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TITLE: “No es un fantasma; es un espíritu.” Visual Technology and Spectropoetics in Eliseo Subiela’s *No te mueras sin decirme adónde vas*

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ABSTRACT: This article explores Eliseo Subiela’s engagement with spectral figures in his film *No te mueras sin decirme adónde vas*. After situating the film within current academic debates around spectral theory, I draw critical distinctions between the figure of the phantasm/ghost, specters, and spirits as conceptual metaphors. Throughout the analysis presented in the article, there is also a delinking of the spectral (the presence of specters and spirits) from discourses on hauntings. To analyze Subiela’s project, this paper proposes a spectro-poetic reading that examines the film’s privileging of visual and cinematic language, the metaphorical implications of specters, and Subiela’s poetic treatment of spectrality. To this end the article traces how the film’s preoccupation with visual language, themes such as temporality, life, death, and love are connected and how these enable a more nuanced perspective on the spectral.

KEYWORDS: Spectral, specters, hauntings, Eliseo Subiela, tecnología visual, memory, spectropoetics, Argentine cinema

RESUMEN: En este artículo se explora la preocupación por lo espectral en la película *No te mueras sin decirme adónde vas* de Eliseo Subiela. Tras situarla dentro de los debates en torno al giro espectral en discursos académicos, se establecen diferencias marcadas entre fantasma, espectro y espíritu como metáforas conceptuales. Además se desasocia lo espectral (la presencia de espectros y espíritus) como aparece en la película y los discursos de *haunting* (asedio). Para discutir el proyecto de Subiela, se propone una lectura espectropoética en la que se explora el entrelazamiento del lenguaje que privilegia lo visual, las implicaciones metafóricas de los espectros presentes en la cinta y la forma poética en que Subiela trata la espectralidad. Con este fin este artículo traza los puntos de conexión entre el lenguaje de lo visual, la tecnología y diversos temas (la temporalidad, la vida y la muerte y el amor) y como estos conceptos nos ayudan a tener una aproximación más compleja a lo espectral.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Espectros, espectral, hauntings, asedio, Eliseo Subiela, tecnología visual, memoria, espectropoética, cine argentino

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“No es un fantasma; es un espíritu:” Visual Technology and Spectropoetics in Eliseo Subiela’s *No te mueras sin decirme adónde vas*

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Eliseo Subiela’s *No te mueras sin decirme adónde vas* (1995) narrates the story of Leopoldo in Buenos Aires during the mid-1990s, where he invents with his friend Óscar a machine they call the dream collector. While one sleeps, the dream collector registers the sleeper’s brainwaves, which are then decoded and translated into images. This apparatus mirrors the function of the movie camera since they both record and make visible the now for posterity. Through a variety of sequences and techniques such as sepia tones, oneiric scenes, or instances of *déjà vu*, the film’s narrative also presents glimpses of Leopoldo and Rachel’s past. For instance, the opening sequence abruptly brings audiences to the late nineteenth-century time and space in which William invented the dream preserver, a prototype of a film projection mechanism, while working in Thomas Edison’s laboratory in 1885.¹ Throughout the film, however, the biggest tension appears to be that Leopoldo has been reborn and Rachel has not. In other words, William’s spirit has been reincarnated in Leopoldo’s body, but Rachel has not yet been reborn and thus remains a spirit. Through the dream collector, which is to say through the use of visual technology, Rachel’s spirit appears exclusively to Leopoldo as a specter, and teaches him to enjoy life and his marriage.

It is in this context that, within the film’s first thirty minutes, Subiela establishes the critical distinction between ghost and spirit. Leopoldo, the film’s protagonist, first sees Rachel in a sepia-tone dream at the beginning of

the film which suggests to its audience a lapse between past and present, the oneiric and being awake, the immaterial and the material, as well as the visible and the invisible. The memory of this dream stays with Leopoldo and materializes after he shuts off the film projector and looks through a small window only to see Rachel’s specter in an otherwise empty movie theater. These first thirty minutes of the film, and this particular sequence, remind us of the early tensions that conceived of cinema as a “system of reproduction of reality on the one hand, and as magic and dream on the other” (Rascaroli 5). By presenting the memory of a dream and its spectral appearance in an empty movie theater, Subiela’s film offers a double concern: a reflection on the history of cinema as a technology capable of capturing both dreams and specters, but also the pervasive presence and appearance of specters at various levels of the everyday life.²

Following their initial encounter at the movie theater, Rachel and Leopoldo go to Óscar’s apartment, where Leopoldo explains to his friend that Rachel “no es un fantasma; es un espíritu,” as she has made it clear (28:30). What does it mean, then, for Rachel’s specter to reject being called a ghost and identifying herself as a spirit, and for others to recognize her as such? Implicit in this distinction is the assumption that a ghost haunts, but lacks spirit, and that spirits do not necessarily haunt as ghosts do. The specter mediates between ghost and spirit as two ontological and semantic extremes and connects the tropes of appearances and visual technology prevalent

throughout the film. The ghost-spirit distinction allows Subiela's exploration of Argentina's fascination with cinema and visual technology through the prism of the spectral.³

In a sense *No te mueras* is concerned with discussing cinema's original function in society in the late nineteenth century, but also with how audiences have changed their relationships to films as visual texts and the film-viewing experience only a century later. *No te mueras* thus forces us to examine this transition in filmic sensibilities. In this article I argue that temporality, life, death, and love are prevalent themes in *No te mueras*, which, in turn, make possible a discussion of spectro-poetics in relation to the film. Spectro-poetics encompasses the interplay of language that privileges the visual, specters' metaphorical implications, and Subiela's poetic treatment of spectrality.

