



Universiteit
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The Netherlands

Cine Argentino y política (1980-2007) : la imagen justa

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Citation

Amado, A. M. (2008, June 10). *Cine Argentino y política (1980-2007) : la imagen justa*. Department of Latin American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Leiden University. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12952>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

ENGLISH ABSTRACT

This project focuses on the political manifestations that can be found in the Argentinean film productions made after the dictatorship, since 1983 until nowadays. The proposed path relates these productions with their socio-political, historical and cultural context, and allows the understanding of the transformations of the links (both ethic and aesthetic) between the filmed world and its referents.

This thesis posits that the memory of the violence that took place in this country during the 70s imprinted a significant mark in the articulation of discursive worlds as well as in any Argentine artistic production. It also considers the memory as a practice that acts in the Argentine collective imaginary, incorporating events from more extended historical periods, that start before the last dictatorship and, in terms of causes and consequences, extend themselves into the present. Thus, the notion of memory is the focus that links the past events with every specific present, and, simultaneously, it is the hermeneutical frame of a research based on a corpus formed by diverse expressive genres, specially film. We analyze the specific systems of representation of events that had a strong political impact, focusing in memory, *Peronismo* and the social aspects. From one end to the other of the proposed historical period, we examine, in fictional and documentary films, the figurations of the myths and narrations of the *Peronismo* and the ways of social irruption revealed in a climate of popular revolt that accompanied profound economical and institutional-political crisis at the dawning of this century.

The periodization established in this work allows to bear in mind the impact that the public strategies of the memory of state terrorism had in the succession of socio-cultural stages in Argentina throughout the last thirty years. These strategies (which were defined at the same time by the content of their demands of justice, by their articulation with politics and by their symbolic expression) allow -roughly- the identification of three historical moments that have influenced the characteristics of the aesthetic productions.

This chronology starts in the 80s, with the return of democracy. This period is characterized by the climate of commotion present in the society due to the dimension of the crimes carried out during the dictatorship. It is also characterized by the start of an innovative political performance of the relatives of the victims of the state terrorism and the Human Rights organizations, through public expressions of symbolically marked slant. The different narrative ways of visualization, denounce and judging of

perpetrators (the testimonies of survivors and relatives of *desaparecidos*, the legal discourses) applied to tell stories based on the innocence of the victims of state terrorism (at that moment, near in time) are relevant to this analysis.

The social process of elaborating the past generated a phase of different sign during the 90s, with a narrative that collected the political experiences of the militants of the 60s expressed testimonial literature, novels, memoirs, documentary and fictional films. In them, the personal and political identity of the victims of violence (that was kept on the anonymity of victimization until that moment) becomes explicit.

During the second half of the 90s, the public emergency of the association HIJOS recovers these stories from the point of view of a generational narrative that incorporates these stories and spreads them through testimonial activities and public denounces, all of them based in a strong symbolic activity. From the dawning of the new century onwards, the account of the victims' children -whether they belong or not to HIJOS- begins to appear in their own documentary and fictional films, where they examine the different versions of what happened to their parents' generation and add interpretations about the political decisions of the last years, that are far from being unanimous.

Simultaneously, this millennium starts with the reaction, from different sectors of the population, against the state and economic powers, due to the harsh effects of the inflexible politics of Neoliberalism implemented in the previous decade. The protests against the lack of responsibility of the political administrators of the system adopted multiple shapes, and led to dramatic alternatives of helplessness for large social sectors. The climate of popular convulsion, the human and social scenario of the crisis had a strong symbolic expression in different artistic manifestations produced in that context. The films made by the young generation of Argentine filmmakers dialogue with the social, political period from a thematic point of reference (memory, poverty, exclusion, marginality) in the way of formal proposals whose understanding to throws light upon the crisis scenario through local and/or regional expression.

This analysis focuses on a dimension of memory in discursive expressions and testimonial documentary films of the relatives of the victims and in texts by Rodolfo Walsh and Juan Gelman. All of them considered as "*countertexts*" where filiation and genealogy are key to refer to the traumatic burden of the past violence. In this approach, the criticism that Judith Butler (2001) makes to the Hegelian and Lacanian interpretations of *Antigone* was useful to defend the contemporaneous alterations in the

