

Shadows on the Screen: Broadcasting counter-archives and dismantling authorized heritage in post-dictatorship Brazil.



Figure 1 Left: The Paiva Family Right: The Actors portraying the Paiva Family

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MA Heritage

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Abstract

This Dissertation examines how post-dictatorship Brazilian screen media questions historical erasure and politics of memory. It focuses on the lingering shadows of the 1964-1985 military regime and its contemporary repercussions. This study investigates how audiovisual stories unfreeze official history to expose the tense relationship between state-sanctioned narratives and the lived experiences of people on the sidelines. The main aim of this research is to analyse the visual, structural and spatial works through which film and television reconstruct subterranean memories and give form to the regime's missing images. It moves beyond spectacular depictions of violence and armed conflict, prioritizing the clandestine, bureaucratic and domestic aspects of state terror. This dissertation uses a qualitative and interdisciplinary textual and cultural analysis with the combination of memory studies with visual culture and post-dictatorship theory. The theoretical framework synthesises the works of Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, Achille Mbembe, Marianne Hirsch, Michael Pollak, Eduardo Lisovsky, Carlos Fico, Marcos Napolitano, Lisa Shaw, Stephanie Dennison, Aleida Assmann, André Bazin, Gaston Bachelard and Elizabeth Jelin. Through an analysis of the case studies, including *O Agente Secreto*, *Ainda Estou Aqui*, *Cabra Marcado Para Morrer*, *Anos Rebeldes* and *Roque Santeiro*, this research demonstrates how screen culture operates as an active site of counter memory. With the analysis of the portrayal of clandestine surveillance networks, domestic invasions, fabrication of myths and generalised state denial, this study finds that these works resist institutional amnesia. Ultimately, this dissertation concludes that post-dictatorship screen media in Brazil does not simply recreate past trauma, but it actively dismantles the regime's archival stasis and reclaims its voice. It asserts an important look against stubborn structure of state violence.

Introduction

Research Context and Scope: Memory, State Terror, and Screen Media in Post-Dictatorship Brazil

The inspiration for this topic was born in a cinema, during the closing credits of Walter Salles's *Ainda Estou Aqui* (2024). When overhearing other viewers express their shock and unfamiliarity regarding the extent of state violence during the Brazilian military dictatorship pointed out a gap in collective memory. Many admitting to having limited knowledge of Brazilian history beyond colonial times, with few cinematic reference points outside Fernando Meirelles's *City of God* (2002). While I had assumed my heritage offered a direct connection to these historical events, I was confronted by how much of this history remained unexplored in public consciousness. The dictatorship was not an abstract historical period for my family, as it was for many in that theatre, as I was raised with the living memories of the generations before me. My mother grew up during the regime before eventually emigrating from Brazil, carrying these domestic accounts across borders. Yet, despite these intimate family accounts, my early perception of the dictatorship was often framed as a distant narrative, a series of warnings passed down by parents to highlight the contrasts between generations. While I never doubted these personal accounts, the absence of broader public testimonies accessible to me made it difficult to grasp the full extent of the regime's systemic impact. This impression was rooted in a silent phenomenon: a wide cultural taboo and collective denial. Within my family and community, this era was rarely discussed in depth until recently, when contemporary political polarization brought the history back into public debate. Because these discussions often migrated into extremes, the dictatorship was invoked, yet its

systemic human cost was rarely thoroughly confronted. For years, this history existed primarily as a silent shadow created by collective silence. Having previously researched the "politics of forgetting" and institutional "anti-memory" within cultural infrastructures, watching the film marked a pivotal turn in my perspective.¹ It became clear that Brazilian screen media do not merely reflect memory alongside physical archives, museums, and intangible cultural heritage. They actively function as counter-archives capable of confronting intergenerational trauma, breaking collective silence, and recovering subterranean histories.

To understand how cinema and television work as counter-archival spaces, we need to inspect the socio-political mechanics of state terror that ruled Brazil through the entire dictatorship. The March 1964 military coup that overthrew President João Goulart on the grounds of anti-communism paranoia, backed by the United States of America, brought the country into a lengthy authoritarian era with systemic violence, the dissolution of congress and heavy media censorship (Fausto and Fausto 2014; Skidmore 1993; Fico 2017; Gaspari 2002). The control was made possible with the introductions of the *Atos Institucionais* (Institutional Acts), decrees that would make it possible to go over Congress or to undergo any democratic process. This would ensure political power when repression would be insufficient. This also meant that the purge of public institutions, political figures, judges, and opposing political figures could be disposed of. Originally, the Institutional Acts were not meant to last. Instead, there were 5, each one worse than its precedent, in a span of a decade (Gaspari 2002, 65–66). The creation of the AI-5, the

¹ The dissertation was written for the department of World Art studies in the BA of History of Art with museum and galleries studies, in 2023. It is titled: *Deixa para lá! (Let it go): What have been the impacts of the culture of anti-memory on the preservation and understanding of Brazilian cultural heritage?*

Institutional Act Number 5, is an important marker of the state terror. As it was a decree without an end date, it allowed those at the executive branch, such as the suspension of *Habeas Corpus*² and absolute censorship of all media. It was an important marker of the state terror (Natalino 2010, 11). Public figures, who have been victims of these Institutional Acts, such as Vladimir Herzog, famously recognized for having been detained by the military police, questioned and tortured, and killed. His death was staged as a suicide, and the pictures of the staging were made public in the media (Lisovsky et al. 2015, 32). The congressman Rubens Paiva, whose disappearance is at the centre of the memoir written by his son Marcello Rubens Paiva, later turned into the film *Ainda Estou Aqui*. One crucial method for the regime to ensure its survival was to start controlling the national imagination and reform its identity.

The scope of this dissertation links the historical infrastructure of state terror with the evolving visual landscape of Brazil in the years following the end of the regime. It investigates how screen media acts as more than personal accounts and recollection, from documentary witnessing of Eduardo Coutinho's *Cabra Marcado para Morrer* (1984), the highly popular and accessible Soap Operas of TV Globo *Roque Santeiro* (Gomes 1985) and *Anos Rebeldes* (Braga 1992), Walter Salles's domestic and intimate postmemorial cinema with *Ainda Estou Aqui*, and Kleber Mendonça Filho's counter archive with *O Agente Secreto* (2025). While originally Wagner Moura's *Marighella* (2019) was selected as a case study, the selection was changed to focus on *O Agente Secreto* which engaged directly with the underground logics of the military regime, more specifically clandestine intelligence, paranoia and secret archives. The film provides us a better ground for the

² Habeas Corpus is a law that prevents unlawful imprisonment

post-dictatorship screen media revealing of censorship and archives that *Marigellha* could have done.

With the analysis of these screen medias, this research is exploring how the movement of the images is disruptive to the official narrative of the state amnesia, transforming private domestic trauma into public heritage and defending the democratic memory against historical revisionism. The reason why the focus of this research carries on screen media rather than on physical archives or literature is because of the unique role visual culture is within Brazilian society. During the dictatorship and the few years of the transition back to democracy, telenovelas have discussed difficult social narratives and framed them into popular stories for everyone to experience inside people's living rooms, while cinema has brought critical analysis and art spaces for political reflections. More importantly, this research holds a sense of urgency. The transition to democracy feels uncompleted, with the 1979 Amnesty Law at the heart of it. By allowing perpetrators to walk free in exchange of the truth, it has created a bubble and feeds into the reemergence of authoritarian nostalgia and historical revisionism of the Brazilian political discourse.³ The re-examining of the dictatorship memory is not a passive exercise in historical record keeping, but an active way to remember.

This dissertation explicitly adopts the chronology of post-dictatorship Brazil because its heart is central to the media reconstitution of authoritarian history rather than the media produced under it. It is researching how medias produced after it, views the times of the dictatorship immediately after and how they reprised the media's interruptions during the regime and continued following its end. It is not about how it happened but how it will be

³ Discussed in more details in later chapter

remembered. With the important exception of *Cabra Marcado Para Morrer*⁴ which is a hybrid of reconstitution and direct, primary witness of the repression. But it acts as the retrospective visual representation created after the return of civilian rule. Rather than relying solely on primary archival sources, the material such as *Anos Rebeldes* and *Ainda Estou Aqui* engages in a dramatic and aesthetic reenactment of the regime through TV fiction and postmemorial cinema. *Anos Rebeldes* focuses through its central love story, the student revolts and guerilla resistance, as well as the conflictual dynamics between friends and family regarding political positioning. *Ainda Estou Aqui* brings us closer to the documentary witness. While it is a reenactment of a lived story, we are propelled into intimacy and silences, and the administrative battle in a setting where archives and official state narrative cannot be trusted. The idea of retrospective further discusses in the highly popular *telenovela*, *Roque Santeiro*, who was originally banned in 1975, as it used satirical allegory to break down state sanctioned mythologies. While it does not deal directly with the military regime, *Roque Santeiro* exposes in its plot, the construction of mythmaking, censorship and historical fabrication in order to preserve a profitable comforting myth that directly mirrors the 1979 Amnesty Law. Kleber Mendonça Filho's historical thriller *The Secret Agent* is a reconstruction of the subterranean paranoia and bureaucratic surveillance of the dictatorship. What we are ultimately trying to determine is whether these retrospective visual reconstructions which are running in the absence or silence of official state records, if they continue to play a fundamental role in the shaping of the contemporary national identity, the collective consciousness and the enduring memory of the regime.

⁴ *Cabra Marcado Para Morrer* literally translates to "Goat marked to die". In this instance, we are not talking about goats, but about the peasants who live in the Northeast, which would then be called "cabra".

Theoretical Premise: From Authorized Heritage Discourse to Counter-Archival Media

The attached bibliography includes both directly cited texts and broader secondary literature read throughout the research process. Together, these items form the theoretical and historical framework grounding this study's analysis. While not everything could be referenced, they are still significant in the building of this work. This dissertation establishes and integrates 5 parts of the theoretical framework in order to help understand all the various aspects of the research. It dabbles primarily in Memory Studies and Film and Media theory but has important sociological and political components to it. It analyses these theories through the lense of the documentary, the setting, television studies and cinematic viewership. I have decided to not treat film and television as passive historical representations, or common entertainment, but as an essential space for memory. It will evaluate how the moving images work as non-institutional counter-archives. The framework traces the path of historical trauma across 5 different stages, showing how state-enforced amnesia is resisted in subterranean spaces, reconstituted through screen counter-archives, expressed through aesthetic duality, and ultimately transmitted to public audiences.

