

The Fractured Memory: The 1970s in contemporary Argentine documentaries

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Abstract

This article discusses the political documentaries made in Argentina in the last fifteen years about the tumultuous 1970s. These 21 films recur to various visual, sound and narrative mechanisms to build a bridge to the militant cinema of that decade, with *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1966-68) as a key referent. Their common discourse is “*setentismo*”, the ideology and praxis of 1970s left-wing political engagement. The article explores the anachronistic persistence of this political imaginary embedded in the films’ belief in a transnational utopia, around Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution.

Keywords

Motion Pictures, Argentina - Motion Pictures, Social Aspects – Argentina, Documentary Films–Latin America, History and Criticism, Ernesto Guevara, Fernando Solanas

*“You’re not going to use the story, Mr. Scott?
No, sir. This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend”.*
The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962, dir. John Ford)

The political documentary occupies a small but relevant place in the history of Argentine cinema. Its key referent – both formally and ideologically – is *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1966-68), the *agit-prop* film directed by Fernando Solanas and Osvaldo Getino. An

ideological interpretation of Argentina's history and politics from a leftwing Peronist perspective, *The Hour of the Furnaces* inserts both of them in the macro history of Latin America. According to this point of view –anchored in the sixties and revamped for the globalised 21st century, as Solanas latest documentaries show- Latin America is in a continuous process of armed struggle, seeking liberation from colonial and neocolonial powers. In this political and geographical imaginary, the Cuban Revolution and its ideologist Ernesto “Che” Guevara, fulfill an indispensable hagiographic function: the possibility of a transnational utopia. The defeat of Guevara in the jungles of Bolivia in 1967 has not quenched the cinematographic ardor of those who have picked up the mantle of militant cinema.

Between *The Hour of the Furnaces* and a series of recent Argentine documentaries about the terrorist organizations of the 1970s –like Montoneros and ERP (People's Revolutionary Army)– two crucial historical events have changed the political landscape: the collapse of the European Communism in the late 1980s, and the fossilization of the Cuban regime, ensconced in power, unelected, for over four decades.

This paper examines the anachronistic persistence of this political imaginary in Argentine documentaries made in the last fifteen years about the tumultuous 1970s. They adhere tenaciously to views and explanations that have lost their luster and magnetism elsewhere. The paper also studies how these films recur to various visual, sound and narrative mechanisms to build a bridge to Grupo Cine Liberación and Cine de la Base. Their common discourse is “setentismo”, the ideology and political activism that embraces, unmediated, the leftwing cause, the speeches and terrorist engagement of that decade. It is also the ideological discourse of Argentina's current administration.

The two main strategies are the cultivation of a romantic nostalgia for the decade and the manipulation of historical truth. Each film uses them differently, but they can be discerned at work

in the choice of interviewees, the use of archival footage and music, the applications of selective memory, and its all-pervasive ideological slant.

Ultimately, this paper argues that documentaries like *Cazadores de utopías* (1996), *Che, un argentino del siglo XX* (2001), *Los malditos caminos* (2002), *El Proceso* (2003), *Raymundo* (2003), *Che, la eterna mirada* (2005), *Errepé* (2006), *Paco Urondo* (2006), *Montoneros—Una historia* (2006) and *Gaviotas Blindadas, Parts 1, 2 and 3* (2006–08) reflect a fractured and slanted memory of the events and people they are evoking. The documentaries specifically about missing people - *Botín de guerra* (2000), *(H) Historias cotidianas* (2001), *Nietos, identidad y memoria* (2005), *Los rubios* (2005), *Papá Iván* (2006), and most recently *M* and *Our Disappeared/Nuestros desaparecidos* (2008) confine themselves to the emotional first person narrative to avoid, eschew or bypass a truthful take on the complex 1970s. Two documentaries about specific events, *Trelew, la fuga que fue masacre* (2004) and *4 de julio, la masacre de San Patricio* (2007) conduct their journalistic investigations privileging some facts at the expense of others, producing either an unadulterated “setentista” narrative, or settle for a shallow Manichean interpretation.