Delinking Specters from Hauntings

The increasing critical attention Subiela's work has received in academic circles since the 1990s coincides with what some scholars have termed the "spectral turn," which continues to produce a sustained interest in discerning the use of the ghost, the specter, and hauntings as conceptual metaphors.⁴ Most scholars who have written on these subjects since Derrida's seminal *Specters of Marx* (1994) have inevitably turned the figures of the ghost and the specter into metaphors that enable discussion of embedded, unresolved, and returning social, political, and traumatic events. Much like the spectral and ghostly figures, the concept of haunting has been delinked from its original supernatural or paranormal associations and has instead been granted the task to perform or derive theory. The danger, however, in carrying out this work is that terms such as specter, ghost, and phantom are often used interchangeably and are stripped of their specificity and historicity.⁵ Haunting still maintains a somewhat negative quality,

but not in its traditional vein of the ghostly or spectral return which "haunts" the living. As a conceptual metaphor, haunting has been turned into an instrument to discuss historical, political, social, personal, or generational events or situations that lack a resolution. For instance, in reference to the use of haunting, Avery Gordon writes:

Haunting was the language and the experiential modality by which I tried to reach an understanding of the meeting of force and meaning, because haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is denied (as in free labor or national security). (xvi)

In contrast to this position, Derrida posits in *Specters of Marx* (1994; 2006) that Marx unknowingly approached the topic of hauntings and the figurative appearance of specters in connection with political economy and historical analysis by using images and language that illustrate how the past haunts the present. Hauntology becomes the means to understand the ways in which ghostly figures, specters, apparitions, and other embodied or disembodied figures appear and disappear. More precisely, hauntology describes the singularity of a haunting act, which is finite, and cannot be reiterated (Derrida 10). Every haunting is unique and is temporally framed by its origin and finitude.

Given the singularity of Subiela's project, it becomes particularly useful to mark distinctions in terminology linked to the spectral. In this article, as in Subiela's film, ghost, spirit, specter, and phantom do not mean the same thing.⁶ For instance, while Subiela's film presents a distinction between ghost (*fantasma*) and spirit (*espíritu*), Derrida demarcates the specter and the spirit when he writes:

As soon as one no longer distinguishes spirit from specter, the former assumes a body, it incarnates itself, as a spirit, in the specter. Or rather, as Marx himself spells out... the specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. (4-5)

This is a particularly pertinent way of distinguishing between these two terms if we think about Rachel's own articulation of who and what she is: a spirit and not a ghost. In a sense, Rachel's self-definition as a spirit has certain logic within the structure of the film since in the end she incarnates a body and comes to life again as a live human being. A ghost is disembodied, perhaps devoid of a spirit, whereas the spirit has the potentiality to incarnate or reincarnate itself, to come to life again, to occupy a body. The transition from spirit to embodiment is what leads to the advent of the specter. This understanding of the specter perhaps has its roots in the Latin word *spectrum* and its relationship to seeing, image, appearance, observing, looking at, and its evolution into optics, as well as our association with the ghostly and otherworldly. Subiela's film makes use of this longstanding tradition that links specters to spectatorship, seeing, the world and tricks of images, technology that materializes what we see in dreams and memories, and visual technology that records impressions. It is also key to keep in mind all the associations with the word specter, including its Latinate derivations, since the film is preoccupied with how we see, how we represent images, how they appear or disappear on the screen and in the lives of the film's characters, but also how these characters confront and communicate with non-material entities. Spectropoetics, as I am using it here, enables an understanding and a discussion of the ways in which Subiela presents us with specters, which is to say images "animated by a spirit" (2).

In discerning the relationship between

hauntings and specters, it becomes important to ask: is fear always associated with a haunting experience and the presence of a specter? Does a specter haunt one's everyday life, psyche, memory, or being? Does the specter have the capability of assaulting our senses by making us more sensitive to stimuli that are barely perceptible to others? Haunting and the appearance of a specter have to do with a direct relationship between that which haunts and the haunted, though fear and likewise feelings do not necessarily have to be involved. In Gordon's eloquent and nuanced work on ghosts and hauntings, for instance, the following relationship is established:

Haunting is an encounter in which you touch the ghost or the ghostly matter of things: the ambiguities, the complexities of power and personhood, the violence and hope, the looming and receding actualities, the shadows of our selves and our society. (134)

This perspective is certainly enlightening to understand Argentina's dirty war as one dimension of the country's history, though some of the tropes Gordon develops could certainly be extended to question other dimensions of Argentine history. In the case of *No te mueras*, unlike ghosts, the presence of specters does not have a neat connection with or an overt relation to discourses about hauntings or embedded traumas, fear of the unknown, or that which lacks resolutions.⁷

Colin Davis has written about the differences between Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's pioneering work on haunting and Derrida's writings on hauntology and argues that Abraham and Torok's *phantom* "is the presence of a dead ancestor in the living Ego, still intent on preventing its traumatic and usually shameful secrets from coming to light" (374). Derrida's work, however, "calls on us to endeavor to speak and listen to the spectre, despite the reluctance inherited from

our intellectual traditions...” (376). Here we turn to the question of a specter’s ontology. According to Davis, then,

Hauntology supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead or alive. (373)

That is to say, can a specter come into being through its state as a non-being entity? In response to some of these questions, Derrida argues that

