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Pedagogy Behind and Beyond Bars: Critical Perspectives on Prison Education in Contemporary Documentary Film from Argentina

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Abstract

Since 2008, numerous Argentine documentary films have explored the complexities of prison education. Prison education documentaries from other countries usually focus overwhelmingly on the possible success of “rehabilitation.” In contrast, this article argues that contemporary Argentine prison education documentaries encourage critical, at times quasi-abolitionist, perspectives on imprisonment by challenging both punitive attitudes and liberal beliefs in the *reinserción* (reintegration) of prisoners into society. Analyzing the documentaries *El almafuerte* (dir. Roberto Sebastián Persano, Santiago Nacif Cabrera, and Andrés Martínez Cantó, Argentina, 2009), *13 puertas* (dir. David Rubio, Argentina, 2014), *Lunas cautivas* (dir. Marcia Paradiso, Argentina, 2012), and *Pabellón 4* (dir. Diego Gachassin, Argentina, 2017), it draws on insights from film studies and criminology to show how these films provide intersectional and structural critiques of imprisonment. “Touristic” and affective encounters between incarcerated and non-incarcerated people serve to challenge comfortable viewing positions predicated on internal-external carceral and cinematic divides. These films teach spectators that outside spaces, people, and institutions are all central to the meaning, problems, and incoherence of incarceration in Argentina.

Keywords: Argentina; prison education; prison tourism; documentary film; affect

Resumen

Desde 2008 se han producido numerosos documentales que abordan las complejidades de la educación en contextos de encierro en Argentina. En otros países, los documentales sobre la educación en contextos de encierro suelen centrarse en el posible éxito de la “rehabilitación.” Por el contrario, arguyo que los documentales argentinos contemporáneos desarrollan perspectivas críticas y a veces cuasi abolicionistas sobre la cárcel, desafiando tanto el punitivismo como la fe liberal en la reinserción de los presos en la sociedad. Analizando *El almafuerte* (Roberto Sebastián Persano, Santiago Nacif Cabrera y Andrés Martínez Cantó, dirs., Argentina, 2009), *13 puertas* (David Rubio, dir., Argentina, 2014), *Lunas cautivas* (Marcia Paradiso, dir., Argentina, 2012) y *Pabellón 4* (Diego Gachassin, dir., Argentina, 2017), combino teorías cinematográficas y criminológicas para demostrar cómo estos documentales ofrecen críticas interseccionales y estructurales sobre el encarcelamiento. Los encuentros “turísticos” y afectivos entre sujetos carcelarios y no carcelarios sirven para desestabilizar las formas dominantes de mirar la cárcel, estructuradas por divisiones rígidas entre

lo interno y lo externo. Estos documentales demuestran que los espacios, las personas y las instituciones fuera de la cárcel son centrales al significado, los problemas y la incoherencia de la cárcel en Argentina.

Palabras clave: Argentina; educación carcelaria; turismo carcelario; cine documental; afecto

Argentine prisons exhibit the Latin American commonplaces of overpopulation, insufficient food provision, and limited communication beyond prison walls, laid bare in December 2019 when these conditions led thousands of imprisoned people to carry out hunger strikes across Buenos Aires Province. Conversely, they also constitute an exception, since, as educator Francisco José Scarfó argues, Argentina is a model, within Latin America, for developing and guaranteeing prison education (Fernández 2019). Following an agreement in 1985 between the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA) and the Servicio Penitenciario Federal (SPF), the pioneering program UBA XXII established the Centro Universitario Devoto, where incarcerated students can study for full degrees. Following this model, most Argentine public universities now teach in prisons. Recent legislation, however, has received both praise and criticism. The 2006 Ley de Educación Nacional no. 26.206 and 2011 reforms to the Ley de Ejecución de la Pena Privativa de la Libertad no. 24.660 represent advances toward providing prison education as a basic, state-guaranteed right, designed for the “desarrollo integral de la persona” (all-around development of the person) (Scarfó, Lalli, and Montserrat 2013, 71).¹ Article 140 of Law 24.660, however, which allows students to access advanced stages of their sentence earlier, is often criticized for making education an imposition, not a right (Albor 2012), and reinforcing the project of “corrective” disciplinary “treatment” (Ghiberto and Sozzo 2014).

Educational reforms, typically associated with rehabilitation, come into conflict with recent punitive trends. Globally, Loïc Wacquant (2009) understands modern mass incarceration as “neoliberal penalty”; reduced state economic intervention, Wacquant argues, entails moving away from welfare toward the incapacitation of groups marginalized by neoliberalism. In Argentina, Máximo Sozzo (2016) highlights that neoliberal penalty contends with the seemingly contradictory “post-neoliberal” Kirchnerism that spans the presidencies of Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2008–2015). Kirchnerism in some respects moved away from Carlos Menem’s neoliberal, socially exclusionary presidency (1989–1999) but also exhibited certain continuities. On one hand, there were progressive appointments to the Supreme Court, notably Eugenio Raúl Zaffaroni, known for his criticisms of imprisonment. At the same time, the incarceration rate rose considerably and there were waves of penal populism—calls for punitive policies based on claims to represent the wishes of “the people” and dichotomies between “honest” citizens and criminals (Sozzo 2016, 197). Such identities are intensified in a context of *inseguridad* (fear of crime). Media outlets and politicians emphasize crime, often for electoral gain, accentuating widespread anxieties that do not necessarily correlate with reality. Within this context, the sociologist Esteban Rodríguez (2015, 22) emphasizes the prevalence of punitive attitudes: “Ya no se dice que vayan a la cárcel ‘para que aprendan’, sino ‘para que se pudran.’” (It is no longer said that people should go to prison “to learn” but rather “to rot.”) In popular opinion, therefore, debilitation is typically prioritized over rehabilitation.

Despite widespread punitivity, several Argentine documentaries since 2008 have focused on the “rehabilitative” topic of prison education, distinguishing Argentina within

¹ All translations of citations are my own. For documentary dialogue, I quote the English subtitles of the referenced online versions of *13 puertas*, *Lunas cautivas*, and *Pabellón 4* but translate dialogue from *El almafuerte*, which is not subtitled, myself.