A caveat before plunging into the analysis: the goal of this paper is not to find fault with these documentaries, since they look back to a brutal decade with nostalgia for the gun, use historical memory with a slant, or lay the entire blame for its bloodshed elsewhere. The filmmakers’ choices and intents are their own and they have made the films they wanted to do. The more militant titles —about terrorist organizations and their leaders— are a continuation of the 1970s by other means, under the same “Che” motto “Hasta la victoria, siempre”.

However, because ideology trumps the historical record in the twenty one documentaries included in this paper, I find that the quote from Ford’s classic Western of the 1960s aptly describes the phenomenon, taking place in my home country today: “setentismo” has become the “official story” of the current

Cristina Kirchner's administration, and the one before her, that of her husband Néstor Kirchner. All these documentaries make the "setentista" discourse explicit, and since they have been financed, supported and promoted by the Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales, they have in fact become hegemonic.

The objective of this paper is to note that we cannot understand the 1970s —the decade I came of age in Buenos Aires as a university student— unless we see it whole and tell it true. The contribution of the paper is simple: to examine the mechanisms at work in the "legends" that have become "facts"¹.

1. The "Setentista" Discourse

I have viewed these twenty one documentaries very carefully, including the Uruguayan *Raúl Sendic, tupamaro* (2005, dir. Alejandro Figueroa), similar in tone and content to its Argentine counterparts. The observations that follow derive from these viewings; I approached each film with a *tabula rasa* attitude, unfamiliar with its content or point of view. The conclusions I have drawn and systematized below are derived from this viewing experience. They are worth considering and debating, if only because they may run against the mill. They deconstruct the "setentista" discourse, first by studiously avoiding its terminology when discussing actors, events and political notions of the 1970s, and then by examining its dynamics.

¹ The criteria for selecting these documentaries were primarily their availability on DVD. In *Imágenes de lo real, la representación de lo político en el documental argentino* (Buenos Aires: Librería, 2007), Josefina Sartora provides a complete list of the possible documentaries made in Argentina from 1932 to 2006. With it in mind, and selecting them by their subject, I have acquired those available ones for purchase in Cultural Video, a Buenos Aires store specialized in Argentine cinema, over several trips from Los Angeles, California, where I reside since 1987. I have not been able to find yet a few relevant ones, such as *Juan, como si nada hubiera pasado* (1987, dir. Carlos Echeverría), *Sol de noche, la historia de Olga y Jorge* (2003, dir. Norberto Ludín), and *Los perros* (2004, dir. Adrián Jaime).

a) *The Fetishism of “Che” Guevara*

In the “setentista” discourse, the role played by Ernesto “Che” Guevara as the model for terrorist struggle is consistent in all the films examined. His figure is an unexamined linchpin, disposed off quickly via visual shortcuts – shots of the classic Korda photograph, footage from the Sierra Maestra campaign, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, and “Che” at work in the cane harvest.

The impact of Guevara’s rural guerrilla theory and practice, including his *Manual del guerrillero*, is commented by interviewees, especially in the three installments of *Gaviotas Blindadas* and *Errepé* (the ERP began its rural guerrilla “foquista” strategy in the Tucumán jungle during the democratically elected regime of María Estela Martínez de Perón in 1974-75). The former terrorists of *Montoneros, una historia*, *Cazadores de utopías* and *Los malditos caminos* also talk reverentially of the martyred Guevara, and his figure is evoked in *Raymundo* and *Paco Urondo*, as a key factor explaining the ideological journeys and choices of these members of ERP and FAR–Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias, absorbed by Montoneros in the mid-seventies). In *Our Disappeared*, the filmmaker protagonist uses the same shorthand, in this case because the emphasis on a personal search —the fate of friends —not the large historical canvas.

The allusions to Guevara emphasize his notions of “revolutionary” and “utopian”, outside of any context, implications or consequences. There is no mention of his disregard for the rule of law, democracy, the marketplace of ideas and respect for opposing views. By validating, unexamined, the concept of “utopia” today, these interviewees gloss over the despotism inherent in the Guevarist praxis, and accept no responsibility for their contribution to the bloodshed.

