

DIALOGUE

**THE HOUSE
AS EXILE**

Interview with

**LAURA ALCOBA AND
VALERIA SELINGER**

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Published in 2007, Laura Alcoba's novel *Manèges: Petite histoire argentine* is based on its author's experience of exile. Other works by the author include *Le bleu des abeilles* (The Blue of the Bees, 2013), *La danse de l'araignée* (Dance of the Spider, 2017), which together with *Manèges* form a trilogy, and most recently *Par la Forêt* (Through the Forest, 2022). When still a child, Alcoba was granted asylum in France together with her mother, giving her a different language in which to express the memories of her childhood during Argentina's last military dictatorship. Enthusiastically received by literary critics and audiences alike, Alcoba's work of autofiction has been translated into several languages, including Spanish and English. Leopoldo Brizuela's Spanish translation of *Manèges* was published under the title *La casa de los conejos*—also translated into English under the title *The Rabbit House*—and became canonical reading almost immediately upon publication.

The novel tells the story of an eight-year-old girl who lives with her mother and other activists against Argentina's dictatorship, in a house that conceals a clandestine printing press used to produce the historic militant magazine *Evita Montonera*. Together with its real-world inspiration—the Casa Mariani-Teruggi, which today is a national historical monument in Argentina—it could be argued that *The Rabbit House*, a widely read and discussed novel, constitutes a *lieu de mémoire*, a site of memory of recent Argentine history.

In 2020, the director and screenwriter Valeria Selinger (*Foliesophies*, 2006; *Le Sixième*, 2002), who is also of Argentine origin, added an audiovisual dimension to this *lieu de mémoire* with her film adaptation to Alcoba's novel. The film—an Argentine-French-Spanish co-production¹ that took the Spanish book title (released in English as *The Rabbits' House*)—foregrounds the perspective of its young protagonist to tell the story of her

fugitive experience in very few words. Fear of betrayal, covert communication, censorship, shyness and shame—all vectors for the silence and dread that run throughout the film—contribute to the intensity of a motion picture that has received several nominations and awards at international festivals, including the New York Latino Film Festival, Seattle Latino Film Festival, Guayaquil International Film Festival, and Taormina Film Fest.

In a conversation on a video call to Paris, France (where both women live), the writer Laura Alcoba and the director Valeria Selinger offer their reflections on *The Rabbits' House*, discussing

the complexities involved in every film adaptation of a novel, while also acknowledging the role that the cinematic image plays in the creation of visual documents of memories related to violence and exile. Both creators explore the way these images are constructed based on the possibilities offered by cinematic language, considering the multiple dimensions opened up by the distance of exile, especially from the perspective of childhood memories, as well as the tensions that arise between the artist's fervent need for personal expression and the construction of a collective document/*lieu de mémoire*.

Valeria, do you remember the first time you read *The Rabbit House* and when you knew you wanted to make a film adaptation of the book?

Valeria Selinger (VS): Yes, I remember perfectly. I was staying near Barcelona, in Platja d'Aro to be exact. My mother had a holiday flat there. Because of her job she receives a lot of books, so every time I go I ask her for a book to read there. She said to me: "Here, this is for you." I took the book and sat down by the public swimming pool to read it. I finished it in a few hours, very quickly. While I was reading it, I visualised images for a possible film. Later on, I went to a lot of presentations where Laura talked about her readers, and I realised that what had happened to me was very similar to what happened to them with her book: a real identification with it. What I had seen while reading *The Rabbit House* were simply fragments of my own life reflected in the life of this young girl, Laura.

Laura, we would agree with Valeria that your book has a very cinematic quality. When you wrote *The Rabbit House*, did you have any visual points of reference? And on this point, what role does the image play in relation to memory—a memory that could be described as comprised of recollections of the images of places you've experienced?

