

AQUÍ Y ALLÁ (HERE AND THERE)

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ABSTRACT

Aquí y Allá is a 22-minute experimental documentary that reflects on family as an emotional system that operates across generations by focusing on the passing of time, the possibilities of remembering and the construction of space as an ongoing historical and subjective process. The film creates an impressionistic tapestry that weaves the historical tension of racial identity in Colombia with the complexity of family dynamics between my grandparents, my father and his siblings during their time together in Chipaque, a small town in Colombia.

I began this project with the intention to trace the echoes of violence in Chipaque between the 40s and 50s' based on stories that my paternal grandfather used to tell. As I was doing preliminary interviews, I became aware that in a way I was chasing my grandparents' shadow, as they have both passed away. Then, the house where my father and his siblings grew up was sold. This development prompted me to refocus the film and make a more personal and intimate exploration of the concept of family bonds and the idea of home.

A type of cognitive map that works as a family portrait, the film juxtaposes colour 16mm images, black and white video footage and photos from the family's archive with an immersive sound design and a diaristic use of text to illustrate the impossibility of looking at the past as a fixed, solid and understandable dimension. Weaving fragments of private and public spaces, gestures, voices and phrases, the film draws from the tradition of experimental cinema to create an intimate audiovisual site of personal and collective memory in which the beauty and the pain from both the past and the present co-exist simultaneously.

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INTRODUCTION: BACK THROUGH THE HEART

To remember: from the Latin *re-cordis*, to pass back through the heart.
— Eduardo Galeano



Image 1. Photo from family archive. *Aunt Yolanda's First Communion.*

Aquí y Allá is a 22-minute experimental documentary that reflects on the tension between personal history and memory by focusing on my father and his siblings' experiences growing up together in Chipaque, a small town outside of Bogota, Colombia. The film does not provide a clear objective point of view that explains exactly what happened (where, when and how), it instead creates a poetic site of memory that draws a blurry line between the past and the present mediated through the architecture of the family home and the small town in which it is located. An exercise on the possibilities of remembering as well as an investigation into my own roots and background, the film echoes the history of Colombia's racial tensions through family dynamics,

physical resemblances and stories of trauma. Deploying a quilt-like juxtaposition of colour 16mm images, black and white video footage and photos from the family's archive, an immersive sound design (based on ambient sounds and interviews that my father conducted with his siblings) and a diaristic use of text, (based on stories compiled from the interviews), *Aquí y Allá* creates a series of audiovisual site memories, *lieux de mémoire*, which as per French historian Pierre Nora, “thrive only because of their capacity for change, their ability to resurrect old meanings and generate new ones along with new and unforeseeable connections.”¹

Given the personal nature of this project, my questions and positions were constantly in flux throughout the development, production and post-production stages. Although most of the time I wasn't quite sure of my final destination, my main interest throughout this beautiful and challenging journey was to find ways to cinematically illustrate memory as a continuum, to evoke history's oscillation between the far past, the immediate past and the present.

In the first half of this support paper I will focus on the development and pre-production stages of the project, including the different circumstances and cinematic references that influenced my journey from the original idea to preparing the shoot in Bogotá and Chipaque, as well as a reflection on how *Aquí y Allá* fits within my body of work. The second part of the paper focuses on my work methodology during production and post-production, the discoveries I made along the way, details of my visual and aural treatment, including reflections on my use of text in the film.

¹ Pierre Nora, Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Realms of Memory: Conflicts and divisions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 15

FROM HERE TO THERE

What am I doing here?

I don't seek, I find.

— Pablo Picasso



Image 2. Behind the scenes photo. *Lina's reflection.*

I include this quote by Picasso because the difference between seeking and finding has been vital in my filmmaking process. To seek is to attempt to find something, to ask for something from someone. To find is to discover or perceive by chance or unexpectedly, to recognize or discover something to be present.

My original idea for this project was to remap the echoes of violence from the 40s' and 50s' in Chipaque, the Colombian town where my grandparents lived for over 40 years and where my father, his three sisters and brother were raised. As a result of this interest, I went to Chipaque several times in the fall of 2017 and with my father's help, I was able to do a series of preliminary interviews with some of the town's elders that knew my grandparents. During these

conversations I realized that many of the stories of violence my grandfather had spoken about when I was growing up took place outside of the town. Unsure of what to do next considering that the stories did not necessarily fit with my initial idea, I asked my father to walk around Chipaque with me and talk about his experience growing up there. It wasn't long after I came back to Toronto that I realized that going to Chipaque was in a way my attempt to chase my late grandparent's shadow. Then when my father called me one afternoon to let me know that the house where they grew up had just been sold, it became clear that not only I had to shift the focus of the film but also re-think the reason why I wanted to make this project. As I went from seeking to finding, I decided to make a more personal and intimate film that would attempt to map the connection between my father and his siblings' memories with the spaces where they took place in Chipaque. I soon realized that given that my father's relationship with his siblings is pretty distant now (they mostly get together to talk about inheritance) making this film would also serve as an excuse to bring them together to remember their shared past and to remember each other. It would also be a way for me to learn more about where I come from as well as to spend time with my father. After all, be it a fiction, a documentary or an experimental film, that is one of the main reasons why I make films: to create an encounter around the camera, between what's behind and in front of it.

As I started to tack my sailing boat towards the wind, I knew that I had to interview my father and his siblings so they could reminisce together. In conversation with my father, we decided that it made the most sense for him to develop the questions and be the one to do the actual interviews, and that I would document the process with a video camera. For his interview, we figured that it was best for me to do it while I shot it, following the same questions he had

asked his siblings. These interviews became the main historical well that was to nourish the different layers of sound, image and text in the film.

Given that I wanted to illustrate the different spatial and temporal layers embedded in memory via texture, I decided to shoot on colour 16mm and Mini DV. In conversation with my supervisor Philip Hoffman, I decided to use 10 rolls of colour 16mm for the interior and exterior shots of the house in Chipaque, as well as for a series of mini-portraits (focusing on faces and hands) I was to make of my father and his siblings after each interview. I used Mini DV to document the actual interviews, as well as our activities during the wrap party (a reunion I organized to thank everyone during which we played games, looked at photos and shared a meal) and the photos that my father and his siblings loaned me from their personal archives. Aiming to further articulate the difficulty of remembering, I also shot the domestic and public spaces in Chipaque on Mini DV using very similar angles and framings to the ones I had used to shoot on colour 16mm.

Independently from the result, I'm very happy with the moments that were created in the process of making this film. I don't think my father's relationship with his siblings will change fundamentally, but the fact that we carved some time and space for them to sit down and talk to each other was a really moving experience for everyone, however fleeting it may feel now.

The past is never dead. It's not even past.



Image 3. Behind the scenes photo. Aunt Yolanda looking at photos.