Another ideological link to Guevara is the notion that the terrorists were fighting for the “New Man”. ERP founding member Roberto Santucho is remembered as the man for whom

“su patria era el futuro” [his motherland was the future]. This elusive goal is tacitly used to blanket the organization’s terrorist depredation.

The two documentaries about Guevara, “*Che*”, *un argentino del siglo XX*, and “*Che*”, *la eterna mirada*, are well researched accounts of his life before becoming “Che”, and after his death. The former examines his childhood and early youth in a patrician *porteño* family of strong anti-Peronist sentiment, noting young Ernesto’s rebellious streak, manifested in support of Axis over the Allies in World War II. He never wavered in his anti-Peronism and anti-US stance (An instance of the legend becoming the fact is the pro-Peronist “Che” in Tim Rice’s musical *Evita*, carried over in Alan Parker’s 1996 version). Interestingly, in “*Che*”, *un argentino del siglo XX*, the director is heard off screen asking the interviewee to gloss over “Ernestito”’s opposition to the fascistic Perón regime, so as not to confuse the audience.

The second documentary deals with the forensic investigation of Guevara’s remains in Bolivia in the late 1990s. A voiceover narrator – Chilean actor Patricio Contreras – recites the text as if reading a poem in honor of a saint. This tone creates a contrast between the nuts and bolts of the forensic explanations about Guevara’s skeleton and clothing, referred “as body number 2”.

Both biographical documentaries are steeped in hagiographical awe. Like Walter Salles’ *Motorcycle Diaries* (2004), “Che” is treated with the reverence given to a saint.

The hagiographic veil that covers the figure and ideology of Guevara is a consistent characteristic of these documentaries. In the case of films about Montoneros terrorism—*Montoneros, una historia* and *Los malditos caminos*, especially - it should also be noted that the contradictions posed by the Marxist component of Guevara’s ideas to this Peronist organization, remain unaddressed by the interviewees of today. There is a surgical strategy at play – as there was in the 1970s by those at the left of the political spectrum: the fascistic core of the Peronist movement is “grafted”

to its right wing sector and its protagonists demonized, as if they were an excrescence of the otherwise progressive body. In this view, Perón stands, immaculate and aloof, sitting on Mount Olympus, similar to the view offered by *No habrá más penas ni olvido* (1983). This re-reading of the Peronist record to “setentize”, is another instance of the legend that becomes a fact.

The hagiography of “Che” is an integral part of the “setentista” discourse. If the 1968 *Hour of the Furnaces* connected to the fetish synchronically via the long take of the dead Guevara’s close-up of 1967, these documentaries use the same footage diachronically, to justify exculpating themselves from their resort to violence, “the monster they generated”, as mentioned tangentially in *Montoneros, una historia*.

b) *Romanticizing the struggle*

The romanticized portrait of terrorism is another shared trait. This process is accomplished in various ways. First, it is done by romanticizing the terrorists themselves, now older men and women speaking on camera about their deeds – university activism, kidnappings, assassinations, assaults to barracks and precincts, and survival in prison. Their testimony is couched in emotional terms and carefully worded statements. Individual stories are generally prefaced by brief descriptions of their hopes and youthful dreams. Some use coded terms and shortcuts like “cárcel del pueblo”, “justicia popular”, or describe specific actions with peculiar wording, such as “recuperar”, euphemism for robbing, or “chupar”, the act of being illegally detained.

These interviews are visual illustrations of accounts that have already been published in memoirs, biographies and history books since the 1980s. But they have here a compelling immediacy, and it is presented as a romantic freedom fighter deeply flawed figures, such as the Catholic priest Carlos Mugica,

the writers Iván Roqué and Francisco “Paco” Urondo, and the filmmaker Raymundo Gleyzer.