The first stage, which we will name State Power, Institutional Amnesia and Archival Secrecy, is an establishment of how authoritarian regimes construct official historical narratives while systematically suppressing state crimes. Laurajane Smith (2006) defines Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) as an institutional process dictated by an elite who would rather embellish and promote state-sanctioned historical accounts over

marginalised traumatic experiences. In post-dictatorship Brazil, with the 1979 *Amnesty Law*, the authorized heritage discourse was flexed around political decisions, fostering the narrative of mutual reconciliation. While this is the official frame of the Amnesty Law, it mutes the voices of the victims of 21 years of state terror, execution, tortures and disappearances. The State Amnesia was supported by a complex web of bureaucratic secrets and censorship. Brazilian historian Carlos Fico (2004, 2012, 2017) discusses in his work that the military regime constructed a very intricate intelligence service that was led by the *Serviço Nacional de Informações*, or the National Information Service (SNI) and enforced by the *Divisão de Censura de Diversões Públicas*, the Public Entertainment Censorship Division (DCDP), and was designed to monitor people, clean public information, censor screen media and suppress sensitive parts of historical knowledge. Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever* (Derrida and Prenowitz 1995) offers a critique of archontic power, the state's control over physical documents meant that official records were classified, redacted or destroyed. What was left of the state archive was no longer an objective instrument for history but a very curated space of political power, produced to enforce collective amnesia and protect the perpetrators from being legally liable.

The second stage concerns subterranean trauma, social frameworks and spatial memory. It identifies where memory goes when official archives are silenced. Michael Pollack's theories in *Memória, Esquecimento, Silencio* (Memory, Forgetting, Silence), the idea of subterranean memory (Pollak 1989). The study locates how marginalised groups preserve underground memory that are in direct contradiction with official history through taboos, quiet fears, and private domestic recollections within families and diaspora communities. Maurice Halbwachs is a scholar who has been most frequently cited in all my research. He first published *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (Halbwachs 1925), but

the version that is most used today, is the 1992's Lewis's translation, *On Collective Memory*, who is more accessible to modern english users. I use the 1925 original version, aware that while I have a more loyal reading in the original language, the text is over a century old. However, as it is still heavily referenced today, his work presenting on individual recollection relying on social groups, particularly the family unit, is just as relevant today in memory and heritage studies. In addition, memory attaches directly to physical architecture and built environments. Gaston Bachelard discusses spatial poetics, he argues that the family home represents an intimate sanctuary of safety and emotional belonging (Bachelard 2014). State terror violently destroys this space through military home invasions, wiretapping and forced disappearances. Opposing the domestic sanctuary are the state's "*architecture of confinement*". In Michel Foucault's *Surveiller et Punir* (1975) analysis of discipline and spatial control, is central to understand the clandestine torture centres of the DOI-CODI (*Destacamento de Operações de Informação- Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna*)⁵ that represent physical spaces created by state to surveil, control and erase identities.

The third stage conceptualize moving images as an active political intervention with screen counter-archives, the battles of memory and popular heritage. Elizabeth Jelin (1994; 2007) and Marcos Napolitano (1964: *Historia e memoria*, 2014) have both argued, post-authoritarian memory is an ongoing political battleground. In this instance, films and tv are operating as "entrepreneur of memory" (Jelin 2007), manipulating aesthetics in demand for historical truth and justice. This makes moving images as a form of counter-archive (Foster 2004). It is a collection of oral histories, personal documents including

⁵ Translates to *Department of Information Operations - Center for Internal Defense Operations*

photographs and any other object of the domestic private life. Darlene Sadlier (2008) envisions the counter archives of Brazilian visual culture to not be exclusive to art-house cinema, but that Telenovelas (serialised tv-soap operas) like *Roque Santeiro* and *Anos Rebeldes* have just as efficiently navigated state censorship and bring critical authoritarian history within the homes of millions of domestic spaces. We can therefore recognize these screen medias are in some ways, an acting site of popular heritage.

The fourth stage is the establishment of a film theory in two opposing parts. It is separated by two distinct aesthetic mode, the documentary witness and the fictional reenactment. It is grounded in classical film theory, such as André Bazin's idea of "indexicality" (1960; 2005), also theorized by Roland Barthes (1981). The documentary film has a trace of reality, especially concerning the example of Eduardo Coutinho's *Cabra Marcado Para Morrer*. The film debuted in 1964 and was meant to be a strong and dramatic embodiment of real peasant activists, using the subject of the films as the actors for the story. The filming was shut down by the military coup, but twenty years later, Coutinho resumed the project with some of the recovered material, that now acted as an indexical witness, or archive testimony. The documentary uses real survivors, text that is unscripted, raw interviews and actual geographical sites, with proof that fiction could not entirely replicate. However, while fictional re-enactment that has been brought to the screens such as telenovelas *Anos Rebeldes* and *Roque Santeiro* as well as the newly made sensations of Postmemory cinema with *Ainda Estou Aqui* and *O Agente Secreto* does not rely on primary historical footage or archival material, the right use of set up and prop (costume, set design props) has proved to be a very effective counter archive, a replacement for what has been lost, erased or tampered with.

The last checkpoint means to evaluate how screen media transmits historical trauma to contemporary viewers across temporal and generational divides through the screen with the help of audience transmission, Postmemory and mobile sites of memory. Marianne Hirsch's *The Generation of Postmemory* (2008) describes the relationship that second and third generations have with traumatic events they did not personally live through, but have inherited through family stories, domestic silences and photographs. Authors and directors such as Marcelo Rubens Paiva and Walter Salles have used postmemorial media to adapt private family grief into a wider public context. Along with this, Alison Landsberg in *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Landsberg 2004) explains how mass media have allowed a wider audience to have a deep sense of the time, through empathetic memories of both tv and cinema, even for those with no direct connection to the dictatorship era in Brazil. Ultimately, Pierre Nora in *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (1984) theorizes that our current societies lack spontaneous memory, and therefore needs to create “*lieux de mémoire*”, sites of memory,⁶ to anchor national history. Because when the state fails to build physical monuments or truth museums, moving images operate as a transportable site of memory and therefore converts all cinemas and living rooms into mobile sites of collective remembrance.

At the end of the regime in 1985, the nation had manufactured an official state of silence. It was brought on and established by the 1979 Amnesty Law and sustained during the transition to civilian rule. The hopes were to reconcile the nation, to bring out the truth and

⁶ For this essay, all theoretical terms will be translated, except for *lieux de mémoire*, which is internationally used as such and therefore does not require a translation. This will also ensure no misunderstandings, as explained, site of memory could be two of Nora's concepts.

appease families of the disappeared, and allow the exiles to return, but at the cost of impunity for human rights violations and erasure of state records. This dissertation is an investigation on how Brazilian screen media, with non-fiction cinema, popular television and contemporary memory film, functions as a virtual counter-archive to challenge state amnesia. Rather than viewing film and television as just casual entertainment, this study places moving images as an active reconstitution of contested and suppressed historical trauma to be transmitted to the viewers.

Aims, Significance, and Core Research Questions

The primary aim of this dissertation is to dissect the formal, narrative and historical mechanics through which Brazilian screen media subverts state silence across the years from 1984 to the present. This research is significant for the links between high-level memory theory with popular screen medias from post-dictatorship Brazil. With the understanding of the theoretical framework concerning archives, subterranean trauma and prosthetic memory and placing it alongside specialised Brazilian media historiography, we are able to demonstrate how popular screen culture assumes the burden of public commemoration when the official state has failed to do so. With the exploration of these dynamics, this dissertation research how Brazilian screen media operates as a virtual site of memory. It examines the precise ways non-fiction film, commercial television and Postmemory cinema build counter-archives capable of challenging state secrecy, administrative censorship and official denial. In addition, the analysis is considering how screen narratives make subterranean domestic trauma into public political memory without reducing structural violence into theatrical drama. So, in

a sense, we are trying to inspect how the relationship between viewers and the dictatorial trauma has evolved across time, from immediate post-transition television broadcasts to contemporary Postmemory cinema confronting modern political revisionism, as recently witnessed in recent Brazilian political times (Zimmermann 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Spatial Memory and Erasure: Collective Memory, *Lieux de Mémoire*, and Authorised Heritage

History memory is neither a psychological collection within us nor a neutral accumulation of empirical facts. It is politically contested and collective and takes a lot of space and is consistently moving. During the transition, the trouble would lie in the way Brazil remember its past, and is linked directly to the physical spaces and the symbols within it. What this means is, with the lack of state involved monuments or discussion, the results of the amnesty law and the generalised social taboo, it is hard to establish the said relationship. Therefore, to analyse how Brazilian screen media is operating as sites of memory, we must dissect the spaces and institutional dynamics through which the collective memory is structured, carried out and consistently erased.

The foundations that explain how individual memory is dependent upon the structure of a group started with Maurice Halbwachs in *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire*. He explains that memories are reconstructed and sustained through social frameworks (*cadres sociaux*), those being through family, class, religious groups and physical

geography. Moreover, he insists that collective memory requires spatial anchoring. The crucial point of his theory in regards to memory and reconstruction, is that if you experienced a memory in the same manner as of the people were experiencing it during the events of same memory, we would be freer and more spontaneous and we would not be bound to a set of chronology to be respected. But if we were insistent in the reconstruction of those memories, there is then a timeline to be respected and it would not be a moment of the past, but a representation of it (Halbwachs 1925, 53). Additionally, Sarah Gensburger (2016) explains Halbwachs theories as essential to the work for collective memory but is insistent that it should be understood correctly, as many have strayed it from its empirical truth (2016, 397). Collective memory as it was originally intended, is a relation to relationships, between individuals and groups and is not to be studied in its isolated self. Memory is both recognised and reconstructed simultaneously. As she highlights from the second edition of Halbwachs text:

“If collective memory derives its force and duration from a group of individuals, these are after all individuals who remember as members of a group. The common memories in this mass are interdependent, and it is not always the same memories that will seem strongest to each group member. We suggest that each individual memory represents a point of view on the collective memory. This point of view changes, depending on the place I occupy, and the place I occupy changes depending on the relations I pursue with other milieus. Thus, it is not surprising that not everyone makes the same use of a common tool. In trying to explain this diversity, however, we always return to a combination of influences that are, by nature, social.” (Halbwachs 1925; cited by Gensburger 2016)

In post-1964 Brazil, the military regime actively manipulated these social frameworks by suppressing public assembly, enforcing domestic isolation and imposing a control over the physical spaces where political opposition could be articulated. With this, the spatial anchors of collective resistance were severed.

Indeed, because memory is an active social construction and not just a simple brain function, it needs a group to survive. Otherwise, it feels unverified and faded. The families were broken up, the students and journalist persecuted and silenced, while the physical spaces they used in order to nurture this memory were being destroyed. Where Halbwachs establishes the importance of these spaces, Pierre Nora (1984) discusses the shift that occurs when natural social frameworks collapses. He opposes the two ideas of *milieux de mémoire* and *lieux de mémoire*, which incidentally both translates into English as spaces of memory. The distinction is minimal linguistically, but enormous symbolically. *Milieux de mémoire* is about the living environment of memory which occurs in the daily, whereas *Lieux de mémoire* is the archival site, the place where memory is artificially frozen and stored, because the natural way of transmission has stopped. A *lieux de mémoire* is significant at a specific historical time, when the community senses that its past is being erased. In the example of Brazil, the 1979 Amnesty Law, is the historical event that has deliberately stopped the making of a *Lieux de mémoire*. And for a long time, former clandestine torture centers, like the DOI-CODI facilities, were not turned into memorials or preserved but were repurposed. This is until the archaeological project of the centre at Rua Tutoia,⁷ to highlight the dark history of a building hidden in plain sight. The other instance is the Memorial of resistance of São Paulo, which lies in

⁷ Tutoia road in São Paulo

Santa Ifigenia, was a former DOPS centre and later became the freedom memorial. But it was rebranded as the resistance memorial in 2009, as the word “freedom” was unsuitable for a place where so many people died under atrocious circumstances.⁸

This institutional suppression fits ideally with the accounts of Laurajane Smith of the Authorized Heritage Discourse. She depicts heritage as a moving set of practices, which says that institutions have systematically defined what from the past was worthy of preservation and what is set to be forgotten, rather than a set of physical monuments. The AHD prioritizes expert management, grand national narratives, consensus, and state-sanctioned stability, while systematically putting aside stories of violence.