Laura Alcoba (LA): The truth is that in the first stage of writing it, I didn't really know what I was going to do with it. I wrote the book out of a fervent need to write, but I was aware that by writing it I was rescuing images from the past, that in a way I was writing something like the photo album I never had. In fact, there is a whole element that is particular to the book and that Valeria took up in the film: the fact they weren't allowed to take photos. This is important because despite the fact our lives are filled with images, there were no photographic documents of that period and no family story, which was very strange. No stories, no vestiges, no photographs. In the first stage of writing

the book, I was aware that I was very specifically rescuing images. What I wrote at first were like mental pictures of the images I was able to reconstruct. Out of those images I constructed the book. In fact, I didn't start with a story, but with what I remembered: two or three lines about images, and then based on that I put together the story. I think that the feeling of a powerfully visual dimension of the book, which many readers tell me they've had and which Valeria noticed, arises out of the fact that its raw material was exclusively visual.

To what extent does cinematic language, as the language of the image, offer ways that are different from literary forms to depict violence, disappearance or exile? To give an example, one of the most significant scenes in the film is when the mother announces her decision to leave Argentina. This introduces a very interesting dialogue between "those who stay and those who leave." Are there elements in the cinematic imagery of this film that can expand or feed back into the memory-image presented in the book, or offer different perspectives or meanings?

LA: Yes, clearly for me it was important for Valeria to make her own film, that she wasn't just making a visual cinematic transcription of the book. I think there are a number of elements in Valeria's film that, without betraying the book, are unique to a cinematic form of expression. In fact, in the scene of the mother's departure, when we know the mother is leaving, there are a number of elements that are not quite the same in the book, but that contribute something and give her departure a feeling that is almost more dramatic, or in any case more embodied.

VS: For me, a book is words printed on a page, where in reality there is no image. The images are the invention of the reader, projections in the reader's mind. On the other hand, in a film, the images are projected on the screen. So there is a kind of "game of mirrors" between the narrative material of the book and the narrative material

that becomes the film. In this case, they tell the same story, but with different components: one with sounds and images, the other with words and what those words mean. I think possibly that particular scene, when the mother announces she's leaving, is where my own moment of breakdown is as a reader of the book—and the moment that most connects to my own story because my mother also left the country, although under different circumstances and at a different time. The details are different, but it is the moment where I identify the girl Laura most with my adolescent self. What I took away most from that moment was the intimacy between mother and daughter. In that shot, taken with a fixed camera, I wanted to highlight that space alone—with two beds and minimal lighting, because it's nighttime—where the characters move to communicate what they are saying to each other and what they leave unsaid. Precisely in that scene, the girl says a lot with her silence and with her eyes, with that kind of rejection of the information her mother is sharing with her. At the same time, for me that's the moment when the girl is forced to grow up, when she stops being a child, because now she has to live a different story. Within the structure of the film, that announcement is the last scene that propels us towards the denouement in the book. It's an important moment because it's also one of the few moments when the girl and her mother have a real dialogue. There are other shorter dialogues between them, when the mother is crying or walking hurriedly to prison, but that scene is pretty much the moment of greatest intimacy between mother and daughter.

In the book, there is an adult voice telling the story that marks a distance from the childhood memory being recounted. This voice not only appears at the end of the book but also at the beginning, when Laura writes "I am going to recall that particular Argentine insanity." In relation to the presence of this adult voice, how did you

make the decision to focus on the child's memory as the axis of the story in the film?

VS: In reality, the film doesn't take the child's memory. When you write a screenplay, even a synopsis, you always write in the present indicative tense because the film unfolds in the present indicative of the screening. The film tells the story from the girl's perspective, but it isn't her memory, because what the girl is experiencing at that moment is her present. Personally, I don't particularly like voice-overs in films. It's something that I have a certain aversion to, except when they're used in films like Marguerite Duras's, with a particular aesthetic or artistic purpose. The first idea, which wasn't mine but was suggested by the first crew I had, was a voice-over narrating the film: obviously, I rejected that idea. I understand why these adult voices can be there, why they exist and have to be written in the book. And in fact it's lovely that the book opens with "hello, Diana, I'm going to write you a letter." I find it very intense, but in the film I don't think it would have made sense, because we see Diana alive. It's precisely the difference between the mental image that the reader of a book creates and the sound and image that exists when we watch a film, as a viewer.

