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The Representation of the Last Dictatorship in Argentine Cinema

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Reclaiming the Narrative of a Generation,
The Representation of Argentina's Last Dictatorship Through Cinema

An Honors Thesis presented by
Hana Meany Kristensen

To Professor Luis González, Ph.D.
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
Honors in the Major Field

Connecticut College
New London, Connecticut
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Abstract

Over 453 films have been made focusing on the topic of the last dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983), otherwise known worldwide as the Dirty War. This time period is characterized by the vile human rights abuses committed by the military junta against those who opposed the government, leading to the disappearances of 30.000 people, many of whom left children behind. These children were often forced to grow up, giving up their childhood, due to their parents' militancy. In the national story of the dictatorship, these children's stories and experiences have often been forgotten. This thesis will investigate the portrayal of the last Argentine dictatorship through cinema, from the perspective of children who grew up during the dictatorship, often children of the disappeared. These films often focus on the recreation of identity, their disappeared parents, and the loss of childhood innocence. Through fiction and documentary film, these filmmakers are able to use a self-reflexive process to recreate their identity and self-represent their own stories, rather than fitting into the narratives forced upon them.

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“Llorar aun sin quererlo. No llorar, aunque quisiéramos. No poder detenerse en la búsqueda frenética por la identidad. Algunas imágenes lejanas, una lucha sórdida, una perdida total del sentido. Año 1976, la dictadura militar se instaura en Argentina y con ella el terrorismo de estado. Yo tenía 5 años. Intento recomponer minuciosamente algunas piezas del pasado. Es una cuestión de tiempo estoy sin identidad.”

Gabriela Golder, *En memoria de los pájaros* (2001)¹

Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: A Brief History of Argentina from 1930-1983	8
20th Century: An Era of Coup D'état's and the Rise of Peronism	8
The Military Dictatorship of 1976-1983: Conflicting Narratives	12
The Trend of the Dictatorship within the Argentine Film Industry	15
Chapter 2: The Memory of Childhood During the Dictatorship	20
The Gateway to an Era of Post-dictatorship Cinema: <i>La historia oficial</i>	23
The Nonsensical World of Childhood Memories: <i>ALUAP</i>	29
Escaping the Grasp of the Dictatorship through Instances of Normalcy: <i>Kamchatka</i>	36
Ghosts of the Absent Parent: <i>Veo veo</i>	42
The Omnipresent Threats of the Dictatorship: <i>El premio</i>	49
Forced Militancy of the Child: <i>Infancia clandestina</i>	56
Conclusion	60
Chapter 3: The Restoration of Identity and Justice	61
The Juxtaposition of Childhood and Terror: <i>En memoria de los pájaros</i>	65
H.I.J.O.S. and their Everyday Stories: <i>(H) Historias cotidianas</i>	71
The use of Reenactment in Reclaiming Identity: <i>Los Rubios</i>	75
Confronting the Militancy of Parents: <i>Encontrando a Víctor</i>	83
Creating a New Identity: <i>M</i>	88
Conclusion	93
Conclusion: The Necessary Inclusion of Childhood Narratives	94
Notes	98
Works Cited	100

Introduction

Can one claim reparations for the ruining of one's childhood and the fragmentation of personal identity? The conversation surrounding the creation of justice for the people who survived past state atrocities is often one that is avoided and brought to a halt. It is difficult to identify the hardships and agony that have been faced by the children of the disappeared since the last dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983).² The last Argentine dictatorship is often referred to internationally as the Dirty War. The Dirty War was a period of heightened state violence, in which opposition to the government was controlled through detention centers and the forced disappearance of over 30,000 people. Having experienced the loss of a parent, often at a young age, these children's lives were tainted by the shadow of their parents' memory. Without being able to fully conjure a memory of their parents, their memories are disintegrated, and their identities are scattered. Their memory is often solely informed through the glorifying stories about their parents told by family members and friends, as well as the Argentine state's complete negation of their parents' deaths using tactics such as officially referring to their parents as *los desaparecidos* [the disappeared] framing their parents' fate in an open-ended state. These children often referred to as *hijos*,³ who are now adults, are often classified in a victimized light excluding their own personal histories from the national narrative. Due to the lack of being included in the narrative surrounding their own lives, these children have taken to other methods of expression, one of these being film. This thesis will be analyzing the representation of the last dictatorship in Argentine cinema through films that employ the child's gaze, and more generally, the perspective of the children of the disappeared.

To fully contextualize the meaning of these films within Argentine history and society, it is important to have knowledge of the main historical events leading up to the dictatorship as well

as how they inform the subject of these dictatorship films. The first chapter is therefore divided into three parts. The first section, *20th Century: An Era of Coup D'état's and the Rise of Peronism*, serves as a way to exemplify exactly how tumultuous Argentina's history has been leading up to the last dictatorship. This part highlights the constant struggle between the political left and right which led to a total of six coup d'état's and much instability, informing the reader of the political context leading up to the last dictatorship. The second section, *The Military Dictatorship of 1976-1983: Conflicting Narratives*, details the struggle between the political left, often made up of members of the Montoneros⁴ and the conservative military junta.⁵ This section discusses the horrific actions of state violence, and the variety of narratives that come into play when examining this period of heightened state violence. Finally, the third section, *The Trend of the Dictatorship within the Argentine Film Industry*, focuses on the mass production of films centralized on the dictatorship. It looks into the common traits and styles within this genre of dictatorship films, especially within those made by children of the disappeared.

The second and third chapters of this thesis, focus on the films used for the analysis of the representation of the last dictatorship within Argentine cinema. The second chapter focuses on 5 fiction films that look into the topic from the child's gaze. These films are *ALUAP* (Hernán Belón and Tatiana Mereñuk, 1997), *Kamchatka* (Marcelo Piñeyro, 2002), *Veo veo [I Spy]* (Benjamín Ávila, 2007), *El premio [The Prize]* (Paula Markovitch, 2011) and *Infancia clandestina [Clandestine Childhood]* (Benjamín Ávila, 2012). All the main characters are under the age of 12-13 years old. These films are often based off of the personal experiences of the filmmakers and serve as an exemplary way to explore the topic from the perspective of a child growing up during the dictatorship. Each film is analyzed in depth through the use of scholarly work in combination with historical knowledge of the time period. The third chapter focuses on documentary films.

These films are *En memoria de los pájaros* [In Memory of the Birds] (Gabriela Golder, 2000) directed by Gabriela Golder, *(H) Historias Cotidianas* [Everyday Stories] (Andres Habegger, 2000), *Los Rubios* [The Blonds] (Albertina Carri, 2003), *Encontrando a Víctor* [Finding Victor] (Natalia Bruschtein, 2004), and *M* (Nicolás Prividera, 2007). These films are all directed by children of the disappeared. They investigate the fate of their parents as well as ponder the themes such as identity formation and personal memories. Finally, this thesis aims to leave the reader with the distinct tools to interpret the sub-genre of films that focus on the topic of the dictatorship from the perspective of the children of the disappeared, as well as understand the importance of the representation of the narratives on the national stage.