The specter, as its name indicates, is the *frequency* of a certain visibility. But the visibility of the invisible. And visibility, by its essence, is not seen, which is why it remains *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond the phenomenon or beyond being. The specter is also, among other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects—on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see. (125, original emphasis)

This particular articulation of the specter becomes critical to understand the appearance of the three specters: Rachel’s, Leopoldo’s father, and Pablo’s who is Leopoldo’s friend. If for Derrida the specter has to do with the realm of the visible, with the imagined, or with what one projects/sees, this act of projection or prospection onto an empty space or screen is precisely what drives Subiela’s subtle connection between the appearances of the three specters and his poetic treatment of spectrality in *No te mueras*. Specters, as they are presented in this film, have the capability of enabling a deeper understanding of who we are and our relationship to our present and past lives, without obligatory recourse to hauntings. Toward the end of the film, for instance, Leopoldo has an epiphany which he can only share with a partially built robot named Osiris and he states:

Está claro que la misión más importante que tenemos en esta vida es aprender. Estamos acá para aprender, sin duda... ¿Qué sentido tendría que aprendiéramos, si después de esto no hubiera nada? ¿Si todo acabara con la muerte? O vamos a volver o esto que aprendemos acá nos va a servir en alguna otra parte. (1:47:45)⁸

Leopoldo has only been able to make this realization after encountering and communicating with the specters of Rachel, his father, and his friend, and learning from them. Rather than haunting, these specters enable Leopoldo to have a fuller understanding of his purpose in life. Put differently, specters do not haunt but communicate with us to help us see what our untrained eyes cannot perceive. At an earlier point in the film, in fact, Rachel makes the following prognosis of Leopoldo’s path to knowledge and sight: “te liberaste... de las tres dimensiones que empobrecían tu visión” (51:30).

Capturing the Immaterial: Technology and Spectrality

In his erudite discussion about the history of visual technology and ghosts or specters, Tom Gunning writes that

Scanning a ghost is difficult because in some sense we cannot scrutinize them. They remain virtual, rather than embodied, images. As such phantoms make us reflect on the aporia of sight, the way the visible strives after the invisible, agonistically. (121)

We are thus reminded of the difficulty in attempting to capture the spectral by means of technology. Yet, the film is concerned with the specter of Argentine cinema’s history which is present in Subiela’s work. As Ana M. López has suggested, by 1896, cinematic technology had already appeared in Buenos Aires, only

six months after it was introduced in Europe (50). With the advent of cinema, Argentina has remained at the forefront of film industries in Latin America, which is perhaps why *No te mueras* is preoccupied with hinting at the embedded history of film within Argentina's claim to modernity.⁹

Early on in the film, Subiela introduces us to a set of characters that lived in the past. In this temporal space demarcated by the sepia tone on the screen, William (Leopoldo's name in a previous life) explains to his boss, Thomas Edison, what he envisions with his new invention, the dream preserver, will offer

the possibility of images that provide relief, images that liberate, images that cure, images that could give back hope; the wonderful possibility of thousands of people dreaming the same dream at the same time... the chance to beat death. Those images will be there forever. Beings moving, loving, hating, forever locked inside a machine that will be able to project those images onto a screen like a window through which dreams can be liberated, fly, and be set free... a dream preserver, so that they won't vanish upon awakening, when we return to the horrors of reality. (00:44-1:39)

In the advent of creating a prototype of a machine capable of recording images, which would later become commonplace to capture moving images into celluloid film, William's monologue introduces a number of key issues that are of great importance to the rest of the film. If the dream preserver will offer images that can at once liberate, alleviate, cure, provide hope, overcome death, and simultaneously marvel audiences as William imagines, it is because this machine will be able to capture the material and the immaterial alike. It will capture human beings, their emotions, actions, and familiar situations only to then project them onto a screen where others can see them at will. The dream preserver becomes a way to simultaneously preserve and

evade life. One affirms life's preciousness by preserving it in images. On the other hand, through the world of images, one may also shy away from experiencing life firsthand and instead become a mere spectator, which is to say one that sees specters, recurring appearances, fleeting and yet preserved images. For Derrida, the specter

(re)pays us a visit [*Il nous rend visite*].
Visit upon visit, since it returns to see us
and since *visitare*, frequentative of *visere*
(to see, examine, contemplate), translates well the recurrence or returning,
the frequency of a visitation. (125-26)

In having the possibility of seeing such projected images, however, the dream preserver serves the function of freeing audiences and enabling them to dream, to be free, to let go of reality. This machine is capable of preserving dreams for posterity, for perpetual enjoyment, and thus technology becomes instrumentalized to supersede the human realm. The creation of this machine recognizes the fragility of life and the perpetual presence of death—after all the machine offers “the possibility to beat death”—and the liminal division between these two extremes. Of particular interest is that the original vision of this machine, much like that of the Lumière brothers, aimed to capture quotidian situations without necessarily stringing them together in a narrative form, fictionalizing them, or inventing scenarios to marvel audiences due to their foreignness or creating visual illusions as with the films of Georges Méliès. In this cinematic fictionalization of the invention of the dream preserver, the novelty of William's creation rests precisely on the possibility of capturing the ephemeral of the quotidian and enjoying ‘preserved’ life as it is, despite reality's horrifying or awful nature. Toward the end of this initial sequence in which the dream preserver is introduced, Edison admonishes William to continue working on this project due to its potential. At this point, the old film stock presents us with a happy moment between William and Rachel and then her tragic and

early death. It is Rachel's death, which the dream preserver could not overcome, that connects the temporal division between late-nineteenth-century New Jersey and late-twentieth-century Buenos Aires.