family scheme and the “active” potential that melancholy has within itself (regarding the Freudian pair of mourning and melancholy). The contributions of Pierre Legendre (1996) regarding the symbolic and legal dimensions in the organization of genealogy and kinship were also useful in the abovementioned approach. In their testimonial speeches, the relatives invert the genealogical directions (the mothers say that they were born from their children, the children speak about giving birth to their parents, the *desaparecido* is referred to as son or daughter and as father or mother at the same time). On the other hand, the documentary productions of the children of the *desaparecidos* that were members of revolutionary organizations during the 70s, are memory operations produced from the personal experience of the collective drama, and, in this sense, they have an important place as a source of information or documentation on that terrible period of Argentine history. These interventions highlight the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and politics in the face of historical facts. These interventions also show clearly the importance of that relationship, from a search of different ways of using the images, or by the use of divergent narrative ways with homogenizing logics. The corpus of this project highlights especially the audiovisual production of the father figure by the point of view of the daughters: Lucila Quieto’s photo installation, *Arqueología de una ausencia*, and the documentary films *Papá Iván*, by María Inés Roqué, *Los Rubios*, by Albertina Carri, *Encontrando a Víctor*, by Natalia Bruschtein, and *El tiempo y la sangre*, by Alejandra Almirón.

In this documentary corpus, some specific figurations are used as an interpretation device. These figurations expand their own processes of sense production and simultaneously determine the relationship that these representations have with the contemporaneous historic and politic frame. The Deleuzian concept of “time-image” that depends, among other procedures, on the disjunction (of vision and sound) of the filmic materials, supports the lack of a representative resolution on how memory functions, in an aesthetic effect of politic value, as it happens with *Los rubios*. In these stories, the children of the *desaparecidos* return to the past to recognize the places and events of a history in which their parents were the main figures (a condition that relates the children of the *desaparecidos* with that of the “foreigner”, the other, described by Derrida (2000), who talks about the acknowledge of the name, of the identity). In María Inés Roqué’s and Albertina Carri’s films, there are points of contact with tragedy, as a mark of the relationship between the logic of mourning and the logics of politics and history. Both of them are narrators of their own films, recreating Antigone’s figure (that

of *Oedipus at Colonus*), deprived from the right of knowing the destiny and the sepulcher of their parents, the law outside the Law, due to the final election of them. On the other hand, Natalia Bruschtein's and Fernanda Almirón's films, present a direct interlocution between the two generation, in scenes where sons and daughters, as new witnesses, question their parents on their political performance in the past, and receive explanations from them. Using Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" (2002:22) –memory that functions from a generational distance and from a different personal connection with history-, these analyses consider that, through their documentary films, the children recreate the traumatic narratives that had place before they were born, from their own versions and conditions.

In the objectives proposed by this project, the inclusion of the *Peronismo* is significant, since it comprises a repertoire of narrations that include myths, dramas, heroes, epic dates, deeds, happy times, terrible times and, above all, it is the protagonist of a historical period (that started in 1945 with the first *Peronista* government, overthrown in 1955) in which starts the largest social violence between classes of the last sixty years. These images that belong to the *Peronismo*, and its contradictions become a part of the visual and narrative plot of selected films through diverse genres and formal procedures. We analyses these representations in films produced during the whole of the period comprised in this project: *Sur*, 1987, y *Argentina latente*, 2007, both directed by Fernando Solanas; *Perón. Sinfonía del sentimiento*, 1996-1999, by Leonardo Favio; and *Pulqui. Un instante en la patria de la felicidad*, 2007, by Alejandro Fernández Moujan. Solanas' filmography allows to establish continuities and differences between the various postulates of the political and aesthetic vanguard that he inscribed in his movies during the 60s and the 70s, his fictional proposals during the regaining of democracy of the 80s and his recent documentary productions after the crisis of 2001. Amongst the stereotypic (and sometimes hermetic) figurations of the images that the aforementioned filmmakers propose in their movies, the historical referents related to the *Peronismo* emerge in their myth condition (epic workers, the power of the techniques, happiness in the community, design of popular images, combatant symbology). All these films employ the myth as a montage of stories that search for the truth, an option that defines one of the views in the debate regarding the aesthetic relative to the *Peronismo* in Argentina. This aesthetic path opens a discussion on "populism", a notion Ernesto Laclau considers that "has always been linked to an dangerous excess, that questions clear molds of a rational community" (2005:10-11). Nicolás Casullo historizes the

Argentinean political debates surrounding this subject and relates it with the current critical perspectives that the governments of the Latin American countries deserve are subject to (2007).

I will expand the theoretical perspective in relation to these concepts (myth and populism) and those of “return” or “repetition”. Within the frame of the current considerations on the historic return in the art field (return to subjects, discourses and iconographies), I value Hal Foster’s proposals on the precise relation between the works and the past (2001:X), using the Freudian notion of *repetition* or deferred action (that which redefines afterwards a past trauma), to distinguish between the original historic referent and an artistic restoring operation. These observations are appropriate to face the rewriting *peronist* arcadia launched by Solanas, pictorially by Santoro, and in the disperse materials that Favio re-elaborates and complements in *Perón, sinfonía del sentimiento*.

