enough as to force a desire of self-improvement on the residents, which the Plan considered that they did not yet have. They thus implied, again, a normalisation:

El objetivo principal que deben cumplir estas localizaciones [the temporary houses] es, además de alojar mejor, servir como *centros de adaptación para facilitar y acelerar el proceso de cambio de las familias* [The main function of these temporary houses is, in addition to housing better, to serve as *adaptation centres to facilitate and accelerate the families’ process of change*] (Ministerio de Bienestar Social, 1968, p. 10; italics mine)

The PEVE was extended into the 1970s under the name of Plan Alborada. The total number of shantytown residents relocated by these programmes is not known, but has been estimated as over 16,000 people (Yujnovsky, 1984: 166 and 193). Later in the century, the last Argentine dictatorship evicted circa 200,000 shantytown residents under the explicit discourse that they were not fit for urban inhabitation, but without offering alternative housing (Oszlak, 2017 [1991]: 189-255).

Since the 1980s state programmes for shantytowns have focused on upgrade, and the discourse of social reform is no longer used. However, territorialised stigmas are as strong as ever. These ascribe a set of negative qualities to a spatially-bound group of individuals, once again considering them as harmful for the social body. Current stigmas regarding the

shantytown population affect social housing residents as well, positing that they are uneducated, indifferent, and, particularly, engaged in violent crime. These preconceptions have become common sense for a wide proportion of the Argentine population, and yet simultaneously they have become too politically incorrect to be expressed openly. For this reason, they do not appear in written form in such a straightforward way as they did earlier in the twentieth century, but rather circulate verbally and are implicit in debates about insecurity, and in the ways that criminal occurrences in shantytowns are represented (Marcuzzi, 2015; Fahsbender, 2016). Crucially, only some of the violent acts perpetrated by police against residents get reported by mainstream media.

Stigmas also affect GPS and other digital maps, marking shantytowns and housing estates as dangerous to taxi drivers, delivery trucks, ambulances and others (Kessler, 2012). In one of the films analysed in this article, *Villa*, stigmatisation is articulated by a secondary character, a cleaner who warns her employer about the danger of making friends with a shantytown kid (Massa, 2013: 33'21). Territorial stigmas affect residents' lives in very concrete ways: by hindering their access to jobs, healthcare, and opportunities to socialise with those who live elsewhere in the city. Accurate information about the shantytown population in Greater Buenos Aires continues to be scarce and partial (Cravino et al., 2008). However, in 1956 there were an estimated 112,000 people (1.92% of the overall population) living in shantytowns (Comisión Nacional de la Vivienda, 1956: 74-77), and by 2008 this had risen to over 1,000,000 (approximately 8% of the overall population) (Cravino et al., 2008: 97). In 2010 the population of Villa 21 (taken together with adjacent shantytown Villa 24) was reported to be 31,018 people; it is the largest shantytown within the Capital City district (Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, 2010).

Villa and Diagnóstico esperanza

The two fictional films *Villa* [Shantytown] (Ezio Massa, 2013) and *Diagnóstico esperanza* [Diagnosis Hope] (César González, 2013) question spatialised preconceptions and discourses about shantytown residents, though they do so in extremely different ways. Finalised in 2008, though not released in Argentina until 2013, *Villa* narrates the story of three young residents of the shantytown Villa 21 (Buenos Aires, Barracas; Fig. 1) as they struggle to find a way to watch Argentina's first 2002 World Cup match on a colour TV. Quite differently, *Diagnóstico esperanza* presents a snapshot of the lives of a selection of residents in a complex of PEVE social housing, Barrio Carlos Gardel (Morón, El Palomar; fig. 1), until recently denominated a 'shantytown'.