Akira Mizuta Lippit reminds us about the role of technology in the shifting modes of visuality at the turn of the century:

the transformation of visuality into vision machines that engender sightless vision, invisible and avidual images, was already at work in the eruption of radical interiority in 1895: psychic, corporeal, and vital interiority were already marked as avidual and mediated by vision machines—psychoanalysis, X-rays, and cinema. These vision machines, apparatuses, techniques, and technologies were already dismantling the visible world, producing an irreversible *démontage* of the world of images and the image of the world at the fin de siècle. (156-57)

It is no wonder, then, that William's character attempts to invent a machine capable of capturing images of the world, while making them gain symbolic and affective meaning for each audience member. The intervention and mediation of vision machines, as Lippit suggests, helped disassemble images of the world only so that viewers could assemble them in an attempt to make sense of the ephemeral, of the elusive, of what appears fleetingly. If the dream preserver gave way to the rise and development of cinema, the film also seems to ask us what has become of cinema. The reincarnation of William's spirit in Leopoldo serves as a thread that weaves inventiveness, visual technology, cinema, and the movie theater as an almost defunct industry.

The film's narrative introduces Leopoldo as a perpetual dreamer out of touch with 'reality,' though he is very much in touch with extra-sensorial stimuli. For instance, Leopoldo can communicate with his plant Anita and can interpret the fluctuations in her emotions. We also see that this ability to perceive the

imperceptible becomes instrumental in his ability to communicate with the specters of Rachel, his father, and his friend. In constant collaboration with his friend Óscar, Leopoldo builds a machine (a hat with a tube connected to a box), which he calls the dream collector. In fact, the way the machine operates makes it easy for anyone to put on the hat, turn on the machine which has an eye that lights up, and record one's dreams during deep sleep. If William's invention allowed him to 'preserve' dreams for posterity, Leopoldo envisions a machine that can 'collect' such dreams and gather them before they dissipate.

In testing whether the dream collector can enable the transmission of electromagnetic signals emitted by Rachel's specter, Óscar asks Leopoldo to put on the hat attached to the machine to see if the specter Leopoldo sees can be projected to a television screen. After this experiment works, Óscar makes the following observation: "Las imágenes vienen directas de tu cerebro. Con este invento se podrían hacer películas con solo pensarlas. No habría necesidad de filmarlas" (32:47). If the dream collector has helped to conjure up Rachel's spirit and her presence as a specter, one could argue that her spectrality is a product of his imagination or a response to his anxieties with modern life. Nonetheless, I will argue here that the film problematizes Rachel's initial appearance, and her materialization on a television screen through the dream collector. Later in the film, Leopoldo comes to understand the full potential of his invention: "Eso que inventé supuestamente era un recolector de sueños. No lo es." Rachel responds: "Creo que inventaste algo más complejo... un traductor de almas. Eso parece" (1:16:50). This invention also gives validity to what Rachel says about Leopoldo, who in a former life was William, presumably the inventor of the first device that could collect images and project them. In this way, and from the perspective of spirits and specters, there is a certain continuity in the desires of William

and Leopoldo, who are almost a century apart, to create devices related to dreams, ways to capture them, while producing discourses about visual culture and the role of technology at two different temporalities.

Specters of Cinema and the Father's Specter

At around the 40th minute of the film, Leopoldo's close friend, Óscar, confesses to Leopoldo that he is worried about him, because of the invention of the dream collector and all of its consequences. For instance, Óscar has trouble believing that Leopoldo invented cinema, the idea of reincarnation, or that Rachel was once Leopoldo's wife. Here we have a contrast between the rational, scientific mind and Subiela's attempt to force viewers to suspend their disbelief and rationality. In order for *No te mueras* to work as a discourse on visual technology, cinema, love, and modernity, the film collapses the neatly defined boundaries that categorize films according to genre or themes. Furthermore, it traverses the romance genre, science fiction, and fantasy, while also grounding itself in a dialog with the history of cinematic apparatuses of recording and projection.

The role of modern life, modernization, visual technology, and their relation to crisis in the film have been discussed by Pablo Arredondo as follows:

la modernización es lo que destruye lo propio, lo identificador, como al cinematógrafo en *No te mueras...*, donde el protagonista, Leopoldo, también sufre de estos procesos. El cine, una creación de la modernidad, sufre el deterioro de esta misma en su proceso globalizador. (104)

Given the impending technological changes to the culture of cinema and film viewing, particularly in a rapidly changing modern society where audiences have more options to watch films than just the movie theater,

the memory of Leopoldo's father emerges as a specter to assuage Leopoldo's anxieties about his impending job loss. Leopoldo inherited from his father his current job as a film projectionist, which is a dying profession in the face of changing technology such as digital films and new media. In a way *No te mueras* seems to pay homage to Giuseppe Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso* (1988) in which a similar concern with film and the death of cinema is also prevalent.

With dwindling attendance to the movie theater where Leopoldo works, his friend and theater owner, Mario, is forced to later sell the theater to an Evangelical group. After the sale, the film presents a critique through irony since the new attendees (the Evangelical group) are figuratively and literally blind and now occupy a space that was used to see images. This is one way in which the Latinate resonances of *spectrum* comes into play, since *No te mueras* is preoccupied with the nature of seeing, images, filmmaking, and what remains of these. In this critique of sight and understanding what we see is also a subtle discourse about the need to hold on to collective spaces, such as a movie theater, because of the multiple memories, traditions, and affective ties that link them to the individual and the community of that particular neighborhood in an ever-evolving and ever-growing urban center such as Buenos Aires. As the film suggests, only by holding on to these spaces can we conjure up embedded memories and feelings, such as the loss of a father or the appearance of the specter of one's love from a former life, which are then projected onto a liminal space of the visual and non-visual, being and non-being, presence and absence.