Chapter 1: A Brief History of Argentina from 1930-1983

20th Century: An Era of Coup D'état's and the Rise of Peronism

Argentina has had a tumultuous history clearly reflected throughout that national cultural production, especially within film. It is important to understand the main historical events in Argentina and trends throughout history, to appreciate why films focusing on the dictatorship are an important subject to explore. Since the early 1900s, Argentina has survived six military coup d'états, with the last most infamous one taking place between the years 1976 and 1983. Throughout this time of constant shifts between authoritarian and democratic rule, Juan Domingo Perón played a central role, serving as president for three terms throughout this period. Perón was known for his focus on welfare through his support for unionized workers and the implementation of government monetary support programs. Perón essentially became the posterchild for the leftist populist movement within Argentina that began to go by the name Peronism. The history of Argentina in

the 20th century is colored by the conflict between the left-wing Peronism and military power that was often conservative.

The first coup d'état begins with the presidency of Hipólito Yrigoyen who was elected as president in 1916. Yrigoyen, a radical leader, countered the country's past conservative governmental history by promoting the inclusion of the entire society (Ruffini). He remained in power until September 6th, 1930, marking the first coup d'état in Argentine history (Romero, 57). This coup d'état was led by José Uriburu and started the Infamous Decade which was characterized by political fraud, corruption and persecution of the opposition, meanwhile the economy was suffering. The seizing of power by Uriburu also marked the beginning of a series of coup d'états that would follow thereafter (Romero, 59). The Infamous Decade ended with the next military coup in 1943. This marks the first instance in which the political sphere is introduced to Juan Perón who is a member of the military government. Perón was elected to serve as president in 1946, winning based off of the public's reaction to the economic failures and changes to industry that had been carried out by the previous military government (Lewis, 99). The infamous decade had brought upon the suffering of many. Perón promised to focus on the working class and lower classes, this rhetoric promoted the emergence of the Peronist movements. Perón remained president from 1946-1953. Though still looked upon as a hero by many today, Perón's government was quite authoritarian known to have imprisoned and tortured opposition to the government. In 1955, Perón was overthrown in a coup d'état organized by the navy who was supported by the Catholic church. This incident pushed Perón to seek exile in Spain (Darity).

In 1966 another coup d'état ensued, as a result of worker and student unrest due to the constant oppression of Peronist values. It was during this time that the first instances of division within Peronism began to show. Argentina was facing increasing instability, economic unrest and

societal unrest. While Perón was in exile the narrative of Peronism began to evolve immensely, leading to different factions within Peronism rise. Peronism was applicable to many political opinions. During the 1960s-1970s there were revolutions throughout Latin America, Che Guevara combined with Perón served as perfect inspirations for the group that later became known as the Montoneros. These revolutionary tendencies in Latin America were combining Marxism with other forms of nationalism and Third World Catholicism. The groups of leftist revolutionaries within Argentina interpreted the society in a variety of ways, splitting the world into separate camps, friends and enemies.

During the beginning of the revolutions throughout Latin America, the first guerrilla organizations emerged inspired by the Cuban experience. Different groups were emerging both among the general political left and within Peronism. Finally, in the 1970s the two main organizations which would have the greatest role to play before and during the dictatorship were the *Montoneros*, who had roots in Catholicism and nationalism with an increased focus on *Peronism* and *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* a Trotskyist group which supported the political and economic principles of Leon Trotsky (Romero, 189). These groups increasingly became violent creating fear among the ruling powers. The Montoneros had a variety of non-violent acts as well, they would often attempt to redistribute government property and distribute it among the poor people in the manner of Robin Hood. The actions by the Montoneros often aimed to place themselves as the center of social conflicts. The Montoneros carried out kidnappings and the assassinations of high-ranking government and military officials. Militancy began to be characterized by sacrifice and heroism, fighting to the very end for their comrades. The Montoneros focused their efforts exclusively on direct action and did not relate the history of their organization back to certain previous traditions or political loyalties. This allowed them to become

a full-blown military-guerilla operation. While Perón was in exile, the Montoneros mobilized youth as well as populations in lower-class neighborhoods, slums and universities. The mobilization of these groups, especially the Montoneros, was typically associated with Perón (Romero, 211).

Perón returned in 1973 from 18 years of exile. He was banned from running in the election, although Héctor Cámpora a supporter of Perón was elected as president. The election of Cámpora allowed Perón to return to Argentina (Romero, 196). When he returned at the airport, Montoneros and Peronist youth members were waiting to greet him at Ezeiza airport. Snipers quickly opened fire on the large crowd of people, essentially trapping Perón's supporters in what is now referred to as the Ezeiza massacre (Fonte, 182-185). The return of Perón highlighted increased polarization amongst groups who preached Peronist ideals, leading to a grim confrontation between organizations at Perón's return speech in 1973. In 1974, new elections were held, in which Perón and his wife Isabel ran together, as president and vice president, gaining 67% of the votes. Perón passed away later that year on July 1st, leaving Isabel as president (Romero, 200-203). Due to the growing conflict between the variety of factions among the Peronist party, as well as the loss of an icon within Argentine politics, a time of instability ensued. Though Isabel remained in office until ousted by a military coup in 1976, these three years were characterized with Isabel's attempts to minimize leftist activism and increase state presence within the economy. Those who had previously voted for Perón had a growing dissatisfaction with Isabel. In the beginning of her rule she was offered much sympathy, however, her actions after becoming president alienated voters. Isabel's policies were completely the opposite of what Perón had laid out his final years (Romero, 208). As dissatisfaction grew, Isabel's power grew weaker, as society continuously grew rebellious. Before Perón had been reelected, the Montoneros began attempting to assume positions

of power within the state. After Perón was reelected, these positions held by Montoneros were quickly lost. After Perón's death the campaign to keep the Peronist left out of power and government continued. The Montoneros were left with a sour taste, leading to their underground rebellion. The revolutionary factions of Peronism, especially the Montoneros, began their struggle against right wing groups which surrounded Peron. The Montoneros were increasingly becoming an underground military, carrying out assassinations and threats, especially eliminating specific visible figures within the power structure of Peron's government. This increased militancy had translated into the years of Isabel, leading to the instability that allowed for the power vacuum in which the last military coup and period of the most brutal dictatorship, sometimes referred to as a genocide, ensued.