The films, which are yet to receive thorough scholarly attention, were chosen on the basis of their complementary approaches to the way in which individuals interact with space in shantytowns, and as a result of their distinct engagements with residents at the time of their production. This article, therefore, aims to contribute to an expanding body of literature about Argentine cinema from the specific vantage point of shantytown space. Poverty, capitalism and inequality have been considered central themes for Argentine cinema since the 1990s, and to a lesser degree so has space (Page, 2009; Andermann, 2012; Aguilar, 2015). Low-cost modes of production, meanwhile, have expanded since the Argentine 2001 crisis, permeating filmic aesthetics and widening the range of actors that take part in filmmaking. Through their portrayal of shantytowns, the films analysed here foreground concerns that are relevant across urban spaces more generally, including: the symbolic identification of human qualities with a specific environment, the impact of past projects of social reform in the present day, and the fraught relationship between domestic and public space.

Villa follows young Villa 21 resident friends, Freddy, Lupín and Cuzco, in their attempts to watch the Argentina-Nigeria 2002 World Cup match on a colour TV. The story is

narrated with humour, but also used as an excuse to create a portrait of the shantytown and denounce the inequalities to which residents are subject. After a failed attempt to use Cuzco's family TV, the three friends go different ways and develop diverging strategies to achieve their goal. Lupín breaks into an electronics store and manages to see most of the match on a concert of TV screens of different sizes. Cuzco squeezes into the flat of an elderly lady he met at the supermarket, initially threatening her and her granddaughter, and afterwards befriending her. Freddy obtains a gun from a shantytown boss on the condition that he will use it for robbing and share the profits. Instead, he uses it to shoot the owner of the pizza shop where he watches the match. In its depiction of the shantytown, *Villa* reiterates stereotypes such as the value of community life, social ties and solidarity networks.

Diagnóstico esperanza also follows a selection of residents in order to construct a spatial narrative, in this case of Barrio Carlos Gardel. Alan is a young kid who likes to sing rap but gets verbally abused by his mother, Naza, which compels him to spend time in the ruined open spaces of the estate. Naza struggles to maintain a family of at least six as a single mum, which she does by processing and selling drugs in her house. She needs to pay regular bribes for this to Ledesma, a corrupt policeman, as does a high street shopkeeper, the only character who never enters the Carlos Gardel. Lautaro is an estate resident who returns upon his release from prison, and rapidly engages in robbery again with a friend and neighbour. One further resident, who is unsuccessful as a street vendor, breaks into and robs a house. All the characters except the street vendor are brought together in the plot when the shopkeeper calls Ledesma and asks him to rob his brother-in-law's house. Ledesma calls Naza who calls her friend Beto, and he in turn engages Lautaro and his friend. This business falls through at the last minute when the shopkeeper hears that his brother-in-law spent the cash they were expecting to steal.

The spaces and lives narrated in *Diagnóstico* are not happily engaged in friendships or community endeavours, unlike those in *Villa*; instead, they are intersected by anxiety and conflictive family ties. In addition, the film does not invoke the idea of solidarity networks: in fact, beyond a few affective personal or familial relations between individual characters, the film presents us with a society facing simultaneous crises of values, corruption, stigmatisation, and, more especially, material and symbolic inequality.

In both films the protagonists are residents, and the viewer is introduced to the spaces portrayed from their point of view (although this introduction is mediated by the director in *Villa*, as will be discussed). This marks a difference to other Argentine films about shantytowns. In *Elefante Blanco* (Pablo Trapero, 2012), for example, the protagonists are highly idealised characters from outside the shantytown whose main purpose is to offer help. The only relevant resident character is engaged in drug abuse, and his misbehaviour leads to the death of one of the protagonists, a priest. The rest of the shantytown characters move in the background and are, in their vast majority, drug dealers or gang bosses. Thus, *Elefante Blanco* does not dismantle territorialised stigmas nor does it de-naturalise the relation between crime and shantytown space.