The apparition of the specter of Leopoldo's father has a comforting purpose as he assuages Leopoldo's anxieties in the face of change. In a sequence that blurs the past and present, as well as reality and the oneiric, Leopoldo walks into the movie theater, while the father is projecting a black and white film. Leopoldo tells his father: "Tengo miedo. No entiendo lo qué está pasando. No entiendo. Sé

qué está pasando y me hace muy feliz, pero no lo entiendo” (57:54). Leopoldo is referring to the feelings he has for Rachel and his inability to decide what to do with the feelings he has for a specter. The location of the conversation, the movie theater, brings forth an unconscious desire in Leopoldo to understand how to deal with Rachel and the changes in his life, including the possible loss of his profession. The specter of Leopoldo’s father responds to his son’s fears with the following words: “No pienses, Leopoldo. La mente no hace más que crear abismos que solo el corazón puede cruzar” (58:11). Leopoldo responds: “Quisiera abrazarte, papá. Pero sé que abrazaría el aire. Amo a Rachel y es como estar enamorado de la actriz de una película. Si se apaga la proyección, solo hay una pantalla en blanco. Los muertos nos dejan tan solos” (58:22). The father replies: “Puesto que yo soy el aire para mí no es abrazar el aire” (58:59). This sequence, which comes from Leopoldo’s imagination, concludes with Rachel witnessing Leopoldo hugging an empty space from which a specter appears, but is not there. As Derrida has noted,

[t]he perspective has to be reversed, once again: ghost or *revenant*, sensuous-non-sensuous, visible-invisible, the specter first of all sees *us*.... We feel ourselves observed, sometimes under surveillance by it even before any apparition. (125)

Leopoldo uses the metaphor of Rachel as an actress and a blank screen to make sense of his love for Rachel as a specter and how her absence is much like a blank screen onto which his embedded desires cannot be projected. This metaphor also allows us to understand that the dead are always part of our life and can return if we remember them or conjure them up through remembrance, much in the same way that Leopoldo did in this particular sequence. As Leopoldo’s father suggests in a romantic gesture, one can understand the presence and appearance of specters through the heart, which is to say through emotions

and affect, and not always through logic or through the language of haunting.

“Te estás acordando:” Love in the Time of Spectrality

When Leopoldo discovers that his dream collector can be used to bring the past into the present, his mind and body experience extreme joy in a dream-like state, which subsequently extends to his experiences while being awake. As the film makes clear, affect, consciousness, and memory are closely connected, and these elicit a reading of the film’s use of technology and the invention of a machine that collects and records dreams as a metaphor of that tension among the past (memories and previous lives), the present (the resurgence of specters), and the future (reincarnation of spirits). This temporal-spectral tension cannot be entirely resolved through technology, but through life. Rachel and Leopoldo cannot be together in the current time-space and instead Rachel is reborn as Leopoldo’s daughter. Viewers are forced to reconsider the changes in the relationship that Leopoldo and Rachel’s spirits have had throughout centuries. In discussing the relationship between temporality and spectrality, Derrida suggests a shift in our understanding of the “spectral moment,” which is “a moment that no longer belongs to time, if one understands by this word the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: ‘now,’ and future present)” (xix). This division of the present allows us to ask the following: do we conjure up specters out of a sense of nostalgia (past present), out a sense of instability or crisis (actual present), or due to speculation or projected desires (future present)? In short, *No te mueras* engages with all three aspects of present and their related emotions. The spectral figures of Leopoldo’s father, his friend Pablo, and Rachel inhabit these modalized presents.

Related to this discussion of temporality, technology, and specters, I briefly turn

my attention to the tension between life and death, and the connection to love, as represented in the film. Arredondo has observed that the film presents us with a profound discourse about the fear of death or the inability to cope with it: “En *No te mueras*..., el miedo a morir del protagonista es el temor a no ver cumplido sus sueños, a ser dominado por las fauces del materialismo” (108). While Arredondo’s assertion is partially true, I would argue that Leopoldo is also afraid of life and the constant changes that life and death, as two complementary extremes, bring forth. It is in this desire to hold on to memories that Leopoldo is perpetually deferring his responsibilities as a breadwinner and husband at home and instead projects his desires and anxieties onto his dreams and his inventions, particularly in building the dream collector. The presence of Rachel’s specter shows Leopoldo his own inability to move away from his stagnation, since he perpetually defers living, which is to say experiencing life as it comes and as it really is. This is yet another way in which Subiela’s interplay between fantasy and reality is instrumental to underscore Leopoldo’s inner tensions. Until Rachel appears, Leopoldo is caught between a desire to hold on to the past and a desire to move more speedily toward the future. Ironically, Rachel also suffers from a particular type of stasis, which has prevented her from being reborn and incarnating a body.