The Military Dictatorship of 1976-1983: Conflicting Narratives

The Dirty War, also known as The National Reorganization Process, was the last military dictatorship in Argentina from 1976-1983. The key to understanding the context of the Dirty War is Peronism, named after the late president Juan Domingo Perón (1895-1974). The conflict was between the right-wing military dictatorship and the left, made up of Peronists. It was a time of heightened state violence and is most known throughout the world for its human rights violations, especially 30.000 people who were disappeared by the military junta during this period of Argentine history. The military group led by Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla and Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera initially overthrew president Isabel Perón (widower of the former president Juan Perón) on the 24th of March in 1976. The United States provided various modes of support to military juntas that came to power in Latin America during the Cold War as part of their foreign policy (Zanchetta, 1088). These military officials often received training on harsh counterinsurgency techniques at the United States Army School of the Americas. This military

group that overthrew president Isabel Perón had been trained mostly by the CIA (Argentina Declassification Project - The 'Dirty War'). The CIA had been using this strategy throughout the entirety of Latin America, as a part of Operation Condor which was a Cold War intelligence alliance to support the repressive tactics of the military regimes throughout South America. This was part of the United States efforts in combating communism during the Cold War. The idea of anything that resembled communism in the American continents was seen as a threat and immediately shut down. In 2019 official CIA documents detailing the time of the Argentine dictatorship were released by the United States which confirmed previous stipulations that the United States had been involved in these atrocities committed by the military dictatorship. These documents were released due to a deal made during the final months of the Obama administration (Argentina Declassification Project - The 'Dirty War'). These documents contained a lot of new information, including the confirmation that many people who disappeared during that period were assassinated at the hands of the state. Bringing the number people who were "disappeared" by the military junta to 30.000. However, some sources claim that these numbers are not accurate and it is indeed much higher. During the early years of the return to democracy, the official number was around 9000, which clearly signifies a discrepancy between numbers which added to the distrust of these official numbers within Argentine society. The disappeared were referred to within Argentine society as "los desaparecidos". To this day, the word *desaparecido* will have a connotation of the memory of the military dictatorship. This figure of the *desaparecido* became known as a term used by the state to describe the people that were targeted and killed during the dictatorship. Desaparecido means disappeared or missing person and gave the military and state the ability to not acknowledge these deaths at the hand of the military junta and push a narrative of denial (Benegas, 22). Though sites of memory have since been created for the disappeared, the

use of the word continues to allow the space for the denial of the atrocities committed by the military.

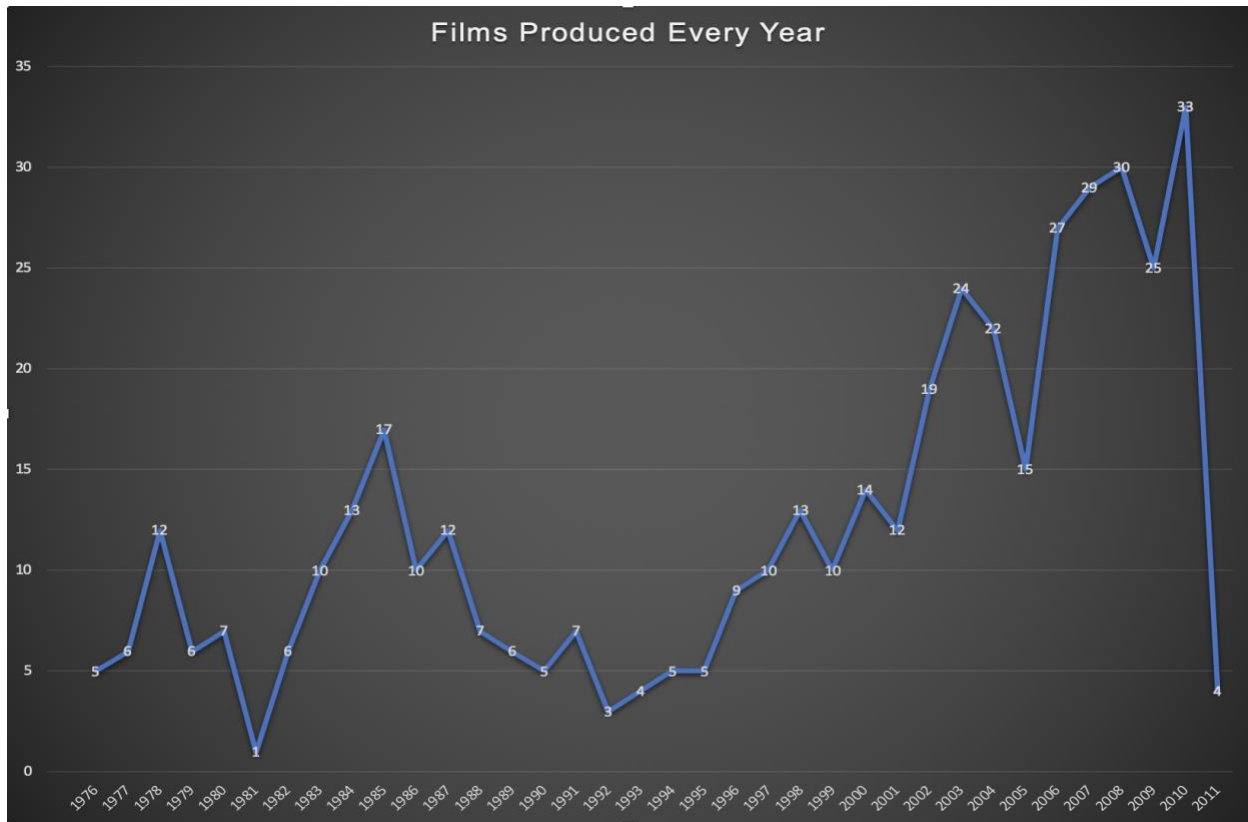
The military officially seized power in 1976, the violence and threat towards the Montoneros had been existent since 1974, as stated in the film *Infancia clandestina* (Benjamín Ávila, 2012). Those who were “disappeared” by the military junta were often opponents to the government and innocent victims. They were often social workers, militants, trade unionists or people who we would traditionally call intellectuals in academia such as; writers, filmmakers, journalists, artists, academics, including anyone who was even the slightest suspected to be a left-wing activist or associated with one. Many people, both opponents to the government and innocent people who were not politically active, were kidnapped in the middle of the night and taken to detention and torture centers and more often than not killed. An extremely important factor to take into account, is that those who disappeared were often young. It has been estimated that most of the disappeared were around 18-35 years old. High school students who were active in leftist activities were targeted as well as parents and family of those who disappeared. Many of the people who were taken into captivity had young children and there were also many women who were pregnant. This led to more than 500 children were born while their mother was in captivity, meaning they were born in detention and torture centers. These thousands of disappearances have left a deep scar on an entire population, not to mention the generation of children who was marked by the absence of their parents as well as the sheer violence they were able to remember from that time. Many of the children who were infants when their parents were taken or born into captivity, were illegally adopted off to military families who were the exact people that were inflicting the violence and killing their parents. There was no documentation of these adoptions’ leavings no way for children who grew up in these families to know that they were adopted and originally

children of militants. These children were illegally stolen by the military (Lazzara, 321). The children who were illegally stolen and their peers had no idea if they had grown up in a military family without knowing their identity or if they simply had grown up in the entirely correct family.⁶ In addition to the 500 children who were essentially stolen by the military, there were multiple children who were young when their parents were taken. Though not adopted off into military families, these children were often raised by their grandparents or family members. Throughout their childhood many of the children of the disappeared were told about their parents in a light that created an image of a national hero, permanently iconizing them. The narratives about their parents were placed upon them, shaping their identities not only through the experiences of their parents as a legacy, but also through the creation of their identity based on a person who was not present during most of their life. Their identities are often connected to a distant hazy memory or no memory of their parents at all.

