

Preface

Images in spite of all:
in spite of our own inability
to look them as they deserve.

—Georges Didi-Huberman

ALTHOUGH THE REPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN FILM and media has been the subject of extensive analysis and critique in the United States since at least the Native American occupation of Alcatraz Island, there is no comprehensive examination of the cinematic representation of Indigenous peoples in Argentina. My interdisciplinary approach to film studies will do so within a frame that links politics, aesthetics, and ethics. Such representation is political in the context of the Argentine state's troubled history with respect to Indigenous peoples, as recent uses of new media increase awareness of Indigenous land claims and resistance to state terrorism. At the same time my project focuses on cinematic production, it acknowledges that ancestral lands predate and transcend national borders, as depicted in films such as *Tierra adentro* (*Inland*, 2011), reflecting Mapuche experiences and struggles toward land restitution, dual citizenship, and self-representation along the porous border between contemporary Chile and Argentina. Such concepts will encourage a new understanding of *argentinidad* closer to the Bolivian experience of a multinational country. Sustainability is yet another multinational issue for Indigenous peoples and film, given their continued removal from ancestral lands for purposes that include deforestation, mega-industrial soybean plantations, or tourism; the continued violence of hired henchmen and corrupt local authorities; and the indifference or complicity of civil society. Aesthetics is more relevant than ever, and I develop a broad and deep understanding of the styles of cinematic representation across periods and genres. Finally, ethics encompasses

the approach of affect and emotion, which underscores hegemonic ideology in the representation of Indigenous peoples throughout most of the twentieth century and allows for raising awareness about their accounts in documentaries and feature films shot in the twenty-first century. Ethics encompasses increasing self-representation and issues of sustainability and environmental justice at the forefront of Indigenous peoples' struggles. My project's engagement of the long history and questionable practices surrounding the representation of Indigenous peoples is founded in a politics, ethics, and aesthetics of contact and collaboration, while acknowledging the justifiable concern among Indigenous peoples with regard to scientific and statist claims and interests.

As we shall see, the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples began with the arrival of conquistadors to the land that became Argentina, since their efforts were compensated with vast tracts of land—including the inhabitants. Indeed, common practice in the so-called *repartimiento* (distribution) was to move and mix those enslaved to expedite assimilation (Bixio, 73). Genocide continued in the following centuries as *criollos* (descendants of Spaniards born in South America) gradually encroached on the ancestral lands of Indigenous peoples and came to head toward the end of the nineteenth century with the Generation of 1880's aspirations of progress and modernity. Indeed, the convergence of several factors, such as the campaigns aimed at the extermination of Indigenous peoples, the creation of museums, and immigration, led to the mythical refounding of Argentina as a nation of people of European descent.

Giorgio Agamben notes that "the development and triumph of capitalism would not have been possible . . . without the disciplinary control achieved by the new bio-power, which, through a series of appropriate technologies, so to speak, created the 'docile bodies' that it needed" (3). In Argentina, economic development was based on the enslavement, exploitation, and exclusion of Indigenous peoples. Numerous peace treaties between Indigenous peoples and representatives of the state were signed and ignored, and many military campaigns were waged against Indigenous peoples throughout the colonial period and the birth of the nation. In 1879, the pact between the cattle-raising oligarchy and the army led to the southern *Expedición al Desierto* (campaign to the desert), which led to the annexation of 8.5 million hectares, divided among 391 individuals.¹ As a result of the campaign, thousands of Indigenous peoples were massacred and those who survived were sent to concentration camps. Indeed, they "were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced

to bare life” (Agamben, 171). Families were dismembered. Able-bodied men were mainly transferred to barracks or sent to work as unskilled labor on sugar plantations or lumber companies in northern Argentina. Women and children were separated and given away as servants. Although individual registration was exhaustive in contemporary institutions such as police headquarters, prisons, and garrisons, the lack of documentation regarding the arrivals, constant transfers, and name changing at the concentration camps in Martín García island (River Plate) and Valcheta (Río Negro province, Patagonia) suggest that genocide (and cultural disappearance) was the end result (Lenton, 46–47).²