In *No te mueras* love functions as both an emotion and as a filmic device, which mediates the tension between life and death. It is this triangulation that justifies and generates the appearance of Rachel. Love then is able to simultaneously transcend time, but also collapses spatio-temporal divisions since Rachel appears to Leopoldo from a previous life in which they were together. As audiences we must suspend our disbelief in order for the film to work. Within the film itself, howev-

er, Leopoldo must also learn to suspend his own disbelief that the spirit of his former wife has returned as a specter. As a way to frame Rachel’s presence, Subiela engages in a number of techniques that suggest a state akin to hallucination or reverie. From Leopoldo’s spectral memory of Rachel at the end of nineteenth century, her emergence through the dream collector, to her ability to become visible and perceptible to Óscar and Carlitos (the robot Óscar invented), Subiela’s film certainly makes use of temporal shifts to leave audiences wondering about how much of what we see on the screen is a product of Leopoldo’s imagination and desire, how much of it has to do with a certain perception of reality or fantasy, and how much of it can be attributed to spectrality’s transcendence of time.

In arguing about the connection between the use of time and fantastical films, Garrett Stewart has suggested that many of the keys to resolve tensions within a filmic text actually take place at the subtextual level, and it is usually through the use of liminal shots. If there are any “narratographic” tensions, these are

Resolved not just over time, but in time’s terms. These ambiguities will tend to sort themselves out either via the uncanny—as in the European cinema of fateful coincidence, erotic reverie, and mysterious second sight—or via the supernatural, concentrated of late in American cinema of the ontological gothic. (100)

In Subiela’s film we do not have any gothic or supernatural undertones or subtexts. One sees, however, some affinities to the erotic reverie in the invocation of a desired/desirable specter in the figure of Rachel. It is in time’s terms that Rachel recognizes that Leopoldo is regaining access to spectral memories of his love for her when she states: “te estás acordando” (35:52).

Memories of the Dead, or Spectral Memory

The appearance of the ghost of Pablo, Leopoldo's friend, who was disappeared during the so-called dirty war, conjures a different set of emotions and problems about specters. Avery Gordon reminds us about the difficulty of dealing with memories and experiences linked to the aftermath of state repression when she states that

The *desaparecido* always bears the ghost of the state whose very power is the defining force of the field of disappearance. The torture, the agony, the terror, the difficult-to-put-into-words experience of being disappeared: the disappeared sustain and convey the traces of the state's power to determine the meaning of life and death. The state creates an identity that remains to haunt those marked by its hand and all the others to whom that hand is extended. (127)

In the course of a conversation at a café, Leopoldo is the only one who can see and communicate with Pablo's specter. Leopoldo also reveals to Pablo that he is quite aware of his death. In turn Pablo wonders why Leo is able to see him. To this Leopoldo merely responds, "te lo cuento otro día" (1:13:15). We also learn that Pablo also wants to retain his memories of when they were young men lusting after women. We are reminded that

[g]hosts are untimely/anachronous (with the Greek prefix 'ana' carrying the idea of repetition) in the disturbance of the distinctions between beginnings and returns as well as between life and death. (Parkin-Gounelas 130)

At a later point in the conversation, Pablo comes to accept his death and his inability to hold on to happy memories, which seem to be his connection to the world of the

living. As a parting favor, Pablo asks Leopoldo to inform his mother and for her to tell other mothers where the bodies of their sons can be found in a mass grave. Leopoldo responds that he will share his dream collector, his invention with Pablo's mother. The idea is that the machine will allow Pablo's mother to retrieve memories and images of Pablo and have them manifest in her dreams, which will then be recorded and can be seen afterward. As Rachel explains to Leopoldo, the dream collector can serve as a translator of souls ("*un traductor de almas*") (1:16:49). Pablo's spectrality can be understood if we remember that

[t]he specter *appears* to present itself during a visitation. One presents it to oneself, but it is not present, itself, in flesh and blood. This non-presence of the specter demands that one take its time and its history into consideration, the singularity of its temporality or of its historicity. (Derrida 126, original emphasis)

The apparition of Pablo's specter conjures up embedded questions and memories lodged in the collective psyche and memory of Argentines. In reference to how the film deals with the specters of Rachel and Pablo, Keith John Richards writes:

As with the appearance of Rachel, the encounter is framed in terms of the oneiric; Leopoldo tells Pablo he was mistaken to think it had all been just a bad dream. The nightmare had been real and he didn't survive. (240)

Subiela frames this particular encounter by diffusing the background with excessive light, almost washing out all the surrounding details at the café and thus placing Leopoldo and Pablo at the center of this dramatic encounter, which invites the audience to think about its historical and affective implications. Pablo's revelation of the location where his body and the bodies of five other disappeared

can be read as a somewhat sinister moment of the film. Here rather than haunting, the specters or the spectral appearance of memories elicit the possibility of respite and solace. The terms of relation between the living and specters shift from a language of haunting to a grammar of resolution, of coming to terms with the loss of a loved one. The reappearance of the specter gives a certain finitude to the unsolved, which is what allows for haunting to exert its force, and supersedes the language of returns.¹⁰

In writing about the connection between history and cinema, Antoine de Baecque has argued about their complementary nature in that cinema can certainly be informed and shaped to suit the needs of a historical event. Conversely, history and other forms of written narrative have adopted a cinematic-visual way of narrating its historical content. To articulate the representational force of history and cinema, de Baecque writes:

In the eyes of many exegetes cinema is a *mise en forme* of the world. The cinema image is a form insofar as it organizes reality, in an essential sense, along rays of imagination. Yet in organizing this reality, the imagination imprints it with history. Conversely, while it is woven by imagination, reality leaves a historical trace—the imagination reifies it into a historical form as if the film form had lent itself, given its body over, to the history of the century. It is a body in all senses of the word in that it offers faces and movements both individual and collective, and also in that it assimilates ideas, references, works, concepts, and practices to become itself capable of thinking and being thought and hence to create and develop a history of its own. (20-21)