These accounts oscillate between the poles of heroism and nostalgia. In some instances, at the hands of skilled editors assembling pithy testimonies from eye witnesses, the stories take the shape of an action film. Such is the suspenseful account of the botched prison escape in Rawson, Chubut province, in August 1972, when only a handful of terrorists succeeded in escaping to Allende’s Chile, and ultimately, reached Cuba for training and briefing. As remembered by those who participated in the planning, outside and inside this high-security prison in the barren Patagonia, the sequence unfolds as a prison escape film, thwarted by a minor but key misreading of signals.

When the documentaries talk about the dead –as in *Raymundo*, *Paco Urondo*, *Papá Iván*, *Los malditos caminos*, (H) *Historias cotidianas*, *Nietos, identidad y memoria* and *Our Disappeared*– they resort to interviews with family members (especially mothers, sisters, children and friends. They emphasize the caring human beings who became Robin Hood to right the social and political wrongs that surrounded them. In every case, the personal, the anecdotal prevails over a more encompassing storyline. A common narrative strategy – with huge emotional dividends – is the use of family photos and home movies to punctuate and illustrate the interviews. Their filmic impact cannot be overestimated. In every case this material packs a punch, especially in those films where the children of missing people show their open wounds on camera.

In general, interviews with family members are staged in cozy, intimate spaces, like living rooms, kitchens and leafy backyards. They often show shrine-like spaces where mementos are lovingly kept. These documentaries make the private pain public, and the use of close-ups is the preferred tool to capture emotions.

Musical scores bring exponential results, most notably the folk revolutionary songs that function like musical madeleines. “La Montonera”, written and sung by Spanish rebel icon Joan Manuel Serrat in *Cazadores de utopías* is one of the most effective examples.

If the guerrillas are emotionally romanticized via recollections, photos and home movies, a different but complementary strategy is utilized to mythologize the terrorist acts. It is illustrated by voiceover narrators over footage of *The Hour of the Furnaces* and other examples of militant cinema, including footage from the Cuban film archives – newsreels and agit prop. The effect here is primarily ideological – in the sense of Eisenstein’s expressive montage to elicit a given political response. This strategy functions also as a shortcut to establish a visual and ideological connection between Argentine terrorism and other Latin American counterparts. *Cazadores de utopías*, an exculpatory view of Montoneros terrorism, makes the link explicit from its opening sequence, which begins with a disclaimer: “The recuperation of memory cannot be dispassionate or impartial. To the 30,000 disappeared and to those who still believe that they can go through history with dignity”.

The declared political objective of leftwing terrorism was the implementation of “la Patria Socialista” (the Socialist Motherland), along the Cuban Marxist lines. Repeated as a mantra in the 1970s, it works as a mantra in these documentaries too. It is alluded to, but never explained or elaborated. Therefore, the terrorist project—seen as “utopian” in these films—of implementing the Cuban Revolution model in the Southern Cone – with “Che”’s Bolivian adventure its spearhead— is shrouded in silence. It is the elephant in the bazaar. No one witnesses *Gaviota blindadas*, *Montoneros, una historia*, *Los malditos caminos*, *Errepé*, *Cazadores de utopías*, *El Proceso*, *Trelew*, *4 de julio*, that talk about the “Patria Socialista” for which they were militarily defeated between 1975

and 1980, ever dwells on the meaning –and human cost– of these two words.

This decision not to elaborate on the terrorist ideology functions –I believe– as a conscious erasure of the historical record. What is not shown or examined cannot affect the spectator emotionally or intellectually. This is, in contrast, for example, with the technique of recounting torture sessions in *Cazadores de utopías* or *Raúl Sendic, Tupamaro* on which the reenactments and drawings create a visceral effect on the audience. On the other hand, the unwillingness to discuss the ideological armature sustaining terrorist actions deprives historical memory of a crucial explanatory fact.

Another strategy to mythologize guerrilla warfare, is the use of numbers –the magic figures are “thirty thousand missing people”, quoted matter-of-factly in *Our Disappeared* and *(H) Historicas Cotidianas*, and “five hundred missing children of missing people”, argued in *Nietos, Identidad y Memoria*, and also in *Our Disappeared*, the only English-language documentary of the group.