As repositories of knowledge, the museums marked the convergence between positivism, the notion of unlimited progress, and the development of science. After a brief stint in two makeshift exhibit spaces in the city of Buenos Aires (in 1877 and 1879), Francisco Pascasio (Perito) Moreno (1852–1919) inaugurated the massive and modern Museo de Ciencias Naturales (Natural Science Museum) in the city of La Plata in 1884. At that time the Conquest of the Desert “shaped Creole interest in indigenous cultures ... focusing scientific and social attention on the physical bodies of contemporary indigenous people who were understood generally as receding into the past” (Larson, 19). Yet “the presence of celebrity specimens and living indigenous people on display ... pulled indigenous cultures into the national present, complicating state-driven narratives of whiteness and indigenous eradication” (Larson, 19). Indeed, Moreno had Chieftains Inacayal and Foyel, their families and retinue hosted at the Museum, where they were expected to provide invaluable data; however, despite their deep depression, these Indigenous peoples resisted. Eventually, aware of their despair, Moreno was able to relocate some of the survivors. Nonetheless, Moreno “allowed the remains of deceased captives to be publicly displayed, [and] studied ... after their death, despite his intimate knowledge of these individuals personally and their cultural beliefs regarding the sanctity and privacy of human remains” (Larson, 48).

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–1888) coined the celebrated phrase that expressed the antinomy civilization versus barbarism that ultimately condemned gauchos and Indigenous peoples to the periphery as he welcomed European immigrants. Indeed, government programs led to the arrival of some 5.9 million newcomers between 1871 and 1914 (Rock, 141). About 80 percent of them “came from Mediterranean countries; half were Italians, a quarter Spaniards, the others Ottomans, Russians, French, and Portuguese”

(Rock, 141). While immigrants were welcomed as farmers, “they found themselves increasingly enjoined from land ownership,” therefore, they migrated to urban areas (Rock, 140). Cities grew, developed, and became modern. The arrival of the railway cemented the importance of Buenos Aires. In the pampas, “the spread of sheep farming drove the free gauchos to the far periphery where they gradually disappeared as an identifiable social group. The growth of farming had much the same effect” (Rock, 142). In sum, the genocidal campaigns against Indigenous peoples, their representation as relics of the past in museums, and massive immigration contributed to their erasure in a hegemonic imaginary ready to embrace Europe and modernity.

This book offers a multiperspectival approach to the cinematic representation of Indigenous peoples throughout a period that spans roughly a century. The sociopolitical grounding of each period is complemented by a historical account of the respective cinematic production. Each section juxtaposes the discussion of the movie set against the ethnographic context of the respective Indigenous peoples with an analysis of the emotions represented to create flashes of intuition that point at the hyphen, the gap between history and representation. Set chronologically, the films included in this study evidence different stages in the projection of the Argentine imaginary, which cannot envision the daily life of Indigenous peoples prior to the conquest or in colonial times, and unsurprisingly remains in denial of their existence in the present.

In keeping with the periodization initiated by Argentine film historian Claudio España—namely, silent films, classical cinema, modernity and auteur, cinema in democracy, and the contemporary period—my analysis traces the initial erotic projection, which moves through melodrama to the conventions of the Western. The 1960s focus on decolonization is superseded by allegorical renditions and the promise of self-expression in the late twentieth-century documentaries. Rather than following a macro-approach—for instance, focusing on the idealism of Latin American youth in 1960s and 1970s or contemporary postemotionalism (Meštrović), both of which are overdetermined and erase the difference of individual histories and reactions—the focus on emotion in this text stems from a close reading of the utterances that appear in each film. However, the main issue as I discuss the movies in this study is the question of translation, which underscores the shimmering difference and deferral of *différance*—in linguistic and cultural terms. Indeed, we face the complex nature of the representation of ancestral oral cultures in a globalized Western present,

where the assumed illiteracy does not refer to the inability to read or write but to the unintelligibility resulting from conflicting world visions and the arbitrary nature of political order.³ In sum, this book offers a critique of the representation of Indigenous peoples in Argentine movies and an invitation to decolonization, which in Argentina was spearheaded by the late David Viñas, and continued by Osvaldo Bayer, and a larger group of younger researchers including Diana Lenton, Mariano Nagy, and Walter Delrio, among others. These attempts at decolonization are interrelated with the work of a growing number of Latin Americanists, such as Argentine cultural critic Walter Mignolo; Spanish Jesuit priest, anthropologist, and linguist Xavier Albó; and Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano. Indeed, the focus on subalternity in Latin American studies of the early 1990s seems to have developed into the renewed interest in Indigenous cultures. While anthropologist Carlos Martínez Sarasola stands alone in his commitment and exploration of Indigenous cultures in Argentina, the work of Bolivian Aymara feminist, and sociologist Silvia Cusicanqui, Chilean and Mapuche-Williche Luis E. Cárcamo Huechante, and Guatemalan literary sociologist Arturo Arias is evidence of a continental paradigm shift.