In *No te mueras* there is no particular effort to make sense of reality or organize it. Instead, it is Leopoldo's imagination or rather the memories of his friend that give rise to the presence of Pablo's specter and thus grounds

Argentina's history of political disappearances at this particular point in the film. Without having to dwell too much on the historical context or provide too much information to frame this unlikely encounter, the viewer understands that the conversation between Leopoldo and Pablo is one that gives history a spectral body. At any given moment these memories of the dead, or a certain kind of spectral memory, resurface and conjure them up to materialize them in an embodiment of what and how we remember our loved ones. This might serve to explain why Pablo's specter has not aged and carries with him a certain look and outfit that situates him at the historical time of his disappearance. In collapsing the time that has elapsed from Pablo's disappearance to the 1990s, the film leaves a lacuna of unresolved emotions for the audience without sentimentalizing them. But as de Baecque has suggested, a film can carry with it the weight of history and give its body to it. In a certain way, by opening itself up to this particular dark side of Argentina's recent history, the film certainly makes a gesture to conjure up personal and collective memories of the dead, embodying them, while providing a certain respite from the force of spectral memory.

Conclusions

In the course of this article I have focused on the ways in which the film provides us with a metacinematic reflection on the state of cinema, explores the affective connections between Leopoldo and his father's specter, questions whether it is possible to love over time, beyond death, and probes on the role of memory in relation to untimely deaths and friendships. Subiela's poetic treatment of these specters as metaphors, which is to say a spectropoetics, allows us to look at the film's preoccupation with visual language and technology. In an odd twist of events, these themes, discussed here in relation to spectrality, come together at the end. Life

and death, love, temporality, and technology provide a type of resolution, albeit an open-ended and problematic one. Leopoldo gradually loses his fear of the present and confronts the uncertainty that the future brings. In fact, his project of the dream collector materializes and actually allows Óscar and Leopoldo to financially profit from this endeavor. By learning to make his projects and dreams become a reality, Leopoldo also learns how to fall in love again with his wife and be a better husband, which leads to the procreation of a baby girl in which Rachel's spirit can now be incarnated. If Leopoldo has fallen in love with a specter, an immaterial woman whom he could not physically love or hug, he must now learn to love his soul mate in a different way, since she has now become his daughter.¹¹ What Subiela seeks to do by incorporating what some might deem as clichés is, in fact, to confront us with our ready dismissiveness of film and narrative clichés that do not quite go away or disappear. By rehabilitating such clichés, by putting them at the front and center as valid figures of conceptual metaphors, Subiela underscores our obsessions with novelty, definitive answers, logical narratives, and chronological organization of time.

Rather than obsessing with nostalgia for an unrecoverable past, Subiela presents a triperspectival look at history in which an examination of the past and present enable a way to move forward to the future. An awareness of the presence and weight of history of visual technology, and our concern with making visible what seemingly inhabits the oneiric or belongs to the supernatural is what drives the film's narrative and enables it to present a set of questions and unlikely points of connection. Who or what is the real specter in the film? Is it the desire to make an idea or a dream materialize? If so, then, visual technology enables for such dreams to become visible. If the specters are linked to the return of loved ones, then, we merely have a discussion of reincarnations, spirits, and memories as they emerge in our

present, the 'now.' Instead, such a return or resurgence of spectral figures made visible or released from their invisibility through an invention such as Leopoldo's dream collector enables us to shift our terms of engagement with specters and spirits. Haunting suggests our inability to have full control over the haunting act, which is left entirely to the specter, the ghostly, memories, traumas, etc. While these specters certainly have the agency to haunt the living, in this film it is the living who beckon specters to appear to engage in a two-way relationship and communication.

When asked about his concern with death and specters, Subiela responds that in completing the film, a number of deaths in his life shaped his vision of it and the final product (Roundtree and Membrez 352). For instance, the death of his friend Hugo Soto, that of a female friend, the memory of his father, and Subiela's own heart surgery impacted the visual and poetic approach to spectrality. The film also forces us to ask questions about how we position our memories of loved ones, how they shape our feelings towards them, and whether we remember them with a certain nostalgia or simply as a way to reaffirm our projected hopes and desires. In this light it is important to remember Cynthia Duncan's remarks about *No te mueras*: "Cinema, photographs, and sound recordings can serve as reminders of human experience, but cannot replace it. They preserve images, but not the essence of those we love" (208). The film also confronts us with questions about the role of technology in relation to our senses and how through speech, sight, and sound we can face and communicate with collected or preserved images, resonances, remembrances, and their coming together in the form of specters. The appearance of specters, then, does not presuppose a haunting quality in them, but that they emerge as a response to moments of affective, psychic, or collective crises, while reminding us about the role of the past and present in our shaping of our future.

Notes

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¹After Rachel informs Leopoldo that he once worked in Thomas Edison's lab, Leopoldo shares this information with his friend Óscar and states: "Parece que trabajé con Edison y que inventé el cine" (30:18). In this scene, Rachel even mentions that he helped build the kinoscope. As we know, the kinoscope is based on the Greek words that aimed to capture movement (kineto) and to watch (skopos). In fact, in 1889, William Kennedy Laurie Dickson, one of Edison's assistants, was given the task of inventing and perfecting this device. By 1892 the kinoscope was completed. In 1891, however, Edison also patented the kinoscope, a device to record images, and the kinoscope, the device used to view the images (Robinson 19; Musser 81).