Latin America.² Prior to *No ser Dios y cuidarlos* (dir. Juan Carlos Andrade and Dieguillo Fernández, Argentina, 2008), centered on UBA XXII, the two previous Argentine prison-based documentaries—*Trelew* (dir. Mariana Arruti, 2004) and *Caseros, en la cárcel* (dir. Julio Raffo, 2005)—focused on political prisoners and dictatorship. These earlier documentaries were released when Kirchner’s government was forcefully aligning itself with human rights movements related to the last military dictatorship (1976–1983). Between 2005 and 2007, Kirchner worked against the punitive turn that had been aggravated by the high-profile murder of Axel Blumberg in 2004, emphasizing socioeconomic reform, not punishment, as the necessary response to crime and giving rise to the only two-year period in modern Argentine history in which incarceration rates decreased (Sozzo 2016, 225). It is within a context of challenges toward punitivity that prison education documentaries arose in Argentina.³

From the convergence of social and penal reform and (challenges to) punitive attitudes arises the need to know how documentaries invite spectators to understand not only the benefits and limitations of prison pedagogy but their relation to broader societal and institutional tensions and inequalities. While I respond to Scarfó and Victoria Aued’s (2013) call to analyze the media treatment of Argentine prison education, I do so by focusing not so much on educational practices as on the social relations they engender and the debates they spark. I show how contemporary Argentine documentaries emphasize the interconnectedness of incarceration and people, spaces, and social structures outside prison, challenging viewing positions predicated on strict divisions between imprisoned and unimprisoned people and between onscreen subjects and spectators. By denaturalizing the imagined separateness of prisons from society and highlighting spectators’ own embeddedness within the unequal structures on which imprisonment is premised, documentaries may approach prison education, commonly associated with reform, through a critical, sometimes quasi-abolitionist lens. Abolitionism here refers to the political project of creating a world without prisons and the inequalities that fuel and are fueled by incarceration.

Given that the spaces in which filmmaking, education, and encounters occur are central to my analysis, I do not analyze testimonial documentaries such as *No ser Dios y cuidarlos* or *La formación: Estudiar en contextos de encierro* (dir. Analía Millán, Argentina, 2011), composed of reflections on rather than images of such spaces. Instead, I analyze four observational and participatory documentaries that exemplify the overarching critical trend in local prison education films but also the diversity of pedagogical practices in Argentine prisons. In *El almafuerte* (dir. Roberto Sebastián Persano, Santiago Nacif Cabrera, and Andrés Martínez Cantó, Argentina, 2009), three UBA graduates teach filmmaking inside Melchor Romero juvenile detention center. The film, which contains sequences shot by the students, emphasizes how education may promote self-worth yet also questions the broader significance of pedagogy when confronted with state violence and socioeconomic marginalization. David Rubio’s observational documentary *13 puertas* (Argentina, 2014) stands out for the unique educational program it explores: in the Unidad Penal no. 48’s San Martín University Center (CUSAM), guards learn alongside prisoners. Taking Waldemar Cubilla and his progression from prisoner-student to sociologist as its narrative thread, the film explores the transformative potential of university

² Only in Mexico have documentaries focused on comparable issues. *Bajo la sombra del Guamúchil* (dir. Rosalva Aída Hernández, 2010, <https://vimeo.com/17755550>) and *Semillas de Guamúchil* (dir. Carolina Corral, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYCQuG9ISNc>) follow writing workshops for imprisoned Indigenous women.

³ A precursor to the contemporary prison education documentaries is “La Universidad entre rejas” (dir. Roberto Vacca and Otelo Borroni, 1989), an account of UBA XXII by the Argentine television series *Historias de la Argentina secreta*. Whereas contemporary documentaries contextualize prison education alongside broader societal inequalities, this earlier program unequivocally emphasizes the transformative potential of education.

education. Nevertheless, the documentary highlights tensions between students, staff, and educators as well as contrastive attitudes toward prison pedagogy: a taxi driver views it as a waste of resources, for example, while Cubilla initially sees it simply as the quickest way out of prison. Whereas these films focus on male institutions, Marcia Paradiso's *Lunas cautivas* (Argentina, 2012) follows poetry workshops run by the feminist collective YoNoFui and photography classes in the female Unidad Penitenciaria 31 de Ezeiza. The film is divided into three sections: the first part focuses on Lidia, who juggles raising her child inside prison with an impending release; the second section follows Majo, who struggles with the separation from her family in Spain; lastly, the film accompanies Lili, a shy individual who goes on to flourish in spite of prison. While these films were released during Cristina Fernández's presidency, Diego Gachassin's *Pabellón 4* (Argentina, 2017) references measures passed during Mauricio Macri's government (2015–2019)—namely, the regressive restriction of temporary releases—to reinforce its resistance toward facile liberal narratives of education as a tool for *reinserción* (reintegration) into society. While Carlos Mena's progression from student to teacher is central to the film, so too are the critiques of education as “salvation” made by the lawyer Alberto Sarlo during the philosophy, literature, and boxing classes that he teaches at the Unidad 23 de Florencio Varela.

The simultaneity of optimism and critique that I identify in these films represents a point of difference with previous studies. Antonio Viedma Rojas (2015, 206), for example, analyzing fictional and documentary films from numerous contexts, concludes that prison education is always portrayed positively. Similarly, Dawn Cecil (2015, 103–6) argues that the “treatment” category of independent North American prison documentaries, covering education, counseling, and drug treatment, consistently “convey[s] the message that rehabilitation is a possibility.” The affirmative tone of such independent films differs, however, from mainstream televised documentaries, which typically reduce crime to an individual choice, ignoring the contexts in which violence occurs and naturalizing inequalities of class and race (Riofrio 2012; Brown 2012). Moreover, the criminologist Michelle Brown (2012, 108) argues that even when documentaries aim to reveal systemic violence they typically fail to subvert common understandings of imprisonment because they do not challenge “ordinary patterns of penal spectatorship,” premised on externality, authority and individualism. Similarly, abolitionist geographer-filmmaker Brett Story (2017, 456) challenges the politics of “humanizing prison cinema,” whereby spectators are “affectively and ethically troubled by the effects of incarceration on individuals” without being forced to reflect on incarceration as a systemic issue.

I build on Brown's (2012) and Story's (2017) insistence that the individual-system balance and challenges to standard spectatorship are central to the critical potential of prison documentaries. I also bring together insights from criminology and film studies to reveal the ways in which “humanizing” films (Story 2017) may indeed offer systemic critiques alongside individual stories of educational success. Where Story doubts that affect might disrupt hegemonic penal spectatorship, an interdisciplinary perspective grounded in cinematic and social approaches toward affect reveals its political potential. Although Latin American prison documentaries have been largely overlooked in the literature, generally limited to studies of a select few Brazilian films (e.g., Stam 2013; Allen 2017; Furtado 2019a), my attention to affect situates this paper within a trend in Latin American film studies, exemplified by Laura Podalsky's *Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2011), to recognize the public and political charge of intimate and personal cinematic affect.

