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Iconic fictions: Narrating recent Argentine history in post-2000 second-generation films

ABSTRACT

*This article examines a recent trend in Argentine post-dictatorial cinema that has not received sufficient critical attention: post-2000 fictional films by second-generation film-makers that go back to a child's or a teenager's perspective, and to an 'archaic' pre-1990s format. By focusing on a political thriller that I find paradigmatic of this recent trend, Gastón Biraben's *Cautiva/Captive* (2005), I argue that these films (which I call 'iconic fictions') should not be read as additional examples of contemporary second-generation narratives. Instead, I propose that their formal exception attests to an intra-generational tension regarding the representation of recent history (in particular, regarding the representation of 1970s political activism). In these films, the use of fiction (and of a child's or a teenager's perspective) allows for a predominance of iconicity over indexicality – a predominance that entails crucial ideological connotations for contemporary Argentina and that demands a re-examination of the efficacy of representing history through a child's or a teenager's lens.*

KEYWORDS

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children
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1. Hirsch uses this concept when referring to second-generation survivors of collective or cultural trauma – not only to those who share family ties with first-generation survivors but also to those who identify with the latter through what she calls ‘retrospective witnessing by adoption’ (p. 10). As opposed to the first generation, who had a direct exposure to traumatic events, the postmemorial generation only ‘remembers’ the narratives of these events. It thus relies heavily on cultural representations and visual images such as photographs. Although Hirsch’s concept is somewhat problematic – for example, as Beatriz Sarlo (2005, *Tiempo pasado*) suggests, any type of memory is always necessarily differed and reliant on representation – I still find it relevant for this article. Hirsch’s emphasis on the visual and repetitive aspects of postmemory helps to explain the choice of a child’s or a teenager’s perspective in post-2000 fictional films made by second-generation film-makers and, as I will analyse in the following pages, the predominance of these narratives’ iconic dimension.

After examining family photographs, wearing her father’s clothes and recreating multiple versions of his death, Carla Crespo – who is now in her 30s – comes to an anti-intuitive conclusion that is commonly heard in Argentina today: she is now older than her father. This unsettling conclusion marks a turning point in *Mi vida después/My Life After* (Arias, 2009) – the play in which six men and women explore how 1970s collective history moulded their own family narratives. After Carla’s statement the stage is all motion: the scenery changes quickly, the six stories interrupt one another and the music becomes so loud that the audience is tempted to cover their ears. Being older than her own father seems to be more disturbing than the gap of his absence, the impossibility of a common future and even the uncertainty of his death. Being older than her own father seems to be the limit of what she can take.

This scene of age recognition is not an isolated occurrence to be found in Lola Arias’s play. Albertina Carri makes a similar statement in her widely discussed documentary *Los rubios/The Blondes* (2003). María Inés Roqué opens the film about her father, a guerrilla leader who died in 1977, with an analogous observation (*Papá Iván*, 2004). And it is the frozen youth of his biological parents the first image that strikes a fictional Juan Cabandié as unbearable after learning the results of his DNA tests in the second chapter of *Televisión por la identidad/Television for Identity* (Colom, 2007). In post-2000 Argentina, the disquieting recognition that they are now older than their parents has become an identity-marker and a collective sign of affiliation for what, following Marianne Hirsch, we could call the ‘members of the postmemorial generation’ (Hirsch 2001: 9).¹

But if the members of the postmemorial generation are now older than their parents, they are also simultaneously the same age as post-dictatorial cinema. Post-dictatorial films grew up as they were growing up, evolved as they were evolving and reached adulthood – and even maybe a saturation point – as they became adults. In fact, if we take a retrospective look at the history of the field, we notice that the second generation is not only coetaneous to these films but also what we could call their ‘formal epitome’, that is, the symbol that embodies post-dictatorial cinema’s format. We also notice that there is a strong correlation between the second generation’s age and these films’ formal choices – a correlation marked by three consecutive stages in the post-dictatorship period. As the second generation is growing up (the first stage), children and teenagers play a crucial role in the narratives’ development, as evidenced by three of the most canonical films of those years: María Luisa Bemberg’s *Camila* (1984), Luis Puenzo’s *La historia oficial/The Official Story* (1985) and Héctor Olivera’s *La noche de los lápices/Night of the Pencils* (1986). In these cinematic fictions, an unborn child, a young girl and a group of high school teenagers condense the main features of the early democratization period. It is because of them that the plots unfold. It is because of them that the films are able to undo the official version of history and design an alternative version from the victim’s perspective. And, more importantly, it is because of them that the narratives create the childlike vision that marks the early years of the new democracy – the eagerness to know, the first attempts to tell and even the innocence that is necessary to simplify. In the late 1990s, as second-generation members became young adults who were able to interrogate the past and voice their own stories, post-dictatorial films began a new (second) stage and were dominated by a new genre: testimonial documentary. Attuned to the increasing visibility of organizations such as Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and HIJOS (Hijos por la Identidad y la

Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio/Children for Identity and Justice Against Oblivion and Silence), young adults born of disappeared parents are the main protagonists of post-dictatorial films, like in the paradigmatic *Botín de guerra/Spoils of Wars* (Blaustein, 1999).

Given the close connections between this second-generation and post-dictatorial cinema, it is not surprising to see that after 2000 (the third stage) the most prominent cultural representations of the military dictatorship are documentaries created by second-generation film-makers who re-examine the recent past from an adult's perspective – a perspective that not only allows for the above-mentioned age recognition but that also facilitates, as we will see later, a re-examination of the political projects of the first generation. To Carri's *Los rubios* and Roqué's *Papá Iván*, we could add Nicolás Prividera's *M* (2007), Andrés Habegger's *Historias cotidianas/Everyday Stories* (2001), Laura Bondarevsky's *Che vo cachai* (2003) and Natalia Bruschtein's *Encontrando a Víctor/Finding Victor* (2005). In these documentaries, second-generation members are not just protagonists who are interviewed to voice their own stories – as in the documentaries of the second stage – but film-makers who create them, direct them and organize their narratives from an adult's lens.²

But there is also another recent trend which seems to go against the history of the field and which I thus find worth exploring: post-2000 fictional films by second-generation film-makers that go back to a child's or a teenager's perspective, and to an 'archaic' pre-1990s format. As opposed to most of the post-2000 second-generation narratives that re-examine the recent past from an adult's perspective, these films choose fiction to explore history from the point of view of a child or of a teenager – like in Pablo Agüero's *Salamandra/Salamander* (2008), Daniel Bustamante's *Andrés no quiere dormir la siesta/Andres Does Not Want to Take a Nap* (2009), Paula Markovitch's *El premio/The Prize* (2011) or Gastón Biraben's *Cautiva* (2005). In other words, although these films belong to the third stage in terms of the historical moment in which they were produced, aesthetically they return to the first stage, interrupting what seemed to be a diachronic tendency. This cultural exception raises a number of questions: Why do these second-generation film-makers choose a format that is at odds with the one typically chosen by their own generation? What are the aesthetic and political implications of moving backwards in the history of the field? What are the ideological connotations of narrating the military dictatorship from a child's or a teenager's perspective after 2000, when the recent past is at the centre of public discourse and its crucial aspects are already well-known both nationally and internationally?

None of these questions have been addressed so far. Most readings analyse these films as if there were no significant differences between their aesthetic configurations and the ones usually chosen by the other members of the second generation: David Blaustein, for example, considers *Cautiva* a good fictional representative of the 'enhancement of criteria regarding memory' that is typical of contemporary documentaries (Blaustein 2008: 155), and Rodolfo Hermida sees in its aesthetic choices the traces of a whole generation influenced by professional film school training (Hermida 2006: 15). Most readings analyse these films as if there were no significant differences between documentary and fiction: Susana Kaiser points out that, since the end of the military dictatorship, in both genres the 'cinematic camera [acts] as a historian' (Kaiser 2010: 101). Most readings analyse these films as if there were no significant differences between creating a narrative from a non-adult's perspective after 2000 and using the same approach in the early

2. Although they are not specifically concerned with establishing stages within the post-dictatorship, my periodization coincides with the chronological divisions proposed by other scholars, such as Tamara Falicov, Gonzalo Aguilar and Joanna Page. Falicov (2007) alludes to three distinct stages marked by significant changes in state cultural policies: the mid-1980s marked by the 'revelatory' impulse of the redemocratization, the 1990s marked by both the new cinematic legislation and the neoliberal politics and the post-2001 'cinema of the crisis'. Aguilar ([2006] 2010) and Page (2009) do not focus on the distinctions between the 1990s and the 2000s, but both assert that the cinema of the 1990s is clearly different from the one in the early democratization period. Among these differences, they highlight the predominance of the documentary (Aguilar [2006] 2010: 64) and the strong visibility of the postmemorial generation and their critique of revolutionary violence (Page 2009: 152–79). I address the issue of post-dictatorial periodization in more detail in 'Temporalidad e historia/'Temporality and History' (Garibotto 2010), suggesting that we can establish three consecutive stages that coincide with three different official discourses on memory.

democratization period: it is in fact common to compare the use of children or teenagers today with the representational strategies in *La historia oficial* (Blaustein 2008: 153; Gorodischer 2005; Kaiser 2010: 106; Scholz 2005).