As I continued to prepare the shoot throughout the first semester of 2018, I realized that I had to find an audiovisual strategy that would aide me to trace the present of the spaces in Chipaque and the faces of my family while summoning the echoes and shadows of the past at the same time. During this research period, I examined the way the following four films represent time and memory in a personal way: Chantal Akerman's *News from home*, Jean-Luc Godard's *JLG/JLG: Self-Portrait in December*, Philip Hoffman's *passing through/torn formations* and Jonas Mekas' *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*. Although there is no direct stylistic connection between my final film and any of these films, I was inspired by the way they all invoke the past and a sense of longing and absence through the immediacy of the moment.

Akerman's *News from home* (1977) consists of long takes of different locations in New York City set to Akerman's voice-over as she reads letters her mother sent her between 1971 and

1973, when the director lived in that city. Her choice to use her own voice struck me as a simple yet very powerful way to invite the audience to feel how these two spaces and times (Brussels and New York) co-exist at the same time in that moment from her perspective. While the image invites the audience to focus on what is happening in the present, the voice over creates a sort of reference to memory (and a longing for her home back in Brussels), the words carry a trace of what has passed while reminding us that time is literally passing right in front of our eyes. These juxtaposition of images and sound invites us to be inside the outsider. Although I did not end up using voice over in my film, thinking about these gaps between time, space, image and voice, helped me figure out my own strategy. At the end, I chose to weave sound, image and text to bring the distant spatial and temporal realities together, and decided to use text to illustrate my presence during the first two thirds of the film. I chose to incorporate my actual voice in the last sequence of the film, during which I am heard asking my father and his sibling's questions about whether or not they discovered something new about each other.

It is not gratuitous that I am titling this section about influences after one of Faulkner's best-known lines "the past is never dead, it's not even past"². It's not only a beautiful reflection on how the past lives with us, but Godard also quotes it in *JLG/JLG: Self-Portrait in December* (1995). The film is a melancholic rumination on his life and work, "an inebriating dialectical diary of words, sounds, images and landscapes"³ that made me think about how one could go about filming a thought in process, about how to illustrate the desire to engage with the past, and the uncertainty and longing that comes with it. As I re-watched the film, I was struck by the direct yet mysterious way in which Godard reveals the intimacy of his home. His focus on darkly

² William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951), 73

³ David Rooney, "Jlg/Jlg — Self-Portrait in December," *Variety*, July 11, 1994, <https://variety.com/1994/film/reviews/jlg-jlg-self-portrait-in-december-1200438036/>.

glowing interiors and seemingly unimportant objects, like a vase with flowers on his desk for example, reminded me of the quiet power of quotidian details, which is something that I have focused on in my fiction work thus far. These details can tell us a lot about lives lived, they are haunted by multiple layers of time and history. In order to remind myself to look for objects or corners that could be easily missed during the shoot, I made notes for myself to keep my eyes open. This awareness led me to capture not so obvious details in the house (a half opened window, a set of dining room chairs, a bathroom sink, a pot boiling on the stove, a curtain moving with the wind, an afternoon at the town's square.) In their simplicity these moments managed to summon different layers of presence and absence that in turn connected with my family's experiences, their memories of these experiences as well as to the actual moment and what was happening in front of the camera when I shot these images.

Philip Hoffman's *passing through/torn formations* (1988)) had an incredible impact on me. This powerful film "deals with the life and history of Hoffman's Czech-born mother and her family, presented as a kind of polyphonic recitation—of words, of images and of sounds."⁴ Its labyrinth-like structure and poetic movements of constantly fragmenting and putting pieces back together gave me the idea to think of my film as a family quilt for which I would collage multiple perspectives using individual and collective memories to create new associations. Phil's use of repetitions and variations, particularly the incredibly moving sequence that starts at the window then goes through the curtain to Phil's mother caringly feeding his grandmother, made me think about the idea of *déjà vu*. It was this feeling that one has lived through a present situation before what ultimately inspired me to develop my own way to suggest that our memory is active, always at work. I did this by shooting the same spaces at the family home in Chipaque from slightly

⁴ Robert Everett-Green, "Touching the film and video edges at Images 88," *Globe & Mail*, June 24, 1988

different angles, first on colour 16mm and then on black and white Mini DV. In a similar way, I was trying to create a dislocation of time and place, a convergence of reflections and memories, an illustration of how the past and the present are constantly intermingling, reacting to each other and creating a new space and time in between them.

Mekas' most acclaimed diary *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1972) "chronicles his first trip back to Semeniskiai, Lithuania, the village where he was raised, after an absence of 25 years"⁵. This personal and intimate film was also an important reference throughout the process of conceiving this project. The way he brings together fleeting images of landscapes, faces and places with his indelible voice over transforms them into small poems anchored in the emotion and intensity of the past and the present. It was after watching his film that I decided that I wanted to shoot glimpses of my father and his siblings on colour 16mm and use them as one of the emotional and aesthetic threads of *Aquí y Allá*.

I was also inspired by the poetic combination of documentary elements and experimental techniques that American filmmaker Chick Strand uses in her 1986 experimental documentary *Fake Fruit Factory*. The film juxtaposes the subtle nuances in facial expressions and gestures of a group of young women who make *papier mache* fruit and vegetables in a small factory in Mexico with a string of candid conversations about sex, food and work. Like Strand, I aimed to maintain an intense closeness to my father and his siblings' faces and the domestic and public spaces in Chipaque, both photographically and psychologically. I also strategically used framing and non-synchronized sounds to create an interpretation of the overlapping layers of time and space that

⁵ Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania," *Chicago Reader*, July 11, 2002, <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/reminiscences-of-a-journey-to-lithuania/Film?oid=1066690>

doesn't follow a dominant narrative organization but instead offers an alternative that invites the audience to actively participate in the creation of meaning.

In addition, I read three books that further inspired me to reflect on how to represent time and perspective. First, I read T.S Eliot's *Little Gidding*, which was first published in 1942. After reading the poem several times, it became obvious that Eliot did not organize his impressions on a descriptive or chronological base. Instead he explores the themes that interest him by creating harmonious counter points between ideas, just as it's done in music, and just like I tried to do during the editing of this project. In a similar way, I tried to use rhythmic combinations of image, text and sound as verses to trace back and forth between the present and the past. Then, I read Pier Paolo Pasolini and Philippe Séclier's *The Long Road of Sand*. In 1959, Pasolini was commissioned by a magazine to do a chronicle of a complete tour of the Italian coasts. He wrote a non-sentimental diary that registered his impressions of an Italy that had left behind the post-war and was trying to enter the promise of a luminous economic development. In the book, the photographs that were in Pasolini's original chronicle, are replaced by new black and white photographs by French photographer Philippe Séclier, who, 42 years later reconstructs with his camera the same trip that Pasolini made back then. Philippe taking photos of the same places originally described by Pasolini is not so different from me going back to Chipaque to attempt to trace the steps of my father and his family. Although it is impossible to revisit the past, it was as a result of reading this book that I decided to shoot the same spaces in different ways (colour 16mm and video black and white) to further suggest the inherent subjectivity of the past. I also read Marguerite Dura's *The War*, which was published in 1985. It's based on the diary that she wrote during the final months of World War II. I was very impressed by the direct, expressive style of the diary, with short and broken sentences, as if they were thoughts. It gave me some

additional rhythmic cues for the editing of my film as well as further encouragement to use my voice via text to illustrate the connection between places and memories based on the stories my father and I collected during the interview process.