In the Brazilian context, this authorized heritage discourse was engineered by the regime to enforce a state of amnesia. As Carlos Fico’s research shows, the dictatorship built a sophisticated web of administrative secrets and official discourses made to manage national memory. Fico (2002) discusses that the regime looked to establish a “moral concordat” with society, with the promotion of narratives of social order and national unity, in order to legitimize its authority while systematically hiding torture, illegal detentions and other political violences, that were hidden behind classified intelligence archives. Furthermore, as he observes in his historiographical synthesis, the post-transition memory area remains defined by the tension between official attempts to freeze a narrative of state-led peace attempts and the opposed demands for archival transparency for justice (Fico 2017).

Memory production in the Brazilian regime is essentially conditioned by state legislation, bringing us to explain the Amnesty Law. The law granted reciprocal amnesty to both

⁸ Web page : <https://memorialdaresistenciasp.org.br/historico/>

political dissidents and state operatives responsible for human rights abuses, and it was passed during the regime's *Abertura*, the transition back to democracy. As memory scholars such as Nina Schneider and Rebecca Atencio (2016) and former president of the *Comissão da Anistia*, the Amnesty Commission, Paulo Abrão (2012; Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril (Universidade de Coimbra) et al. 2010) observe, this legal agreement institutionalised a policy of “official amnesia”, shielding military tortures from being prosecuted and forced state intelligence archives to be sealed for decades. Brazil maintained legal immunity for the perpetrators, unlike neighbouring Southern Cone nations like Argentina, which repealed its amnesty laws and conducted landmark human rights trials (1994; 2007). Consequently, the struggle over historical memory moved from courtrooms to the cultural domain. It was not until the establishment of the *Comissão Nacional da Verdade*, the National Truth Commission in 2011 (with its results completed in 2014) that official state silence was formally interrupted and provided a new legal and archival foundation for the contemporary counter-archival media.

“Based on the analysis of historical documents and the use of constitutional history methodology, the historical conditions that made the emergence of this commission possible were explored, as well as its attributions. It was then possible to evaluate the expectations surrounding its performance and the criticisms about how it emerged, being aware of the national and international importance of the historical discourse produced by this work of memory. Depending on how it is carried out, such work may give rise to resentments or reconciliations, hatred, peace, bitterness and/or forgiveness, (ir)responsibilities of the agents and the State, setbacks or advances in the process of democratization.”(Oliveira and Cabral 2021, 116)

This emotional ambivalence described by Oliveira and Cabral (2021, 116) directly mirrors the dynamics of modern Brazilian screen media. Moving images do not simply record history by confronting an unresolved traumatic past, but they actively fight in these memory battles as an uncomfortable space between the State and underground memory. Marcos Napolitano demonstrates that the transition out of the authoritarian rule in Brazil was defined by a clean break or a unified collective consensus but by intense and ongoing memory battles, as discussed by Jelin. These battles represent an important fight between the official narratives dispersed by the military state and counter-memories held by victims and activists. These official narratives were later inherited by civilian post-dictatorship institutions. Napolitano (2020, 42) points out how the post-1985 political arrangement manufactured a selective amnesty and tried to equalize the requirements between state perpetrators and political dissidents. Against this state-directed agreement, cultural artifacts, in our case screen media, become a critical battleground. The moving images do not just record these memory battles, but they actively participate in them, offering visual forms that interrupt state amnesia and challenge the limits of the Authorised Heritage Discourse.

In another parallel, Nora often viewed *lieux de mémoire* through a nostalgic focus. This has been criticized by such people as Aleida Assmann (2008, 2014, 2011), Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam (1996), with the added viewpoint of the ideologically charged nature of such sites. Assmann reframes memory with the distinction between functional memory which is active and has social ties, and stored memory which is passive and archival. She emphasises that state institutions often use stored memory to control the limits of functional memory, and suppressing uncomfortable truths until social movements or cultural interventions force their return into the public discourse. She adds that while

Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* is fundamental, it is limited to its time and fails to recognize the human capacity to grow its understanding concerning memory.

Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam travel even further, with a warning against the over-extension and the myth of the term "collective memory" as we previously established being founded by Maurice Halbwachs. The argument is that collective memory is an idealised construction and not an empirical reality. In their opinion, memory is strictly an individual and cognitive, that what scholars agree to being a collective memory is more accurately understood as a political myth, a state ideology or a fabricated narrative enforced by the dominant social group. They explain:

"We may confidently sum up our analysis of Halbwachs with the following conclusion: "collective memory" has become the predominant notion which replaces real (factual) history, on the one hand, and real (personal) memory, on the other hand. Indeed, "collective memory" has become the all-pervading concept which in effect stands for all sorts of human cognitive products generally. This is most unfortunate"(1996, 40)

It does indeed raise some interesting questions as the notion of collective memory is widely accepted. While the idea of a collective memory sound and appears to be functioning, the reality is that it often seems to be portrayed in situation such as the Brazilian authoritarian regime, just to name this example, as using the collective memory to enforce a single memory. It would be preferred to think that more than just admitting that it is an entirely manipulated construction or its opposite, the explanation of social groups and how they remember, that in parallel, multiple groups might be collectively remembering but simultaneously, having their own individual memory. Further into

spatial memory, is what can be explained as the “architecture of confinement”. The material enforcement of state terror relies fundamentally on the manipulation of spatial geography. To understand how moving images map traumatic history, one must examine the tension between public sites of sovereign discipline and private sanctuaries of domestic intimacy, Michel Foucault shows how state power relies on the control of physical spaces to monitor and regulate citizen’s daily lives (1975). Clandestine torture facilities like the DOI-CODI operates as enclosures made by the state. They were hidden, hyper controlled spaces within the urban landscape where legal protections were completely suspended and human bodies were subjected to absolute control. Additionally, in *The Power of the Archives and Its Limits*, Achille Mbembe describes a similar scenario, albeit more visual. He frames the physical archives as a prison, with locked documents and at the mercy of whoever controls them.

“Up to now, we have treated archives on the basis of their power as a relic, and their capacity to function as an instituting imaginary. We have deliberately left aside two aspects: the subjective experience of the archive by individuals, and the relationship between the archives and the state” (Mbembe 2002)

Going beyond Foucault’s and Mbembe’s carceral framework, the use, or misuse of archives is discussed by Elizabeth Jelin in a Latin-American context. As she argues in her analysis of memory struggles and public memorialization in the southern cone, official attempts to enforce amnesia through state secrets end up generating counter-movements or “labors of memory” (2007). Jelin demonstrates that when the state uses its power to cleanse physical geography and destroying official records, these labors of memory are denied access to public monuments and state archives. Consequently,

memory is forced to migrate out of the public square and into clandestine, non-institutional, and cultural realms. As Napolitano (2025) and Tatiana Signorelli Heise (2012) observe in the Brazilian context, post-dictatorship popular culture became the principal battleground for these memory wars. By denying physical space and official recognition to victimized communities, the state inadvertently created the exact structural conditions for screen media to affirm its agency, with its operation as a site of memory capable of confronting state amnesia on its own terms. These conditions involve testimonies of people living in silence, and those whose voice have been driven underground.

Subterranean Memory, Embodied Testimony, and the Politics of the Body

Following the establishment of the signification of collective memories contradictable battles, we are driven the depth of the trauma. With the military regime, the state enforces official amnesia through legal injustice, without condemnation, it does not mean that there is no traumatic history, and it is possibly argued that it makes it worse. To understand how screen media translates the hidden historical trauma, into the public counter-archive (full theoretical analysis of this term in section 2.3), it is necessary to examine how state violence is stored within the people and is observed in the domestic space and the political struggle. This section explains the subterranean survival of memory through the relations between Michael Pollack's concept of secret memory,

Elizabeth Jelin and Andreas Huyssen's work of memory politics, Gaston Bachelard's spatial poetics and Elaine Scarry's analysis of somatic trauma.

As previously mentioned with the "labors of memory", Jelin (2007; 1994) argues that official state attempts to enforce national amnesia inevitably generate counter-movements led by survivors, families of victims, human rights advocates and cultural producers who fight to anchor traumatic recollections in the public sphere. When the state uses its power to cleanse spaces and censor public discourse, these labours of memory, are denied access to official monuments and state archives. Consequently, memory is forced to migrate into alternative, non-institutional realms. It is important to note:

"When blocked by contesting social or governmental forces, the subjectivity, the desire and the will of the women and men who are struggling to materialize memory look for alternative channels of expression, renewing their strength. There is no pause, no rest, because memory has not been deposited anywhere; it has to remain in the minds and hearts of the people." (Jelin 2007, 148)

This shift of memory into private and clandestine spaces aligns directly with Michael Pollak's theory of *mémoire souterraine*, or subterranean memory (Pollak 1989, 4)⁹. He theorised subterranean memory as a silenced, underground counter-memory that exists directly beneath the dominant national narrative. Subterranean memory works inside the margins and is preserved by marginalized groups, the persecuted and a wide web of family

⁹ The original text is in French, but the only accessible version of it was in Portuguese. It is important to note, that my findings is the result of two processes of translation, one by an unknown translator, and the second one by myself. While I consider the ability to use multiple languages for my findings, I am aware that things can be lost in translation.

networks. This is contrary to official history that is dependent on public visibility and political consensus. Pollak observes that under authoritarian conditions, subterranean memories remain restricted to private networks to protect survivors from further state violence. Crucially, Pollack emphasizes that subterranean memory is not a passive storage of grief, as it maintains the potential to destroy, like a time bomb that is just waiting for any political cracks and break into the public discourse to challenge state amnesia(1989, 9). He contests Halbwachs generalised view of sharing a memory base line, as being the incubator to silence:

“When you put forward the accounts of the people excludes, the marginalizes and the minorities, oral history highlights the importance of subterranean memories, which as a primary part of cultural and oppressed minorities, are opposing to “official memory”, in this instance, state memory.”¹⁰

Pollacks critiques of Halbwach’s theory is that the collective memory tends to assume cohesion. In instances which a lot of voices are forced underground and silenced, the outside appears to cohesive, but it does not consider the subterranean memory. It is particularly true of the Brazilian military regime, where the state enforced narrative becomes the true collective memory. The physical containment of subterranean memory within the domestic space is connected directly to Gaston Bachelard’s “spatial poetics”(2014). He frames the home and the domestic interior as a protective sanctuary for the human mind, the space where intimacy and suppressed grief can endure outside the watchful eyes of the external authority. During the regime, when public spaces, universities and political assemblies were monitored and militarized, the domestic

¹⁰ Translated from Portuguese

household became the primary site of psychological and physical survival. As Lisa Shaw and Stéphanie Dennison discusses (2007), when explicit political speech was condemned, the private spaces and popular cultural outlets became vital ways for preserving taboo social realities and subterranean trauma outside state control. However, subterranean memory is at its core, physical and somatic. Authoritarian violence inflicts its most severe marks directly upon the human body through torture and forced disappearances. In her text, *The Body in Pain* (1985), Elaine Scarry discusses how physical torture is designed to unmake the victim's world. She argues that state torture weaponizes the body against the self, making trauma notoriously difficult to translate into conventional verbal language or legal testimonies. She says:

“As has become evident even in this brief review of the four initial assertions of this book (and as will become much more evident), the difficulty of articulating physical pain permits political and perceptual complications of the most serious kind. The failure to express pain-whether the failure to objectify its attributes or instead the failure, once those attributes are objectified, to refer them to their original site in the human body-will always work to allow its appropriation and conflation with debased forms of power; conversely, the successful expression of pain will always work to expose and make impossible that appropriation and confutation.”