In addition to fictional characters, both *Villa* and *Diagnóstico esperanza* were conceived, to different degrees, with input from actual residents of the spaces portrayed. However, *Villa* was ultimately directed by Ezio Massa, while *Diagnóstico esperanza* was itself conceived and made by a Carlos Gardel resident, César González. It is possible to trace this difference in the plots, in some features, and in the general approaches of both films. Massa started to form the idea for *Villa* when, in the midst of the 2002 crisis, he passed by a central shantytown, Villa 31 (Buenos Aires, Retiro), and was struck by the poverty observed: ‘Lo primero que sentía es “¡esta gente siempre estuvo en crisis!”... Y, “¿cómo estarán viviendo el mundial?”’ [‘The first thing I felt was “these people have always been in crisis!”...’

And, “how may they be experiencing the World Cup?”] (*VILLA - Making Off*, 2008: 1’32). In order to make *Villa*, Massa engaged both a local NGO, SOS Discriminación, and a few residents who were already engaged in film-making such as Julio Zarza. The script was partially adapted by its actors, almost all of whom were residents trained for the film.

Despite this productive engagement with residents, *Villa* stands as a realisation of Massa’s original concept. Massa and the actors/residents have explicitly stated that it was their intention to belie stigmatisation by underlining the residents’ hard-working and non-criminal nature (*VILLA - Making Off*, 2008: 4’30). However, in its confrontation of stigmas about shantytowns, *Villa* inevitably reiterates a series of long-standing stereotypes regarding community life, solidarity, and spaces of encounter such as the *canchita*. In this regard, the film positions its point of view outside of the shantytown universe: it can be read as the deployment of a series of positive, romanticised notions about shantytowns, which are themselves in discussion with a series of negative preconceptions, rather than representing an engagement with topics emerging from Villa 21 itself, and not previously imagined by the middle classes. The style of the voiceover narration betrays this approach: throughout the first 30 minutes of the film, Villa 21 is introduced to an audience of assumed ‘outsiders’ through explanations and shots of shantytown spaces. These introductory scenes combine pedestrian perspectives with aerial views: the latter contribute further to construct a viewpoint that is external to the space depicted, thereby removing the spectator from the confusion of ground noise, and positioning him/her as an omniscient and floating voyeur (de Certeau, 1984).

Stigmas and stereotypes

The celebration of community life is structured, in *Villa*, around the space of the *canchita de San Blas*, which is crucial within the depiction of the shantytown: ‘En la villa hay un lugar donde todos nos juntamos. Donde está todo bien. Ese lugar es la canchita de San Blas, frente a la capilla’ [In the shantytown there’s a space where we all get together. Where everything is OK. That space is the San Blas *canchita*, in front of the parish] (Massa, 2013: 9’34; first voice over) (Fig. 2). Historically shantytown *canchitas*, or informal football pitches, played a key role in the formation of shantytown residents’ identities and as a space for their interactions (Ziccardi, 1977). In the case of the *canchita de San Blas*, its importance is further reinforced by its relation with religious practice: the pitch is located in front of a Catholic parish, and next to a sanctuary dedicated to Gauchito Gil, a folk saint or figure of popular devotion in Argentina.

The shots of the *canchita* are intertwined in *Villa* with an emphasis on the cheerful everyday atmosphere of Villa 21. The audience is invited to engage with snapshots of various spaces across the shantytown: juxtaposed with background percussion music, which is reminiscent of *candombe* (in this case a theme based on ‘Chiruda Stone’, by La Chilinga), we see a display of bright colours in the corridors as residents go about doing their business, kids play football, and people joke back and forth with their neighbours while walking (Fig. 3). The voices of football commentators recounting the preparations for the World Cup are layered over the percussion music, creating a feeling of everyday excitement. At night, the three protagonists’ comments reiterate ideas of solidarity and friendship: ‘(Freddy) Nos tenemo’ entre nosotros... ni siquiera tu vieja te quiere (Lupín) Che Cuzquito no te sobra una frazada?’ [‘(Freddy) We have one another... not even you mum loves you (Lupín) Hey Cuzquito, don’t you have a spare blanket?’] (Massa, 2013: 9’).