My article proposes an alternative interpretation of this phenomenon. Instead of analysing these films as additional examples of post-2000 second-generation narratives with no significant variation, I read their cultural exception as a sign of an intra-generational tension regarding recent history, especially, regarding the political projects of the first generation. This ideological tension has a formal counterpart: the clash between documentary and fiction. As I will show in my analysis, the use of fiction allows for a predominance of these films' iconic dimension over their indexical dimension – a predominance that erases certain (uncomfortable) aspects of the recent past and that conflicts with the assertion that a child's or a teenager's angle is the basis for a successful historical representation. In order to show this, I will focus on Gastón Biraben's *Cautiva*, a film that I find paradigmatic of this recent trend. I will explain how this film's formal exception reveals ideological tensions that ultimately call for a reading of post-2000 second-generation cinema as a site of political confrontation and that demand a re-examination of the effectiveness of representing history through a child's or a teenager's lens.

VISUAL RESEMBLANCE: THE USE OF A TEENAGER'S PERSPECTIVE IN CAUTIVA

Shot between 2001 and 2002, released at international film festivals in 2004 and in Argentina in October 2005, *Cautiva* emphasizes from the opening scenes the tension between documentary and fiction that is crucial for understanding the film's ideological implications. A caption that highlights the narrative's hybrid stance towards reality ('This film is a fictional film based on real events') precedes two opening sequences. Archival footage displaying Argentina's victory in the 1978 World Cup is followed by a sequence of fictional scenes where Cristina, the protagonist, and her family celebrate the girl's fifteenth birthday in 1994. This initial time loop aside, Gastón Biraben's *opera prima* is built upon a clear-cut chronological plot. One day 15-year-old Cristina is forced to leave during school hours to see a judge who tells her that her parents are in fact her adoptive parents and that her biological parents disappeared in 1978, during the military dictatorship. The rest of the film is an account of how the teenager gradually learns about her real parents, discovers recent Argentine history and finally comes to terms with her new identity.

Cautiva's connections with adolescence are not restricted to the choice of a young protagonist. The film also ties the spectator to a teenage perspective through two interrelated strategies: the development of the narrative structure and the emphasis on psychological characteristics that articulate teenage subjectivities. Biraben's film is organized as a coming-of-age story, in which Cristina goes through a series of identity crises and gradually detaches herself from her (adoptive) parents' values until reaching a new more mature subjectivity. The filmic structure follows this development and enhances it through the choice of a particular genre: the political thriller. In *Cautiva*, age and genre cannot be disengaged from one another. As the girl matures, suspense becomes stronger. As she confronts her new identity, the film reaches its climax and history reveals its final truth. Cristina's quest for her biological identity is told by means of a detective story in which the characters' lives always seem to be in danger; the main clues for reconstructing the truth are urgently whispered

in a dark basement; and, upon finding out the solution, the spectator realizes that the main keys to solving the problem had been in front of his or her eyes from the very beginning – it was during the final game documented in the archival footage that the baby was born. As most reviews promoting the film announce, Gaston Biraben's *Cautiva* is, in every possible sense, a political thriller. And this political thriller is based upon (and depends on) the psychological characteristics that are at the core of teenage subjectivities: identity crises, disengagement from the adult world, influence of peer groups, periods of 'storm and stress' and moments of self-consciousness (Erikson 1968; Hall 1904; Steinberg 1996). These characteristics create an emotional atmosphere of doubt, increasing knowledge and revelation. As the spectator accompanies Cristina in her subjective turmoil, he or she is also emotionally ready for the thriller's resolution and its political implications.

It is in fact because of these strategies that most readings (Blaustein 2008: 153; Gorodischer 2005; Kaiser 2010: 106; Scholz 2005) trace a parallel between *Cautiva* and the canonical *La historia oficial*. In both films, the private details surrounding a child who was born of disappeared parents force the protagonists (and the spectator) to re-examine collective history. In both films, the choice of an innocent character underscores the traumatic effects of the recent past and creates a narrative to denounce its atrocities. In both films, the mystery behind a child impels a thriller whose hidden truth ultimately unveils a political truth. In other words, according to these readings, in both films the use of an infant or adolescent gaze is the basis for an effective historical representation.