In post 1964 Brazil, the military regime relied on this unmaking of language, systematically denying the reality of torture. With neither space to express the pain nor the language to verbalize it, its memory is absent. It is precisely where written language fails that somatic resistance emerges as a critical component of Jelin's (2007) labors of memory. Traumatic memories are registered not merely in intellectual narratives, but in physical gestures,

somatic scars, domestic rituals and the physical presence of relatives holding photographs of the disappeared. Napolitano's (Napolitano 2020) idea is that the central challenge of post dictatorship Brazilian culture was finding an aesthetic form capable of translating this mute subterranean somatic trauma into a visible public discourse without trivializing the suffering of victims. Screen media steps directly into this void. By combining the photographic indexicality of the physical bodies with cinematic staging and narrative space, film and television perform a vital somatic recovery. For a better understanding, the photographic index refers to the way a filmmaker or television director casts human actors, places them in realistic domestic interiors, and captures their physical presence, gestures, scars, and tears on camera (Barthes 1981; Bazin and Gray 1960; Dalle Vacche 2020; Bazin 2005). The moving images give visual and acoustic form to Scarry's "unmade world", extracting Pollak's subterranean memories from domestic confinement and bringing them into the public sphere. In doing so, screen media operates as an autonomous virtual framework, transforming private grief into a collective, public counter-archive.

Postmemory, Screen Witnessing, and the Spectral Archive

To fully understand how post-dictatorship Brazilian screen media functions as a counter-archive, it is necessary to examine the mechanisms of state suppression and the transgenerational transmission of trauma. The dictatorship's systematic concealment of administrative records, added with the Amnesty Law, established an official policy of state amnesia designed to sever the past from the present. To conceptualize how screen media disrupts this state-enforced amnesia, this section synthesizes Marianne Hirsch's theory of Postmemory, Mauricio Lissovsky's analysis of photographic stasis, and

Derrida's archival theory. Together, these frameworks reveal how cinema and television perform and active "archival impulse" (Foster 2004), transforming indexical visual traces into a generative, virtual counter-archive (for early usage in this dissertation, see Sections 2.1 and 2.2). Where direct witnesses to state violence face physical erasure or subterranean exclusion (Pollak 1989; Scarry 1985) memory must migrate across generational lines to survive. Marianne Hirsch (Hirsch 2008) conceptualizes this phenomenon as Postmemory. This relationship that the second generation bears to the powerful, often traumatic, experiences of those who came before them. Crucially Hirsch emphasizes that Postmemory is not an identity based on direct recollection but it is rather an active, creative relationship mediated not by recall, but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation (Hirsch 2008). The "post" prefix does not signal a departure from memory, but a delayed mediated form of engagement born from living in the shadow of unspoken family trauma and state-imposed silences. While her theory of Postmemory is the concept on how following generations inherit and process through transgenerational trauma through imaginative investment and projection, Mauricio Lissovsky (Lissovsky et al. 2015; Lissovsky 2008) identifies the precise material and visual field where this postmemorial process happens in Latin America, as the "battle of images". In post-dictatorship Brazil, when the regime has systematically destroyed official records and enforces state secrecy (Fico 2012, 2017), Postmemory cannot depend on traditional government archives to uncover the past. Instead, as Lissovsky affirms, historical memory is an active visual space in conflict that lives within state amnesia, among the flood of unassimilated presence of suppressed images. Another conflictual theory would be Gary Weissman's (2004) account of Hirsch's Postmemory theory. He believes that inherited trauma through visual culture is nothing but a fantasy. His warning is that by

attempting to relieve and recreate trauma that they have not directly experienced, it would be a risk of replacing the victim's real history with modern emotional fantasy. Hirsch views Postmemory primarily as a private family process, where trauma is passed down through personal objects and family pictures. In post-dictatorship Brazil, however, memory work must happen in public. Because of the lack of innumerable records, missing history is where Lissovsky's concept of photographic stasis comes in (2008). Static photographs are not dead relics, regardless of the subject, whether they are of political prisoners or propaganda. Instead, they hold frozen historical energy in suspension, waiting for an outlet such as screen media to unfreeze them and release their suppressed truth into the public sphere. Vladimir Herzog's staged suicide photograph reflects this suspended stasis. On the subject Lissovsky et al. comments:

"Having presented himself [Herzog] at the army barracks to testify, he died under torture within 24 hours. In an attempt to hide the crime, the military staged a suicide scene in his cell. Since the photograph was official, it circulated freely in all the Brazilian newspapers. It did not convince anyone: after all, how could someone have committed suicide by hanging himself if the corpse was not off the ground? The drama of the episode, society's unexpected capacity to react, and the free circulation of the image at the time all helped transform it into one of the most frequently cited and iconic images of the dictatorship. But with the passing of the years, it gradually ceased to represent a farce and instead became evidence of Herzog's assassination. Nowadays, it is possible to find the image in textbooks or on the Internet, where it is published very frequently, without any reference whatsoever to the fact that the scene was staged; it is as if Herzog was murdered in the way shown in the photograph."

This transformation of Herzog's staged suicide from the military's attempt at covering up, into a naturalized historical fact illustrates the precarity of static photographic evidence. When it is left unexamined in the larger context, the image runs the risk of confirming the very state lie it was staged to produce. For screen culture to resist this passive embodiment, it must actively "fix" the photograph, with unfreezing its suppressed truth and the re-establishment of its critical status as a contested visual evidence. If relating Hirsch and Lissovsky reveals anything is that the true function of post-dictatorship screen media is that Brazilian screen media transforms private trauma into a public debate and defrosts paralyzed historical evidence to build an alternative archive that cannot be erased. Alison Landsberg (2004) warns that mass media often replaces memory with "prosthetic" constructs, an idea supported by Gary Weissmann (2004), who warns the voyeuristic "fantasies of witnessing", Brazilian cinema and television overcome these limitations by mediating between the familial and the public. By adding real photographic traces of past violence into moving image narratives, screen media acts as an essential motor of Postmemory. It unfreezes static visual evidence of state crimes, shifting subterranean bodily trauma out of private domestic grief (Pollak 1989; Scarry 1985) and building the public counter-archive that directly opposes the state's monopoly over national memory (Foster 2004). Consequently, screen media does not merely reflect inherited trauma; it operationalizes it. Directors, screenwriters and other visual artists work in the postmemorial era walk directly into the "battle of images" (Lissovsky et al. 2015). By the re-staging of the suppressed archival pieces, moving images break the silence imposed by the Amnesty Law and official state narratives. In doing so, Brazilian screen media transforms inherits generational loss into an active visual counter-discourse. It re-writes the erased histories into the contemporary public sphere and

grounds film and television as a vital and alternative collection of Brazilian Heritage. When moving image media restages these immobile photographic traces, it performs a radical act of temporal liberation. As established in section 2.2, film and television uses photographic indexicality, the ability of the camera to record physical bodies and surrounding objects as direct light traces of reality. And it through this indexicality that counter-archives emerge.

The necessity to create alternative archives becomes urgent when judged against the state's institutional records. Jacques Derrida exposes in his work *Archive Fever* (1995) the intimate link between state power and record keeping. It also bridges to political dominance, through the concept of archontic power. Derrida explains that official archives are never neutral collections of past events. Instead, the state exercises power by deciding who has the authority to gather and classify official documents, doing so dictating which histories are preserved and which are silenced. Through this control over official memory, state power goes beyond physical violence and adds erasure. With the classification of intelligence files and the destruction of interrogation records, the repressive regime defends a secondary form of violence. With doing so, it denies victims a recognize place in the national record (Derrida, 1994). In post-dictatorship Brazil, this archival control functioned as a primary mechanism of political defence. Intelligence documents from state repressive agencies, such as the SNI and the DOPS, were selectively destroyed (Fico 2017). Consequently, the Brazilian state archive operated not as an open site of historical truth, but as a vault of institutionalized impunity designed to protect perpetrator and erase the physical evidence of state violence (Fico 2012, 2017)

With the bridge between Lissovsky's photographic stasis and Hirsch's Postmemory that the counter-archive raises as the theoretical highpoint of Chapter 2. It is rooted with Foster's concept of the "archival impulse" is the counter archive that represents an anti-hegemonic practice that destabilizes official state oblivion. The archival impulse would be best defined as where the creative practitioners turn to fragmented historical materials to construct alternative counter-archives. Because physical state archives in Brazil were cleansed or made widely unattainable, screen media steps in to fulfil a visual archive function. The term "visual" here operates in a dual capacity:

1. Technological: it refers to the audiovisual projection of light, sound, and narrative space on screen, operating outside the physical walls of state institutions.
2. Philosophical: it denotes a real, strong site of memory that has an actual force, capable of generating new historical consciousness even without physical paper documentation.

By restaging secret detention centres, visual media exposes how political violence infiltrated even the most private domestic spaces (Bachelard 2014; Scarry 1985). As screen media re-enacts long-suppressed oral testimonies (Pollak 1989), it unfreezes the static visual evidence of dictatorship-era crimes. This process transforms inherited generational grief (Hirsch, 2008) into an active, public counter-archive, that bypasses state institutions (Derrida, 1994) to establish cinema and television as alternative holders of national heritage.