The book begins precisely with a quote by Gerald de Nerval, "A memory, my friend, we live only in the future or in the past," and in the first pages we read: "The fact that I am now gathering together my memories in order to describe the Argentina of the dictatorship, the Montoneros and the reign of terror, all from a child's perspective, is not so much to help me remember as to find out whether, afterwards, I can begin to forget." We want to ask you about that tension between the need to forget what happened—by letting it out, Laura, through your writing—and that memory which, once told, is not forgotten but made present for others. How do you manage to shape the tension between the memory of the person who has lived through the events being told—who seeks

“closure” for her own story—and the construction of a testimony whose presence serves others not to forget, but as an “opening” to this story?

LA: Yes, it’s made present. It’s true that the adult voice is there in *The Rabbit House*, but it appears in a very limited way, just at the beginning of the book, at the end and in that little chapter about the Spanish word *embute*. But in reality, the book isn’t written as a recollection. It’s true that I used my memories, but what came to me was in the present tense: through the child’s voice, through an “it’s like this, now,” returning fully to the rabbit house, but not with the logic of memory. The question “what do I remember?” came before I started writing, but from the moment I started to write, the present came to me and the child’s voice came to me: “La Plata, 1976,” in the present, “we are there.” The present in the book is there, not just in the very, very brief preface, which is the letter to Diana, and at the end, because the whole book is written based on the presence of that experience in the present, in the “we are there.” That’s what was really important to me, and perhaps it’s also what makes the book so open to adaptation in that way, or open to that presence, as Valeria put it, to that immediacy of cinema’s “we are there,” which in a certain way was already in the book. It’s not about remembering, it’s not about evoking, but about being there again, in that moment.

VS: What cinema also makes it possible to do, with this book, is just what you said at the beginning, Laura. The fact that there are no photos and that all the photos need to be invented. The fact that there are people who died, there are survivors of this story, and there are no photos. So this was like a task to take on, a huge commitment to try to do it. At every step we took to make the film, the value and the weight of that commitment was there. We were making images of that history that didn’t exist before, that were in the minds of some people and that had killed others.

The “rabbit house” referred to in the book and the film is recognised today as a historical monument in Argentina. It is a memorial site named Casa Mariani-Teruggi, a “house of memory” or “the house on Calle 30”. In this sense, does the film constitute a document capable of “triggering memory” for the present? Is it a work constructed to address this “lack of documents” that can show what has never been told and needs to be? In other words, in what sense can this film also be constructed as an archive-document of memory?

VS: I think so. Cinema has that quality. Even a burlesque comedy, I mean, any kind of genre—if we admit the existence of genres—has a documentary function. There are things called costumes, scenery, which speak of an era and a way of filming that also conveys a certain style or period. Anything filmed is always partly a documentary. A Latin American telenovela is also a documentary, because it portrays the particular traits of a society at a given time, in a given place and in a given era. In this particular story, of course, the weight of what we call “memory” was important. There was, on the one hand, the story told in the book. In my opinion, the book is wonderful; Laura’s writing is just beautiful, the story really touches me, I love it. On the other hand, there is the weight of the work with memory at the level of social commitment, at the historical level. Because it is a very clearly defined period, a very controversial period in the history of Argentina.

The documentary footage used in *The Rabbits’ House* was taken from an Argentine film called *Resistir* (Jorge Cedrón, 1978). How was the decision made to include excerpts from this documentary in your film, Valeria? What is its importance in the narrative construction of *The Rabbits’ House*?

VS: It was hard, first of all, to find documentary footage from this period. That film was the only one I found that I liked. It was an anonymously made film, because the director whose name ap-

pears on it doesn't really exist. The real filmmaker is a person who was abducted by the regime, and it was made using archival footage. So the footage I took came from Jorge Cedrón's film, but it's not even really his footage. He found it and I was given the rights by his daughter and nephew, who sold us those excerpts and told us that the filmmaker himself didn't know where they had come from, because it was a very chaotic time. Moreover, the laws regarding film rights were not like they are now. People filmed whatever they could, however they could, and it would be passed on from person to person. I don't know how Cedrón ended up with that footage. Actually, there's a lot of footage in the film that isn't from that period. There are several periods covered in that documentary, which tells the whole history of the Montoneros [the activist organisation that operated the "rabbit house"]. You can tell sometimes from the police or military uniforms. I kind of did the same thing: I took the excerpts that I thought I could use, regardless of the era they came from.