The Trend of the Dictatorship within the Argentine Film Industry

This tumultuous period within Argentine history has inspired many film depictions. Hundreds of films have been made with the dictatorship as the main focus, made throughout the years before and after the return to democracy in 1983 both nationally and internationally. The earliest most well-known film *La historia oficial* (1985) began production just one year after the return to democracy. There is a clear difference in the way the films depict the Dirty War in the 1980's compared to after 2000's and even 2010's. The earlier films avoid the depiction of violence, while many of the later films directly show it and show the brutality of the time period. "Dirty War Films" have often used the theme of everyday life and the family as motifs, because these families' lives have forever been changed no matter which side of the dictatorship they are on. Over 453 films have been made about the last dictatorship, ranging from fiction, to documentaries, short

films to full length feature films. This information was found through an organization by the name of *Memoria Abierta* [Open Memory],⁷ that has a specific website dedicated to a database categorizing *La dictadura en el cine* [The Dictatorship in Film]. This database has catalogued almost every film that touches on the dictatorship since the beginning of the dictatorship in 1976 up until the year 2010, with a few films from 2011. The database, though it doesn't necessarily include every single movie, serves as a way to understand the presence of the genre of Dirty War films within the Argentine film industry. In the chart below, it is possible to visualize the sheer amount of films that have been made with the dictatorship as a focus. The includes all the films listed on the database *Memoria Abierta*, to give a visualization of the production of films every year on this subject.⁸ Below, it is possible to see a clear spike in films since the late 1990's. From the graph, one can gather that the largest number of films touching on the dictatorship were produced in 2001-2011, the most populous year being 2010 with 33 films released with the dictatorship as a main theme. The stories of *hijos* began to have a presence within the cultural sphere for the first time in the end of the 1990's due to the children of the disappeared being of age to produced films (Souto, 195). In the 2000s in general, there was a wave of films from the Southern Cone countries,⁹ which used middle-class child protagonists to look back on the trauma of the recent past.



Graph made from number of films produced each year, categorized in a catalog of films by the name of *La dictadura en el cine* by *Memoria Abierta*

The database *La Dictadura en el cine* [The Dictatorship in Film], by *Memoria Abierta* [Open Memory] includes information such as who the directors are, the production companies, where the film can be found, what year the film was made, and how it fits into a variety of categories created by this organization. Some of the categories included, *in favor of the regime, the search for justice and the truth, the dictatorship in the classroom, mothers and fathers*, etc. As an inspirational guideline, this thesis has used films from the themes; *the generation of the hijos, the gaze of the children, mothers and fathers, and stolen children*, while also using films that were not included in the database.

With the information presented in the previous pages detailing a brief history of Argentina as well as the data and table regarding the amount of films about the dictatorship of 1976-1983, it can be stipulated that the infants who were born in captivity during the military dictatorship would

have been around 27-34 years old in 2010, while the children who saw their parents taken away would have roughly been in their late thirties, early 40's. My hypothesis is that the children of the disappeared and their peers are the ones who are making these films. The generation of children that was scarred by the dictatorship. These are individuals who experienced the years of repression as children and began depicting the dictatorship years through the eyes of the child once they reached adulthood. They are also individuals who were too young to remember the years of repression but are currently dealing with the effects of the dictatorship on their identity and place within the world as well as their memories. Often in the case of the children of the disappeared, militancy was turned into a private lifestyle. Rather than a collective action, militancy entered the personal home sphere (Inés Garibotto, 264). The child is often portrayed as part of the militancy used to highlight the risks that come with militant action. Luz Souto, details in her article "*Los niños subversivos y la inter memoria*", that the cultural production of the children of the disappeared emphasize the mistrust and lack of recognition, as well as the weight of being a child during a curtailed revolution. Their works reflect the absurdity and horror that comes with growing up during the dictatorship and the knowledge that their parents were being murdered, kidnapped and disappeared. Souto states, that the effect of the disappearances has spread from the past to the future as they have impacted the following generations who were old enough to experience the loss. The inability to mourn disappearance and the lack of closure has become a characterization of this generation, as they have become the transmitters of memory in the flesh (Souto, 191). The memory and identity that these children build is not only linked to their disappeared parents, but also their marking as child-victims. Souto's intermemory theory suggests that these children's films cannot be considered solely on the basis of post-memory but must be seen as a production of intermemory. Through Souto's text, it is possible to define the concept of intermemory as a

gradual and staggered reconstruction of events that directly affects those who state it, in this case, the children who state their memory for the purpose of cultural production.

The memories of the *hijos* and their identities have been impacted throughout the years, due to the reexamination of these memories during new political contexts throughout their life as they gain more maturity as well as knowledge of the dictatorship. The constant rekindling of their past, through recent changes in the government's stance, shifts in memory policies, the halting of justice trials and the increasing presence of human rights organizations, adds to the shifts and changes within their memories. These shifts are aided by the clash of their personal memory as well as the collective memory of their family and the greater nation. Their parents and themselves have entered a greater category of victims within society, whether it is something they wish to use to identify themselves or not, these children are involuntarily looked upon as children of the disappeared. The filmmakers approach the topic from the perspective of the victim and investigate the actions of the past and present with that lens. Within the reproduction of these memories through film, the influence of the constant shifts and changes are clear, creating a memory of confusion combining nightmarish and fantastical imagery in some. Other films have a clear focus on certain aspects of their memories, heightening certain parts of their stories for the viewer. The intermemory production of these children, highlights the need to build a personal identity from a collage of personal memories as well as collective memory, attempting to manage the absence of their parents while recovering their parents identity and memory. Their memories are often a "reality woven from fictions" (Piglia, 11), which is clear especially in the fiction films that combine traits from fairytales and fantasy stories with their childhood memories, as well as the use of various sounds and colors to jump back and forth between a nightmarish world to a dreamlike world. Events in childhood that these directors hold onto are key to their memories, such as

birthdays, first loves and school contests. These key childhood events end up combining with the horrific narrative of their parents and their own fates. These cultural reproductions are the children of the disappeared own accounts of their childhood. Through their production they are able to reclaim their narratives from the human rights organizations and the narrative created by the military junta and the following governments. These personal stories that fit into a greater narrative, are present across a variety of mediums such as short and feature length films both fiction and documentary, television soap operas, as well as art installations.