Methodology and Corpus Design

Methodological Framework: Archival Close-Reading, Spatial Mapping, and Screen Analysis

Evaluating Brazilian cinema and television as alternative archives requires a comprehensive research format, one that bridges records, physical geography and film language. To achieve this result, this research applies methodological triangulation, bringing together three research methods to study the same core topic. Combining these directions ensures a complete analysis that no single method could achieve on its own. As it stands, relying exclusively on film critique risks reducing screen media to artistic expression and that would not be grounded in historical and political realities. On the other hand, relying only on historical and archival document analysis does not consider how audio-visual jargon such as frames, montages, and sound design triggers emotional and transgenerational memory in the viewer. Therefore, by the combination of archival reading, the analysis of space and the dissection of textual film and television, this methodology creates a balanced framework. This three-part method mirrors the theoretical foundations that we established in Chapter 2, with the translation of the concepts of secret state archives with Jacques Derrida and Carlos Fico, spatial memory with Andreas Huyssen and Bachelard, and finally the postmemorial visual representation with Marianne Hirsch and Mauricio Lissovsky.

Archival close-reading serves as the historical anchor of this research design. In the context of post-dictatorship Brazil, the archive is not an objective or complete repository of truth. As established by Derrida (1994) and documented by Fico (2017, 2012), the state

exercised archival power by the omission of records, destroyed selectively by the SNI and the DOPS. Methodologically, archival close-reading involves a critical examination of primary and secondary sources that have survived. This includes declassified intelligence reports, the National Truth Commission documentation, and physical pieces of propaganda. Instead of treating these physical pieces of evidence as being neutral facts, we approach them interrogating their gaps and their silences. With the establishment of what state official record have left out or darkened, archival close-reading provides the historical benchmark against which screen media's counter narratives are judged.

Spatial analysis assesses how physical sites of memory and state terror are constructed on screen. Drawing on spatial theories of memory (Huyssen 2003) and the political framing of domestic space this method tracks how audio-visual works navigate geographical and architectural environments. Methodologically, the study of space examines two things:

1. Institutional and Clandestine Sites of Terror: Examining how films and television series physical torture centres, clandestine detention facilities (such as the DOI-CODI units), and police checkpoints. The analysis focuses on framing the space to evaluate how physical confinement and state surveillance are visually connected. This is seen through camera placement, lighting and claustrophobic sets.
2. Domestic Spaces as Sites of Resistance: Tracking how private homes and family living spaces are portrayed as porous environment where state violence invades daily life. The methodology studies how domestic objects, hidden spaces and the interior architecture acts as a domestic archive of memory.

Spatial analysis reveals how screen media reconstructs erased physical landscapes of memory by mapping these cinematic spaces against real-world urban geography. The textual analysis brings the formal toolkit to deconstruct screen media as a powerful visual language. This method breaks down the specific aesthetic choices made by directors, editors and sound designers. Following standard cinema and media studies protocols, textual analysis focuses on three audio-visual aspects:

1. Montage and Photographic Unfreezing: It analyses how static historical photographs and fictional re-enactments are edited together. This directly reminds of Lisovsky's theoretical insight concerning the "battle of images", evaluating how moving images reactivate static historical photos to reveal suppressed testimony.
2. Sound Design, Voiceover and Silence: It deconstructs the audio landscape, including the use of suppressed oral testimonies (Pollack), music and silences. Attention is made to how audio elements restore voices to victims whose testimonies have not been included into official records.
3. Temporal Editing and Non-Linearity: It examines how flashbacks, slow motion, and temporal jumps disrupt linear historical progression, and re-creates the intrusive nature of Postmemory and trauma (Hirsch, 2012).

The rigor of this methodology relies on the communication between these three aspects. Archival close-reading highlights what was erased. The analysis of space shows where the erasure has happened and at the end, the textual film and television analysis is a revelation on how screen media restores the erased memory. It is by bringing these three

lines together that we ensure that the concept of the counter-archive is grounded in its historical context, space and film form.

Comparative Corpus Rationale: Television vs. Cinema Across Eras

Choosing a relevant and balanced group of case studies requires a clear set of guidelines to justify film and television soaps included. Rather than choosing screen media based on personal preferences or popularity, this study presents a dual axis selection rationale. This framework balances two intersecting factors: cultural tier (mass market television against art-house cinema) and production era (early post-dictatorship media against contemporary retrospective works). The evaluation of the moving images across both axes ensures that the counter-archive is not analysed merely as a niche artistic project. It is also considered as a broad cultural phenomenon that moulds collective memory across Brazilian audiences.

The first axis balances high-culture art house cinema with mass-market television. In Latin America memory studies, academic scholarship often prioritizes festival awarded cinema and auteur documentaries as primary sites of political critique. Independent feature films regularly engage in formal experimentation using long takes, archival montage that challenges official narratives. But limiting the investigation of historical memory strictly to theatrical cinema is risking the overlook of how narratives circulate across everyday broadcast audiences. Indeed, broadcast television and streaming series operate as primary vehicles for popular memory in Brazil. Telenovelas reach millions of viewers across distinct socioeconomic backgrounds. The balance between cinema and

television ensures that this research judges both form and audio-visual depth and wide societal reach. Crucially, this study makes the distinction between a film's international reception and its domestic cultural impact. While feature films such as *Ainda Estou Aqui* and *O Agente Secreto* have primarily circulated abroad within the festival circuits and art house cinemas, their domestic reach is different. In Brazil, these films have achieved significant box office success, and have been received as major cultural events, sparking national political debates. It is important to recognize this geographic detail as it prevents treating these films as niche, elite products. Within Brazil, they have functioned as high-visibility, public counter-archives that directly challenge state-enforced amnesia on a mass scale.

The second axis accounts for historical distance, with the examination of works made across different political eras in post-dictatorship Brazil. Screen media created in the immediate aftermath of the regime during the late 1980s and 1990s is a reflection of a period of cautious democratic transition. These early productions navigated ongoing political instability. In contrast, productions in the 2010s and 2020s function in a transformed research landscape and is heavily influenced by both public hearings and the released documents of the National Truth Commission (2014). Contemporary directors have tremendously benefitted from the direct access to declassified intelligence files and the identification of the physical detention centre, allowing them to construct counter-archives with a level of historical specificity that earlier productions could not attain. This study traces how screen representations of dictatorship-era state terror evolved from cautious allegories into direct historical interventions.

Ultimately, this dual-axis selection framework establishes clear parameters for the primary research corpus analysed in chapter 4. To avoid the two common research pitfalls, it is necessary to ground the case study selection in both wide accessibility and formal artistic rigor. First is the isolation of cinema from mass cultural consumption. Second is the dismissing of television as mere commercial entertainment that is incapable of serious historical engagement. Examining the dialogue between these two ideas demonstrates how Brazilian moving images systematically challenge state-enforced amnesia across both public and specialised spheres.

Comparative Analytical Framework: Evaluating Micro-Archives, Aesthetics, and State Legislation

This study uses a three-part comparative analytical framework to assess how Brazilian screen media functions as a counter-archive. Rather than analysing films and telenovelas through subjective commentary, this structure applies consistent analytical elements throughout all the case studies. Each selected work is judged along three intersecting dimensions: its treatment of micro-archival pieces, its audiovisual and spatial aesthetics, and its engagement with official state legislation. With the application of these criteria's allows this study to have a comprehensive comparison of different media forms on equal theoretical grounds.

The first dimension of this framework has a focus on micro-archival insertion. A Key function of the counter-archive is its ability to integrate real or simulated historical fragments into fictional narratives. These micro-archives refer to short visual moments

and even acoustic, such as police mugshots or radio broadcasts, and is integrated fully into the moving images. Analysing these fragments requires examining how moving images reactivate static visual traces to release suppressed historical testimony. Rather than using archival media solely as a prop, counter-archival screen media uses these pieces to stop the primary narrative and forces the viewer to face raw historical evidence within dramatic fiction.

The second dimension examines screen aesthetics and spatial analysis. This study analyses specific audio-visual techniques to understand how moving images construct memory. This includes camera movement, lighting design, sounds and space. The state terror of the Brazilian regime relied heavily on spatial control. Film and television recreations of these spaces construct a visual mix of claustrophobia and surveillance. The sound design can play an equally terrifying role with off-screen noises, muffles interrogations and echoes. Radio broadcasts are intrusive and make state terror touchable without having to rely on explicit visual graphic violence. With the interrogation of these visual and audio choices, this research demonstrates how screen aesthetics turn abstract historical memory into tangible experiences grounded in our space.

The third dimension evaluates screen media against Brazil's legislative landscape, particularly the Amnesty Law and the following National Truth Commission. Instead of treating the law as an immobile background, this framework examines how films and television series directly critique state enforced impunity. Early post-dictatorship works often navigated the constraints of ongoing impunity through subtle allegory, whereas contemporary productions directly interrogate the findings of the National Truth

Commission. With the analysis of this legislative backdrop, it is revealed how moving images actively challenge legal amnesia and fill the gaps left by official state justice.

By triangulating micro-archival analysis, screen aesthetics and legislative context, this comparative framework provides a rigorous methodology for chapter 3. It ensures that every film and television series in the corpus is interrogated not simply as creative storytelling, but as an active, multi-faceted intervention into Brazilian memory.

Textual Analysis and Discussion: Comparative Case Studies

Cabra Marcado para Morrer: Foundational Archival Montage and Interrupted Memory

Eduardo Coutinho's *Cabra Marcado Para Morrer* is a foundational piece for the Brazilian counter archive. The film's playground involves political and artistic interruption, using a palimpsest structure to expose how state violence leaves ongoing scars across both human lives and the landscapes (Sayad 2006; Harris 2008; Henn 2009). Coutinho constructs an investigative memory framework with the layering of the colour footage recorded in 1984 directly over the black and white footage of 1964 (Henn 2009). Hugo de Almeida Harris (2008) argues that this messy editing method prevents the archival material from settling into passive nostalgia. But Harris shows that Coutinho uses clever manipulation of the incomplete 1964 footage as an active intervention and forces the unresolved trauma of the repression of the rural states to enter the political

consciousness of the transition to democracy. Instead of presenting the past as a static, closed chapter, the film exists within what Aguiar (2011) identifies as *cinema de arquivo*, or archival cinema. This idea is for official state history to be re-evaluated by suppressed archival fragments. The documentary established the frictions of time and space at the start. The camera captures the assembly of a film rig inside an abandoned rural cabin, just before suddenly cutting to 1960's black and white film. The footage is of peasants traversing the Northeastern landscape. This juxtaposition immediately forces the viewer to navigate two distinct timelines simultaneously. Sayad (2006) discusses that in documentary realism, the physical presence of the filming crew on location grounds the act of remembering in concrete geography. Text on screen dates the archival material to April 1962 during the *Univolante*, the mobile cultural caravan organized by the National union of Students (Uniao Nacional dos Estudantes-UNE) and the Center for Popular Culture (Centro Popular de Cultura – CPC) (Harris 2008). The sequence contrast stark visual depictions of rural poverty with the ambient soundtrack of “*Canção do subdesenvolvidos*,” a classic CPC anthem critiquing foreign imperialism. Through this opening montage, Coutinho grounds the film in the highly politicized cultural atmosphere immediately preceding the 1964 military coup. At the centre of this material, the context that led to the creation of the film is the 1962 assassination of João Pedro Teixeira, founder of the Liga Camponesa (Peasant League) in Sapé, Paraíba (Coutinho 1984). Formed to secure legal protections and land rights for exploited rural laborers, the union grew to 7000 members, making Teixeira a prime target for local landowners and state security forces. After the murder, his widow, Elizabeth Teixeira, was the frontrunner of a public protest, accompanied by six of her 11 children. Instead of making a conventional dramatic film, the CPC tried to film a documentary-type adaptation of Joao Pedro's life on

location, casting Elizabeth and her children to play their own roles (Coutinho 1984). However, following the January 1964 rural revolts and the coup in April of the same year, the military police occupied the filming location, arrested members and confiscated equipment (Henn 2009). Only 40 percent of the film had been shot. Some of the footage survived, as a few of the rushes had been sent to the laboratory in Rio de Janeiro to be processed, accidentally preserving visual records that were meant to be destroyed. Seventeen years later, after the happenings of the Amnesty Law, Coutinho returned to the region to find out what had become of the cast and the crew, some knowing had gone into hiding, other who had completely vanished. The film presents the surviving 1964 footage as they were, unedited, in the order they had been films and all the takes. These were shown at the exceptional gathering of a few of the then peasants/cast. But it is at the crucial moment, when Coutinho locates Elizabeth Teixeira that is marked in Brazilian screen history. The widow had lived under a false identity and in hiding for almost two decades. On the topic of the political relaxation under President João Figueiredo that allowed exiles and other hidden dissidents to return, she said:

“Because of him, I am in your presence today.” (Coutinho 1984)

Scholarly accounts on Brazilian cinema highlights the political impact of Coutinho’s archival rescue. As media scholars Machado and Martins (2014) have observed, it was only in the 1980s that Brazilian cinema began to reclaim its visual memory, following the years of censorship. The Amnesty Law enabled the making of documentaries that was aimed at filling the void left by the state, refusing the documentation of the repression (Schneider and Atencio 2016; Heise 2012). Additionally, Machado and Martins (2014)

highlight an important dilemma: state institutions produced no official visual records of torture or clandestine detentions, resulting on what they call “missing images”.

This lack of records brings out a crucial methodological question for memory studies. If fictional cinema implanted the re-enactment of state torture into the public imagination, how does documentary media refine those representations? Because of the absence of the archival evidence, or what would be considered as official evidence, Coutinho’s documentary shows that cinema does not just represent history but it actively rebuilds new memory frameworks, and forces the viewers to question what has been preserved and what has been thrown away (Martins and Machado 2014). Daniel Jara (2020) argues in relation to post-authoritarian memory dynamics, confronting these gaps necessitates to move the focus away from passive victimhood toward the examination of the lingering presence and silences left by state perpetrators and local elites. Henn (2009) adds that public memory is often shaped by journalistic codes, which claim objectivity, but frequently work under political agendas. On the other hand, Coutinho’s documentary framework creates a “subterranean memory”, as previously discussed as the underground memory. The film gives a voice to the silenced, to a community that the official channels and state archives have systematically erased.

Finally, the built environment in *Cabra Marcado Para Morrer* functions as a physical manifestation of what Guilherme Carrera (2021) has theorized as an “aesthetic of ruin” in Brazilian cinema. The rural landscape is not a passive backdrop, but a space violently overwritten by state terror. Lisa Blackmore’s (2018) work on how authoritarian regimes uses the built environment as a show of control, Coutinho’s camera shows the opposite: the modern state progression that turns into decay and displacement. Upon his return in

1984, the camera contrasts 1964 images of organized peasant labor and collective farming, and with the 1984 color footage of depopulated communities, physical ruin and abandoned fields. With the focus on the crumbling concrete structures and houses in complete decay of the former union leaders, the film transforms completely out of order into tangible evidence of structural state violence. While the Amnesty Law promoted institutional forgetting and legal impunity, the scars of the countryside stand as a permanent testament to authoritarian devastation (Smith 2006; Schneider and Atencio 2016).

Mass Television as Public Memory: *Roque Santeiro* and *Anos Rebeldes*

While independent documentary cinema made its place as counter-archives within specialized cultural spaces, mass television in Brazil works on a larger national scale. Telenovelas produced by the television channel Rede Globo were the principal space, where millions of citizens collectively negotiated political trauma, state censorship, and official mythmaking (Hamburger 2005, 2011; Ribke 2010). As Shaw and Dennison (2007, 38–39) point out, by the end of the military regime, the number of television sets in the Brazilian domestic space had tripled, and while Globo has received numerous criticisms for its ways and influence, it is one of the largest producers of television programs in Latin America. Parallely, broadcast media worked directly under authoritarian watch, deciding on censorship parameters while encoding subversive political critiques within its

entertainment (de Paiva 2001). Analysing *Roque Santeiro* side by side with *Anos Rebeldes* shows how mass screen media functioned as a large public counter-archive. These productions challenged the Authorized Heritage Discourse that was enforced by the regime, with the translation of structural violence, corruption, and resistance. *Roque Santeiro* constructs a satirical allegory that breaks down how authoritarian regimes fabricate civic mythologies to enforce collective amnesia and preserve elite power (Quintas 2017; Sayad 2006). Set in the fictional town of Asa Branca in the Northeast, the story is set around the fabricated martyrdom of Luis Roque Duarte (Roque Santeiro)¹¹, a young altar boy who is believed to have died defending the church from bandits. The local rulers are a corrupt landlord, *Sinhozinho Malta*, the fraudulent *Viuva Porcina*, the widow, and a very opportunistic town mayor. They transform *Roque* into a saintly figure and establish a flourishing economy around his sacrifice. The first episode shows a group of tourists visiting Asa Branca and are being pushed to buy religious merchandise of Roque Santeiro, being told of all the miracles he could perform. This narrative is interrupted when Roque returns seventeen years later after his death, alive. The return is a threat to the profitable myth that has been sustaining the town's entire social hierarchy (Aragão 2025). Far from an anomaly within a corpus focused on dictatorship-era trauma, *Roque Santeiro* serves as the crucial transitional case study that illuminates the cultural mechanics of historical revisionism. Banned by state censors in 1975 and broadcast only at the dawn of democratization in 1985, the telenovela's central narrative functions as a precise allegory for how Brazilian society negotiated state-sanctioned amnesia and institutional

¹¹ The word "santeiro" mean that has the potential for spiritual guidance or that has reached a certain enlightenment. By its definition in English, making it seem it is a farce. However, in Brazil, it means that someone has attained a saintly status by religious devotion. The original definition is what an artisan of religious imagery, depicting them to be lifelike.

complicity during the *abertura*. This was achieved through the exposure of falsehoods, with local authorities creating a fabricated hero. The allegory of *Roque Santeiro* directly critiques what Carlos Fico (2002) has described of the dictatorship's *concordata moral*, a state-enforced social pact that promoted reconciliation and national unity by suppressing uncomfortable truths. Aleida Assmann (2011) has observed that regarding cultural memory, institutional regimes rely on selective forgetting to assure power. Asa Branca's elite mirrors the Brazilian military state, which used the Amnesty Law to dictate official amnesia regarding state-sponsored violence (Blanc 2024; Ribeiro 2019). The town's panicked attempts to conceal Roque's living presence dramatize the fragility of state-sanctioned history when confronted by the resurrected truth. The fictional community operates as a microscopic site where official heritage is aggressively staged to delegitimize popular memory. In addition, the aesthetic construction of the town of Asa Branca is an illustration of how spatial environments embody political deceit (D'Angelo 2024). The town's grandiose monuments, fake shrines, and commercialized relics represent an artificial spectacle of modernism that is built to hide the underlying socio-economic exploitation (de Paiva 2001). While Eduardo Coutinho's documentary frame in *Cabra Marcado Para Morrer* exposed physical rural decay, *Roque Santeiro* uses the kitsch visual language of mass television to break down state mythmaking from the inside. The telenovela demonstrates that mass media, even with its commercial limitations it can act as an active site of political contestation during the democratic transition (Shaw and Dennison 2007; C. L. Junior 2024)

The miniséries *Anos Rebeldes* confronted the physical realities of dictatorship-era state violence directly, unlike *Roque Santeiro* who used satirical allegory to go over the reminders of censorship during the *Abertura*. The series follows the political divergence

of a group of high school students in Rio de Janeiro, starting from the military coup and continuing until 1979, the year of the Amnesty Law. The story is centered on the tragic romance between João Alfredo, whose idealism leads him to join an armed guerrilla resistance, and Maria Lucia, apolitical but seeking personal security.

Methodologically, *Anos Rebeldes* is a major marker of the evolution of how mass television incorporated non-fiction archival aesthetics (*cinema de arquivo*) into the narrative (Junior 2011; Da Silva Vilão 2024; Nunes 2016), Braga systematically incorporates authentic newsreels, papers, and radio from the *anos de chumbo*, the years of lead (Nunes 2016, 77), directly into the fictional story. As Eduardo Victorio Morettin (2003) notes in regard to the screen media, this formal confrontation between melodrama and historical documentation forced the audience to confront physical realities of state violence and film, in this instance telenovela, in replacing the historian in the reconstitution of the archive. Broadcast during the affirmation of the post-dictatorship democracy, the telenovela functioned as a counter-archive and educated a whole generation that had grown up under state-enforced silence (Morettin 2003; Figueiredo 2017).

The cultural impact of *Anos Rebeldes* was extended beyond the screen and demonstrated the active relationship between media memory, and real-world civic activation (Junior 2011). The telenovela showed that television could be an activator of what Aleida Assmann describes as “communicative memory,” transforming historical trauma into a resource for contemporary democratic accountability (J. Assmann 2011; Ferdinand 2023). However, it is important to consider the structural and commercial limitations of television as a counter-archive (Shaw and Dennison 2004, 38–39). Broadcast networks

like TV Globo kept a complex relationship with the military regime. The television channel often cleansed political critique to suit advertisers and a wide range of family audiences. Cinema, even when heavily censored was still more liberated than the TV broadcasts.¹² (Blanc 2024; Shaw and Dennison 2007, 2004; Heise 2012; Hamburger 2005). *While Anos Rebeldes* exposed state torture, it sometimes removed politics from the state terror by framing resistance through individualized romantic tragedy and personal victimhood (D'Angelo 2024). Despite the commercial boundaries *Roque Santeiro* and *Anos Rebeldes* prove that Brazilian television functioned as a vital, and highly accessible counter-archival media. With the utilization of political allegory, the myth-busting satirical comedy and the direct archival insertion, these television platforms made prime-time broadcasting into a nationwide space for historical protest. They made the suppressed memory accessible, and doing so ensuring that the structural violence of the regime stayed visible in the public sphere long after state institutions tried to enforce official amnesia.