The historical record has proved these figures inaccurate. The latest correction has come from Graciela Fernández Mejjide’s memoir of working in human rights organizations – including the *Comisión Nacional de Desaparecidos* in 1984. In *La historia íntima de los derechos humanos en la Argentina*, the figure she gives is 9,000 missing people. Nicolás Márquez had previously examined the verified data from a variety of sources, including the Conadep and other records, and had reached a similar conclusion. On his investigation of missing children, the figure of confirmed cases is not the 500 proclaimed but never proved. *Botín de guerra, Nietos, identidad y memoria* and most recently *Our Disappeared* take 30,000 and 500 as facts.

c) *The demonization of the enemy*

The “setentista” narrative sees 1970s Argentina primarily as an ideological battlefield where a progressive leftwing vanguard takes up the cause of the oppressed masses against the twin evils of capitalism and imperialism. The use of violence is legitimized, and the dead are stepping stones to the “Patria Socialista”. The other side –the industrialists, the landowners, the Church hierarchy, the army– is the enemy. (Interestingly, the current president frames her administration quarrel against farmers and ranchers in a vintage “setentista” narrative).

The demonizing of the enemy –in its various incarnations, are all paradigmatically present in the militant cinema of the 70s– This is done by utilizing black and white archival footage of military and police functions, parades and events. The same materials are shown up in most films. A visual trope that becomes a cliché recurs in many of them: helmet-clad soldiers march in slow-motion to a soundtrack of menacing special effects, vaguely evoking Leni Riefenstahl’s goose-step boots. The enemy remains a cipher, behind moustaches and dark glasses. Clichés and caricatures have reduced the uniformed to cartoonish entities.

4 de julio, the massacre of San Patricio, presents a variation of the enemy as a cipher. The film reconstructs the killing of three priests and two seminarians in 1976; it is a gripping account of how these men of the cloth may have been murdered. The directors set out to explore the context of this senseless massacre, but the “setentista” narrative railroads the project by emphasizing the emotions wrapped in a shallow ideological interpretation. To explain the reaction of the stunned Church hierarchy, the filmmakers interview the journalist and former Montonero Horacio Verbitsky, who has an ax to grind against bishops and cardinals. Imagine a documentary on 9/11 voicing only the perpetrator Al Qaeda’s point of view.

For the record, not one of the documentaries interview military, policemen, academics or experts, to present a minimal counterpoint. The victims of terrorist violence –widows, orphans, bystanders– have an equally heart-breaking story to tell, through family, friends and witnesses. They are missing, however, in the “setentista” discourse.²

2. The Limits of Memory

A complementary approach is also rewarded in the study of shared traits among these twenty one documentaries: how the conventions of the documentary are utilized.

The films fall into two categories: a) chronicles of the 1970s – with its timeline extended before and after those years, depending on the subject; and b) the search of missing loved ones -parents or friends. In these cases, the quest for answers becomes the subject of the film.

It is also useful to take into account Bill Nichols’ observations about the types of documentaries, and see how they can be applied into the two groups. Nichols notes six modes of representation that function like sub-genres of the documentary film genre itself. He defines them as: poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive and performative. They “establish a loose framework of affiliation within which individuals may work; they set up conventions that a given film may adopt;

² See Nicolás Márquez, op.cit, and also *La mentira oficial, el setentismo como política de Estado* (Buenos Aires, n/a, 2006) for a redressing the historical record. Juan B. Yofre’s recent chronicles of the decade should also be consulted for his ample use of private and official archives, and the impartiality of his approach. “Fuimos todos”. *Cronología de un fracaso (1976-1983)* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2007); “Nadie fue”. *Crónica, documentos y testimonios de los últimos meses, días y horas de Isabel Perón en el poder* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2008); and *Volver a matar. Los archivos ocultos de la “Cámara del Terror” (1971-1973)* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2009).

and they provide specific expectations viewers anticipate having fulfilled”³

The chronicles correspond to the expository mode of Nichols’ terminology. In the seventeen films the materials are arranged chronologically and organized around interviewees, with the archival footage used as illustrations. Some have voiceover narrators providing a commentary; others are a compilation of interviews. Only one, Román Lejtman’s *El Proceso*, an hour long documentary made for television and integrating a series on contemporary Argentine history, features a voice-of-God narrator. The factual context is replaced by an unadulterated “setentista” discourse. Its companion piece, *La Guerra de las Malvinas (2004)*, also by the same director, follows a similar visual and narrative pattern.