To do so, I first engage with prison tour studies, exploring the nexus between documentary form, prison tourism, and affect. I examine how affective encounters between prisoners, staff and “visiting” educators, filmmakers, and spectators risk recreating the voyeuristic dynamics of prison tourism while also reflexively revealing the structural inequalities of incarceration. Then, engaging with criminological critiques of rehabilitative

logics, I analyze accounts of individual transformation alongside the tempering of such narratives through affective challenges to the ideological underpinnings and practical possibilities of the *reinserción* of prisoners into society—the self-stated objective of the SPF on the official webpage of the institution.⁴

Prison tourism

For a documentary to focus exclusively on prison education calls into question the potentially selective understanding of prison that it creates for viewers. Prison education is in practice exclusionary, often reserved for prisoners who, according to authorities, are “well behaved.” Indeed, over half of Argentine prisoners participate in no educational program (Parchuc 2015, 21). Similarly, there are inevitably less positive prison spaces than classrooms. Such caveats regarding positionality and perspective structure critical accounts of prison tourism, a field of cultural criminology focused on commercial visits to former prisons and academic tours of operational facilities for ethnographic research or university-level pedagogy. While I focus on the dynamics of academic tours, the commercial-academic division is not definitive. Indeed, while the documentaries that I analyze draw on ethnographic practices and teach viewers about prison, they were released commercially.

The lack of sustained reflection on tours of operational prisons in Argentina means that I adapt studies developed elsewhere. Pedagogically, sanitized scripts controlled by staff deny the chance to learn about prison “reality” (Huckelbury 2009; Minogue 2009; Piché and Walby 2010). Ethically, tours often make prisoners feel degraded by objectifying them and breaching their privacy (Minogue 2009; Piché and Walby 2010). Socioculturally, Brown (2009) argues that tours exacerbate the social distance between frequently white, middle-class “penal spectators” and overwhelmingly racially and socioeconomically marginalized prison populations. In this vein, Joey Whitfield (2016), writing about the San Pedro prison in Bolivia, discusses the continuities between backpacker prison tourism and the written memoir *Marching Powder*, about the same prison, as symptomatic of neoliberal and spectatorial penal logics.

Here, I build on Whitfield’s (2016) attention to the intermediality of prison tourism alongside Brown’s (2009, 2012) argument that hegemonic penal spectatorship also structures fictional film and documentary viewing. Indeed, the form of standard prison tours, in which staff guide visitors around a prison and its population, recalls Bill Nichols’s (2001, 13) description of documentary’s “most classic formulation”: “I speak about *them* to *you*.” Like prison guard guides, the filmmaker’s “I” creates distance between the filmed “them” and the spectatorial/guided “you.” Prison documentaries disrupt such parallels, however, since filmmakers, who often possess little knowledge about incarceration, are themselves frequently guided by staff or inmates. In prison education documentaries, the relationships through which knowledge about prison is produced are further complicated by “visiting” educators. Alberto Sarlo of *Pabellón 4*, for example, first experienced prison through a university tour and, upon arriving as a teacher, had to be guided by two knife-wielding students. Such uncomfortable and unequal encounters, shared to differing degrees by education, tourism, and documentary, point to the relational rather than merely visual foundations of documentary knowledge and ethical issues of voyeurism.

Touristic encounters: Between voyeurism and political education

In *El almafuerite*, filmmaker-teachers, students, and authorities all contribute to guiding or directing what is learned from the documentary-tour. Indeed, early on, the teacher Gato

⁴ “Misión y objetivos,” Servicio Penitenciario Federal, <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/spf/acerca-de-nosotros/mision-y-objetivos> (accessed May 26, 2022). While among the films I study, only *Lunas cautivas* is based in an SPF-run prison, the prioritization of “reinserción” among the SPF’s aims exemplifies its discursive salience.

explains to his students that they will also film and participate in editing. Immediately before discussing editing, however, Gato signals that the camera is already filming, to which the student Jonathan reacts with surprise, turning toward the camera and joking about not being ready. The simultaneity of participation and filming without consent produces a moment of reflexivity, a documentary “mode” that “prods the viewer to a heightened form of consciousness about her relation to a documentary and what it represents” (Nichols 2001, 126, 128). Here, viewers are made acutely aware of differences between Gato, who engages amicably with the students, and themselves, implicated in a touristic and less participatory voyeurism. Prison voyeurism, Jeffrey Ian Ross (2015, 400) argues, occurs not simply when outsiders look into prison but from attempts to “understand and/or experience corrections without engaging intimately in the subject matter” and “without the appropriate rigorous and potentially boring downsides.” In this vein, differences between teacher-prisoner and viewer-prisoner relationships in *El almafuerte* distinguish engaged outsider interactions from voyeurism. At the start of the film, spectators are flown into prison by a drone shot, plunged into a sequence of interviews where the questions put to prisoners and staff are inaudible, denying any sense of reciprocity. The visiting teachers, meanwhile, necessarily engage with people and protocols before filming begins. The lighthearted tone of Gato’s interaction belies a preexisting relationship with the students and prison environment, teaching spectators, through contrast, to question their own oversimplified insertion into prison without the “boring downsides” of dialogue and consent. Voyeurism, which has critical potential when denaturalized, as it is here, results not necessarily from unreturned gazes but rather the unquestioned hierarchies and spatiality of unequal relationships.

The prison relationship with the most unequal balance of power, meanwhile, is between staff and prisoners. Indeed, in his analysis of Paulo Sacramento’s 2003 Brazilian documentary *O prisioneiro da grade de ferro*, which also includes scenes filmed by prisoners, Robert Stam (2013, 150) argues that the “hybrid authorship” of shared camera usage may subvert prison-guard voyeurism: “we do not look at the prisoners through the peephole like the guards . . . ; rather we look with prisoners at the guards.” Whereas Stam, building on Foucault (1995), grounds his analysis in the “panoptical voyeurism of the prison film genre” (Stam 2013, 150), the framework of prison tourism encourages us to consider the deeper discursive role of prison staff in mediating what “visitors” learn about prison. In *El almafuerte*, the warden Martín Mollo is interviewed by students and filmmakers and guides an actual tour of the prison. Although Mollo does not operate the camera, he authorizes the classes and influences the tone of the documentary. Indeed, he voices his concerns about the end result of the project: “No me gustaría que termine siendo el programa que hoy vemos en la televisión sobre las cárceles . . . , el sumo de lo que uno no quiere que se muestre.” (I wouldn’t like it to end up being the sort of prison show we see nowadays on television . . . , the epitome of what we wouldn’t want to be shown.) His request to resist the sensational presentation of prisoners as violent “celebrities” in squalid surroundings is granted by both the filmmaker-educators and the students, who, through their access to the cameras, construct a less stigmatizing image of themselves and their surroundings.