Villa challenges territorialised stigmas not only by foregrounding the positive aspects of the shantytown, but also by denouncing marginalisation. The opening scene is particularly clear in this regard: the background commentary of the World Cup opening ceremony, which digresses about the importance of football for young people and insists that youth and sport have ‘shaken hands’ in the Cup, is revealed to be hypocrisy as the spectator sees the three protagonists struggling to catch a glimpse of the event on TV through a pizza shop window. The sense of their exclusion is reinforced when they are chased out by the shop owner while a policeman patrols the area. The film’s denunciation is at moments articulated through Freddy’s voice:

¿Sabés dónde tendríamos que estar nosotros? ¡Allá afuera, loco, no mendigando una imagen loco! [...] ¿Qué somos nosotros, loco? [...] ¡esto es una porquería, loco, parece una caja de pan loco! ¡¡yo no mendigo nada acá en mi rancho, loco, yo no mendigo nada!! [D’you know where we should be? Out there, mate, not begging for an image, mate! [...] What are we, man? [...] This is a piece of junk, man, it looks like a bread box man! I don’t beg for anything here in my shack man, I won’t beg for anything!] (Massa, 2013: 57’42).

Ultimately, although it may initially seem that *Villa* reiterates the identification of shantytown spaces and criminality, this is substantially undermined by the way the film works to distance the protagonists from criminality. This detachment is initially articulated in the brief narrative of the second voice over, which refers to drug dealers as a minority within a community of hard working people. In addition, the voice over constitutes a playful intertwining of the voices of Jonathan Rodríguez and Julio Zarza (actors for Cuzco and Freddy respectively), and thus it establishes the protagonists as those who introduce the

audience to the shantytown. In this way, the film portrays the protagonists as the shantytown residents proper and the dealers as an exception to the norm. More importantly, the three protagonists are not characterised as gangsters; their main interest is to watch the football match. When he trespasses by entering the electronics shop, for example, Lupín is the only character who ends up being arrested, though for scarcely a few minutes: while the police officials are distracted watching the match themselves, he escapes again. Cuzco breaks into the flat of his elderly lady friend violently, but soon forgets that he is supposed to appear threatening as he lets himself be carried away by the match. This results in the lady taking compassion on him and cooking him the dinner he has not yet had. Freddy, in turn, becomes a failed gangster: he is the only one of the trio who actually employs physical violence. However, he is not as interested in committing crime as he is in watching Argentina-Nigeria, and in seeking revenge on the shantytown boss and the pizza shop owner who chased him and his friends at the start of the film.

By questioning stigmas, *Villa* challenges deterministic notions, such as the idea that space both determines and reflects the human nature of its inhabitants. *Villa* interprets shantytowns as spaces where, beyond extreme material scarcities, what matters is community life; and where most of its inhabitants, though exposed to poverty and crime, work to improve their lives. When violence does exist, the first to suffer its effects are residents themselves, such as in the cases of Freddy, the boss and his partner. Freddy, in addition, places the blame for poverty on marginalisation and stigma as social processes and not on the shantytown as a spatial environment.

In its deployment of tropes relating to the value of everyday life and community interaction, and in its creation of a joyful atmosphere when depicting a shantytown, *Villa* presents striking similarities to Bernardo Verbitsky's landmark novel *Villa Miseria también es América* (Verbitsky, 1957). Just as Massa was inspired when passing by Villa 31,

Verbitsky's imagination was captured by Villa Maldonado (Tres de Febrero, Ciudadela) in the mid-1950s, at a time when conceptions such as those postulated by the Plan de Emergencia were dominant. Verbitsky contested them by portraying resident characters as proactive, good-hearted, and working hard to improve their living environment. These aspects were also emphasised in the discourse of the Left in Argentina during the 1950s and 1960s (for example, in Communist newspapers such as *La Hora* or *Nuestra Palabra*), in publications produced by shantytown residents (such as *La Voz de las Villas*), and 1970s-1990s social sciences works (Ziccardi, 1977; Gúber, 1991). In this way *Villa* contributes to a long-standing agenda that contests shantytown stigmas, including indolence, vice and, more recently, crime, by underlining the opposite qualities.