None of the films I watched or the books I read were static or spoke about a solid reality. They were all fluid. And if I was to identify one thing that influenced me the most, it would be this: the important reminder to continue to face the process of writing, filming and editing in a fluid way. To be able to wander without a clear destination and cherish every minute of it. To be okay with getting lost, as terrifying and frustrating as it can be. To be open and willing to see and see again as if it was for the first time.

You could also say that a key source of inspiration for the film — and my filmmaking in general — is the present. I am interested in the process of discovery, so I work strategically to create space so my collaborators and I are able to be present, engage, and share something of ourselves. There is no point in summoning a group of people to share their present if there is no willingness and opportunity for them to take and leave something behind. Independently if it is a fiction, non-fiction or experimental project, for me to perform, to be, to occupy a space at a certain time is inevitably connected to the turbulence of emotions and experiences of the present, in front of and behind the camera. I make films because I am drawn to the romanticism of that togetherness in the fleeting present, and I see one of my main responsibilities as a director to constantly remind myself and others to be open to improvisation and to absorb the reality that is happening in front, behind and around the camera, to allow that additional layer that only the present can bring to give life to the film.

A family affair.



Image 4. Behind the scenes photo (Lina Rodriguez, Clara Monroy, Jose Rodriguez). *The crew.*

Considering the personal and process driven nature of this project, I knew from the start that I had to work with a minimal crew that was open and flexible. I was lucky to get the best crew I could have gotten for an adventure like this one: my mother, my father and I. Although I had worked with my parents in my films before (my mother plays a secondary character in my two feature films *Señoritas* and *Mañana a esta hora* and my father was part of the production team for both films), this film gave us the wonderful opportunity to work even closer, which is something that we all appreciate very much considering that we live in different countries.

My mother agreed to do sound recording after I showed her how to operate the equipment and my father was eager to collaborate behind and in front of the camera. Like I have done for all of my experimental short films to date, I shot, edited and did the sound design for it. Because I

couldn't afford to be bogged down with equipment (physically and financially), I kept it to the minimum. I only used cameras that I could handle myself, a Mini DV camera and a Bolex, as well as basic sound equipment, a Tascam, a shotgun and a lav mic.



Image 5. Behind the scenes photo-montage. *The gear.*

Shooting in this very intimate and artisanal manner was the only way I could have approached this project. I wanted our very presence and the way we were shooting to leave an imprint on the film. It was important for me that my effort to make sense of these images, of these stories and these places, felt raw and imperfect, which is why our “fingerprints” are visible all over the film: my camera work is not always steady, my exposure readings were not consistently accurate, there are microphone bumps and drops throughout, my father’s questions don’t always get fully answered. Just as Jonas Mekas, who long advocated for imperfect cinema,

wrote in 1959 “every breaking away from the conventional, dead, official cinema is a healthy sign. We need less perfect but more free films.”⁶

⁶ Geoff King, ed. *A Companion to American Indie Film* (Chichester, West Sussex, MA: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2017), doi:[10.1002/9781118758359](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118758359)

Wanderer, your footsteps are the road.

I was born and raised in Bogotá and came to Canada in 2000 with a student visa to study Film Production at York University. I finished my BFA and for many reasons (including meeting my wonderful partner) decided to stay in Canada. Today, nineteen years later, I'm also a Canadian citizen. I've utilized this very experience and perspective of living in between both countries in my work. It's a very particular space to inhabit, because although my daily life is mostly here, I'm constantly divided between these geographical, emotional and psychological spaces. Even if my accent is not that noticeable at all times, I still get asked where I'm from in most initial conversations with new people in Canada. Nevertheless, I've established a myriad of relationships in Toronto, and now have multiple layers of memories and experiences that make me feel partly at home. Considering that my parents sold the very house I grew up in back in Bogotá and that I've missed significant moments in the lives of both my close and extended family (I've not been part of an endless list of births, funerals, weddings, Christmas, divorces, birthdays, Sunday dinners), I still have countless memories of my time growing up there and a close connection to many places and people. Although, there are plenty of things in both cultures that are close and familiar, there are plenty that are not, which makes me feel like I belong and I don't at the same time. It is precisely because of this dislocated sense of self and this fragmented set of experiences and memories that I've been invested in exploring the idea of performance in my work.

I see performance (both in front of the camera and in life in general) as prompted by expectations. Sometimes expectations come from who you are, what you look like, how people see you, the role you have in a group dynamic, what happens when you enter or exit that dynamic. There are these questions as to how you meet those expectations? How can you feed

them? How can you change them? I am interested in tackling these very questions, as well as reflecting on how we construct our identity, how do we perform this identity (in front of others, with others, for others and for ourselves), how do we influence the behaviour of others?

My artistic practice focuses on narrative feature films (*Señoritas*, *Mañana a esta hora*) that rely on the strategic juxtaposition of formally challenging aesthetics (predominantly long takes and an impressionistic sound design) with naturalistic performances (obtained through a mix of improvisational and scripted elements with a combination of actors and non-actors). Both films explore how we're constantly negotiating expectations of ourselves and those around us as a way to find our place in the world and construct a sense of self, as authentically as possible. Shot independently in Bogotá, they are very personal works that strip away the exoticism often expected in depictions of the global south (underdeveloped and violent). They offer a non-stereotypical glimpse into the construction of Latina identity within the hierarchy of family relations, which is something that interests me very much because I consider family to be one of the great laboratories to observe behaviour and the performance of roles. This may be in part because family imposes a dynamic that you don't really have much choice about.



Image 6. Production still (María Serrano). *Señoritas*.



Image 7. Production still (my mother Clara Monroy and Laura Osma). *Mañana a esta hora*.

My first film, *Señoritas* (2013) is a subtle, contemplative and deeply intimate examination of the way one young woman navigates the daunting terrain of sex, desire and identity and we see her adapting her “performance of self” depending on whether she is with her mother (played by my mother) at home, or flirting with boys in a bar. *Mañana a esta hora (ThisTime Tomorrow)* (2016) is an intimate portrait of a family’s everyday life in Bogotá before and after a tragic incident not only forces them to confront an uncertain future but it also makes them alter the roles that each have become accustomed to perform as part of this very family.