But if the choice of age and genre certainly invites a parallel reading of both films, there is a significant difference owing to the specific historical moments of their release. *La historia oficial* confronts the spectator with unknown (or untold) aspects of the recent past. As with a detective, the audience joins the protagonists in deciphering the clues that will at the same time reveal Gaby's history and a new version of collective history that is lacking in the early democratization period. *Cautiva*, however, employs a teenage perspective to finally reveal what the spectator has known for at least 30 years. The closing captions make the difference quite visible:

Although the number of victims of Argentina's last military dictatorship is uncertain, they are supposed to be around 30.000. Those who are responsible, except for some cases of home arrest, are free, protected by laws that were created in their benefit by subsequent democratic governments. To date, 74 children of disappeared people have been identified. The fate of many more is still unknown. The search for them continues.

If, upon watching Puenzo's film, there was a new historical map in front of the audience's eyes, upon finishing *Cautiva*, the spectator is faced with recent Argentine history's most well-known facts, both at home and abroad. The implied assumption that after 2000 these facts are still waiting to be revealed is as anti-intuitive as Cristina's character, who does not know anything about the military dictatorship as late as 1994.³ *Cautiva*, a post-2000 second-generation film released when the history of the military dictatorship is at the centre of public discourse, is told by means of a typical pre-1990s format.

The film's climax attests to this temporal slippage. After furtively examining documents, asking questions that in 1994 are strangely perceived as dangerous and secretly navigating the city, Cristina meets an old nurse who had witnessed her birth and who is supposed to finally tell her the truth

3. Jabbaz and Lozano (2001: 97–131) interviewed teenagers and young adults to assess their knowledge of recent Argentine history. Although they found certain disparities, especially regarding the causes of the military dictatorship, all of the interviewees seem to be aware of the basic facts that *Cautiva* reveals: the dates, the number of disappeared people, the quest for children born in captivity. We could thus say that *Cautiva*'s revelations are already shared by any possible audience: an adult domestic audience, a teenage or young audience and an international audience.

about her parents. This final revelation is accompanied by the only formal variation that, except for the opening archival footage, the film incorporates in its own texture: a sequence of scenes that compose a flashback which was shot with a hand-held camera and using a different colour scheme and filter. These temporal and formal changes underscore the impression that what the spectator is watching is both Cristina's hidden story and the resolution of the political thriller. Yet, just like Cristina – who ends up finding out what she already knew from the very beginning: that she was born of disappeared parents – upon finishing the flashback, the viewer finds that his or her acquired knowledge of recent history equals his or her preceding knowledge. Despite the film's detective-like environment and its constant allusions to undisclosed dimensions of the recent past, the spectator's only task is – as Kaiser suggests – 'to verify if what is being represented matches the already-documented facts' (Kaiser 2010: 103). As opposed to most post-2000 second-generation narratives, Biraben's film requires that the viewer return to an early democratization perspective, that he or she go back to the beginnings of post-dictatorial cinema. Released in 2004 and 2005, *Cautiva*, a second-generation *opera prima*, is built as an anachronistic film.

But it is not necessary to appeal to the history of post-dictatorial cinema in order to perceive *Cautiva's* anachronism. The filmic texture itself reveals this temporal dissonance. The indexical condition of the cinematic image confronts the viewer with the clash of temporalities and the predominance of the iconic dimension that allude to the film's ideological undertones. As it has already been discussed in film theory at least since Peter Wollen's classic *Sign and Meaning in the Cinema* ([1969] 1972), film is a good example of a sign system where an indexical, an iconic and a symbolic dimension merge. Following Peirce's typology based on how signs refer to their objects, Wollen observes that film entails an indexical dimension because there is a real connection between the sign and the referent, because – as it happens with the wind and the weathervane or the foot and the footprint – the referent is involved in the formation of the sign. In the case of film, the cinematic image bears an evident indexical status, as it is an imprint and a trace of the profilmic – that is, of whatever real objects were in front of the camera while it was being shot. Yet, if the cinematic image, due to its indexical condition, guarantees a close relation to referentiality, it also entails an iconic dimension. The filmic image not only attests to the existence of a real object; it also resembles it – it also looks like that real object (like the subway map and the actual subway or the shape of a woman in the women's restroom). In other words, the cinematic image is both an index and a visual duplicate of a real referent. Finally, since film is a type of narrative, it also necessarily includes a symbolic dimension – that is, part of its meanings is based on arbitrary conventions, such as language, with no real or visual connections to the referent.