Gabriel Kessler has conceptualised three ways in which residents react to territorialised stigma (Kessler, 2012). In the first of these, residents incorporate the stigma, and may feel embarrassed about inviting acquaintances in, as well as being scared of their own neighbours. A second reaction consists of accepting the existence of problem neighbours, but emphasising the fact that they are a minority, and that similar problems exist everywhere else. A minority of residents, meanwhile, confront territorial stigmas by denouncing implied 'blame-the-victim' strategies, and relating these to other forms of discrimination, such as those used against indigenous or foreign populations. *Villa* mainly employs the second type of reaction towards stigma, although Freddy's speech momentarily points to the third. *Diagnóstico esperanza*, meanwhile, moves beyond the third characterisation since it is not afraid of bringing crime in front of the camera and it thoroughly contextualises criminality as a consequence of verbal abuse, consumerism and a total loss of social trust.

Questioning social reform

Diagnóstico esperanza engages with the lives of a selection of Barrio Carlos Gardel residents as they go about a few days in their lives but, unlike *Villa*, it does not explicitly focus on countering stigmas. In its depiction, instead, it seriously challenges not only the idea of domestic space as a key tool for social reform, as was promoted by the PEVE (the scheme under which the Barrio was designed), but also the relevance of the very idea of family. As explained above, following social reformism, the PEVE conceived of space as a tool through which to model a normalised society. The house was considered to be crucial in shaping the nuclear family: the primary unit of a well-behaved social body. In *Diagnóstico Esperanza*, however, the notion of motherhood, which is central to the idea of family, is destabilised as it is troubled by anxiety, desperation, and domestic violence. Of the three mothers featured or mentioned, Ledesma's has abandoned her child, Lautaro's is distressed about her son's involvement in crime, and Naza is fraught with despair and frustration in her attempt to support her family on her own, which leads her to practice consistent verbal abuse. In addition, just after the start of the film, a secondary character presents motherhood as merely the reckless by-product of sexual desire: 'Me gusta ese instinto animal que tienen de querer todo el tiempo que les den, que les den [...] "¡Llename, llename, llename, llename!" [...] Después ni se hacen cargo; después se olvidan que tienen un nene adentro nueve meses' ['I like that animal instinct they have of wanting to get sex, to get sex all the time [...] "fill me up, fill me up, fill me up, fill me up!" [...] Afterwards they don't take responsibility; they forget that they have a child inside for nine months'] (González, 2013: 22'50). There are no elements in the rest of the film that contest this point of view. On the contrary, abortion is presented as an unattainable desire by Naza: 'Te juro que, si hubiera tenido un peso de más, ¿sabés cómo aborto un par de guachos? 'que mirá lo que es mi vida, boludo, llena de pibes, de pibes, 'toy re podrida...' ['I swear to you that, had I had one spare *peso*, d'you know how

I'd have aborted a few kids? 'cause look what my life has become, mate, full of kids, kids, I'm fed up'] (González, 2013: 36'40).

Furthermore, it is in Naza's home that a substantial proportion of the scenes take place, but it is a domestic space permeated by anxieties. As the site of a small cottage industry – one of which involves the processing and sale of drugs – its interior is continuously intersected and interpenetrated by external influences (Fig. 4). Not only is the dining room the main working space in the house, as the processing of drugs takes place simultaneously and intertwined with meals, but selling is also done through the back window, and buyers are a constant presence in domestic life. Policemen, too, come to collect and negotiate their bribes in that same dining room, occasionally verbally abusing Naza, while both the dining room and the patio frame the planning of a larger crime.