Image 8. Production still. *ante mis ojos*.

In addition to my feature films, I have also made five experimental short documentaries: *ante mis ojos* (2018), *Protocol* (2011), *Einschnitte* (2010), *Pont du Carrousel* (2009) and *Convergences et rencontres* (2007). They all examine the complicated layers of history present in touristic sites in different countries (Guatavita and Cartagena in Colombia, famous statues in

Vienna and Pont du Carrousel and the Montparnasse cemetery in Paris) and question our ability to see (seeing is not as easy as it seems) and determine what is visible and what is not. Using Super 8mm and Mini DV's respective textures (all but *Convergences* were shot on Super 8mm), I am interested in reflecting on what the images reveal about the history of these places through a close study of light and contrast. They have all been process driven projects for which I did not have a predetermined idea of how I wanted to shoot. As a matter of fact, I didn't necessarily have a clear intention to make "a film" when I was shooting with my camera at these different locations. Instead, I was more interested in being present, reacting to the moment and documenting that time and space. I only decided to make a film out of this footage when I was back in Toronto and after looking closely at the footage found some sort of path to organize these images into a film. Just as acclaimed filmmaker Peter Kubelka says, once you start editing, you must surrender and ask "Film, here you are, what can you do for me?"

I have also produced several installations and performances including *YELLOW BLUE RED* (2009), *Cosmetics* (2008) and *N.N* (2007), just to name a few, which have taken place both inside and outside gallery spaces in Canada and abroad. With these works, I was interested in exploring the possibilities of tracing the impact of the human body in space and time, as well as the presence and power of an action and its aftermath, inside and outside the frame.



Image 9. Production still. *N.N. (no name)*.

As a result of over a decade of practice, I've developed both a production model and a work methodology that has allowed me to take risks, remain curious, present and open so my initial ideas can be transformed, either through collaboration and/or contact with the specific times and spaces.

Aquí y Allá stems from my ongoing interest to use cinema as a way to simultaneously preserve histories and explore subjectivities. It establishes a new path in my practice as it is my first time making a directly personal film with and about my family. On a formal level, it granted me the opportunity to further develop my interests to use framing and duration as punctuation tools to create rhythm and poetically incisive editing and off screen sound to deepen atmospheres. I was also able to continue exploring some of the themes that have underpinned my work thus far: time/change, memory/identity and self/the performance of self. Even if the film is technically finished and I am here writing this text reflecting on what happened and how it happened, there are still plenty of layers of mystery about the film that I am unable to understand. I can't fully

explain exactly why I made this film. Being uncertain yet having a desire to discover new things and new paths is indeed one of the reasons why I am interested in making films. Just as Chick Strand wisely said in an interview “I have no idea what my films mean when I’m doing them. That is boring to me to figure out...If I knew what the meaning was, there would be no reason to do it.”⁷

⁷ Chick Strand and Kate Haug, “An Interview with Chick Strand,” *Wide Angle* 20, no. 1 (1998): 110.

FROM THERE TO HERE

Me and the others.

I used to want to be the others
to know what was not me.
Then I understood that I had already been
the others and that this was easy.
My biggest experience would be to be the
other of the others: the other of the others is me.
— Clarice Lispector



Image 10. Behind the scenes photo. *Playing mirror at wrap party.*

As an immigrant filmmaker who lives in between countries (Canada and Colombia), I am constantly asking myself questions about my sense of belonging and my relationship to the land, history and culture of both countries. Something that we Canadians and Colombians have in common is the way European colonization has shaped the way the original inhabitants of these

lands are viewed and valued, and how this imposed post-colonial narrative has robbed us all of the rich culture and history of our continents.

I grew up hearing my father and his siblings constantly praising the white skin and blue eyes of my great-great-grandmother (whom I didn't meet), always equating these qualities to a desired beauty. Although as a child I didn't quite understand the historical racial tension embedded in these statements, it was later on when I started school that the subject of national identity started to appear on my radar. Around the same time my Social Sciences teacher introduced me to an important concept: *mestizaje*. This complex and ever changing process is not easy to define in Spanish and it is even harder to translate into English, yet Stefanie Wickstrom and Philip D. Young provide a fairly simple definition that addresses the difficulty of doing so:⁸

Its meaning and significance have been debated for centuries, since colonization of the Americas by European powers began. Its simplest definition is “mixing.” Norms and ideas about racial and cultural mixing have been imagined, imposed, questioned, rejected, and given meanings by different people and peoples, ethnic groups, classes, races, organizations, and institutions at different times in different places.

French anthropologist, philosopher and psychoanalyst François Laplantine and French professor Alexis Nouss also endeavour to unpack this slippery concept in their book *Le Métissage*. For them “mestizo does not mean a fusion, cohesion, and osmosis, but rather confrontation and dialogue.”⁹

This cultural and racial mixing in Colombia was produced among the three main groups that made up the colony at the time: first peoples, Europeans (most of them Spanish) and Africans. Out of this process came the creation of what Colombian writer Alfonso Múnera

⁸ Stefanie Wickstrom and Philip D. Young, eds., *Mestizaje and Globalization: Transformations of Identity and Power* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), ix.

⁹ François Laplantine and Alexis Nouss, *Le Métissage* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), 10

lucidly calls “the old and successful myth of the mestizo country, within which Colombia has always been, since the end of the XVIII century, a country of mestizos, and whose history is exempt of racial conflicts and tensions”¹⁰ This ongoing denial of racial differences, a denial to accept that *mestizaje* is not a fixed and solid concept but instead one that fluctuates and is always in motion, has meant that many of us grew up with the distorted idea that we are all the same, that we all are *mestizos*, and that the indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities are outside of us. We are us and they are “the other”. Just as Elizabeth Cunin states in her book *Identidades a flor de piel*, “mestizaje can not be perceived as a denial of racism: instead of eliminating the stigma, it allows you to live with it.”¹¹

It was only until 1991 when a new Constitution replaced the old one, which dated from 1886, that Colombia was finally defined officially as a multiethnic and multicultural country. Nevertheless, as Sara Milena Ferrer Valencia states in her article *I also wanted to be white: the dilemma of racial identity in Colombia*¹², “racial relations in the country continue to have ‘whiteness’ as a reference of superiority”. This desire to be white, is something that permeates both the private and public realms in Colombia on a daily basis. I remember very clearly that during my first week at a private university in Bogotá (where I was studying Social Communication and Journalism) I was talking to a friend, who I guess had more pronounced indigenous features than me but would not identify as an indigenous person. After my friend left, another friend (who had blond hair and blue-eyes) approached me and asked why I was talking

¹⁰ César Rodríguez Garavito, “A propósito de la semana de la afrocolombianidad, la pregunta es: ¿Colombia es un país racista?,” *Dejusticia*, accessed March 30, 2019. <https://www.dejusticia.org/a-proposito-de-la-semana-de-la-afrocolombianidad-la-pregunta-es-colombia-es-un-pais-racista/>.