The decision to use this footage was precisely to show the opposite idea; I mean, I absolutely didn't want the film to look like a documentary, to have to explain "here this happens" or "this is the situation" or "this is the president." Is there an explanation? Yes, with the titles at the end. But, well, at that point the viewer has seen the film and if they want to read them they will, and if they don't they won't. Explaining things would have meant abandoning the child's perspective. I just wanted to explain things by showing what the girl saw. It seemed a good idea to me to be able to give an antithesis, in the introduction, with a little bit of what the girl didn't see. That footage is there, in the title credits, besides the film's opening narration. In fact, the frame [aspect ratio] is also smaller; it's four thirds. Then we mixed it with an image filmed by us of the mother and the girl running, and then the screen opens out into scope format, which is the aspect ratio we used in the film.

Further to these documentary excerpts, as you already pointed out, Laura, one of the passages of the book analyses the origin of the Spanish word *embute*, questioning its omission from the Spanish dictionary and pointing out that this term always appears in relation to Argentina, and that it has something of a unique meaning for Argentines...

LA: Less so now, I suppose. It's a word that was very much a slang term and it wasn't widely understood; even in Argentina very few people understood it. And that was the point of the word, you see? The fact that it was a word with a very particular usage, referring to a space for protecting and hiding things...

In the specific context of exile or violent conflicts, words are constantly being created to describe or try to explain the processes of repression or situations being experienced. Is this research/reflection appearing in the book about the word *embute* also part of your own quest to make sense of what you experienced? Is it a term that represents something, not only for you but also for that period? And again with this question we return to the issue of the relationship between the individual and society...

LA: There's one element here that, for me, it's crucial that it actually doesn't appear in the film—and it's normal that it doesn't appear—and that's the fact that I wrote the book in French. That was the first difficulty in the verbal construction: that what I wrote was entirely in French. I'm convinced that I couldn't have written the book in Spanish, because the language I write in is French. [When I started writing,] the first word that came to me was a word in a Spanish that was also a private Spanish, filled with slang. It was a paradox, an additional difficulty, for me, to make sense of all this in French. But I think it actually helped me. Many people who had experiences like this in childhood remain locked up in a kind of pact of silence that is very difficult to break [because] as children—at the

same time they join the pact—they assimilate the need to hide and to say nothing about that very strange reality. I've met a lot of people of my generation in Argentina who've told me things like: "I experienced something similar, and I still can't talk about it; thank you for writing the book." I believe that the distance, the geographical and linguistic distance, really helped me talk about that experience and that silence from a different place.

If there is exile in my writing it's there, in the writing, but not explicitly. That first book of mine doesn't talk about exile, but it's written from the perspective of a form of exile, from a distance, from another shore. In the film, necessarily, that doesn't happen, because the perspective is fully on the events [depicted]. It's important to remember that *The Rabbit House*, in the form you read it and as Valeria read it, is a translation of a book I wrote called *Manèges*, which was published by Gallimard. If exile is there, in reality, it's essential but not thematic, not explicit. There was a strangeness that was really very powerful for me when I wrote dialogues in French that were basically in my memory in Spanish. Actually, I think that helped me a lot. Although, as I said at the beginning, the story is told from inside, there in 1976, I wrote it all in another language. That helped me overcome the silence and the fear of talking, which fully forms part of that experience. Actually, in her adaptation, Valeria gave a lot of room, fully inhabiting, in cinematic terms, the silence in that child who keeps mum. I think what helped me break the silence was to write, to tell the story of that very strange experience with different words.