On the other hand, this project draws attention to the climate of popular revolt that accompanied the economic and institutional crisis of 2001, as another key moment of the historic-political reality of Argentina that had a profound impact in the imaginary and the memory of society. A scenes and visual forms repertoire translated into different aesthetic languages (media, theatrical, plastic arts and film) emerged from the crisis.

The figure of the popular revolt as an operation and axis of sense is analyzed from Michel De Certeau’s point of view (1995). He highlights the different political shapes that manifest as an action approach, with presence and participation. The popular revolt is also explored from Julia Kristeva’s view (1998): she considers that the “attitude of revolt” promotes significant operations in the subject. The chaotic reality of the crisis is analyzed through its visual representation in plastic and theatrical installations, through some motifs or figurations that can be characterized as “tiredness” (Deleuze, 1996), “identification”, “transmission”, “precipitation”, “image-symptom” (Georges Didi-Huberman (2006), amongst other representational constructions in productions from foundational filmmakers of the New Argentinean Cinema: TV series with large audiences such as *Okupas* (Bruno Stagnaro, 2001) and *Tumberos* (Adrián Caetano, 2002) , and *La ciénaga* (a film by Lucrecia Martel, 2001). Taking as a starting point Adorno’s statement, “the art forms register the history of humanity more precisely than documents” (1979), the aesthetic analysis of these films, an analysis based on the mentioned figures, does not reduce these works to their structures. On the contrary, it pays attention to the forms in which a film –as well as every other artistic work-

projects itself in the world as well as the world goes throughout it and these motives or “figures” become a fundamental device that functions as a basis to study this relationship.

The selected corpus, with different discursive and expressive genres finds a reference frame in the progression of the depicted socio-cultural movements. The films that constitute it, as well as other artistic and cultural productions, do not illustrate it pedagogically, nor psychologically “explain” the transformations that took place, but they allow to question, in their representative ways -visual, narrative- the links that they have with every considered present.

From what was expressed onwards, it seems to be obvious the unavoidable amendments that history and politics, or simply the advance of history, makes a mark in an art that is particularly sensitive to reflect its movements or effects, such as it is the cinema. But at the same time, the cinema constructs ideological and political senses that illuminate (or, on the opposite side, manipulate) the more conflictive aspects, sometimes hidden, of reality.

In its mandatory proximity to the complex socio-cultural context of Argentina, its influence is perceived in the thematic, aesthetic categories and in the creation of generic categories (the “social cinema” and the “memory cinema” make use of the documentary films instead of fiction, for example), as a part of the alternatives that this work examines to analyze the sense, more and more wider and elusive, that debates between film, aesthetic and politics.

The film and author selection it is not oriented in all cases by the high aesthetic achievement. Most of them focus and explore the essential part of the questions on the images of the current times, as main devices of the contemporaneous reality. The particular interest of this project is located in those works of the contemporary Argentina cinema, where reality is referred to as a (political) subject, and with it, they find fundamentals for an (artistic) answer.

In the theoretical frame of my investigation, a key character is Jacques Rancière, who considers that the actions of affirmation of a political collective almost always involve an aesthetic commitment (2002, 2005). This can be observed when the politics (that, for this author, it is above all a matter of subjects, i.e. that implies ways of subjectivation) employ acts and abilities of enunciation and representation. Giorgio Agamben (1998, 1999) and Jean-Luc Nancy’s (2005) arguments about the limits of the representation of

trauma constitute the conceptual base for this work to tackle the cinematographic aesthetics referred to memory, violence and death in Argentina during the 70s. The testimonials of the new generation regarding this period, allow being analyzed through the “listener-witness” figure, implied in the figure of the narrator, Walter Benjamin (1991). The documentary production of the children of the victims and that of the survivors of the 70s develop with diverse poetics the figure of the “listener-witness”, as a third person that makes their way towards the account of what it is absent, somehow opened to the conscience of the past, to reach it from a different notion of time (notion of past and notion of future), and create a record of the possibility of memory and ensure a transmission.

In its intention of paying attention to the link between the symbolic-cultural dimensions and its political manifestation, among past representations and present interpretation, this work sought to avoid the mere application or illustration of theoretical concepts. Thus, it focuses in the aesthetic and political relationship as one of the debates that establish the contemporary culture and that have been present in the Argentine context for several decades now, attaining very singular political-formal resolutions. In that task, the cultural theory and the aesthetic view converge with the intention of an unsatisfied political reason.