¹¹ Elisabeth Cunin, *Identidades a flor de piel* (Bogotá: IFEA-ICANH-Uniandes-Observatorio del Caribe Colombiano, 2003), 151

¹² Sara Milena Ferrer Valencia, “Yo también quise ser 'blanca': el dilema de la identidad racial en Colombia,” *Observatorio de Discriminación Racial*, accessed March 21, 2019. <http://www.odracial.org/#!/interna/2536>

with that “Indian”. Although it was not the first (or last time) I heard that term in relation to an individual who looked “less white”, I was still really bothered by it and tried to engage in a conversation about my blue-eyed friend’s background. Nevertheless, she dismissed my questions and left as if nothing had happened.

Throughout the process of making this film, I was reminded pretty early on that this confused sense of national racial identity had also had a direct impact on my family. As my father and my aunt Nohora were sharing stories about their upbringing during an interview, my aunt Nohora very casually talked about how her mother (my grandmother Cecilia) used to call her “the black one” and used to constantly tell her that she was ugly because of this. Then later on, my aunt said that her grandmother (my great-grandmother Ericinda) told her she shouldn’t feel bad for being darker. As they were close, my great-grandmother taught my aunt Nohora the following poem so she could defend herself against my grandmother: “Ladies, I am dark-skinned, I do not deny my colour. Because between roses and lilies being dark-skinned is better.” Although it is not subtitled, I intentionally included my aunt Nohora’s voice reciting the poem towards the end of the film as marker of this complicated relationship with race inside my own family.

There was another instance when the issue of race within the family came up again. It was when my father was interviewing my uncle Jairo and my uncle remembered how my grandmother’s Cecilia extended family used to dislike my grandfather when they were first dating. Apparently they used to refer to him as “the Indian, the black one, the illiterate, the driver.” It was interesting to see a direct line connecting my grandmother’s family identifying my grandfather as the non-white one, as the “other” and then my grandmother herself calling out the non-whiteness on my aunt Nohora.

Although I arrived in Colombia with the desire to document the family home and get to know my father and his siblings better, the closer I got to the material the more I realized that it was also a personal journey of getting to know myself better as well as a journey of getting closer to the fabric of my family and the fabric of Colombians and our ongoing struggle to understand who we are. It became clear that I had to look back so I could perhaps move forward...after all, how can we know who we are and where we want to go if we don't know where we come from?

As I kept thinking about how to figure out where I come from (how am I connected to my family, what are the threads that link us), I started further focusing my attention on the idea of family, which is something that I have been interested in for a while. This may be because for some reason I have always found it fascinating that even though many of us grow up in families, most of us know very little about them or about how they evolved to where they are. As I continued to look for ways to understand the family dynamics between my father and his siblings and how these may have or may have not affected me, I started reading several texts on family psychology. It was then that I came across Murray Bowen, an American psychiatrist known for defining the family as an emotional system operating across generations. This system, “the Bowen family systems theory is a theory of human behaviour that views the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe the complex interactions in the unit. It is the nature of a family that its members are intensely connected emotionally.”¹³ This idea of family members being connected to each other may seem like an obvious thing, but I don't think I had really understood the depth and impact of this connection until I started making this film and learning more about the history of my father's side of the family. Through this web of family stories, images of faces and places, I started to recognize a sort of emotional fabric or language of

¹³ Michael E. Kerr, “One Family's Story: A Primer on Bowen Theory,” *The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family*, accessed March 15, 2019. <https://thebowncenter.org/theory/>

the family which became fundamental during the editing process, as it served as a sort of guide to develop a structure that would recognize the threads of separateness and connectedness between my father, his siblings, their individual and collective memories and me.

As part of this journey of facing these others outside of myself in regards of my family (their stories, their memories, the bonds that bring them closer, the resemblance of their faces) and with regards to how we as Colombians have been recognizing ourselves as a country of mestizos that at the same time rejects the indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, I have also started considering my place in regards to the history of Colombian cinema. Up until very recently I felt completely outside of the official Colombian film industry, embodying in this case the role of the other, of the outsider. This may not only be due to the fact that I haven't lived in Colombia for 20 years, but also because even if many of my films have been shot in Colombia with a Colombian cast and crew, I have made them completely independently (none of my films have received financial support from Colombia). Although for the most part I am still operating outside the official Colombian film industry, the international exposure of my films has led to some sort of recognition of me as a Colombian filmmaker. It is thanks to this international circuit of festivals and film institutions that I have been able to connect with other Colombian immigrant filmmakers who are living in countries such as France (Laura Huertas Millán and Camilo Restrepo), England (Juan Soto) and Argentina (Mercedes Gaviria and Felipe Guerrero), just to name a few. As I have gotten to know most of these filmmaker personally, I have also become familiar with their bodies of work, which has been a great inspiration that has also allowed me to recognize an additional connection between us, besides the fact that we all live outside of Colombia.

Our works, most of them made independently, are characterized by a formal approach that

favours montage and sound as autonomous tools to create sensorial cinematic experiences, reclaiming the pleasure of hearing and seeing above the demands of traditional narrative.

Now that I have finished *Aquí y Allá*, I have come to realize that the film has additional links with a tendency that Colombian film critic and writer Pedro Adrián Zuluaga has coined as “the cinema of the children.” It was actually Pedro himself who told me about this when I asked him a few months ago if he knew of other recent Colombian films that dealt with family. He also pointed me to several articles where he has made reference to what he has called a “family of films about family” made by Colombian filmmakers of a diverse range of backgrounds that are also looking for their parents or grandparents hoping to gain a better understanding of themselves and perhaps of the country’s history. In a piece that he wrote in 2014 *a propos* Marcela Montoya’s *Las Bromelias* (a biographical short film in which the director revives a critical moment in her family life), Pedro states that¹⁴:

In Colombian cinema the search for the father or the mother, or for that elusive ancestor that defines us in his presence or in his absence, sustains an area of exploration that progressively expands: it is the impulse behind Andrea Said's *Looking for*, of Ricardo Restrepo's *Cesó la horrible noche*, of Luisa Sossa's *Inés, recuerdos de una vida*, among the most recent productions.