Without doubt, silence is fully present in *The Rabbits' House*, as is fear: the fear of giving everything away, always being careful about what you say. The film creates a whole atmosphere in which silence and fear are presented from that distance which, as you point out, allows us to see another dimension of the experi-

ence. María Zambrano argued that exile, in its separation, enables us to understand aspects that others—those who remain "inside"—cannot see or say about their own reality. Now, Valeria, we have two questions for you: How do these sensations translate into cinematic language? And how can this be done from your perspective, from your own distance?

VS: On the one hand, I think one of the brilliant aspects of Laura's book—besides the fact that it tells the story in French—is precisely the fact that she speaks, putting silence into words. In the book there is one word next to the other, and what they tell is precisely that silence. That's what grabbed my attention, what I liked, what attracted me to this book and the story it tells, living far away—both in time and space—from the period. It's what connects Laura's story to the story that I myself could have lived; it's like a bonus, a trump card. Because my Argentina, the one I know, is the Argentina of that era. People talk and dress like they did in that era, people think like they did in that era. While I still go very often—and in 2006 and 2007 I even lived for a year and a half in Argentina—that is the Argentina that moves me. So constructing a period film was easy, because it's what I knew. If I had been a different age, it would have been a different story. In fact, when the actors spoke—language is something that evolves very quickly, and Argentine Spanish evolves even faster—they used idioms, expressions and a lot of diminutives all over the place that weren't right for that era. It was something that kept taking me out of the scene, as I needed to constantly correct it so that they would try to talk the way people talked then.

The music plays an important role in the silence. It's a bit like "a cherry on top", because Laura introduced me to Daniel Teruggi (Diana Teruggi's brother), who wanted to do the music for free. I think it was when I had told Laura first that I wanted music with noises, and the music Daniel does was just the kind of thing I had in mind. For

me, the music served to fill the girl's silences. Not only does the music say what the girl doesn't, but also, in a way, the silence is expressed, as I said before, in everything the girl explains and tells us through her gaze. Indeed, if the girl's gaze hadn't been an expression of the silence and of the need to hold her tongue, her mother would probably have to be explaining to her: "look, we're going to do this here, for such and such a reason." There would have to be explanations all the time; there would be scenes of things that happen. But it's not like that, precisely to amplify the girl's silence.

Regarding the actor who plays the leading role, Valeria, did you ask Laura for any information to choose and/or do the casting work with her? And Laura, did you have contact with the actor during filming or afterwards? In other interviews you've mentioned that your mother saw the film and that she even felt that there was a physical resemblance between you and the actor who plays you. Was there any specific preparation work with the actor or in choosing her? It is often said that working with child actors is difficult...

LA: For me, the resemblance wasn't important. The girl is not me. I don't identify myself with her at all; it was not something that was important to me. So, yes, my mother did say that. My father said the opposite. The truth is that it wasn't what mattered. Valeria was kind enough to send me two little screen tests with two potential girls, to see what I thought. I said that I thought there was one who was more expressive. That seemed important to me; not which one looked more like me or which one I could identify with, that was never it. Regarding the tests Valeria sent me, I said: "I think there is one that I feel has more presence." And it turned out that she was also the one she liked. I didn't meet or talk to the girl at all beforehand, because this was an actor and a film, it wasn't about finding a "mini-me" or telling her "it wasn't like that," not at all. She's the girl who plays

the character in *The Rabbit's House*. She's not me at all. But afterwards, I did have the opportunity to see her and tell her that I had found her performance moving.

VS: Yes, physically, let's say, there was no preamble. We did two casting calls for the girl and there were blondes, redheads, brunettes, tall girls, short girls: the physical characteristics of the girls didn't matter at all. What mattered was something else; above all, it was the gaze. And to me, from the very moment of the casting, Mora—the actor's name is Mora Iramain García—captivated me with her eyes and how she was able to handle this question of the silences and to convey emotion. Because ultimately that's what the film needed: the ability to convey emotion with her eyes, with her postures, with her body; as she conveyed it, without needing monologues, or sentences, or even dialogue. Her mother brought her to the casting call because of her own personal story, as it turned out that the girl's grandparents were among the disappeared. When she told me this, I said, "No, this girl can't be the actor, because she's going to break down on me; after two scenes she'll be crying, she's not going to be able to do it." So I pushed, I mean, I was more "brutal" in the casting call with her. I told her: "Look, since you know the history of the military dictatorship and all, let's imagine that the soldiers are there, the ones who took and captured your grandparents. What would you say to them?" And her response was perfect. Then I said: "now, let's imagine you have to do the same thing, but without saying anything to them. What do you do? The soldiers are there. How do you talk to them without talking to them?" She did it in a way that the three of us who were doing the casting were left teary-eyed. Suddenly, Mora got up and said: "Hey, girls, I'm acting. Don't cry." By then she had won us over. The truth is that I was really lucky because, yes, although in general making a film with children is difficult, this girl is exceptional and it was very easy to make a film with her.