The “Liberty Valance” factor (“when the legend becomes fact, print the legend”) is in full swing when violence is romanticized, terrorists mythologized, and ideological slants rewrite the facts. A revealing example is the use of the date March 24, 1976 –the military coup d’état– to mark the beginning of anti-terrorism warfare.⁴ The militant *Gaviotas blindadas (1973-1976)* presents the most extreme case of this distortion: the bloody assault of ERP to a military arsenal is described as an “intense love story”.⁵ An American counterpart would be a documentary

³ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001), p.99. The seventeen chronicles fit exactly in the expository mode, [that] “assembles fragments of the historical world into a more rhetorical or argumentative frame than an aesthetic or poetic one. It addresses the viewer directly, with titles or voices that propose a perspective advance an argument or recount history”. (p.105).

⁴ The democratically elected regime of María Estela Martínez de Perón, the vicepresident of president Perón who became president upon his death in July 1974, had signed two decrees ordering the armed forces to fight guerrilla insurgency, first in Tucumán province, later in the whole country.

⁵ In December 1975 the ERP led an assault to an army arsenal in Monte Chingolo, Buenos Aires province, suffering over 60 casualties. An ERP-related website posts articles and interviews about the event – examples of “setentista” discourse. See http://www.elortiba.org/mch.html#El_combate_de_Monte_Chingolo. In *Juicio a los 70. La historia que yo viví* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2009), Peronist intellectual and

“celebrating” Timothy McVeigh for bombing the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, killing 168 people, the deadliest act of terrorism before September 11th, 2001. Such a piece of propaganda can only come from the bizarre world of the rightwing nuts.

The indefinite article “una” in the title *Montoneros, una historia*; opens the possibility of an alternative version to “setentismo”. However, it makes the rank-and-file foot soldier Monica (no last name given) an emblematic representative of the dreamers, and directs the critique to the leadership. *Paco Urondo*, about a writer/terrorist, is one of the most sophisticated cases of “print the legend”: the filmmaker had at his disposal a wealth of archival materials, eloquent commentaries by family members and former terrorists, and an excellent editor. The result is the portrait of a dashing Robin Hood.

The last four documentaries constitute a compact group: *Papá Iván*, *Los rubios*, *M* and *Our Disappeared*. They record the search for missing fathers, mothers and friends, by filmmakers that are either their children —the first three— or a friend – Juan Mandelbaum, a US-based director since the late 1970s. The documentaries trace an open-ended quest for information and closure. The children of missing guerrilla, now young adults with a camera in hand and painful unanswered questions, want to understand why their parents chose the armed struggle over them. Their investigation is, on the one hand, a process of grieving, and on the other, an attempt to understand the 1970s from a subjective perspective. The filmmakers’ memory is selective, because it is purely personal, not historical. They fall in the participatory mode described by Nichols -first person narratives where the filmmaker, or his surrogate, interviews and interacts with the subjects.

politician Julio Bárbaro examines the question of violence and terrorism as a divide between guerrilla groups and those on the left, like himself, who chose to fight within the democratic system.

Archival film, home movies, family photos and mementos are used to advance in this search.

Papá Iván, a medium-length film directed by María Inés Roqué, the daughter of a Montonero killed in 1976, uses as a narrative linchpin a letter written by her father in 1972 explaining to his young children why he was becoming a terrorist. Inquisitive and angry, the daughter questions his decision while reconstructing the arc of Roqué's death. Working imaginatively with the conventions of the first person documentary, *Papá Iván* has been widely praised for its handling of form and content.