A brief analysis of how these three dimensions merge in *Cautiva* reveals the connections between the film's formal exception (a result of temporal dissonance) and its ideological implications. Released after 2000 and set in 1994, the first formal contradiction is, as I have already suggested, the anachronism of the film's symbolic dimension. The viewer notices this anachronism not only regarding the narrative's format but also regarding its linguistic content. The main characters, for example, speak as they would have spoken before the 1990s, in the first years of the new democracy. Cristina's high school friends are probably the best example of this archaism and confirm the connections between a teenage perspective and the film's temporal dissonance. One of them is expelled because she aggressively complains to her teacher about

the presidential decrees releasing the members of the military, decrees that in reality were signed five years before the main action in the film. Another friend explains how the former girl's parents were 'subversive communists who killed priests during the war against communism' and how the disappeared people are not really disappeared but people who fled the country and are now happily living abroad – two statements that sound too old for 1994 and that, in fact, Argentines instantaneously associate with the 1980s. In *Cautiva*, an adolescent perspective allows for a filmic language that is perceived as an anachronistic discourse, as a crystallized residue of the past circulating the present. The same thing could be said about some of the details that are meant to provide historical context: the crowded protests of Madres de Plaza de Mayo that Cristina involuntarily witnesses (and that are too crowded for 1994, thus transporting the viewer back to the late 1980s), and the newspapers that insist on denouncing the US involvement in Argentine recent politics (an insistence that is also typical of the early democratization period, when the first details regarding the military dictatorship came to light).

But if the symbolic dimension is archaic compared to both the film's main temporal setting (1994) and the historical context in which it was produced (2001–05), its indexical dimension alludes to a future time which underscores the clash of temporalities that is at the core of *Cautiva's* aesthetic dissonance. The indexicality of the cinematic image – the fact that the image is a trace of a real referent – forces the viewer to realize that what he or she is watching was shot after 1994. This realization is tied to some of the real objects that penetrate the film and that point to a future time: an automatic machine from which Cristina gets her ticket before boarding a bus, a card that she uses for calling her parents from a paid phone and, more evidently, the graffiti signed by HIJOS that fill the city. What is more noticeable is that although all of these objects do not actually belong to a very distant future – the organization HIJOS was formed in 1995, the automatic ticket machine was launched at the end of that same year and it was possible to use a card for calling from a *Telefónica* pay-phone towards the end of the decade – their slight anachronism is emphasized by a sharp contrast with the archaic quality of the symbolic dimension. In other words, these objects strike the viewer as almost futuristic when compared to the film's old format, plot and language.

In 'The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity', Mary Ann Doane agrees with Peirce that cinema is 'primarily indexical, subordinating the iconic dimension to secondary status' (Doane 2007: 134). Although cinematic and photographic images might look exactly like the object they represent, their resemblance is ultimately based upon a physical correspondence to the represented object. The cinematic image's special credibility is more tied to physical correspondence – to the fact that the represented object testifies to the existence of a real object that was once in front of the camera – than to visual likeness. It is more grounded on referentiality than on resemblance. In this sense, iconicity ends up being a 'by-product of its indexicality' (Doane 2007: 134). While Doane's remarks are an accurate account of the cinematic field as a whole, we could say that in *Cautiva* the clash of temporalities inverts the equation. The 'futuristic objects', though evidenced by indexicality, join an archaic format in reminding the spectator that what he or she is watching is less a product of referentiality than of resemblance – that the film is less an index (a document of a real referent) than an icon (a sign that visually duplicates a referent, regardless of its real connections to the latter). To put it simply, *Cautiva's* anachronism – the mixture of post- 2000, pre-1990s and

1994 components, a mixture enabled by the use of a teenage perspective – reminds the viewer that what he or she is watching is a fictional account of recent history. It reminds the viewer that this representation of historical facts is a narrative that *resembles* the post-dictatorship period but that, by no means, *documents* the post-dictatorship period. The film's temporal dissonance hence results in a loss of referentiality and in an intensification of iconicity.