Since then, there have been many other films by Colombian filmmakers looking at their own families for answers about personal and collective identity and history. Some of these include Laura Huertas Millan's *Sol Negro* (2016), in which “family bonds are delicately explored not so much for an origin of evil but as a kind of introspective polyphony: the voices of aunt, mother

¹⁴ Pedro Adrián Zuluaga, “Las bromelias, de Manuela Montoya: el cine de los hijos,” *Pajarera del medio*, accessed January 21, 2019. <http://pajareradelmedio.blogspot.com/2014/07/las-bromelias-de-manuela-montoya-el.html>

and daughter (the director herself) are heard as she struggles, through fiction, to escape from her family's fate¹⁵,” and Clare Weiskopf's *Amazona*, a personal documentary about the director's mother that “marks a moment of reconciliation between a mother and a daughter, and an attempt to redefine their bond¹⁶.”

¹⁵ FIDMarseille, “Black Sun,” *dafilms*, accessed March 1, 2019. <https://dafilms.com/film/10202-black-sun>

¹⁶ Bianca-Olivia Nita, “Looking for love and answers in the Amazon,” *Modern Times Review*, accessed February 20, 2019. <https://www.moderntimes.review/looking-love-answers-amazon/>

Scratches on the wall.

Whenever you make an incursion into a space, that space is altered. I like this idea of leaving a scratch because that space is altered by that scratch after. It's like a piece of paper that has a mark on it and is no longer blank[...] In other words, the memory leaves a mark. The mark is always there. And the memory [...]

– French choreographer Mathilde Monnier in Claire Denis' *Vers Mathilde*



Image 11. Screenshot. *Wall shot on 16mm at family home.*



Image 12. Screenshot. *Wall shot on Mini DV at family home.*

After I came back from the shoot, I spent about four months (from September to December 2018) trying to make sense of what had happened. I went through over 18 hours of black and white Mini DV footage, 40 minutes of 16mm footage, 200 family photographs and 35 hours of sound recordings. My first step was to log everything so I had to look and listen to all of this material several times in order to create a catalogue of stories, shots, sound bites and ambience sounds. Then in January 2019, I was finally able to get past the overwhelming feeling of not knowing where to start or where I wanted to go and decided to use a selection of video footage to create a sort of prelude. I had shot this footage during a drama game called mirror that we played at the wrap party. It consists of images of my father and his siblings (all but my aunt Silvia were present) standing in front of each other in pairs, concentrating on each other as the leaders move in whichever way they choose at any given time while the followers try to mirror

each movement to the best of their abilities. I found the abstract yet focused movements they were performing as the perfect introduction to one of my key interests in the film, which has to do with the exercise of recognizing (knowing again).

The next section is a kind of personal tour of the family and Chipaque that introduces each room in the family home, different public spaces in the town and my father and siblings one by one. Each space is presented through a combination of different perspectives which I illustrated by juxtaposing images shot from very similar angles on colour 16mm footage and black and white Mini DV. By looking at this new space that emerged from these two layers (the black and white video and colour 16mm footage) and the impossibility of identifying if one was newer or older than the other, I started to feel how all of these layers of the past were still present. As I kept thinking about how the echoes and shadows of my father and his sibling's memories occupied both these spaces and now these images that I had captured with my cameras, I immediately thought of the wonderful Colombian modernist architect Rogelio Salmona. An icon of urbanism and architecture in Latin America, he is also known for his transformation of the Avenida Jiménez (an iconic street in Bogotá's downtown) into a brick pedestrian concourse that winds through the city and traces the sinuous path of the San Francisco river. Right after finishing this ambitious project, Salmona wrote a text called "In Memory of water" in which he defined place (in this case referring to the Avenida Jimenez) as "the emanation of the place and not an object without roots"¹⁷. When Claudia Patricia Cristancho Gómez talks about what characterizes

¹⁷ Rogelio Salmona, "La memoria del agua," *Fundación Rogelio Salmona*, accessed February 20, 2019. <http://inicio.fundacionrogeliosalmona.org/notas/obra-destacada-eje-ambiental---la-memoria-del-agua>

his style in her master's support paper titled "Crossing through the concept of journey as a determining factor in the oeuvre of Rogelio Salmona" she observes that:¹⁸

The work of the architect Rogelio Salmona stands out for evoking different cultures that manage to conform a unique body of work, that is to say, that what is particular about his projects is that "recreation" that brings forward something new even though it evokes places and architectures of the past, generating a cultural gear, which in turn produces or gives life to its own architecture.

I found that Salmona's desire to recreate a space, to create a new space that has roots in the past and is connected to his experience of both the present and the past is not that different from what we try to do through cinematic images, which in a way are spaces inside spaces within time within time. When we look through a camera, we are not only facing our own gaze and perspective in relation to this specific space and time, we are also registering a present that automatically becomes the past while simultaneously dealing with the layers of the past that inhabit this very time and space. This contract that we sign as filmmakers with the time and space in between the past and the present, is also a contract with memory, which Italian scholar, grammarian, historian, and philosopher Boncompagno da Signa poetically describes as:¹⁹

A glorious and admirable gift of nature by which we recall past things, we embrace present things, and we contemplate future things through their likeness to past things.

The process of filmmaking in itself is also a personal journey through time and space. My overlapping journeys from the "here" (Canada, Toronto, the present, my ideas of family) while I was preparing the film to the "there" while I was shooting (Colombia, Chipaque, the past,

¹⁸ Claudia Patricia Cristancho Gómez, "Travesía por el viaje como determinante en la obra de Rogelio Salmona" (master's thesis, Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano, 2016): 10

¹⁹ Boncompagno da Signa, *Rhetorica Novissima*, ed. A. Gaudcntio, (Bologna: Bibliotheca Iuridica Medii Aevi, 1891), 255, quoted in Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 58

meeting with my family) and then from another “here” (the actual time when I was in Colombia shooting) to another “there” (how distant Canada felt during the shooting) in a way echo Rogelio Salmona’s definition of architecture, which for him was “the meeting, the confluence, the border, between geography and history.”²⁰

²⁰ Felipe Lozano Puche, “Lo mejor de Salmona en Washington,” *Semana*, September 15, 2009, <https://www.semana.com/vida-moderna/articulo/lo-mejor-salmona-washington/107453-3>

Haunted faces.

The face is present in its refusal to be contained.

– Emmanuel Levinas



Image 13. Screenshots. *Close-ups of my father and his siblings.*

Aquí y Allá is composed of mostly long and medium shots of private and public spaces in Chipaque and close ups and extreme close ups of my father and his siblings' faces and hands. I believe that this insistent interest to focus on the body (which is also present in my two feature

films) comes from a curiosity to decipher the mystery behind what is visible. Because I believe that our bodies can speak without speaking about our inner lives, I obsessively concentrate on gestures, body language and the rhythm and cadence of movements within a space. Although I could say that I know what my father, uncle and aunts look like (if I saw them on the street I would recognize them immediately), spending time observing details of their bodies during the shoot and then during the editing process, became an incredibly illuminating experience as I found myself discovering echoes and resemblances between them that I had never seen before. These set of recognitions was not limited to acknowledging some of the striking physical similarities between them (their ears, their mouths, their eyes, their noses as illustrated through one of the penultimate sequence in the film), it also extended to the way they moved, paused and laughed. The nakedness of their faces and expressions invited me to relate to them, they became a sort of map that guided me to recognize them (to know them again) and to ultimately also recognize myself in them. At a more literal level, the juxtaposition of their current faces with photos of them when they were younger created an additional layer that calls attention to the passage of time.