Another point that we want to raise is the capacity that works of art have in these contexts to find pathways towards reconciliation, restitution or justice, in a society broken by its violent history. To what extent do you consider that your work plays a role in this? For example, in both the film and the book, the children stolen by the military dictatorship are identified as an unresolved issue in Argentine history and society. We want to ask you both: do you think of art as a way to confront, reconcile or rebuild what was broken?

VS: I think so, but not because of the stories it tells, not because in this story we talk about people who were savage killers or about stolen children, but because the way the atmosphere is represented has a lot of depth. Through the film I tried to tell the story with very few elements and with a type of cinematic narrativity that I believe helped avoid a certain banality in the discourse. I don't know whether I succeeded, but in my view the political side of any artistic work has more to do with form than content. Obviously, there is a thematic core to this story told in Laura's book—as the source text—and this film—as its adaptation—that has a strong political dimension with a relatively clear and well-informed ideological stance. But it seems to me that if a film or a book can help to debate ideas and change a reality, whatever it may be, to fight for what is right, or to find the missing children, it isn't so much because of what the story is as for how it is told. Because of the way the creators decide to tell it. I don't think that one without the other would work. Then there are viewers of other types of films that have worked successfully, really well, in addressing these topics: films from Argentina and other countries that deal with similar issues and that are films that also help. Laura, what do you think?

LA: I'm always very careful with topics that relate to a moment in Argentine history that obviously and inevitably raises a whole range of questions and political issues. In fact, I don't like dogmatic art and I'm quite fearful of it. I think taking the

perspective of a little girl to tell the story keeps [the book] from getting tied down to something dogmatic. The girl is there because she's there; she has no militant position to justify. The Montoneros weren't right either; it wasn't like "these ones were right, and these ones weren't", or "that movement or the other was right." Writing from that perspective was kind of imposed on me when I wrote it. I think it raises multiple questions that are more subtle, more complex. And that's the good thing, that the film totally respected the child's point of view with all its complexity. The child is there without having chosen to be; this is very important, and it's also there in the film. She's there because of the violence of the situation, because of external violence, but it isn't justifying any kind of position. She's there, and it's even more violent because of that. All of that is there, as questions raised, without any answer put forward: there's no dogmatic point of view. In any case, in my book there never was. I think of course that the film raises a lot of questions, because it touches a very painful moment in Argentina's memory. I didn't write a militant book, and I don't think the film is militant either, because militancy is always narrower.

VS: Of course, that's what I meant by depth. There's an obvious connection with the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, with the issue of the stolen children. I liked the fact that in addition to telling a very beautiful, very intense and well-written story, there was a connection with that part of Argentina's history that touches me on a personal and individual level. If both Laura's book and the film can contribute to finding the children who have still yet to be found, that would be great, but it isn't the reason you do this. Because otherwise, it would be a bit like positioning yourself as God: who are we to claim that what we're doing will lead to the discovery of the missing children who haven't been found up to now? The film and the book describe history in a particular way, but, in any case, they speak of history with a capital "H".

And, from that perspective, as we're talking about history, there actually is a commitment.

To conclude, you both speak of the importance of recounting history through a “little story”, which is also the subtitle of the book in French (*Manèges. Petite histoire argentine*). In other words, history affects people, and in that storytelling process, there is a phenomenon of speaking-listening to the memory of the second- or third-generation exiles who are faced with banishment or repression that, as you point out, raises more questions about what happened and about the place they have in the events depicted. Also taking into account the multiple types of distance that you've pointed out, who is *The Rabbit House* written and filmed for?