The government still hasn't done much to deal with the horrific history, there have been attempts to create plaques and sights of memory with educational museums such as ESMA.¹⁰ ESMA is a former Clandestine Detention, Torture and Extermination Center. About 5000 of those who were disappeared when through ESMA where many of them were dropped alive into the sea on what is referred to as death flights.¹¹ In addition to ESMA, the government has added other sites of memory, but there have been no official apologies. The justice system and the trials of those who were involved with the military's atrocities have been inconsistent, depending on the agenda of the elected president and the party in power.

Chapter 2: The Memory of Childhood During the Dictatorship

The directors of *Kamchatka* (Marcelo Piñeyro, 2002), *El premio* (Paula Markovitch, 2011), *Infancia clandestina* (Benjamín Ávila, 2012), and two short films; *ALUAP* (Hernán Belón and Tatiana Mereñuk, 1997) and *Veo veo* (Benjamín Ávila, 2007), employ cinematic factors such as music and symbolism to highlight various aspects of the Dirty War and the impact it had on families, especially children. The films use families and children as central focal points in their stories often unified by their focus on family life and the disruption of everyday life and routines, due to factors that are out of their own control, such as the involvement of their loved ones in the

political situation of Argentina. The main characters lose their stability and sense of identity due to their family's actions during the Dirty War. Though there are plenty of other films that explore this topic through the adult children of the disappeared such as *Buenos Aires viceversa* (Alejandro Agresti, 1996), *Schafhaus, casa de ovejas* (Alberto Masliah, 2011), and *El olvido* (Fermín Rivera, 2013). For the purpose of this topic and the goal of this thesis, I found that it was important to focus on the films with children as the subjects, especially because many of the filmmakers are in a sense telling the story of their childhood experience through film. The filmmakers recall these traumatic and confusing memories in an attempt to communicate with the viewers and the greater Argentine public about their own personal experience, an experience that mirrors many children's lives during the Dirty War. They are advocating for themselves now that they have the power and tools that they previously did not possess as children. This group of children who was forgotten, the most marked by the period of the Dirty War, is now able to communicate their hardships and trauma. *Kamchatka*, was directed by Marcelo Piñeyro, who was forced into exile because he was a politically active film student during the dictatorship, whereas the screenwriter was fourteen at the time of the military coup d'état. *El Premio* is an autobiographical film by Paula Markovitch that takes place in locations of her childhood in the La Plata region, to north of Buenos Aires. *Infancia clandestina* is based on the director, Benjamín Ávila's own early life. *Veo veo* is a short film, also by Benjamín Ávila, focusing on a subject who is a bit younger than the boy featured in *Infancia clandestina*, and though the makeup of the family dynamics are a bit different, both boys are named Juan. Finally, *ALUAP*, is one of the earlier films with a child as the main character. Though a short film, the directors attempted to recover the child's gaze regarding what had happened during the time period of the dictatorship. This short film was one of the first productions in this new generation of filmmakers who have attempted to communicate and explain how life

was growing up during the dictatorship. There are many trends and commonalities among these films. In the following paragraph, these exact trends which are common within the fiction films regarding the Dirty War from the child's gaze will be investigated in correlation with the historical period in which they take place.

In the following section, I will focus on what I claim are the key factors of Dirty War fiction films from the child's gaze:

1. The film taking place during the dictatorship
2. The focus on the disruption of family and everyday life
3. The focus on documents of identification as well as clandestine books and the destruction of these
4. The symbolic presence of the military dictatorship through images of flags or the national anthem

All the films chosen in this section take place during the dictatorship. Many of the films focus on the hardships and psychological toll that their parents' militancy and the threat of the government had on the children. They all focus on the effect of the dictatorship on the children, from the child's perspective. Tension and stress are key in these films. The impact of the dictatorship is viewed directly in the family life. The parents are often dealing with immense amounts of stress, often portrayed as being able to easily get mad. The children provoke and the parents fight. There are many scenes that focus on the burning and destroying of photographs, documents and identification papers, key components to how we as people construct our identities. The children often have to deal with the upheaval of everyday life, having to move and start at a new school. They are forced to adapt to change while dealing with the constant terror of the government catching their family. In many of the depictions, it is clear that the children understand

the feeling of danger, and long for normalcy while attempting to continue with their daily lives. There are many physical indications of stress that the directors portray among the children, such as wetting the bed, temper tantrums and defying parents' desires and orders. They are working through their traumas using film. In addition, the main children in these films are all forced to become adults and grow up due to their parent's militancy. The parents place an immense amount of trust and pressure on their children. For example, in both *Kamchatka* and *Infancia clandestina*, the parents tell the older child how to take care of their younger sibling if someone comes shooting or looking for them. In addition, in most of the films the children are taught to lie about their identity, their parents stress the importance of hiding who they truly are as a matter of life and death. There is often a clear nostalgic grasp on the concept of birthdays within these films, especially in *Infancia clandestina* and *ALUAP*, the birthday of these children is a central event. The children are also often portrayed as going against any type of nationalism related to the military government, like the raising of the flag or singing the national anthem, which were tools that were often used to enforce nationalism and encourage national pride and obedience among the population. In all the films, both using adults and children as the main characters, filmmakers are able to ponder and discuss the theme of identity through their work. Through these narratives, the filmmakers are able to reclaim the past as part of their history. They aren't retelling the heroic efforts by their militant parents or pushing the agenda of the state narrative, they are bringing forth a memory that hadn't previously been visible within society, namely that of the children of the disappeared.

The Gateway to an Era of Post-dictatorship Cinema: *La historia oficial*

It is not possible to discuss the topic of Argentine Dictatorship Cinema without mentioning the Academy Award-winning *La historia oficial* [The Official Story]. Though it is much different

than the films that will mainly be used, because its main character is an upper-class woman who is married to an ex-military officer and the film focuses on her journey realizing her child might be one of the children of the disappeared. It is essential to understand how this film opened the gateway to this topic, in addition, it is important to include it to juxtapose it with the films and stories told from the child's gaze. Set in the early 1980's, *La historia oficial* depicts Argentina after the loss of the Falklands War and the end of the Dirty War. The film focuses on an upper-class Argentine family with an adopted daughter and a husband with a military past. The film was directed by Luiz Puenzo and released in 1985, a year after the end of the Dirty War and military dictatorship while Argentina was still recovering. During this period, there was finally freedom to create content again. Puenzo, much like many other directors, had been restricted from creating content that questioned the military dictatorship in any way (Darnton). In addition to this, Norma Aleandro who played Alicia (the main character) had been in exile for five years because of her statements about the military dictatorship that were considered controversial. During the transition back to democracy, the production of film was encouraged by the state and supported through private sources of funding, this film is a result of these efforts to rid the society of the stigma surrounding societal commentary (Falicov, 127). Unlike the other films, this focuses on the upper class of Buenos Aires. It directly shows how the upper-class businessmen, military and the United States were all involved in the outcome of the conflict, and that each were involved for its own reasons, but the common reason was to combat left wing politics and gain power both politically and monetarily. The director tries to highlight the corruption of the governmental system in Argentina both during the war and after. This film combines the historic period with the narrative, emphasizing the need to understand the history of Argentina to analyze and understand these films. Gaby's illegal adoption nods to the hidden actions during the military dictatorship. The

connections with Gaby's father (a former member of the military) and interests of US corporations emphasize the economic reasons behind the US's support for the coup d'état. Finally, the naivety of Gaby's adoptive mother Alicia highlights the general mindset of the population during that time directly following the dictatorship.

