The Argentine film industry has long been recognized as one of the most developed and prolific in Latin America. During the last military dictatorship, from 1976 to 1983, artistic expression such as filmmaking was stifled. Post-dictatorship Argentina saw a resumption of film production by pre-1976 “old masters,” who established film schools to train the next generation. As such, the period known as the New Argentine Cinema did not begin until 1997. The formative years of the New Argentine Cinema also saw dramatic changes in the nation itself. Whereas most films of the immediate post-dictatorship years focused on atrocities of the past, young filmmakers abstained from explicit politics or moralizing messages. Their films told stories of the present, of protagonists marginalized by neoliberalist economic policies under which individuals were exploited and commodified. The severe economic crisis of 2001 accelerated processes of social change in a traditionally deeply Catholic culture. Yet even as the government expanded legal rights for some social minorities, others continue to struggle for recognition.

My investigation concerned the manner in which these “body politics” manifest in contemporary cinema—how onscreen physical representations communicate relationships of power with regards to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, religion, class, and nationality. I also sought to gain a sense of the degree to which the filmic portrayals of social groups defined by the aforementioned signifiers reflected broader social attitudes towards them. In Buenos Aires I attended film festivals and screenings to acquire familiarity with the local culture of cinema. A previous semester of study in Buenos Aires also familiarized me with the canon of Argentine film dating back to the silent era and deepened my understanding of the cultural and historical contexts of the New Argentine Cinema. I took notes and made photocopies of archived material in the library of the National School of Filmmaking and Experimentation (ENERC), which catalogs news articles contemporary to the release of each film as well as scholarly film criticisms. I was able to inform my investigation with the purchase of DVDs which are presently scarce or unavailable in the United States, and took advantage of Argentina’s developed film critics and scholars with the purchase of books on the New Argentine Cinema which have not yet been translated into English for North American distribution.

I also sought to make personal contact with both film scholars and filmmakers. Through her involvement with my study abroad program, I was able to interview Clara Kriger, a professor, author, and scholar of Latin American cinema. Clara also put me in contact with Lucia Puenzo, director of XY (2007) and El niño pez (2009), whom I am planning to interview via Skype. My hostess, professor of technology Beatriz Almark, had over a decade of experience in the cinema, and introduced me to professor, veteran filmmaker and producer Kiko Tenenbaum (La era del ñandú, 1986) with whom I also conducted an interview. Although the majority of his experience in the film industry occurred before the onset of the New Argentine Cinema, his lengthy involvement gave him a valuable and unique perspective on the relationships between film and society in Argentina. I conversed with director Julián D'Angiolillo, who loaned me a pre-release copy of his documentary Hacerme feriante (2010). Alejandro Sammaritano, president of the Cine Club Nucleo, put me in contact with director Fito Pochat, who was likewise kind enough to give me a pre-release copy of his documentary Un tren a Pampa Blanca (2011).

In the coming semester, I will be conducting an independent study of the same topic. I hope to synthesize the information I gathered from books, newspapers, magazines, films, and interviews into an honors project for Spring 2012.

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