This intensification entails important consequences that should not remain unnoticed. If indexicality depends on the referent's materiality, iconicity depends on a combination of repetition and steadiness. It is because a sign (the subway map) regularly repeats a steady referent (the actual subway) that an icon is formed. It is because a sign (the shape of a woman) refers multiple times to a referent that is always the same (the women's restroom) that people are able to evoke that referent upon seeing the sign. Iconicity requires both repetition (of a particular sign) and stability (of an invariable referent). Hence, as Wollen suggests, in iconic signs the gap between signifier and signified becomes closer, relying on instantaneous evocation but precluding the task of interpretation (the subway map immediately recalls the subway and demands no further consideration). Like the subway map and the actual subway or the shape of a woman in a women's restroom, the representation of recent Argentine history in *Cautiva* is based upon a repetition of iconic images that instantaneously recall well-known aspects of the past and that demand no further analysis. These images refer to a reality that is already known by the viewer and that requires no further interpretation. Thus, the film becomes what I will call an 'iconic fiction' (i.e. a fictional film where iconicity takes precedence over indexicality). This iconic fiction evokes an already-given referent with an invariable content that lies outside of time, untouched by history or politics.

The inclusion of family photographs is a clear example of this tension between iconicity and indexicality, and helps us to understand what happens in the film as a whole. Like in most post-dictatorial narratives, in *Cautiva* photographs occupy a central space. Those typical post-dictatorial scenes in which the protagonists sort family albums and examine the first generation's past are recurrent in Biraben's film, constituting the coming-of-age rituals that gradually lead to the teenager's new subjectivity. Cristina's aunt and grandmother use photographs to recall details about her parents, Cristina's friend brings pictures of a detention centre to explain their fate and family portraits are to be found everywhere at her grandmother's place. Photographs accompany (and haunt) the girl in her coming-of-age story and in the quest for her new identity. In this sense, *Cautiva* seems to fit perfectly well within second-generation culture. As Marianne Hirsch outlines, photographs are privileged objects for the postmemorial generation. And it is precisely these images' indexicality that makes photographs crucial for the postmemorial process of retrospective witnessing by adoption:

[The photograph] is the index par excellence, pointing to the presence, the having-been-there of the past. [...] This illustrates the integral link photographs provide for the second generation, those who in their desire for memory and knowledge, are left to track the traces of what has been there and no longer is. Pictures, as Barbie Zelizer argues, 'materialize' memory.

(Hirsch 2001: 14)

It is the photographic image's indexicality – the fact that the image testifies to the reality of the past, the fact that it has referential value – that carries the evidential force that is necessary for postmemory. It is because photographs materialize memory that they provide the sense and bodily experience that connects two generations. It is because they are markers of truth-value that they allow second-generation viewers to relive and re-enact the traumatic past.

But if the inclusion of photographs affiliates *Cautiva* with second-generation culture, the specific manner in which photos are used attests to the irreconcilability of their aesthetic and political concerns. The film's photos are *fictional* photos – photos where iconicity takes precedence over indexicality. In other words, the fact that these images resemble the recent past (that, for example, they portray people who look like disappeared people) is more important than the fact that there were once real objects in front of the lens (precisely because those real objects are known to be actors and actresses representing disappeared people). The inclusion of fictional photographs condenses what happens in the film as a whole: the use of fiction, as opposed to documentary, emphasizes the iconic representation of Argentine history. The recent past is visually evoked but, given its lack of referentiality, it is not an object of interpretation. Cristina's response to the fictional photographs further illustrates this point: photos are for her the proof of her own identity (the proof that she was born in 1978) and of the successful development of her teenage subjectivity rather than a resource for examining the past or for witnessing by adoption the memories of the first generation. In *Cautiva* the adolescent gaze, enabled by the use of fiction, interrupts the indexical connection that is necessary for a successful process of intergenerational re-enactment and postmemory.

INTRA-GENERATIONAL TENSIONS AND INTERGENERATIONAL CONCERNS: NEGOTIATING THE 1970s

I opened this article with an account of a recurrent scene in post-2000 second-generation narratives: the scene of age recognition. After examining their family photographs, manipulating their parents' objects and even, like Carla, wearing their parents' clothes, members of the second generation are confronted with the unsettling evidence that they are now older than their parents. Indexicality plays a crucial role in these scenes of age recognition. Unlike the fictional photographs in *Cautiva*, these objects' indexical status forces intergenerational identification. It is the fact that these objects are traces of their parents' lives (that they carry referential value) that allows second-generation viewers to identify with them. And it is not surprising that, since members of the second generation are now adults who are telling their stories from an adult's perspective, in these narratives the moment of age recognition is at the same time the moment of addressing first-generation political projects. The disturbing recognition that they are now older than their parents confronts second-generation members with the question of political commitment – of their parents' political ideas and of how they in turn respond to those political ideas.