In terms of cinematic aspects, Puenzo uses symbolism as his main tool. Puenzo chose to tell the story through the perspective of an upper middle-class family from Buenos Aires, focusing on the mother Alicia. The director uses the character of Alicia to bring the viewer along as she slowly realizes the truth about the period of the military dictatorship and the truth of the roles everyone around her played during the war. Her slow realization leads her to discover that her own daughter may be a child of a woman that was kidnapped during the Dirty War. This personal realization quickly makes her conflicted regarding the morality of her own role and coming to terms with her own actions, which become the main focus of the film. The director uses Alicia as a tactic to symbolize the Argentinians who were in denial of the Dirty War. Throughout the film the viewer gets a sense that she goes by the book and doesn't question anything, which reflects the unwillingness to acknowledge the military's actions because she was in disbelief of the truth. The choice of telling the film through a character of the upper middle-class could be understood as a way to appeal to a "middle-class universalized audience" (Falicov, 128). The national anthem that plays at the beginning can be understood in a more political aspect in the movie. The director is trying to depict that playing the national anthem before the start of the school day was a typical practice during the time. This reflects the government's quest to try to instill a certain feeling of nationalism in the people of Argentina, especially in the youth, during a time in which Argentina was struggling. The government was trying to gain back the trust of the citizens.

Alicia is a history teacher, and at the beginning of the film she tells her class that: “a nation must have its history, because history is the memory of its people and no people can survive without memory”. This is quite ironic, due to the fact that Alicia is oblivious to the true history of Argentina. Her students contradict her by saying that history is written by the winners, which plays into the fact that Alicia is oblivious to the history of her country, and has no concept of reality because she assumes that what was written is correct, but it is often just written by the winners, as her students say. The main plot focuses on Alicia's realization that her adopted child is probably the child of “disappeared parents” (Falicov, 129). In addition to this, Alicia symbolizes the bourgeois guilt commented on by her colleague from work (Falicov, 131). Children have a certain role in *La historia oficial*. There are various scenes including children contrasting an idea of violence. They are used to symbolize the opposing positions during the Dirty War. For example, at Gabi's birthday party a magician entertains Gabi's birthday party guests by impaling a dove with a fake needle. Some of the children cheer him on with toy guns while the other kids scream and are horrified. This can be paralleled with the torture scenes that are mentioned in the movie (Taylor).

The most important child in the film is Gabi (Roberto and Alicia's adopted daughter). She symbolizes *the disappeared* and those who were born in captivity. There is also a certain nursery song, “En el pais de Nomeacuerdo” [In the country of I don't remember] which Gabi sings that has a significant purpose within the film. The viewer hears it for the first time in the beginning of the film, and it later turns into the instrumental piece of music that repeats itself throughout the movie. Played at the beginning and end of the film, the song talks about a land of “I don't remember”. Its lyrics state “I take three steps and I am lost,” which symbolizes that Alicia didn't quite know what she got herself into when she started investigating. It also says, “One step this

way, I wonder if I may, one step over there, oh what a big scare,” this describes how she had to look into Gabi’s past in secret. The opposition she met from her husband, ended up scaring her, because she realized her worst possible fear was true. Later, when Alicia is remembering childhood memories of her own abandonment, Gaby’s song is sung again, connecting the two. In addition, this song sung by Gaby can be considered a way to connect it to the society’s blindness during the military dictatorship. The leitmotifs created throughout the soundtrack in the film, especially through the song “En el país de Nomeacuerdo”, emphasize the recurrent themes of Gabi’s history as well as the ignorance of the general Argentine society. The role of Gabi is extremely important to the film, she encompasses all the people that were negatively affected by the Dirty War. Many scenes in which Gabi is present represent various actions of the military dictatorship. For example, when Roberto buys a life-sized baby-doll, one could compare that to Alicia and Roberto “buying” Gabi (Taylor). Alicia realization that her daughter could possibly have been adopted illegally through the resources and power her husband had through the military, destroys the core of her character and increases tension within her family, changing her and her family’s reality forever.

La historia oficial has often been criticized as a rewriting of history through cultural production. Since the release of the film in 1985, it has been the leading artistic representation of the dictatorship. The film, not focusing on the oppressed, but the perspective of the oppressor, seems in a sense to favor the perspective of the military government, as it leaves out key information regarding the atrocities during the dictatorship and victimizes the wife of a high ranking military officer who benefitted from the dictatorship. In a sense, this film could be seen as a way in which other narratives within history are erased, especially due to the popularity both nationally and internationally that this story gained. In regard to cultural production on certain subjects, film can often be utilized as a way to shape collective memory. In this sense, *La historia*

oficial, lacks the representation of the variety of other narratives present in the history of the dictatorship that not only had been neglected in cultural production, but in the state narrative as well. The emergence of films directed and produced by children of the disappeared is a necessary genre of films when it comes to the representations of the dictatorship and the shaping of collective memory.

As efforts were made by INCAA (the Argentinian National Institute of Film and Audiovisual Arts) and other cultural policies, these narratives became more welcome on the national stage. Allowing for a different avenue to create justice for these children. Though the films are not able to compensate for the losses, or provide an official apology of the state, it creates the platform for the discussion of these narratives which can provoke future national action as more citizens become aware of the other narratives. Telling these stories through the gaze and the experiences of children, carries a certain amount of weight and innocence. This allows for the intended audience to sympathize with the losses these children experienced, namely the loss of their parents and the loss of their childhood innocence. This generation of children, now adults, are dealing with the hardships they faced through film. Able to criticize the government for their responses and actions, while also being able to question their parents' militancy from a critical lens, creating a sense of unofficial justice through the platform they are able to speak from. These films emphasize the ghosts of the dictatorship that still haunt the present. The children of the disappeared are able to regain their agency through these films. Powerless at the time of their childhood, they are now able to tell their history on their own terms, serving justice to not only themselves in today's world, but also to their past selves who had to endure pain that was the result of a battle that was not their own. Throughout the history of Argentina there has been a common recurrence of experiencing crisis one after another, without necessarily dealing with the impacts

and repercussions. Therefore, these films are a necessary part of the process of coming to terms with the recent past.