It is interesting to think that although the visibility of the face is a given during our selfie-obsessed era, we continue to be fascinated by what we see on its surface and what we imagine to be underneath it. The more and more I looked at my father and his sibling's faces, the more I felt both closer and further away from my ideas of them, while also getting confused about what it was that I was seeing, were these faces or masks? That blurry line between what is visible and what is hidden on them kept me wondering and guessing. Just as Paul Coates brilliantly states in his book *Screening the face*, the face and the mask sort of melt into one, the face "becomes a

mask that fails, a surface haunted by intimations of concealment, interiority and exteriority.”²¹ I also found Richard Rushton’s reflections on the face useful as I continued to think about it, particularly when he says that²²:

What the face thus brings forth is a model of *representation*: the face represents or expresses the inner feelings of a person; it expresses something that is hidden behind the face, yet there is something in the appearance of a face (*on* the face) that allows access to what is hidden beneath.

²¹ Paul Coates, *Screening the Face* (Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

²² Richard Rushton, “What Can a Face Do? On Deleuze and Faces,” *Cultural Critique* 51 (2002): 219, doi: [10.1353/cul.2002.0021](https://doi.org/10.1353/cul.2002.0021)

Wandering sounds.

There is no natural and preexisting harmony between image and sound
— Michel Chion

Cinema is based on the relationship (the montage) between images and sounds. In the same way that Argentinean auteur Lucrecia Martel emphasizes sound as an essential element in the atmospheric and spatial construction of her cinema, I am interested in using sound as a tool to deepen our sense of place and movement (time) and contribute to further flesh out the materiality of the image. Throughout *Aquí y Allá*, I tried to answer Rick Altman's call to think of sound as "multiple, complex, heterogeneous, and three-dimensional,"²³ by creating a series of aural textures made from the combination of ambient sounds that my mother recorded both in the domestic spaces inside the family home as well as the public spaces in Chipaque, with room tones from my father and his sibling's houses, with fragments from the recordings of the interviews themselves, with snippets of sounds from the wrap party. I stitched together these sound threads and used their particular colour and rhythm to create a new space in between the present and the past, with its own atmosphere and rhythm.

Because this is a film that is dealing with the construction of space as an ongoing historical and subjective process, I intentionally went against the redundant relationship between sound and image, meaning "that" expectation that the sound that "we" hear has to be synched to the image that "we" are seeing. I used sound design as a compositional counter point to the images throughout the film in order to trace the visibility and invisibility of these physical and psychological spaces, which come together to form a sort of labyrinth of this subjective and

²³ Rick Altman, "The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound," in *Sound Theory Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (American Film Institute: Routledge, 1992), 16.

shared past. I also used simultaneity by blurring the line between background and foreground sounds to create a vivid sense of place while at the same time developing a more abstract experience of space that dislocates the audience and invites them to get involved and engage with these wandering and fragmented sounds more actively.

Screen writings.

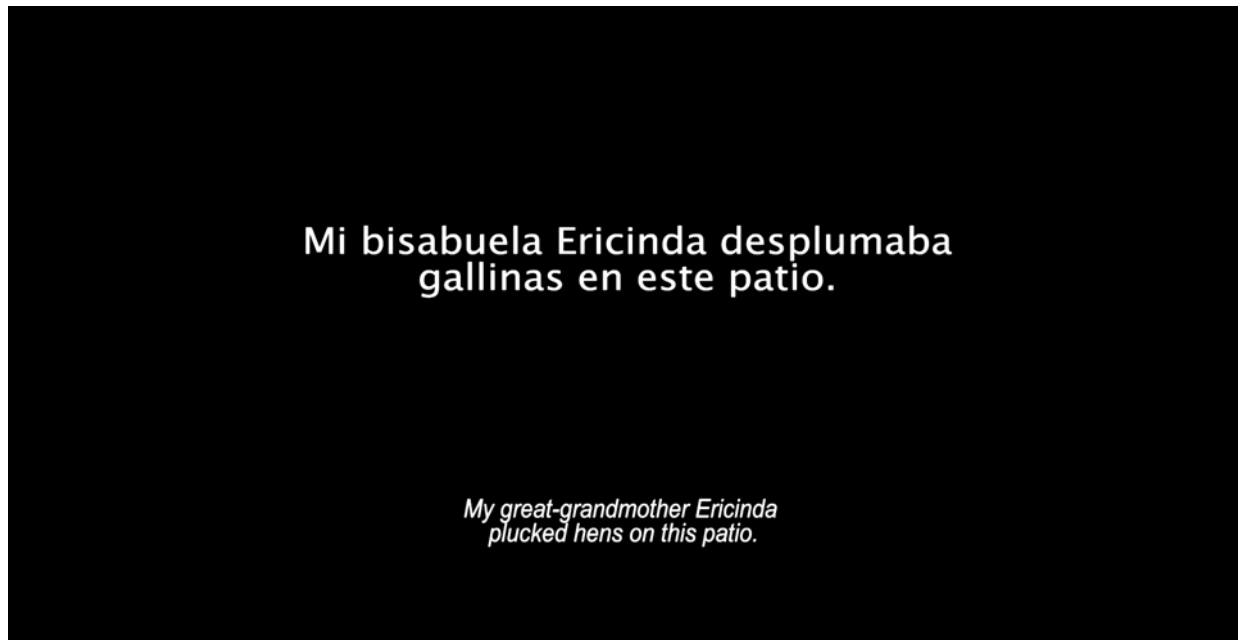


Image 14. Screenshot. *Me recalling my great-grandmother Ericinda.*

A question that accompanied me throughout the making of this project had to do with perspective, how to determine whose perspective should the film speak from. I was clear on my desire to go back to Colombia to spend time with my father, use my cameras and the sound recorder to document my father's chats with his siblings about their upbringing and then go to Chipaque and attempt to retrace their steps by visiting the family home and public spaces in the town. As I was shooting (observing all of this behind the camera), it became clear that in a way I was also serving as a sort of family biographer, which led me not only to ask myself again whether or not to inscribe (to carve, to engrave, to etch) myself in the actual film but also about the place I occupied in this audiovisual family portrait that I was weaving together out of these fragments. It was this line of questioning that led me to decide to use text from my perspective in the first two thirds of the film as a way to indicate my presence and perspective. I felt that I had to add myself to the equation in order to communicate my own experience of trying to connect

these faces and places but also to illustrate the multiple layers of history and time that converge in the film: me observing my father and his siblings recount their individual perspectives of their shared past and then my father showing me the spaces and places in Chipaque. I felt that it was necessary to make these stories and memories literally visible on screen (yet mediated through my voice) by using text yet as another thread in this family tapestry. By using text as image I not only gave these stories a visibility within the body of the film, they also became what Scott MacDonald calls “screen writings”, which he defines as “a literary engagement with the screen as a surface as well as window.”²⁴