This positive approach, however, risks sanitizing prison realities. Indeed, several prisoners not involved with the film later criticized its focus on the good-behavior wing and consequent failure to expose the often harsh realities of life inside the prison (Sigil Comunicación y Sociedad 2010). The selectivity of people and space tempers “hybrid authorship” and risks reproducing the pedagogical limits of prison tours, which, as Charles Huckelbury (2009, 127) argues in the US context, often make visitors think that prisoners live “a leisurely life in a cushy environment.” Similarly, in Argentina, Jorge, a student at Florencio Varela prison, describes his despair during the COVID-19 pandemic at hearing the false perceptions that many non-incarcerated people have of prison



Figure 1. Luis Eduardo Sosa's house in *13 puertas* (dir. David Rubio, Argentina, 2014). Reproduced with permission of David Rubio.

conditions: “Escucho decir a mucha gente que acá vivimos mejor que los que están afuera, que vivimos como reyes.” (I hear lots of people say that here we live better than those on the outside, that we live like kings) (Cuenteros, Verseros y Poetas 2020). The punitive discourses of inseguridad present prisoners as so evil that any conditions would be “too good.” While, as I show later, *El almafuerte* does dwell on the structural violence of the criminal justice system, the humanizing image of prison produced collaboratively by prisoners, staff and “visiting” filmmakers may actually risk fueling punitive attitudes.

Whereas the staff who collaborate with students in *El almafuerte* are administrative authorities, in *13 puertas* students participate with guards in the university classes taught at the prison. This distinction is important, since prison education in Argentina sometimes sparks resentment from guards, who, unlike their invariably university-educated administrative counterparts, often have little access to formal education (Sozzo 2012, 55). Where prison films typically reinforce the “cruel guard” stereotype (Cecil 2015, 76), advocates of pedagogical prison tours emphasize that tours “challenge negative stereotypes of correctional officers” (Arford 2017, 933). Rubio’s documentary does so by highlighting how wide-reaching social inequalities bring together guards and prisoners. Cubilla explains the prisoners’ acceptance of guards as fellow students: “Más allá de lo azul de la gorra . . . no eran muy diferentes a nosotros.” (Besides their blue uniforms . . . they were not very different from us.) Part of this similarity lies in the Unidad Penal no. 48’s specific relationship with the local neighborhood, José León Suárez. Cubilla highlights that many of the local laborers who constructed the prison went on to be guards. The prisoner/cruel guard dichotomy is blurred by shared working-class origins, accentuated when the camera tours the humble house of the guard and student Luis Eduardo Sosa (figure 1). Beyond class, Cubilla hints at race when discussing Sosa, noting that his appearance makes it clear that he comes from a similar place and background: “Se le nota en la piel.” (You can see it in his skin.) Beyond pointing to Sosa’s general demeanor, Cubilla’s remark may also be understood as referring to a shared darker skin tone. In doing so, Cubilla highlights the collusion of class, race, and location in Buenos Aires, partly supporting what Rita Laura Segato (2007) terms “el color de la cárcel” (the color of prisons) in Latin America. Segato (2007, 142, 144) argues that the predominantly “no blanca”

(nonwhite) prison population points to a naturalized colonial racism. In *13 puertas*, such inequalities are not limited to prison. Cubilla emphasizes socioeconomic, geopolitical, and racial continuities that disrupt neat interior-exterior carceral divides. The camera's exploration of Sosa's own domestic space, guided by Cubilla's voice, adds spatial and relational plurality to typically unidirectional prison tours and documentaries, teaching us that we cannot learn about imprisonment by looking only at prisons and prisoners.

The dynamic relationship between prisoner-students and guard-students in *13 puertas* coexists with the complex interactions between "visiting" educators and students. Early on, Cubilla describes Vanesa Parziale's ethnographic motives for entering prison while he also emphasizes his close friendship with her; the camera, meanwhile, accentuates both the filmmaker and Vanesa's touristic externality, following her slowly through the numerous doors that give the documentary its title. Later, one of the students explains the tension that Vanesa's presence can cause: "Ella también te prueba a ver qué piensa este negro." (She also tries to test you. She wants to know what this bum thinks.) Vanesa denies observing the students with a voyeuristic, colonial gaze, suggested by the here derogatory and racially inflected "*negro*,"⁵ insisting that she dialogues with them. The student responds that she has misunderstood: "En este lugar hay mucha gente que viene que al ser una persona que nunca estubo en un penal . . . al no saber, uno comete errores, se equivoca, y si uno no se equivoca es como que no aprende nada" (A lot of people come here who've never been in prison . . . But here, one can make mistakes, if we don't make mistakes we learn nothing). With no mention of the camera, the simultaneity of the prisoner's on-screen reflexivity over being observed and the camera's observational fly-on-the-wall stillness foregrounds the complexity of (filmic) encounters grounded in educational, racial, socioeconomic, and experiential inequalities. By allowing students' voices to guide reflexivity, *13 puertas* supports Joanna Page's (2016) identification of the reflexivity of the other superseding that of the filmmaker self in recent Argentine ethnographic documentaries, but here with a social rather than cinematic reflexivity. In this way, this scene challenges the inequalities of classical prison tours. The focus on the difficulties of internal-external encounters teaches teachers, filmmakers, and spectators that it is through discomfort that, as "tourists," they reflect on their positionalities and, only after this, learn about incarceration. Beyond Stam's (2013) focus on shared camera usage as a more democratic and less voyeuristic mode of representation, documentaries are more politically informative when they foreground the unequal social relations underpinning imprisonment.

Performative affect and pedagogy

Reflexive encounters in *13 puertas* and *El almafuerte* suggest that documentary practice and analysis may contribute toward the "greater reflexivity" needed to respect prisoners' dignity during tours (Piché and Walby 2012, 417). Indeed, the extra layers of touristic encounter afforded by documentary form invite filmmakers, educators, and spectators to reflect on how their differing experiences and privileges interact with people and places largely unknown to them. Such reflexivity may add transparency, counteracting the fact that "prison tours are always choreographed performances" (Huckelbury 2009, 126). Performance, however, is not neatly distinct from reflexivity. Indeed, Stella Bruzzi, in her deconstruction of the distinct documentary modes theorized by Nichols, emphasizes that "all documentaries are performative acts" and that, in many recent documentaries, authenticity itself depends on a reflexive, "multi-layered, performative exchange between

⁵ The meaning of *negro* in Argentina is complex: "It can certainly be derogatory and racist. But in other contexts, it can also be used as a term of endearment" (Adamovsky 2017, 275). The context of its usage in *13 puertas* suggests the pejorative meaning.

subjects, filmmakers/apparatus and spectators” (Bruzzi 2010, 1, 10). Performative relations and performance accrue particular importance in prison education documentaries, where students are frequently filmed putting newly developed cultural skills into practice: students in *Lunas cautivas* read poems at a tearful recital attended by loved ones; students in *Pabellón 4* perform corporeal testimonies of violence, drawing on the expository skills developed during the workshops. I take the intimacy, deep interpersonal relationships, and corporeality that define such performances as the essential qualities of affect at the interstice of education, documentary, and tourism. In recent Argentine documentaries, Pablo Piedras (2014, 146) locates affect in the increasingly reflexive and subjective presence of the filmmaker, entailing an introversion from the public sphere toward the private. Affect in prison education documentaries highlights the structural inequalities that define imprisonment through subtle forms of reflexivity toward the ethically challenging demands made of prisoners by tours, documentaries, and pedagogy.