Answers do not follow a homogeneous pattern. Carla Crespo proudly recalls her father's leadership and suggests (joining the other actors and actresses in the play) its continuity in the recent re-emergence of political militancy. Albertina Carri distances herself from her parents' ideals and even alludes to this distance in the documentary's title ('the blondes' refers to how

4. As Aguilar outlines ([2006] 2010: 36, 64), since the 1990s Argentine cinema has witnessed a return of the documentary. This return is evidenced not only by the fact that the vast majority of films are documentaries but also by the fact that fictional films incorporate documentary sections. This mixture can be found in many of the cultural products that I analyse in this article: in *Televisión por la identidad*, the fictional account of the lives of children born of disappeared parents is interrupted by the inclusion of the real children (now adults) certifying the fictional version. In *Los rubios*, Carri mixes real documents and her own presence with fictional stories, fake interviews and with the presence of an actress who duplicates her. Even in *Cautiva*, a completely fictional plot follows archival footage depicting the World Cup. Thus, my intention is not to set a clear boundary between second-generation documentary and fiction (an impossible task) but to analyse their different uses of iconicity and indexicality, and the important ideological consequences that this difference entails.

low-class neighbours perceived her parents as strangers who had moved to a poor area without actually belonging to that space or class). Juan Cabandié sees his own interest in political participation as an inheritance of his predecessors' struggle. But, even with their heterogeneity, there is a striking coincidence that connects these narratives: in all of them (even in that mixture of documentary and fiction that are *Televisión por la identidad* and *Los rubios*),⁴ an indexical sign (a photograph, an object, a real neighbour) forces the members of the second generation to examine (and to take a position regarding) recent history, especially the political projects of the first generation. We could even say that, for the first time in the post-dictatorship period (and probably fuelled by the resurgence of political militancy that followed the 2001 crisis and that is usually seen as one of the main features of *kirchnerismo*), these political projects occupy a central space in cultural and public discourses. It is the second generation who are mostly responsible for this centrality – as the founding principles of the organization HIJOS clearly state:

We acknowledge our parents' political struggle: because they wanted to change society, they wanted things to be different, and that is why they were taken. They were fighting so that we could all have a decent job, so that we could all study, so that we could all have access to good hospitals, they were fighting for a better life.

(HIJOS 1995)

In fictional films by second-generation film-makers the movement is exactly the opposite. The use of fiction allows for a configuration of a child's or a teenager's perspective that, as a close reading of *Cautiva* shows, eludes the interpretation of controversial aspects of the recent past. As Marcela Jabbaz and Claudia Lozano suggest (2001: 102), people under 30 do not typically appeal to larger political or economic causes. Unlike an adult who is confronted with his or her own adulthood, children and teenagers do not usually question their own place in history, their own political agency or their predecessors' ideological projects – this is probably why the only information that we have about Cristina's disappeared parents is that they were architects. History is usually perceived as a given referent that accompanies (and influences) the search for their individual and social identities. Hence, the use of fiction (and of a child's or a teenager's perspective) enhances these films' iconic dimension and bridges the gap between signifier and signified. As with all icons, the sign resembles a constant invariable referent, leaving the question of referentiality aside. Contrary to what happens in most post-2000 second-generation narratives, in these iconic fictions, history (the 1970s as well as the post-dictatorship period) is visually evoked and, like the subway map and the actual subway, instantaneously remembered. Yet, like the shape of a woman in the women's restroom, the recent past (the 1970s as well as the post-dictatorship period) is not an object for further analysis; it remains outside the task of interpretation.

In this sense, Pablo Agüero's *Salamandra* provides another example of an iconic fiction. This 2008 fictional film by a second-generation film-maker joins *Cautiva* in the temporal dissonance that evidences the predominance of iconicity over indexicality. In *Salamandra*, the use of a child's perspective is paramount to the film's pre-1990s format (in fact, the main action, though never specifically dated, seems to be set in the early democratization period). The use of a child's perspective allows for the creation of the film's thriller-like suspense

and mysterious environment, as it is emphasized in the opening scenes, where the 6-year-old boy 'practices waterboarding' while taking a bath and then examines his dark house carrying a toy gun. The use of a child's perspective allows for the circulation of an ambiguous (and anachronistic) language that requires no further consideration: the boy's mother, for example, whispers ambivalent phrases like 'I was locked' or 'I had a hard time during the military dictatorship', and his mother's friend confesses that he 'did a dark job during hard times'. In *Salamandra*, like in *Cautiva*, recent Argentine history becomes an invariable background that accompanies the main action in the film. The recent past becomes a surrounding atmosphere, a well-known emotional environment – as the inclusion of María Elena Walsh's song, almost a repetition of the same resource in *La historia oficial*, suggests.⁵