²The dream collector, in a way, appears in the film as a device that conflates the kinoscope (as a device for private viewing) and the cinematograph, which displays images to an audience. The cinematograph allowed recording, developing, and projection of such images. Of course, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, there were other devices such as the phantoscope, the vitascope, the biograph, the kineopticon, and the projectoscope. The film plays with this tradition and obsession with capturing, materializing, and preserving images.

³On July 18, 1896, at the Odeon Theater in Buenos Aires, the first films of the Lumière brothers were screened (Finkielman 5-7; López 50). Two years prior to this exhibition, Edison's kinoscope received little attention in Buenos Aires. In comparison, as early as 1894, there is the first kinoscope in Brazil and in 1896 has its first cinematograph (Süssekind 22-24).

⁴For a detailed discussion of the 'spectral turn,' see Luckhurst and Blanco and Peeren. For a discussion of the usages of the ghost, specters, phantoms, and hauntings as conceptual metaphors, see Derrida, Gordon, Blanco and Peeren, Gunning, and Davis.

⁵In Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, he is often careful to keep such terms separate and, in fact, often turns to their etymological roots to differentiate their usefulness and theoretical implications.

⁶A cursory look through the Oxford English Dictionary reveals some of the sources of conflation in these terms and how they are used interchangeably. Specter, as a word stemming from Latin, is associated with the ghostly, phantoms, apparitions, and contains a terrifying quality. Ghost, which has its roots in pre-Germanic languages, has a long-standing history that links it to the concepts of spirits and souls in the religious sense. As early as the thirteenth-century, ghost also took on the connotation of an apparition of a soul of dead person. Phantom has its roots in Anglo-Norman, Old French, and goes through Middle French and Middle English into its current form, which is closely associated with apparitions, specters, ghosts, or the image or idea of something that haunts the mind or the imagination. Most of these words have a direct correlation in Spanish and are used in similar ways, as one can see from a cursory overview of the dictionary of the Real Academia Española. The precise translation of these terms and the question of translation is beyond the scope of this paper, but one must be aware of these distinctions and the etymological entanglements of these terms, particularly given the nuances of the terminology used in film, literary, and theoretical writings related to the 'spectral turn.'

⁷The trickiest term, however, is haunting or to haunt, which the OED defines as something related to what a spirit or ghost can do. In other words, a spirit or a ghost can haunt, though the word "haunt" meant habitual visitations. As a word that can be traced back to Middle French and Middle English, it does not have a precise correlative in Spanish. As examples of different expressions used to describe the "haunting" experience, we have: *estar perseguido por recuerdos, en la casa hay fantasmas, la casa está encantada o embrujada, en ese lugar penan almas*, to name a few. To use haunting as an adjective or verb, possible words that could be used in Spanish are *inolvidable, imborrable, evocador, persistente, obsesionante, agobiante, acechador, aparición, asediar, recorrer, rondar, plagar, inundar, atormentar, reaparecer*, etc. I draw attention to these euphemisms in Spanish in relation to "haunting" to underscore the difficulty of narrowing down these lexical possibilities to a single term as it has been used in English to describe the return of ghosts or specters.

⁸Derrida's *Specters of Marx* begins with a question or a necessity to explore what it means to learn to live. This critical invitation mirrors how the film ends with Leopoldo's realization that the most important function of living is learning.

⁹According to Finkielman, the first known film to be made in Argentina was a short film entitled *La bandera argentina* (1897) by a Frenchman living in Buenos Aires, Eugenio Py, and with the support of Max Glücksmann (Austrian) and Enrique Lepage (Belgian). They used a Léon Gaumont camera. This film, unfortunately, seems to have been lost and the earliest recordings available are of surgical operations. At a later point in *No te mueras*, starting at around the 57th minute, the film provides a particular sequence that also hints at the film's preoccupation with Argentina's film history. Leopoldo opens up the movie theater where he works, but upon walking in, he finds himself in a sort of time warp in which the present and past have been conflated. We see a poster of Luis César Amadori's *Madame Sans-Gêne* (1945), which is being projected in the movie theater. In the same poster, we see the name of Niní Marshall, an Argentine actress of the period known for her roles in comedy films. As he walks upstairs to the projection room, we see another poster of *Lo que le pasó a Reynoso* (1937) by Leopoldo Torres Ríos, father of acclaimed director Leopoldo Torre Nilsson. This sequence leads to the reunion between Leopoldo and the specter of Leopoldo's father inside the projection room where they have both worked. The choice of names for Leopoldo and William also resonate with historical figures in Argentine cinema (Leopoldo Torres, father and son) and American cinema (William Kennedy Laurie Dickson).

¹⁰Despite obvious differences in style, genres, and filmic approaches, Subiela's gesture in this film is similar to what Patricio Guzman attempts to do in *Nostalgia de la luz* (2010) in which science, particularly astronomy, sight, and memory come together as an attempt to put to rest the haunting effects of the unsolved, the unexplained as related to the aftermath of mass disappearances and state terrorism.

¹¹Like many of Subiela's films, there are psychoanalytic subtexts and the final scenes of *No te mueras* certainly leave us with an ending that is both suggestive of a possible Electra complex that might ensue and how problematic their relationship might become now that spectrality has been transcended. An extended discussion of a psychoanalytic reading of the film, and of the scene in which Rachel's spirit reincarnates in Leopoldo's daughter, is beyond the scope of the paper. However, as Subiela has expressed in a number of interviews, psychoanalytic language is ever-present in his scriptwriting and cinematic language.

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