In *Pabellón 4*, the student Germán reveals the pains of imprisonment through oral testimonies, emphasized as performances by the applause of his classmates. Having early on recited the experience of witnessing a friend being killed by prison staff, he later performs a text in a scene that affectively captures his own suffering. Halfway through, in a full shot, he describes his yearning for his mother’s embrace; his body is overtaken by the intensity of longing; he dries his eyes before the camera cuts to Sarlo, as his voice cracks up. The camera returns to Germán in a more intimate close-up, in which frontlighting foregrounds the newly copious sweat on his brow as he says, “Perdóñenme Estado, lo que me duele . . . es que de ahora en adelante no puedo creerles.” (Forgive me, State, what hurts . . . is that from now on I won’t be able to believe in you.) The scene ends with hugs from Sarlo and the former student Carlos. By temporarily removing Germán from sight, sharpening our auditory attention just as his voice deteriorates, and ending in proximity to perspiration and embracing bodies, the scene foregrounds painful individual and supportive interpersonal affect. The misconception of carceral violence as solely sporadic bursts of interpersonal confrontation is denaturalized temporally into the everyday, and spatially into relationships across prison walls. The symbolic violence of the state severing citizens’ trust and separating families is made corporeal, accentuating Germán’s vulnerability. The political potency of affect here lies in a context of inseguridad, in which marginalized sections of society become automatically labeled as “dangerous” (Parchuc 2015, 24). This scene troubles the essentialization of prisoners as uniquely “dangerous” by highlighting bodily vulnerability and community, and challenges the widespread denial of prisoners’ own exposure to trauma that engenders punitive attitudes.

While Germán’s performance teaches viewers about the pain resulting from the structural violence of the carceral state, the film problematizes the prison-tour logic of making visitors think they “know” what it is to be imprisoned” (Arford 2017, 935) by juxtaposing the performative classroom space seen throughout the film with the seldom-seen private space of a cell. Immediately after the recital, Germán is shown lying in bed, with off-screen, discordant music producing a sense of claustrophobia, his deep sighs signaling fatigue, and bright backlighting obscuring his facial features (figure 2). The private space, his unreadable face, and solitary silence create a sense of voyeuristic unease through contrasts with the camaraderie of the previous scene, prompting viewers to reflect on the potentially traumatic aftermath of education and the fact that classrooms are representative of neither carceral space nor how students act and feel. The exceptionality of the classroom made visible to the spectator-tourist is confirmed in the following scene: Sarlo, at home, learns that Germán has abused his trust—so powerfully portrayed after the recital—by using the classroom printer to counterfeit money, jeopardizing their whole project. Taken alone, Germán’s visceral classroom performance risks reproducing what Page (2016, 137) critiques as “the positivist dogmatism of many anthropological or televisual documentaries, which proceed as if knowledge of the other may be straightforwardly



Figure 2. Germán lying in bed in *Pabellón 4* (dir. Diego Gachassin, Argentina, 2017). Reproduced with permission of Diego Gachassin.

gained and communicated.” *Pabellón 4*’s emphasis on the spatial and affective inconsistency across three consecutive scenes, however, reflexively reveals its inability to offer an all-knowing touristic or anthropological communication of the lived complexities of prison.

Pabellón 4’s subtle reflexivity regarding the communicative potential of affective performance provides an interesting counterpoint to Jonathan’s revelation in *El almafuerte* of the performative nature of affect itself and the potential impasses of filmic reflexivity. The scene in which Jonathan interviews deputy warden Oscar Andrada foregrounds its own construction: an off-screen educator interrupts Jonathan to suggest different questions, while shots clearly alternate between ones taken by filmmakers and students. Filmic reflexivity, however, develops into spontaneous debate. Jonathan passionately explains to Oscar the difficulties faced by young men trying to escape the circularity of unemployment, urban marginality, and detention. Oscar repetitively retorts that reintegrating into society is merely an individual choice. Afterward, Jonathan’s reflections on the debate are striking: “me olvidé que estaban filmando y empecé a enojarme.” (I forgot they were filming and started to get angry.) By suggesting that he would have contained his anger had he remained fully aware, Jonathan reveals the performative affective labor that prison documentary tours demand. Following Michael Hardt (1999, 96), affective labor requires workers in industries such as entertainment to create and manipulate affects, such as “a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion.” Jonathan’s comments suggest that in the industry of prison tours and documentaries, prisoners are expected to suppress anger toward systemic, societal failings and produce easily digestible information, limited to prison itself, leaving faith in the broader criminal justice system untroubled. Although the scene forces spectators to dwell on its staging, Jonathan’s insightful remark suggests that filmic self-reflexivity, by (usually) reminding prisoners to behave in “consumable” ways, may perpetuate the distancing effect of prison tours, restricting what we learn about incarceration.

It is this tension between viewing a single prison and its “exceptional” prisoners and the educational impulse to develop wider-reaching conclusions about imprisonment that runs through prison tourism and documentaries. Ross (2015, 411) includes documentary spectatorship and tours of operating facilities in a continuum of forms in which people may “potentially gain experience about corrections,” suggesting that both activities “have equal potential for both learning and voyeurism.” I suggest that the further layer of spatial

and relational complexity in prison education documentaries, provided by educators, filmmakers, and spectators, potentially affords the documentary extra critical and political reflexivity over standard tourism. By reflexively foregrounding uneven encounters and affect, these documentaries interpellate viewers' positionalities into the structural underpinnings of imprisonment but resist phenomenologically inserting them into the painful experiences of prison. The internal-external divides inherent to prison and cinema are thus troubled by the overarching inequalities of touristic encounters. Brown (2017, 157), imagining what abolitionist prison tours might look like, envisages "a penal subject capable of recognizing and resisting the terms of her own production." In the documentaries that I analyze, reflexivity foregrounds the socioeconomic, racial, and educational imbalances that produce touristic relationships. Resistance to such inequalities, and thus incarceration itself, for Brown, entails disrupting vision: building on the concept of "counter-visibility" (Schept 2014), she insists that spectators be made to "loo[k] precisely for what is not present," namely, naturalized histories of oppression (Brown 2017, 159). In the Argentine documentaries, reflexive allusions to "what is not present" highlight wide-reaching inequalities as well as unseen spaces and affects of the prison tied to the performative nature of classrooms and documentary tours.