Persecution, Archival Retelling, and Urban Space: *O Agente Secreto*

Before diving deep inside the visual details of Kleber Medonça Filho's *O Agente Secreto*, an important methodological distinction concerning media formats within Brazilian film studies must be established. While a feature film allows for comprehensive, frame-by-frame textual and visual analysis within the framework of this dissertation, the application

¹² This is in the context of *pornochanchadas*, a humourous film with heavy sexual innuendos and depicts nudity. As defined and explained by Shaw and Dennison, the term "porno" is potentially too strong. The reason it is significant in our context, is that actors in conservative roles on TV were sought out by filmmakers to star in these *chanchadas*. Page 171-173. Therefore, assuming that TV broadcasting was more conservative and controlling of its outgoing content.

of the same standards of small individual details to a long-form telenovela presents challenges. The telenovela *Roque Santeiro* for example, operates under industrial production boundaries, long and elaborate subplots, which drives the series to extent to 209 episodes at approximately 45 minutes each. Consequently, the concentrated cinematic form of the feature film, such as *O Agente Secreto* and later *Ainda Estou Aqui*, provides the opportunity of closer inspection that are more easily concentrated.

Medonça Filho opens the film prior to the first scene with a striking archival montage set to a lively music. The sequence displays archival photographs of prominent Brazilian artists, musicians such as Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil and of films such as Bruno Barreto's *Dona Flor e Seus Dois Maridos*.¹³ This opening montage functions as a curated cultural preface and it invokes the vibrant artistic counter-culture that flourished in tension with state censorship (Dunn 2001). Set in 1978, the year of the revocation of the AI-5, *O Agente Secreto* act as a sort of historical warning (Costa and Junior 2026). Mendonça Filho demonstrates that legal changes did not magically end the state terror, instead, authoritarian logic receded into normal civic institutions, urban architecture and bureaucratic surveillance systems (Heise and Tudor 2013; Soares 2026). He extends his counter-archival intervention beyond the narrative content and into the material heritage of Brazilian cinema itself with the incorporation of original credits from *Embrafilme*, *Empresa Brasileira de Filmes* (Brazilian Film Company). The studio was established during the military regime as a state-controlled affair to regulate and censor national cinema. *Embrafilme* was a representation of the regime's attempt to construct an official

¹³ The film is a *pornochancada*, as explained above. It portrays the life of Dona Flor, her marriage to a violent, selfish hedonistic man, who dies early from his excesses during the Carnaval. Dona Flor remarries to the kind but simple and rigid pharmacist. While her life has become easier, she craves the passion of her late husband, who comes back as a ghost. She starts having an affair with her dead husband's ghost. It is an important film during the 70s, where the plot of *O Agente Secreto* takes place.

cinematographic heritage (Heise and Tudor 2013; Heise 2012; Shaw and Dennison 2007, 2004). With the deployment of the official studio credit within *O Agente Secreto*, Mendonça Filho executes an intriguing cinematic subversion. The inclusion of state-approved archival footage, directly into a counter-archival production is the weaponification of institutional amnesia in order to prove the need for a counter-memory. It is important to highlight that the film does not focus on heroic resistance fighters. The secret agent explores Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil" (1964) through everyday characters navigating a system where state violence crosses paths with corporate greed. The story highlights the capitalistic undertones with the plot that wishes to have Armando eliminated. It reveals how dictatorial repression worked not only for political ideological control, but also to protect private business interests. Mendonça Filho builds a deep spatial irony around Armando, who is hidden under the name Marcelo. He seeks refuge from persecution in the institute of identifications, helped by a mysterious underground group, and looks for the only proof of his mother's existence in the archival room. But on the day he arrives, the Institute has coincidentally transformed into a temporary police station. The film directly depicts media manipulation and the complicity of the local police force. In very candid conversations, police officers acknowledge that state crimes are systematically covered up. They explicitly note that what happens on the streets never matches what appears on the newspapers. One scene, the sergeant holds a paper with the article of a missing student, and he refers to him having his limbs cut off, implying that they have something to do with it. Earlier, they get called to the marine institute, where the scientists have found a leg, inside a shark they were about to dissect. It is believed to be an early introduction to a Recife urban legend. Mendonça Filho draws on real life

historical event, the story of the *Perna Cabeluda* (Hairy Leg). It was a famous satirical chronicle published in Recife newspapers during the 1970s (Braga and Ecco 2023).

The *Perna Cabeluda* chronicles were real, unlike the narrative of the film, which is fictional but a reflection of historical truths. The film incorporates this satirical myth into its narrative, linking the little boy's obsession with the films *Jaws* to the discovery of a severed human leg inside a shark. In a film that is incredibly tense and stress-inducing, the director inserts a moment of dark comedy, when the detached leg comes to life, after suffering a second death, leaping through a public park and beating people up. But it is far more than just an instant of comic relief. The inclusion of these absurd sequences work as a political critique (Bivona 2020). When unidentified bodies turned up during the regime, the controlled press passed the violence to the mythical *Perna Cabeluda*. The absurd urban legend served as a convenient explanation for the disappearances, that no one dared officially investigate.

“Assim sendo, a lenda da Perna Cabeluda pode ser compreendida como uma metáfora social da opressão que moradores de rua e demais segmentos das populações vulneráveis sofrem em uma cidade sequestrada por uma polícia absurdamente violenta, grupos de extermínio, milícias, grupos de vigilância clandestina, assaltantes, traficantes e afins.”

“Accordingly, the legend of the Perna Cabeluda functions as a social metaphor for the oppression inflicted upon homeless people and other vulnerable groups in a city held hostage by an exceptionally violent police force, death squads, militias, clandestine vigilante network, muggers and drug cartels” (Braga and Ecco 2023)

The enthusiasm depicted when the crowds rush at the printers to get hold of the papers completely offsets the terrible truth behind it. The leg does not hide the truth behind the disappearances or possible assassination just renames the perpetrators. While the people comically and satirically joke about the legend, a cloud of fearful doubt remains. On the other hand, the film depicts it satirically, implying that perhaps it might have also been a tool to denounce police abuse. While the newspaper is an explicit way to portray memory, whether it is constructed or not, the public university serves as another key site of memory. It acts as an intellectual counter-archive where young researchers transcribe recorded audio tapes, trying to reconstruct Armando's story. Their intervention, particularly in the area of visual analysis, is interesting. The director cuts the main story line and uses the two student in our contemporary setting, to explain gaps in the story that are hard to understand as it is purposely told out of order. This is not a matter of poor editing but a powerful methodological tool to instigate confusion and makes us question our perception, beliefs and the way we recollect told stories. It brings us back to Noa Gedi and Yigal Elams's (1996) assertion that collective memory is rarely unified, but rather a reconstruction from fragmented subjective stories. Armando says in the film: "To be truthful, I am telling this story out of order."¹⁴ It is only then that we understand that while they are loyal and truthful in their narratives, even within the truth we are unreliable narrators, affirming Gedi and Elam's accounts. Towards the end of the film, the slow-burn pace suddenly accelerates when Armando's false identity is discovered by the hitman, a man subcontracted by the original two hitmen from São Paulo.¹⁵ While the job goes south

¹⁴ This happens during the meeting with the underground group, when they record his testimony, which is listened to by the students.

¹⁵ This is an interesting perspective that can be further researched, as the two hitmen from the South treat the job as a beach holiday, subcontracting their hit to a local man, insulting him as having an "animal" job.

and two of the corrupt police officers appears to be lethally wounded, the local hitman is chased by the one who hired him, and the latter ends up being shot himself. The newspaper reads:

“A local tourist was shot, and this incident is potentially related to a revenge crime.”

This brings us to the culmination of the movie. Armando calls the woman from the underground group and inquiries about their passports, as he and his son need to depart Recife as a matter of urgency. The scene cuts back to the present, with the students on their laptops. One of them has moved on to other tasks, as she felt too anxious to carry on, and lazily admits that she has not found anything on the internet, as these were “pre-google” people. Her commentary reinforces the separation between their time, and the one they are investigating. The other one, who reads the paper scans of the hitman’s murder, reveals that the case has touched her. In the next scene, we see her holding her child, reading the newspaper article about Armando’s murder, the day after the last we see of him. The film makes us believe that while he is was in danger, as the hit job has gone bad, he may have made it.

The news article title reads:

“Shot Researcher was accused of corruption; the police have received the information that he was involved in crimes that are being investigated.”

Two deaths, two dramatically different news headlines. This is a deliberate directorial choice. The film depicts a lot of grotesque. The body under a piece of cardboard

This superiority attitude from the south is a recurring theme in the film and is something that is still felt today.

consumed by the flies and being eaten by street dogs, the decaying leg inside the dead shark, the cat with two heads, the park with a numerous amount of people engaging in sexual activities, and the blood splashing from the police officers, but the murder of the protagonist is silenced and off camera. We have no information, no buildup, just the related information on a newspaper that was witnessed throughout the film to be flawed.

The film's exploration of transgenerational memory culminates at the end: Wagner Moura, who plays Armando throughout the entire film, takes on the role of his grown-up son, Fernando. When he is interviewed by one of the students who was hearing the tapes of his father's accounts of his hiding and process of escape, the son reveals that he has very few personal memories of his father, Armando, and affirms that by the listening of the tapes, she must know more about him than he did. Crucially, when the students ask to clarify some question about who was helping him through his time hiding from persecution, Fernando becomes visibly defensive and uncomfortable and evades the question entirely. This reaction shows the delicate and sensitive nature of intergenerational trauma. It also demonstrated that Postmemory is not an objective inheritance of facts but an emotionally charged process where descendants struggles with guilt and unsettling boundaries of resistance (Hirsch 2008). As Soares describes:

"The Secret Agent places itself as a method of aesthetic-political rupture, as it refuses to act as restorative nostalgia and insists on the discomfort of memory."

This aesthetical refusal is central to the film's counter-archival power. Mendonça Filho uses the cinematic atmosphere and the uncomfortable space to ensure that the violence of the dictatorship remains active in the contemporary Brazilian consciousness. In the end, *O Agente Secreto* established that the resistance against national amnesia requires

leaning into the discomfort of memory. That is a theme that is also extensively explored in the next section, with *Ainda Estou Aqui*.

Family Memory, Disappearance, and the Truth Commission Era: *Ainda Estou Aqui*

Where *O Agente Secreto* maps the paranoid public geographies and institutional bureaucracies of the dictatorship, Walter Salles's *Ainda Estou Aqui* redirects the counter-archival scope towards the domestic sphere of the Paiva family. The film is based on Marcelo Rubens Paiva's *mémoire* (2015) and it focuses on the forced disappearance of his father, the congressman Rubens Paiva and the transformation of his mother, Eunice Paiva, into a quiet but resolute symbol of resistance, going far beyond the years of the military regime. Salles challenges the traditional, male-dominated political biopics that focus on armed resistance or public political martyrdom as seen in Brazilian film and television such as *Anos Rebeldes* or *Marighella*. The film positions the family home and maternal endurance as central sites of memory, effectively breaking down the state's Authorized Heritage Discourse with the elevation of the private trauma to the status of national historical heritage (Smith 2006; Pereira Ferreira 2016; Scheffer et al. 2025; Carvalho et al. 2025).