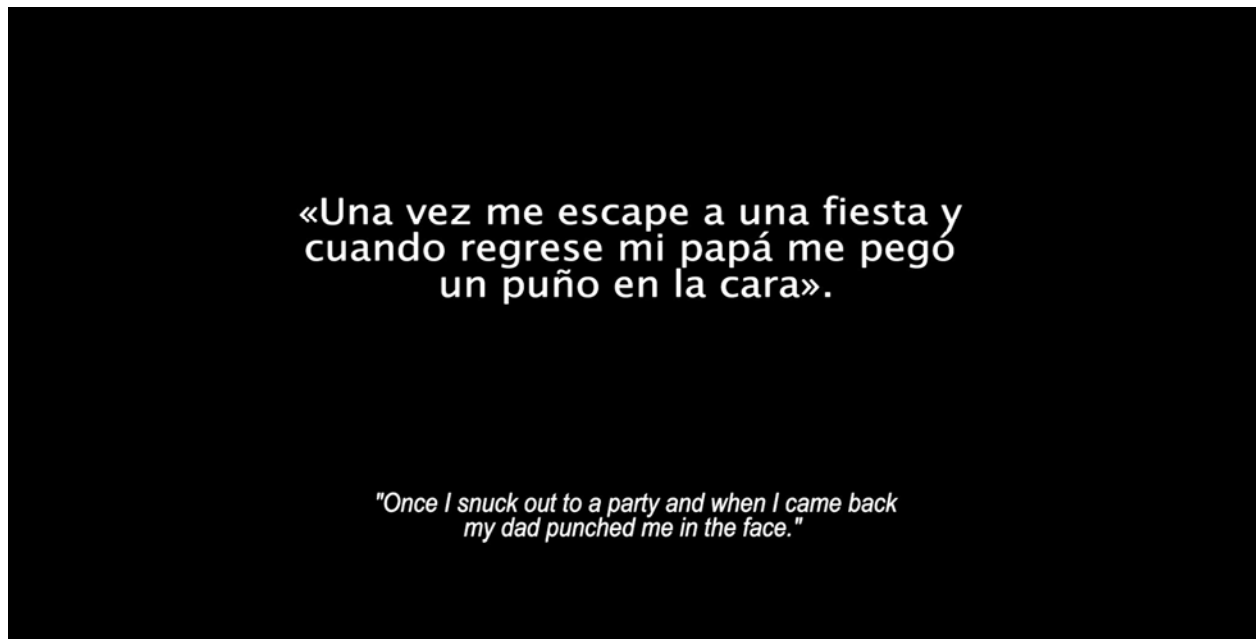


Image 15. Screenshot. *My aunt Yolanda recalling a story about my grandfather.*

As I continued editing, it became clear that although my father and his siblings' voices had already been present throughout the first two thirds of the film via sound fragments and

²⁴ Scott MacDonald, *Screen Writings: Scripts and Texts by Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), quoted in Kim Knowles, “Performing Language, Animating Poetry: Kinetic Text in Experimental Cinema,” *Journal of Film and Video* 67, no 1 (2015): 46. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed March 3, 2019).

image, they needed to literally come to the foreground as text/image during the antepenultimate sequence of the film which consists of a rapid montage of the domestic and public spaces in Chipaque, the spaces where the interviews took place and their faces and gestures. By shifting the connection of the “I” (the “I” in me, the filmmaker), to a sort of collective “I” that represents each of them without specifying exactly whose story we are reading about, illustrates how my very decision to locate the “I” in the centre from which to speak of this history, paradoxically opens it up so it can be embodied by multiple subjectivities at once. Additionally, this decision makes the “I” lose its central position, it dislocates it, in turn calling attention to the simultaneous connection and distance between me and these other “I’s” which also highlights the way my “I” is both inside and outside these other “I’s” and how these other “I’s” are both inside and outside of me. Just as Colombian novelist Carolina Sanin says in a recent interview about her use of first person in her latest book “Somos luces abismales:”²⁵

The first person can generate an intimacy, but it also generates a distance and a border. By saying 'I', I invite the reader to my point of view, but I also put it on the opposite side of that point of view (in the 'you'). And that opposite side can be a mirror but it is also an unknown territory.

²⁵ Carlos Restrepo, “ ‘Busco la elocuencia de todas las cosas’: Carolina Sanín,” *El Tiempo*, March 25, 2019. <https://www.eltiempo.com/cultura/musica-y-libros/carolina-sanin-habla-de-su-libro-somos-luces-abismales-341580>

CONCLUSION: A BAG FULL OF ECHOES



Image 16. Photo from family archive. *Family portrait.*

Like with all creative processes, it is difficult to comprehend the full extent of why things happened the way they did, particularly when one is not only in the middle of such process but also inside of it, as it has been the case for me with *Aquí y Allá*. As I have mentioned several times throughout this paper, my main interest in filmmaking is closely linked to my desire to discover and learn, to see again as if I was seeing for the first time. I am not interested in finding definite resolutions or in reaching a complete understanding of me and all of the others so I can efficiently separate heroes from villains. In a way I'm interested in film more as a framework of representation than as a clear window into reality. I'm searching for something comparable to what Ursula le Guin touches upon in her essay "Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" when talking

about the novel, for her “the natural, proper, fitting shape of the novel might be that of a sack, a bag. A book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings. A novel is a medicine bundle, holding things in particular, powerful relation to one another and to us.”²⁶

I am fully aware now that part of this quest to capture time’s traces by looking at the world through a camera has everything to do with the past and its echoes. Considering that the past is always under construction, there is no definite place or time one can visit to get a complete picture. Not even photos or moving images can fix or freeze the past into a solid reality. It’s a strange and beautiful country that looks different on each remembrance and that is exactly what I tried to do with *Aquí y Allá*. The film in itself is an act of remembering that brings the past to the present through the juxtaposition of fragments of voices, images and texts, echoing the nebulous nature of memory. Ultimately the film is my attempt to keep the past in mind somehow, because I don’t know where else to keep it.

²⁶ Ursula K. Le Guin, *Dancing At The Edge Of The World: Thoughts On Words, Women, Places* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 152-153

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