Rehabilitative ideologies

While reflexivity and performativity allow Argentine prison education documentaries to counteract tourist selectivity to an extent, the centrality of education may still reproduce prison tourism's misleading tendency to focus on individuals who "demonstrat[e] the successful transformation from miscreant to citizen" (Huckelbury 2009, 126). This practice reinforces a reductive imaginary of imprisonment whereby prisoners are entirely separate from society and then "reintegrated" following their "rehabilitation" in prison. Zaffaroni (1997, 179) groups "reinserción," "resocialización," and "reeducación" together as ideologies that become instrumentalized to justify imprisonment by obscuring the damage inflicted by prison and reinforcing a project of "corrective" treatment. Prison treatment, Michel Foucault (1995) shows, is grounded in processes of individualization that construct the "deviant" criminal in need of "correction" through disciplinary education, isolation, religion, and labor. Prison education conceived of as a basic right thus differs significantly from its insertion into individualizing rehabilitative ideologies that deemphasize the structural inequalities of class and race that determine which groups—the poor and dark skinned—are overpoliced and disproportionately made to populate prisons.

Such inequalities are exacerbated in contemporary Argentina. Gabriela Silvini, the former director of the San Martín University Center, argues that, in the context of discourses of *inseguridad*, we must ask the following questions: "¿a dónde se va a reinserir un sujeto que nunca estuvo incluido?, ¿qué es resocializar a alguien?, ¿desde qué lugar nos paramos para definir 'nosotros' sin la participación del otro?, ¿qué sociabilidad es la correcta?" (Where is a subject who was never included going to be reintegrated? What does it mean to resocialize somebody? Where do we position ourselves to define 'us' without the participation of the other? What form of sociability is the correct one?) (Bistagnino 2015, 25). Film, capable of distorting time, reimagining space, and experimenting with the positionalities of filmmakers and filmed subjects, can be a site for questioning the doubtful futurity of *reinserción*, the positionings underpinning prison education, and the kinds of return to society that are possible. More frequently, however, films embed rehabilitative ideologies in their narrative form, highlighting transformations from "dangerous" criminals into "integrated" citizens.

This insistence on rehabilitation contradicts contemporary penal practices. Since the 1960s, rehabilitation has become widely regarded as a failed project (Zaffaroni 1997,

180). It is commonly understood that prisons are designed no longer for correction but as “depósitos” (depositories) or “jaulas” (cages) (Sozzo 2009). Working from this disparity between discourse and practice, Karina Mouzo (2014) argues that the “discurso resocializador” (resocializing discourse) in Argentina has not disappeared but changed in nature. In the context of an increasingly exclusionary labour market, the emphasis that previous discourses placed on preparation for labour and the future is no longer possible: “el ‘afuera’ se desdibuja como horizonte a alcanzar en beneficio del orden interno de la prisión” (the “outside” as an end goal is neglected in favor of the internal order of prison) (Mouzo 2014, 185). The spatiality of rehabilitation and its relationship to internal and external divides are neither constant nor rigid. Film can further disrupt such divides through spatial and affective contrasts and continuities. Next, I show how documentaries construct narratives of transformation and reintegration. Then, building on Foucault’s insight that “prison ‘reform’ is virtually contemporary with the prison itself,” since the shortcomings of prison are used to justify intensified carceral intervention (Foucault 1995, 233), I argue that the most cogent, at times abolitionist, critiques of incarceration result not from simply showing the failure of *reinserción* but from embedding failure within broader structures and spaces that decenter prisons and displace their boundaries.

Narrating transformation

In *Pabellón 4*, the central figure of transformation, having progressed from incarcerated student to teacher, is Carlos. In one scene, encouraging a student who wants to write professionally, Carlos expresses his belief in the transformative potential of prison, arguing that imprisonment poses hardships that make you a better writer. Similarly, during the inauguration of the new classroom, Carlos describes imprisonment as an educational experience that was not just beneficial but in fact necessary for his new life. Despite these two scenes being filmed inside classrooms, it is prison itself on which Carlos focuses. The film reinforces Carlos’s transformation by having both instances adjacent to scenes of him outside prison, “inserted” first into the family home and then in a plaza, where, chatting with two men, he discusses his criminal past. Carlos’s acknowledgement of his past, his spatial *reinserción*, and his insistence on prison as constitutive of his transformation contradict Segato’s (2003) theory of incarceration as a “pedagogía de la irresponsabilidad” (pedagogy of irresponsibility). For Segato, the interpersonal and symbolic violence of prison produces subjects incapable of assuming accountability for their actions. There is, however, also violence inherent in making prisoners relive potentially traumatic pasts. Although the observational distance of the camera in *Pabellón 4* suggests that Carlos’s discussion of his past is voluntary, there exists a deeper relationship between documentary, *reinserción*, and confession. Foucault (1979, 59) shows how confession has spread throughout Western society, reaching “justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relationships” as a “techniqu[e] for producing truth” that is never truly voluntary: “one confesses—or is forced to confess.” Alongside Carlos being physically outside prison, the documentary, itself a form of truth production, requires him to confess his past for his transformative *reinserción* to be accepted as true. Although, as I show later, *Pabellón 4* does foreground Sarlo’s arguments against reintegration, the spatial and confessional form of the sequences centered on Carlos does reinforce the idea, seemingly supported by Carlos himself, that prison itself is an educationally transformative experience.