The film precisely builds the Paiva family home in Rio de Janeiro as a lively space which is then ruptured by the presence of the military regime. When agents of the police, although it is not specified directly in the film, by historical accounts it would have been the DOI-CODI (Joffily 2009; Neves 2026), taking former congressman Rubens Paiva, later Eunice and her second eldest daughter, the domestic sanctuary is shattered and turned into a

site of occupation and surveillance. It is important to highlight that these events occur after friends of the family decide to move to London as they fear for themselves, but ultimately decide to remain, sending their eldest child, Veroca with them when she starts to show revolutionary tendencies and fear for her safety. Throughout the film there is a correspondence with their daughter that Eunice herself censors to her other children, as she decides to shield them of worry, showing how within the family, similarly as the state, there is a certain taboo and auto-censorship. Veroca outwardly discusses the happenings of the country as she sees it in the international press, showing she seems more aware of the regime from London than the people in Brazil. Drawing on Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, the Paiva residence ceases to be merely a physical dwelling and becomes a contested archival space. The state attempts to erase the father's existence by leaving no official trace of his arrest or death, but Eunice counters this institutional amnesia by refusing to let the state dictate her family's narrative, insisting on maintaining the home's openness and vitality as an act of silent defiance. In a photo-operation by a newspaper, the photographer demands of them to show their grief and to look sad. She refuses and says they will all smile and look happy.

To formally construct the domestic counter-archive, the director weaves the cinematic narrative with the aesthetics of home recordings. These intimate, grainy visuals of family life on the beach or inside the home serve a deep knowledge. These very fragile home movies become precious counter-heritage pieces, especially with the absence of official documentation of Rubens Paiva's murder. They insist on the reality of his existence, in direct opposition with the dictatorship's tactic of forced disappearances. This is a strategy of production for "missing images" and leaves the families in a state of suspended mourning. One famous quote of Marcelo Rubens Paiva's *mémoire* reads as such:

“A tática do desaparecimento político é a mais cruel de todas, pois a vítima permanece viva no dia a dia. Mata-se a vítima e condena-se toda a família a uma tortura psicológica eterna. Fazemos cara de fortes, dizemos que a vida continua, mas não podemos deixar de conviver com esse sentimento de injustiça.”

“The tactic of political disappearances is the most cruel of all, as the victim remains alive day after day. It kills the victim and condemns the whole family into an eternal psychological torture. We put up brave faces and say that life must go on, but we cannot let go of living with this sense of injustice.”

This is well represented throughout the film, the sentiment of uncertainty and rage, for the family that is constantly reminded of their missing father and are unable to process their grief. At the end of the movie, Marcelo and his sister discuss about their own timelines. She asks him, when did he finally understood that their father was dead and would not come back. Rubens Paiva's death certificate would only be produced over 20 years after they last laid eyes on him, and it is believed that he died within weeks, if not days, after he was taken from his home. By elevating these intimate formats, the film argues that when the state's official archives are weaponized to conceal violence, the most authentic historical truths are often found in the decentralized, affective archives of the family (Hirsch and Spitzer 2009; Hirsch 2008). The visual absence of Rubens's torture and death is central to the film's theoretical weight. Salles refuses to stage or make a spectacle of the violence inflicted upon Rubens Paiva, and instead focuses on the haunting, the void his disappearances leaves within the family structure. The film explores how the trauma of the first generation is transmitted to and inherited by the next one. Marcelo and his siblings inherit a history that is define by their father's absence, the missing image, and

that they can neither fully understand, nor leave behind. Eunice's lifelong struggle to obtain a legal death certificate for her husband is a fight to force the state to formally incorporate this trauma into the national archive.

Ultimately, *Ainda Estou Aqui* functions as an act of prosthetic memory for the Brazilian public, with the translation of Marcelo Rubens Paiva into a dense, atmospheric cinematic experiences, Salles allows contemporary audiences to bear witness to the personal cost of the military regime. The film demonstrates with force that breaks down of authoritarian heritage is achieved not only through the exposure of state crimes, but through the rigorous, compassionate preservation of the intimate lives the state attempted to erase. Having established how each of the five case studies constructs its own micro-archive across different media and eras, this dissertation now turns to the synthesis of its findings in the conclusion.

Conclusion

Synthesis: Screen Media as Brazil's Counter-Archive

This dissertation has argued that post-dictatorship Brazilian screen media functions as an important counter-archive, actively dismantling the Authorized Heritage Discourse in regard to the 1964- 1985 military regime. Chapter 1 established the personal, political and historiographical problem space of the dissertation. This opening chapter frames screen media as an important battle ground for national memory, and it is grounded in a self-reflexive position, with the acknowledgement of how personal memory and lived

proximity to Brazil informs the critical scholarship. It contextualized how the 1979 Amnesty Law enforced a general national amnesia and institutionalized impunity, with the prevention of official truth mechanisms from fully dismantling the Authorized Heritage Discourse. Crucially Chapter 1 detailed the methodological evolution of the content. It moves away from the hero type political dramas, or biopics, like *Marighella* and prioritized *O Agente Secreto*. It shifts the analytical focus onto the subtlety of mundane every day, with state terror and paranoid urban surveillance and domestic counter-archives. In the end, Chapter 1 laid out the five core checkpoints guiding the research:

1. Defining state power, institutional amnesia and archival secrecy through the AHD and Brazilian scholarly participation.
2. Identify subterranean trauma, social frameworks and spatial memory, through the works of Michael Pollack and Maurice Halbwachs.
3. The conceptualization of screen counter archives, memory battles and popular heritage, through Napolitano and Foster.
4. Establishment of duality of texts, comparing documentary witnessing and fictional reenactment.
5. Audience transmission, Postmemory and the mobile sites of memory.

Chapter 2 is a construction of the theoretical framework and literature review by the synthesis of critical heritage, memory studies, film theory and historiography. To criticize how state power constructs official narratives, the chapter put Laurajane Smith's AHD next to Michel Foucault's analysis of archival regulatory systems, adding Gedi and Elam's

methodological cautions against conflating memory with history. The literature review mapped the social dynamics of memory through Halbwachs's collective memory, Nora's lieux de mémoire, Jelin's labors of memory and Pollack's underground subterranean memories. To examine the body and psychology of the dimension of state terror, this study engages Scarry's phenomenology of physical pain, Weissman's critique of second-hand trauma based on Hirsch's Postmemory, which is also discussed. These memory frameworks where anchors in post-dictatorship Brazilian history with Carlos Fico and Marcos Napolitano, while spatial geography was discussed through Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space and Huyssen's urban palimpsests. In the end, to evaluate how screen media constructs counter-archives, chapter 2 drew on Bazin ontology of the photographic image, Lisovsky's visual histories of Brazilian cinema, next to Lisa Shaw, Stephanie Dennison and Tatianna Heise's scholarship on Brazilian screen memory and political representation. Together, this comprehensive literature establishes the conceptual vocabulary required to demonstrate how film and television dismantles state-sanctioned amnesia.

Chapter 3 establishes the dissertation's qualitative research methodology. This chapter articulated a comparative method of operation across three scales: close reading of archival material, and the textual analysis to film and television and spatial analysis. This was achieved through questioning of censorship and the destruction of state records, the film design with sound and camera composition, editing and serialization, and finally, examining urban palimpsest, paranoid geographies and domestic interiors. Through this balanced framework, Chapter 3 provided the analytical tools to systematically cross-examine primary audiovisual texts alongside historical records, evaluating how screen

media reassembles suppressed archives and constructs counter-narratives against official state-amnesia.

Chapter 4 applied this methodological architecture across concrete audiovisual case studies:

- Eduardo Coutinho's *Cabra Marcado Para Morrer* established the foundational precedent of the interrupted, reassembled archive, elevating community testimony over state records.
- In mass serial television, Dias Gomes's *Roque Santeiro* and Gilberto Braga's *Anos Rebeldes* demonstrated how long-form broadcasting introduced allegories of state hypocrisy and historical memory into millions of domestic households, navigating commercial and censorship constraints.
- In contemporary feature cinema, Walter Salles's *Ainda Estou Aqui* turns to the domestic sphere, using home movie aesthetics to transform the private residence into a counter-archive and centring maternal postmemory against forced disappearance.
- In parallel to this domestic focus, Kleber Mendonça Filho's *O Agente Secreto* (2025) maps paranoid urban space in 1978 Recife, destroying state media mythologies (*Perna Cabeluda*) to unmask state-sponsored disinformation.

Theoretical and Heritage Contributions: Bridging Postmemory and Spatial Justice

Together, these chapters prove that Brazilian film and television do not merely reflect history as they actively intervene in the nation's ongoing “memory wars”, ensuring that state violence remains visible and interrogated. With the addition of critical heritage studies into direct dialogue with film and television theory, spatial geography and post-dictatorship history, this dissertation offers three core theoretical contributions:

1. The expansion of critical heritage theory beyond physical monuments: while AHD traditionally focuses on state-sanctioned physical monument, museum and official preservation policies, this study proves that moving images function as dynamic “screen monuments”. The research shows how camera framing, sound design, editing and serialization can construct an intangible counter-heritage that actively disrupts top-down state amnesia and archival secrecy with Jacques Derrida and Carlos Fico.
2. The reconceptualization of Postmemory through medium: the intersection of Marianne Hirsch’s Postmemory idea with visual histories of Brazilian cinema with Mauricio Lissovsk, Kristal Bivona) this study shows how medium format dictates the transmission of trauma across generations. The scale of serial tv provides long form societal temporal context and a broader reach, while the visual density of feature length cinema translates intergenerational trauma and missing images into tangible forms.
3. Translation of spatial memory into heritage justice: with the intervention of Bachelard poetics of space and Huyssen’s urban palimpsests as well as Pollaks underground memories, this dissertation links geography directly to heritage justice. The built environment of post-dictatorship Brazil is shown to be haunted by unresolved state crimes. Screen media acts as a spatio-temporal intervention,

exposing how authoritarian surveillance and state terror receded directly into everyday urban and domestic geography.

Broader implications and future research

The broader implications of this research speak directly to contemporary concerns regarding democratic fragility, historical revisionism and memory politics in Brazil and the wider southern cone. As highlights by historians such as Napolitano and Fico, the recent resurgence of authoritarian nostalgia in Brazilian public discourse underscores that the “memory war” remains volatile and unresolved, when political actors seek to rehabilitate authoritarian figures, deny atrocities or weaponizes official archive, moving image counter archives become vital bulwarks for democratic culture and human rights.

To pursue following the results of this dissertation from all chapters, two promising ways for future research appear:

1. Digital counter-archives and platform mechanics: for future studies should investigate how counter-archival practices transition into digital, decentralized spaces to examine how digital circulation alters the reception of Postmemory among younger generations who have lived too far from the dictatorial era.
2. Comparative southern on screen memory: expanding this dissertation three part methodology (archive, space and textual analysis) into a comparative study across Argentina, Chile and Uruguay could bring valuable insights into how distinct transitional justice mechanisms such as truth commissions and amnesty laws shape the formal aesthetics and spatial geographies of screen counter archives

across south America. While similar research has been done, it usually compares Spanish speaking Latin American countries together and none seem to offer a comparative analysis to Brazil.

Ultimately, as audiovisual formats evolve, the imperative established throughout this research remains unchanged: deploying screen media to ensure that state terror remains visible and not forgotten.

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