The Nonsensical World of Childhood Memories: *ALUAP*

ALUAP, a short film directed by Hernán Belón and Tatiana Mereñuk is one of the first instances in which a child is put at the forefront of a narrative concerning the dictatorship, one that focuses on the experience of growing up during the dictatorship (Feierstein, 159). Through an interview that was conducted, the directors were attempting to revisit the child's gaze on life during the dictatorship (Feierstein, 145). This film is part of a series of short films by the name of *Historias Breves* (short stories) supported by INCAA. *ALUAP* was one of the films that was shown on national television through the *Historias Breves* initiative. The film is also available for free online through a streaming platform by the name of CINE.AR Play, which was created by INCAA. The streaming platform that has all of the groupings of *Historias Breves* up until 2018. Representing an entirely new wave of filmmakers who were looking to communicate their childhood during the dictatorship to a greater audience, *ALUAP* focuses on an event that signifies normality and identity in the eyes of a young child, namely, a birthday party. Utilizing contrasting cold and warm colors to emphasize the differences between safety and innocence versus the grimness of the time period and the reality of her family's situation, *ALUAP* highlights the child's gaze through sound, cinematography, colors and symbolism. The film is framed as an instance within the main character's memory. The first scene starts with a high angle shot showing a box addressed to Paula being opened. In it there are photographs, letters, and a bouncy ball. As soon as she opens the flaps to the box, a murmur of sound, conversation, and children playing and yelling begins. In sync with the overwhelming amount of sound the viewer is hearing, there are two voices, a man and a woman, that come out clearer than the other sounds. The male voice states "Paula, remember what

we talked about yesterday?” and the female voice states, “and the tickets? Tomorrow? What do you mean tomorrow?”. The noise and sounds continue to increase while someone whom we can assume is Paula, perhaps in her late teens or early 20s, is staring at a bouncy ball. The noise continuously increases and the sound of a bouncing ball hitting the floor immediately switches scene to a flashback of Paula as a child. This opening scene emphasizes that this film will be dealing with memory. It utilizes sound and setup-payoff of the bouncy ball, as a way to maneuver the viewer back into a memory of the main character.

The first scene of the flashback has Paula holding up a drawing in front of a mirror with her name spelled in large letters reflecting back at her backwards. This scene pertains to the quote from *Alice in Wonderland* that is displayed at the beginning of the film before the opening scene. The quote reads, “Oh what fun it’ll be when they see me through the glass in here, and can’t get at me!”, taken from *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice found There*, a novel popular among both children and adults. As Paula’s name is reflected in the mirror backwards, it seems to refer back to this quote and the story of *Alice in Wonderland*. The film can be seen as a dream or alternate universe that turns into a nightmare (Feierstein, 146). Through the way this short is filmed, it seems to pertain to the nonsensical world of Alice in a dark manner. Throughout the film, overlapping voices and conversations, contrasting colors and tones, and slow motion are used creating a nightmarish memory of childhood. One could possibly understand that the childhood of these children who grew up during the dictatorship is not only tainted, but a mixture of memories, stories they have been told. The use of this quote emphasizes childhood and the longing for it, due to the disruption of her childhood by the position her family is in during the dictatorship. In much scholarly work on *Alice in Wonderland*, it is often described as a novel that navigates the character going from being a child to reaching a certain maturity and adolescence. Alice acts both as a child,

and as a child attempting to act like an adult (Karlsson, 1-3). In this film, and many other films that use the child's gaze to narrate this grim period of Argentine history, an immense amount of pressure is put upon the child by the parents. This forces the child to understand adult issues, issues and problems that Paula is not fully able to grasp yet at such a young age, although she is able to pick up on the sense of abnormality worrying her. Paula, is forced by her situation to act like an adult, conflicting with her regular everyday childhood experience.

The title of the short film helps emphasize the disordered and confused logic that surrounds the tales of *Alice in Wonderland* in conjunction with the film, creating the understanding for the confusion and disruption of childhood during the dictatorship. *ALUAP* is the name of the protagonist spelled backwards, reflected back at her in the first scene of the memory part of the film. The film starts with a quote from *Alice in Wonderland* and ends with a dedication "to all those who were children during the 70's". These two statements; a quote and a dedication, serve as a way for the viewer to travel through childhood with the protagonist, ending with the acknowledgement of the long-lasting impacts that the dictatorship had on an entire generation's childhood. Through the title, one can understand that the film is a mirror that reflects the collective childhood of a generation, highlighting the nostalgia of the songs on the record player and the styles of the clothing. The mirror in the film, along with the quote, serves as a way for the older Paula from the beginning of the film, to reflect on her childhood, which is similar to the other directors that have chosen to retrace stories and memories from their childhood through film. It can be understood from the address written on the box, that Paula was able to escape into exile with her parents to France. Feierstein proposes that the scene of Paula holding her name in front of a mirror and it being spelled backwards could be a metaphor for the reflection that she has on her earlier childhood years through this box of memories. The entry into the world of Paula's

childhood through the box of memories and the mirror, is a journey into the past. Feierstein states that the package represents the address to whom that memory is addressed to.

The parallels with *Alice in Wonderland* continue throughout the film. Within the plot, there are countless instances at which regular events and childhood indicators are flipped, turning Paula's childhood memory into a nonsensical world, one which she cannot recognize, bringing the viewer along with her back to this nightmarish memory. During her birthday party, a child notices a suspicious man watching the house from outside. It can be assumed by the viewer, knowing the historical context of the film, that this man serves as a threatening symbol of the military kidnappings worrying the adults. The adults take action immediately and turn off the power. To not alarm the children by the power being turned off and danger that may be waiting right outside their door, the parents start singing Happy Birthday as a disguise. Paula can sense that there is a problem, switching from a smiling face to a somber face back and forth throughout the song, it is clear that she is uneasy. As the scene continues, the shot in which the candles on the cake are lit is juxtaposed with the scene of her father looking at the fire in the sink where he is burning their identification papers, the sound of the fire overpowers the sound of people singing happy birthday. Once Paula has blown out the candles, the power is not able to be turned back on, so the parents suggest to all the kids that they should also try to blow out the birthday candles as a game. Disguising a safety measure and the danger of the situation with child's play. Her birthday party is overshadowed by terror and fear. Magic tricks are present at her party, as her uncle is a magician. He says at one point "I'm going to make my favorite niece's nose disappear", the very mention of the word disappear, hangs in the air throughout the rest of the film, reminding the viewer of the threat right outside the door (Feierstein, 146). Another example of this nightmarish and nonsensical world Paula finds herself in, is when she is told to distribute her toys to the children attending her

party since she cannot bring them all into exile with her. This part of the film is first introduced when Paula opens the box, one of the first comprehensible things she hears is “Paula, remember what we talked about yesterday?”, later the audience learns that this is in reference to her giving away her toys. The set-up and pay-off of this scene, is used to emphasize this moment in her memory highlighting it as one of the main events she clearly remembers from her birthday. The scene in which Paula is giving away her toys to the attendees of her party, has a nightmarish and eerie feel to it. There seems to be a cold overtone of colors, all the children and parents are staring at her. The children go up one by one and take a toy from her bag. This scene is entirely in slow motion. As the children approach her, they stare right at her, close their eyes and grab a toy holding it up in front of her to show what they have selected.