Individual stories of transformation are also integral to *Lunas cautivas*, although the documentary emphasizes that transformation is not experienced equally by all. The second section, for example, dedicated to the Spaniard Majo, ends abruptly with shots of her flight to Madrid, and we do not learn how this transition pans out. Indeed, the lack of follow-up and the emphasis on her return to Spain highlight the incongruence of “reintegration” for migrant prisoners, who not only experience intensified isolation

during imprisonment but may also leave the society in which they are to be “reintegrated” following release. In contrast, there is a strong narrative of transformation for Lili, whose story occupies the third section of the film. Following Lili’s emotional reading of her rewriting of Luis Cernuda’s poem “Yo no fui,” her fellow student Lidia explains the affective changes that she has noted in Lili since they first met: whereas she was once shy and awkward, she is now more open and sociable. The classroom provided Lili with a space to shed her shyness and build friendships. Indeed, during a poetry recital, Lili explains to the audience that in the past she would never have dared to speak in front of dozens of people, but that she now can thanks to writing. Central to Segato’s theory of prison’s “pedagogy of irresponsibility” is the “pobreza lingüística” (linguistic poverty) that incarceration engenders by suppressing discussion in favor of instrumental demands (Segato 2003, 19). Juan Pablo Parchuc (2015, 26), in turn, describes this linguistic debilitation as part of the “silenciamiento de la voz del preso” (silencing of the prisoner’s voice) that educational programs combat. Unlike Carlos’s focus on the prison habituating his transformation, Lili’s transformation arises from the classroom working against the linguistic and psychological debilitation that prison undertakes.

Both documentaries, however, actively construct these transformations. Strikingly, the dialogue between Lili and Lidia is from the same workshop that opens the first section of the film, where Lidia was the focus. Whereas Lili was the only person not to speak on the first occasion, she is now the protagonist. Through editing, the documentary constructs Lili’s *resocialización* in filmic time. Lili’s transformation from shy to confident, however, bears little resemblance to contemporary Argentine discourses of *reinserción*, restricted to maintaining order inside prison, or indeed the historical understanding of “correction” as the reinsertion of “productive” citizens into the workforce (Mouzo 2014, 185). Indeed, in the film’s only extended scene outside prison, the temporary return to society is marked not by order and productivity but by community and creativity. At the headquarters of YoNoFui, the women recite poetry and dance to upbeat music. In her poem, Lili describes herself in contrast to the language used by the carceral state: “algo más que las letras en negrita del expediente” (something more than the bold letters in the file). The scene then ends on a shot of her wide smile as she dances freely in close contact with other women (figure 3). Furtado (2019b) argues that documentary, beyond its archival, surveillant, and pedagogical affinities with legal practice, may surpass logocentric judicial documentation through sonorous, bodily, and visual foci. Here, the attention afforded to bodily joy and community surpasses the bureaucratic rehabilitative binaries—innocence/guilt, imprisoned/released, productive/surplus—registered on Lili’s file. “Rehabilitation” here relies not on prison but an affective community that extends beyond prison walls.

Beyond failure: Death, politics, and coloniality

Where Lili’s and Carlos’s transformations adhere, to different extents, to individual narratives of change, documentary may, following Zaffaroni, emphasize such “miraculous” transformations as outliers to the overwhelmingly debilitating effect of imprisonment (Zaffaroni 1997, 185). In *El almafuerte*, for example, the teleology of *reinserción* is shattered halfway through by Jonathan’s death during a temporary release and, at the end, by an update on the other workshop participants: five had been reincarcerated or relocated, one had died by suicide, and only four were not currently imprisoned. Importantly, Jonathan’s death is presented not simply as a failure of prison (education) but as a result of urban state violence and politics. When Jonathan guides the filmmakers and educators on a tour of his neighborhood, he explains his emotional attachment to the area: “Este barrio . . . es mi lugar Acá me siento seguro. Salgo del barrio y es como que me siento desprotegido.” (This neighborhood . . . is my place Here I feel safe. I leave and I feel vulnerable.) A slow-motion shot then shows him, camera in hand, walking through his



Figure 3. Lili dancing in *Lunas cautivas* (dir. Marcia Paradiso, Argentina, 2012). Reproduced with permission of Marcia Paradiso.



Figure 4. Jonathan walking through his neighborhood in *El almafuerite* (dir. Roberto Sebastián Persano, Santiago Nacif Cabrera, and Andrés Martínez Cantó, Argentina, 2009). Reproduced with permission of Roberto Persano.

neighborhood (figure 4), accompanied by solemn extradiegetic music; with no musical cut, two close-up shots then show the despondent, silent faces of the educators Marcelo and Emiliano, who explain that Jonathan has been killed by the police.

The affective impact of this sequence is best understood with reference to Brian Massumi (1995, 84), who argues that “the primacy of the affective is marked by a gap between *content* and *effect*”; the pre-emotional nature of affect, for Massumi, means that the bodily intensity of viewers’ responses does not necessarily correspond to the explicit content of an image. In *El almafuerite*, the expectation that Jonathan will go on to be safe and

successful, grounded in the image of him moving through a space that he labels his own, is overridden by the affective flow of minor music that prefigures the failure of *reinserción*. The educators' distraught faces confirm that it is the affective rather than the immediately visible that drives meaning, teaching viewers to look beyond linear narratives of *reinserción*. Indeed, shortly after, Emiliano explains that, unless deep structural changes take place outside prison, offering people hope through education inside prison might ultimately be "dishonest." As the site of Jonathan's death, the "outside" of the Buenos Aires *conurbano* (the metropolitan area surrounding the city), like the Brazilian favelas described by Wacquant (2008, 68), is shown to suffer "the accelerating 'prisonization' of [its] social fabric." Wacquant (2008, 57–58) argues that economic deregulation, ethnoracial division, and the political dramatization of "the monster of urban crime" have caused increasingly militarized violence, blurring the boundaries between prisons and urban margins. *El almafuerte*, affectively foregrounding the dramatic vulnerability rather than "monstrosity" of criminalized classes, shows that education confined to prison classrooms cannot provide *reinserción* if the spaces into which people are released are saturated by "prisonized" state violence.

El almafuerte decenters individual stories, prisons, and education programs from debates surrounding *reinserción* by foregrounding state violence, complemented with explicit political critique. Interviewed shortly after Jonathan's death, the politician Daniel Arroyo explains how youths imprisoned at the time were products of Argentina's 2001 economic and political crisis. The filmmakers also interview Zaffaroni, who explains that contemporary problems have their roots in the 1990s, when Argentina's social fabric became fractured under Menem's neoliberal government. By socially contextualizing crime, the film translates criminal justice into the need for social justice, resonating with abolitionist thought. Maximiliano Postay (2012, ix, xviii), for example, highlights that contemporary Latin American prison abolitionists focus more of their attention on the political and economic structures and interests that perpetuate mass incarceration than on the specific conditions of prisons themselves. *El almafuerte* intervenes in such systemic critiques alongside individual tragedies and stories of success, providing an intimate and affective rather than merely abstract point of entry into a societal problem.