But why is it so important to assess these films' formal and ideological differences? Why is it so crucial to distinguish them from other examples of second-generation narratives? My intention has been less to create a normative baseline for the evaluation of contemporary films than to argue for a reading of post-2000 cinema as a site of political negotiation – a reading that is vanishing after more than 30 years of this recurrent topic in Argentine cultural production. Rather than analysing this recent trend (these iconic fictions) as an additional example of contemporary second-generation narratives – where there is no difference between documentary and fiction, between the use of a child's or an adult's perspective, between the post-2000s and the early democratization period – I interpret these films as cultural exceptions that point to radical political tensions.⁶ Rather than interpreting them as additional examples of the cinematic representation of recent Argentine history (an 'iconic interpretation' that ultimately assumes an invariable referent), I am trying to argue for a reading of second-generation cinema as a site of ideological confrontation – a confrontation that entails crucial implications for the contemporary political situation. Iconic fictions reveal the existence of two tendencies at odds in contemporary Argentina (and in contemporary representations of Argentina): a commodification of the recent past (where the 1970s are an invariable static referent that serves as a background for cultural creation) and a politicized reading of that commodification (where the 1970s are still a terrain for examination).

In assessing these films' difference, I am also arguing for the need to reconsider the effectiveness of a child's or a teenager's perspective. In a volume whose main concern is the process of intergenerational transmission of recent history, Sergio Guelerman asserts that, in order to avoid the risk of freezing the past and converting it into a mandate that is vertically controlled by the first generation, it is necessary to create a narrative in line with teenage subjectivities; this is an assertion that also underlies the above-mentioned readings of *Cautiva*. A narrative based on the main psychological characteristics of an adolescent – doubt, identity crisis, detachment of the adult world-view – should allow for a discourse that serves as an analytical tool for exploration as opposed to a fixed dictate to be repeated (Guelerman 2001: 49–50). *Cautiva* demands that we re-evaluate the universality of this assertion. As I showed in my analysis, a teenage perspective is at the core of a filmic structure and an emotional atmosphere which, after the 2000s, lead to a political thriller that is typical of the early democratization period. A teenage perspective makes it possible to elude a consideration of larger political causes. A teenage perspective enables an archaic language and an inclusion of coming-of-age rituals which result in an enhancement of iconicity. Rather than a successful means of

5. In *La historia oficial*, María Elena Walsh's song 'En el país de no me acuerdo'/'In the Land of I Don't Remember' accompanies the entire film, allegorizing historical blindness during the military dictatorship and instilling a change in perspective for the new democracy. In *Salamandra*, it is 'Canción de títeres'/'The Puppet's Song', another song by the same author, that accompanies the plot, creating the same allegorical environment and transporting the viewer back to the early democratization period.
6. We can find a hint of these tensions in the reaction of María Gracia Iglesias, a member of HIJOS, after watching *Cautiva* (Gorodischer 2005). Interestingly enough, her rejection contrasts with an equal praise from both the first generation (as evidenced by Blaustein's article) and the international community (all of these fictional films, which went mostly unnoticed at home, received international awards). I find this difference indicative of the increasing global commodification of the military dictatorship and of how 1970s revolutionary violence is a problematic topic that is still under negotiation for survivors of the first generation.

historical exploration, in post-2000 iconic fictions, the configuration of a teenage subjectivity can be the exact opposite: the basis for converting the 1970s into a static mandate that precludes further interpretation.

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Transnational Cinemas has emerged in response to a shift in global film cultures and how we understand them. Dynamic new industrial and textual practices are being established throughout the world and the academic community is responding. Our journal aims to break down traditional geographical divisions and welcomes submissions that reflect the changing nature of global filmmaking.

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Transnational Cinemas covers a vast and diverse range of film related subjects. It provides a new and exciting forum for disseminating research. The editors are seeking articles, interviews, visual essays, reports on film festivals and conferences. Articles should be up to 6,000 words in length and should be written in English, with all quotations translated.