Albertina Carri's *Los rubios* reconstructs segments of her parents' life and death as montoneros by mixing genre conventions. This cinematographic self-reflexive hybrid documents the process of the director making a fictionalized account of her family life –the “blonds” of the title– with an actress playing her role, visiting places of her childhood, including the police precinct where the Carri were detained. Playing with Godard's experimental techniques, and creating a distancing effects à la Brecht, the one-of-a-kind *Los rubios* received wide critical acclaim in the international festival circuit and has been extensively written about.

In *M*, Nicolás Prividera wants to solve the puzzle of his mother's life. The title is steeped in film and political references, with a “rosebud” at the center of his quest; M can stand for Mother, Muerte, Montoneros, and even Fritz Lang's classic thriller. A first person narrative, with the director as a protagonist, the film has elements of the observational category proposed by Nichols, where the filmmaker is an observer, not a participant. In fact, many of the interviews secured by a persistent Prividera are fishing expeditions with unexpected and disturbing results. Interestingly, if anything can be inferred from the director's quest is that, in a nod to Lang, the demarcation between good and evil is at best blurry; memory, both personal and historical, is treacherous. What

remains, untainted, is the beautiful image of his mother frozen in celluloid.

Our *Disappeared/Nuestros desaparecidos* is the latest documentary available for this study to deal with the 1970s. The fact that the director Juan Mandelbaum lives and works in the United States shapes its form and content. It is an elegantly constructed, first person account of his search for the fate of missing friend that began in Google of all places. Propelling the quest is Mandelbaum's need to articulate an understanding of the 1970s, as one who rejected the terrorist model and left the country. But the director also has an audience in mind, Argentine and foreign, especially the young, whom he wants to help navigate the bloody 1970s from one side of the fence. The questions he asks are rhetorical, yet as someone who rejected the path of violence he lived to tell the story, thirty years later. This personal documentary opens and ends with a photo and a poem about a college sweetheart who had gone to the dark side. In purely cinematographic terms, the "setentista" narrative is encapsulated.

What do we remember? What can we remember? What do we want to remember? What should we remember? The question of memory and historical record is engaged tacitly or explicitly by the twenty one documentaries examined in this paper. In these films the responses given are slanted and incomplete. The whole memory –and I trust that such an enterprise is possible– remains a project to accomplish. *Sine ira et cum studio*⁶.

Filmography

Botín de guerra. Dir. David Blaustein. 2000. DVD. SBP (Argentina), 2006.

Cazadores de utopías. Dir. David Blaustein. 1996. DVD. SBP (Argentina), 2006.

⁶ Juan B. Yofre, "A manera de prólogo, aclaración obligada para el lector", in *Fuimos todos, cronología de un fracaso*, p.7.

Che, la eterna mirada. Dir. Edgardo Cabeza. 2005. DVD. SBP (Argentina), 2005.

Che, un argentino del siglo XX. Los años en Alta Gracia (1932-1943). Dir. Luis Altamira. 2001. DVD. Argentina, n/d.

4 de julio, la masacre de San Patricio. Dir. Juan Pablo Young and Patricio Zubizarreta. 2007. DVD. Argentina, n/d.

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M. Dir. Nicolás Prividera. 2008. DVD. 791 Cine (Argentina), 2008.

Los malditos caminos. Dir. Luis Barone. 2002. DVD. GLD (Argentina), 2003.

Montoneros, una historia. Dir. Andrés Di Tella. 1998. DVD. SBP (Argentina), 2006.

Nietos, identidad y memoria. Dir. Benjamín Ávila. 2004. DVD. SBP (Argentina), 2005.

Our Disappeared/Nuestros desaparecidos. Dir. Juan Mandelbaum. 2009. PBS Series: Independent Lens. Broadcast KCET (Los Angeles), September 2009.

Paco Urondo, la palabra justa. Dir. Daniel Desaloms. 2006. SBP (Argentina), 2006.

Papá Iván. Dir. María Inés Roqué. 2004. DVD. SBP (Argentina), 2005.

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Received : January 15, 2012

Accepted : April 9, 2012