Similarly, *Pabellón 4* centers systemic critique through Sarlo's affectively charged attack on the idea of education as rehabilitative "treatment": "a mí me chupa un huevo la *reinserción*, que ustedes se inserten" (I don't give a damn about your reintegration). Citing the Nazism of Heidegger, Sarlo lambastes the supposed equivalence of being educated and a good person: "Yo acá no vengo para que ustedes sean mejores personas. ¿Cómo voy a enseñar literatura y filosofía y Foucault para que sean mejores personas? Eso es colonialismo. Eso es dominación." (I don't come here to turn you into better people. How will I teach literature, philosophy, and Foucault to turn you into better people? That's colonialism. That is domination.) With particular scorn, he highlights the incoherence of *reinserción* and poverty: "Acá tengo la receta para que no roben más y cuando estén cagados de hambre no van a volver a robar nunca más ¿Cuál es la receta Sarlo? Leer a Bioy Casares ¡Andate a la concha de tu hermana, boludo!" (Here's the recipe for you not to rob ever again, and when you're starving you won't rob ever again. What is the recipe, Sarlo? Read Bioy Casares. Go fuck yourself, ass!) Sarlo's critique of "rehabilitative" education as colonial is best understood in relation to the logic of salvation that Walter Mignolo (2007, 463) identifies at the heart of colonial modernity, running through the "civilizing" and Christianizing justifications of colonial invasions to the more contemporary Western imposition of modernization, development, and neoliberalism on the rest of the world. Sarlo undermines the idea that teaching high, often European culture can "improve" criminalized men from the Buenos Aires *conurbano*, in need not of "salvation," Sarlo suggests, but changes to their material circumstances. By emphasizing hunger and its

subordination in rehabilitative ideologies to educational salvation, Sarlo reveals another logic underpinning what Aníbal Quijano (2000) terms the “coloniality of power”: racist Eurocentric domination that outlives regimes of colonialism through inherited social and cultural structures. Quijano (2000, 554) shows how “salvation” was embedded in the Christian soul-body dichotomy, with the soul being “the privileged object of salvation.” This dichotomy was then solidified with the Cartesian separation of the rational subject from the body, and instrumentalized colonially through the labeling of supposedly nonrational, nonwhite races as inferior (Quijano 2000, 555). Alongside the film’s consistent exposition of the students’ own critical and rational capabilities, Sarlo subverts the privileging of the mind over the body, emphasizing the futility of “saving” the soul through education when faced with the simultaneously structural and intensely bodily issue of hunger.

Beyond the content of Sarlo’s rant, the way in which it is filmed also emphasizes corporeality, isolating Sarlo in frame and moving from a full to a medium shot to dwell affectively on his angry, gesticulating arms. Prison pedagogy for Sarlo is not simply about imparting philosophical insights in the classroom, comparable to Paulo Freire’s (2000, 72) description of the (often colonial) “banking concept of education,” whereby teachers, external to the needs of their students, merely “deposit” knowledge. Rather, Sarlo’s pedagogy is a committed, bodily practice, attentive to the material realities of his students and grounded in affective bonds that extend across prison walls. Prior to his rant, Sarlo is filmed in his office, making pleas by phone for Germán not to be punished with a transferal to a dangerous wing; he fights for a student whose misuse of the classroom printer directly contradicted the rehabilitative linearity of education and “good behavior.” The camera dwells on Sarlo’s bodily exasperation as he rubs his tired eyes, intensified by the shallow depth of field that foregrounds him against the blurred background of his office. Rather than attempting the touristic and indeed colonial endeavor of placing viewers in the position of the prisoners, the film’s overarching focus on Sarlo, a middle-class professional moving between his office and home as well as the prison, provides a more realistic point of viewer identification. The documentary is ultimately concerned less with teaching viewers about prison than how to feel about imprisonment. While, like Sarlo, we do not experience the pains of prison, we are made to feel affective fluctuations of anger and solidarity when faced with the incoherence of the colonial and socioeconomic inequalities behind the myth of education as a tool of *reinserción*.

Across these films, critique of the logic whereby criminals are “saved” and transformed into repented and reintegrated citizens through education depends on spectators being invited to link individual, intimate realities to structural issues and inequalities. These links, I have suggested, are often provided by affect, which, be it in the form of individual disbelief or collective joy, shows that education often follows different paths from those envisaged by prison. It is this diversion from carceral logics that provides possible abolitionist readings of these films. On one hand, abolitionists, who adopt a wide-reaching, structural approach to imprisonment are typically weary of celebrating “rehabilitative” projects inside prison: “que los presos trabajen, estudien o participen de alguna actividad festiva” (that prisoners work, study, or participate in some merry activity) (Postay 2012, xv). These films show that prison education cannot be considered separately from the structural issues that make *reinserción* incoherent. Indeed, it is the films’ social critique that moves beyond simply exposing the shortcomings of prison education. Foucault (1995, 234) shows that highlighting prison’s failures has, since the birth of the penitentiary, justified “a series of accompanying mechanisms, whose purpose was apparently to correct it, but which seems to form part of its very functioning”; failure is part of the perpetual cycle of prison reform. The foregrounding of poverty, violence, and coloniality teaches viewers to focus on broader societal inequalities of which they are part, not solely educational reforms inside prison.

Conclusion

Contemporary Argentine prison education documentaries, through their reflexivity toward touristic encounters and their questioning of rehabilitative ideologies, show how the experiences of individuals and small groups inside prison are never entirely separate from wide-reaching injustices, and how practical prison reform need not operate in a vacuum from structural, at times abolitionist critique. While the entry into prison of film-makers, educators, and spectators is plagued with the ethical challenges of voyeurism, intrusion on prisoners' lives, and the documentary imperative to produce a complex message that centers a variety of voices and spaces, I have suggested that, when dealt with reflexively, these ethical challenges can themselves contribute to a documentary's critical capacity. Rather than aiming for "pure" inside perspectives or strict externality from the inequalities of prison, these documentaries trouble the internal-external boundaries of imprisonment and the individual comfort and authority of hegemonic "penal spectatorship" (Brown 2009).

I have argued for the need for an interdisciplinary approach to understand the political potential of these films. Whereas film scholars have, building on Foucauldian insights, prioritized vision and gazes in Latin American prison documentaries (Stam 2013; Allen 2017), criminological studies of prison tourism, voyeurism, and rehabilitative ideologies invite us to consider pedagogical, touristic, and artistic interventions in prison as embodied and relational practices. As a result, I have mobilized affect theory, an approach in fact more common to film studies, from which criminologists who analyze prison tourism could benefit. Indeed, it is affect that most powerfully binds together the embodied challenges and possibilities of prison education, tourism, and documentary film-making and that, when foregrounded reflexively and performatively through film, reveals the inextricability of these practices from people, spaces, and structures outside prison.

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