LA: I can simply refer to the complexity, or above all the individuality I talked about at the beginning, the fact that I wrote it in French, in Paris. I think that at the time I was writing, a form of storytelling began to emerge that for me was like recounting that moment to someone who knew nothing about it; in other words, it was for everyone, it wasn't targeting a particular audience. For example, when the book was later translated and launched in Argentina, I was asked a lot of questions about how I position myself generationally. And I would say: “But I'm not; I don't belong to any generation. I wrote from a different place.” I didn't feel I identified at all with a way of positioning myself in an Argentine discourse. I didn't even know that the book was going to be translated. For me, it was to say something and rescue something from the total silence, from that experience that was so huge, so strange. So it wasn't aimed at a particular reader; I didn't think specifically of an Argentine reader, or a Hispanic American reader. It was to salvage something from that sea, from that ocean of silence, about that very individual experience, which I actually still held somewhere in my mind and body. So Valeria might say something else, but that was really how I wrote it.

VS: Writing a book, or writing, even if it isn't a book, is already something huge and very powerful that requires a lot of concentration and work, a lot of things. Making a film involves a tech crew as well: cameras, lighting, a human team, a lot of people working on it, a financial team. Huge amounts of resources are needed. Considering all this, I think a film is basically always made out of the desire of the person who initiates it. What it mobilises is desire. Desire and need, which is almost the same thing in this respect, as something that cannot be stopped, an overriding need. There is a kind of inner urgency that nobody can even explain. Now, years later, it's impossible for me to explain what that desire, that overriding need, was based on. But that's how it was. I think there's a moment in writing, whatever it might be, when you create something, which is like when the boat really starts moving through the deep water and you start sailing inside what you're doing. And for that to happen, there has to be that deep desire that enables you to spend hours and hours and hours going over and over that same text, or that same scene, whatever you're doing. Perhaps I could connect this to the previous question, because it seems to me that this did not arise, either for me or for Laura, as an act of vindication. Perhaps the words “to find out whether I can begin to forget” are kind of what Laura's book and my film are about... This story is more an act of resistance than an act of vindication. So resisting is what you can do with this history so that it continues to exist. It brings together this vital need to move through this history with making this history exist. ■

NOTES

- 1 Soon to be available on the Filmin streaming platform. To arrange specific screenings, please contact valesel@aol.com

THE HOUSE AS EXILE: AN INTERVIEW WITH LAURA ALCOBA AND VALERIA SELINGER

Abstract

Laura Alcoba's novel *Manèges. Petite histoire argentine* (2007), based on the memory of her childhood during Argentina's last military dictatorship, and its film adaptation by the filmmaker Valeria Selinger (*The Rabbits' House*, 2020) serve as a framework for this dialogue with these two creators. The interview explores the complexities in the production of any film adaptation, while also considering the expressive potential of the film image and cinematic language for the creation of visual documents of memories related to violence and exile, both personal and collective.

Key words

The Rabbits' House; Argentine military dictatorship; Film adaptation; Memory; Exile; Violence.

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LA CASA COMO EXILIO: ENTREVISTA CON LAURA ALCOBA Y VALERIA SELINGER

Resumen

La novela *Manèges. Petite histoire argentine* (2007), de la escritora Laura Alcoba, basada en la memoria de su infancia durante la última dictadura militar argentina, y su adaptación cinematográfica, realizada por la cineasta Valeria Selinger (*La casa de los conejos*, 2020), sirven de marco para este diálogo con ambas creadoras. La entrevista no solo aborda la compleja realización que conlleva toda adaptación cinematográfica, sino que también plantea las posibilidades de expresión que poseen la imagen y el lenguaje cinematográficos para la creación de documentos visuales de memorias sobre la violencia y el exilio, tanto personales como colectivos.

Palabras clave

La casa de los conejos; Última dictadura argentina; Adaptación cinematográfica; Memoria; Exilio; Violencia.

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