In her analysis of domestic spaces throughout African-American history, bell hooks argues that black mothers created a world of care and protection in their homes as a way of contesting an extremely hostile, white exterior (hooks, 1991: 46–47). In their homes, the absence of whiteness signified an absence of hostility and reflected their explicit intention of preventing the racial tensions of the prevailing social system from penetrating the space of the home, or from affecting their children. The home of the marginalised became, thus, a site of political resistance. In Naza's home, in distinction, its boundaries are crossed back and forth continuously. Indeed, Naza's house is located within a different context than the spaces analysed by hooks: a neoliberal twenty-first century Buenos Aires where income (rather than race) is the main variable in determining someone's place of residence. However, it also represents a marginalised domestic space within a hostile environment where motherhood could have culminated in introversion. The coldness of interpersonal interactions in Naza's home reflects a situation where material needs, and the hostility of the outside environment,

have penetrated the domestic space and have thereby affected intimate relationships, such as the one between the mother and her children.

The normalising visions about home, society and nation contained within eradication plans are not only belied by the film, but they also appear alien in the context of the world of affections and conflicts that *Diagnóstico esperanza* narrates. Designed in 1970 by the Argentine architectural practice STAFF (led by Jorge Goldemberg, Ángela Teresa Bielus and Olga Wainstein-Krasuk), the Carlos Gardel complex, originally called Conjunto Morón, won the competition for the PEVE housing schemes numbered 11, 12 and 13 (Fig. 5). It consisted of a series of four-storey, high-density buildings located between the streets Marconi, Carlos Gardel, and Perdriel (current República) in the Morón district (Bielus et al., 1971). Later on, the complex took the name of the street where its main entrance is located. In addition to poor maintenance, further temporary housing set up in the area led to a rapidly deteriorating environment and to the estate being denominated *villa* or shantytown (Rametta and Canali, 2006) (Fig. 6). A full discussion of the distinction between shantytowns and social housing estates unfortunately exceeds the scope of the present article. However, what should be borne in mind is that the space portrayed in *Diagnóstico* was originally designed as the state response to urban poverty, but is currently equated to a shantytown in the public and residents' imaginary.

In their description of the project, STAFF architects express once more a conception of shantytown residents as maladjusted to urban life and 'con fuerte tendencia al aislamiento' ['with a strong tendency to self-isolation'] (Bielus et al., 1971). The complex is thus designed to normalise these behaviours, for example through common spaces for socialising. Indeed, even though the project dates from as late as the 1970s, it hinged on nineteenth-century reformist conceptions, despite the different contexts that existed during these periods. In the

nineteenth century, following the approval of the Constitution, a system of government was being established, and land was violently seized from indigenous communities to sustain Western modes of exploitation. In the early 1970s, meanwhile, the dictatorship's self-styled *Revolución Argentina* was approaching collapse. However, it is possible to argue that the conception of 'nation' sustained in both contexts is not necessarily radically different. As was the case decades before, in the 1970s, the Argentine government was trying to instigate a process of nation building based on what they considered Western, Catholic values (for example indissoluble marriage within a nuclear family), which were tied to nationalist symbols. The society the PEVE aspired to create, control and normalise, thus, was not too far from Cafferata's 'nación fuerte, próspera y grande'. Both referred to the idea of a nation state of homogeneous culture and values, inspired by those of the West and by Catholicism. These were precisely the values that the state endeavoured to promote through spatial reformism.

The conflicted domestic spaces presented in *Diagnóstico esperanza* are closely linked not only to the alienation of affective relations but also to a society focused on consumerism and material values. This, in turn, renders meaningless normalised family ideals and the conceptual construction of a nation state. The shopkeeper, for example, offers access to his brother-in-law's house to Ledesma, a corrupt policeman, not only expecting to obtain a material reward for it, but also out of resentment and envy. The same shopkeeper enthusiastically joins a rally in the city centre, which could be interpreted as a reference to the anti-government protests held during the administration of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner ('Después del 8N', 2012). The abstraction of the narrative sustained in this rally, which is depicted invoking national symbols such as the flag, the national anthem, the country's name or the term 'democracy', appears hypocritical when juxtaposed with, and shown in contrast to, the misery and desperation experienced by the Gardel characters. The street vendor meanwhile, robs a house mainly to be able replace his trainers: although the trainers are

revealed to be worn out in a previous shot, the choice and process of buying them implies an enjoyment of consumerism as much as it implies material want. Consumerism is also at the fore when, as they prepare to rob the shopkeeper brother-in-law's house, Lautaro and his friend plan their enjoyment of the profits:

Yo me voy a ir, también, amigo, me voy a ir de vacaciones, me vo'a comprar mi nave, me vo'a comprar un par de llantas... [...] al baile, al puterío... y despué' en la semana salir a comer... Por eso, hay que hacer vida de bacán, amigo, ¿qué te pensás? [...] ¿que los chetos nomás pueden bacanear? [I'm also gonna leave, mate, I'm gonna go on holidays, I'm gonna buy my car, I'm gonna buy a few trainers... [...] go to the club, the brothel... and then during the week go out for dinner... That's it, we must live an indulgent life, mate, why not? [...] or can only posh guys live indulgently?] (González, 2013; 79'58)

Ideas of consumerism, society and nation, are therefore deeply intertwined in *Diagnóstico's* reframing of notions of home and family. In fact, revealing the tensions between the mainstream media images of family and consumption, on the one hand, and the ones attainable by Carlos Gardel residents, on the other, has been crucial to González's work: 'Y te ponía triste también ver la televisión, y el modelo de familia que te vende la televisión hasta el día de hoy, ¿no?' ['And you'd get sad watching TV, and the family model that TV tries to sell to you even today, no?'] (González, 2014, 5'16). In this way, *Diagnóstico* belies the eradication plans' expectation that the re-housing of shantytown residents would lead to families integrated into a 'nación fuerte, próspera y grande', not only because the families narrated do not comply with any of the standards that such plans prescribed, but more especially because the idea of a grandiose nation itself has lost its meaning in the context of an unfair, corrupt, and marginalising society.

Final thoughts

Modern conceptions of domestic space have often interpreted it as clearly distinct from public space: as the most private and intimate environment where individuals and families detach themselves from their roles in society (Aboy, 2005: 7; Hales, 2003: 1). This distinction, however, should not be considered rigid, as both spaces continuously permeate one another (Page, 2009: 192-194). First, in cases such as Naza's house, in *Diagnóstico*, the boundary between public and private is rendered meaningless through the continuous interpenetration of business, crime and public matters within the domestic space. The blurriness of this boundary is perhaps more visible in marginalised spaces, but can also be perceived in other places. The very origin of the term 'domestic', in fact, can be found in the Roman term *domus*, which refers to a site of family life in as much as it consisted of a home, but also functioned as a workplace and a stage for political and public negotiations (Hales, 2003: 2). In addition, and perhaps more importantly, domestic space is assigned a key function for modern nation-building: through a process of aggregation and scaling up, the house becomes the primary unit for the construction of society. The political function of domestic space is particularly evident in social housing (Aboy, 2005: 7) but, again, can also be observed elsewhere. Likewise, within 1960s-1970s architecture, the dwelling unit was thought of as a cell which, through repetition, could be scaled up to become a tissue: collective housing, and beyond it the totality of the built environment (*Summa*, 1967; Aliata, 2004).

The re-framing of twentieth-century ideas of domestic space, housing and society in *Villa* and *Diagnóstico esperanza* does not close down the discussions about the relation between space and human practice. On the contrary, it expands their scope, by exploring alternative notions of housing, home, domestic space, and society. Even though the films are arguably pessimistic in their denunciation of social inequality and their critique of the

unsuitability of pre-existing notions of home, both productions also open up new debates about the ideals and practices that surround the house, and by doing so, they represent a new means of interrogating the relation between human practice and the domestic environment.

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