ALUAP (Hernán Belón and Tatiana Mereñuk, 1997)

The sound of their slow footsteps is amplified and unbearable, emphasizing the weight on this scene for Paula's memory. Once the last toy is about to be picked, the viewer is able to slowly hear an increasing sound of the children singing happy birthday. As the song continues, it echoes with the sounds of laughing children, as if it is mocking her birthday. Paula looks back into the bag and imagines that it is full of presents again. Creating a mixture of a dream and a nightmare, this scene emphasizes what this birthday party signifies and how it is remembered by Paula. It is clear that the undertones of the dictatorship and her parent's decision to go into exile are present,

though not fully understood. Through the emphasis on sound, echoes, layering of conversations and noise, the directors are able to recreate the confusion that Paula is shown to be experiencing for the viewers.

In addition, colors are utilized to contrast the nostalgic moments of Paula's birthday, with the overshadowing moments of panic and worry from her parents and the other adults in the film. For example, as Paula is at her birthday party, she realizes the fact that something else is going on. She overhears conversations and is able to pick up on something not feeling quite right. As Paula leaves the scene of her birthday party filled with cold blue and green tones, she enters her room, and warmer colors flood onto the screen. Sunlight is hitting her room, the decor is mostly pinks, offering a sense of comfort. She sits down next to a trash bag filled with her toys, toys that she is meant to give away. A bouncy ball falls out of the bag, she holds it up in front of her face, connecting this scene to the first scene of the film.



ALUAP (Hernán Belón and Tatiana Mereñuk, 1997)

This bouncy ball is used in the final scene while the family leaves their house. Paula's parents are preparing for departure. A leak in the sink is focused on by the filmmaker. As the scene progresses, the sound of the sink turns into a sound that imitates the noise of a ticking clock. As Paula and her parents leave, the bouncy ball falls out of the pocket of Paula, bouncing, hitting the floor with a large pounding sound emphasizing the ticking sound of the sink, drilling it into her

memory. The bouncing sound further connects this scene to the beginning of the film, in which the sound of a bouncing ball is used to transport Paula back into her memory.

Through a variety of conscious decisions surrounding the sound and colors, Mereñuk and Belón are able to capture the confusion and nonsensical world of the memories of children who grew up during the dictatorship. The constant echoes, overlapping conversations and sounds, as well as the choice to prioritize and emphasize noises such as a fire burning and a sink dripping, create a nightmarish world in which the viewer is invited in to explore along with the child protagonist. A world in which the regular is no longer existent, and abnormality is now the normality. Childhood is disrupted and replaced with a mixture and concoction of memories, emphasizing the difficulties in distinguishing the real from the fake, however, placing a certain emphasis on moods and feelings, which emanate the narrative of these childhoods. The metaphorical use of the quote from *Alice in Wonderland*, along with the analysis and parallels one can make between the fantastical novel and the film, is an impeccable way to illustrate this exact genre of post-dictatorship films from the child's gaze. As one navigates the realm of post-dictatorship films with child protagonists at the center, it helps to emphasize the disruption of their childhoods and the search for answers. These children and their experiences during this time, is best explained by Feierstein in her analysis of the film comparing it to Susan Rubin Seliman's (2006) work on the categorization of a generation of child survivors of the Shoah. Feierstein utilizes a quote from Suleiman which she connects to the Argentine case, the children in both cases were those who were "too young to have an adult understanding of what was happening to them, and sometimes too young to have any memory of it at all, but old enough to have been there" (Feierstein, 145). This captures the realm of dictatorship film through the child's gaze. The films are a combination of fiction and fact, a mixture of told experiences and remembered experiences,

accounting for an entire generation. Though not everyone was a child of the disappeared, that memory and loss is still present for this generation of children. Too old to solely be impacted by the generational trauma their parents and grandparents survived and too young to have fully understood the magnitude of the tumultuous period of history (Feierstein, 145). These films, including *ALUAP*, serve as a way for the adult to reflect on their childhood, and compensate for their lost narrative, by giving it representation within the audiovisual world.

Escaping the Grasp of the Dictatorship through Instances of Normalcy: *Kamchatka*

Kamchatka, directed by Marcelo Piñeyro focuses on a family who is forced to go into hiding, after the father finds out that his subversive friends have begun to disappear. The film *Kamchatka* is told through the eyes of the son, who is around 10-12 years old. It is the first full length feature film that represents the dictatorship and time period from the point of view of a child. Piñeyro had served as the producer on the film *La historia oficial* (1985), which approaches the topic from quite a different perspective. The writer of the script, Marcelo Figueras also wrote a novel published about the same childhood, written in the past from the perspective of an adult, reminiscent of much of his childhood. Focusing on a family from the perspective of the oldest son Harry, the film takes place during the period of increased violence towards the subversives and Montoneros. The parents are well positioned in their lines of work, the father being a lawyer and the mother working in a lab as a biologist. The family goes into hiding in a summerhouse the year of 1976. It is important to note that the film takes place just a few days after the military seized power of the government. The viewer only knows the protagonist by nicknames and his alias name, “Harry” (coming from his obsession with Harry Houdini) and only know his younger brother by his nickname “Enano” and alias name “Simon”. Harry’s parents bring in an older boy, Lucas, who is also using a alias name. Lucas stays with the family for a large portion of the film, and ultimately

acts as Harry's mentor. However, Lucas ends up abandoning Harry, by being forced to leave, a recurring threat and factor in Harry's life during this time period. When Lucas leaves, Harry is upset and decides to not continue being friends and say goodbye to Lucas, as he decides there is no point if they will never see each other again. This is where the viewer is able to understand that Harry is more aware of the situation of his family than the viewer previously realized. Harry's parents ultimately decide that the safest decision for themselves and their children is to leave their children with their grandparents and attempt to go into hiding from the military again, and not bring the children along into their mess. The final scene in the film is powerful and shows "Harry" standing alone on a dirt road after watching his parents drive away from him and his grandfather, this scene is one which both introduces and ends the film (Dufays, 269).

In *Kamchatka*, to emphasize and communicate the narrative the director has mostly utilized music, symbolism and the idea of the ellipsis, where the viewer is forced to fill in the blanks using the knowledge they have gained throughout the story. *Kamchatka* begins Harry's father whispering in his ear, "Kamchatka" and kissing him on the cheek, and continues with Harry narrating how his story begins and ends. He speaks of how cells become people and says,

"no one ever explains what happens after the cells become people and the moment in where the person climbs the Himalayan mountains, invents a vaccine, or becomes an amazing escape artist like Houdini, that is a mystery, no human talks about these things, no teacher, but my father did tell me about it, one time, the last time I saw him, my story starts with a cell like everyone's, but it ends within *Kamchatka*"

While the viewer is listening, a sequence focusing on various moments throughout the film plays, each of these images from a crucial moment of change within the film. The narration places the child at the center of the story while emphasizing his assumption of the responsibility of an adult as the guiding force in the film (Dufays, 181). Throughout the film, the viewer can sense the tension, anxiety and intensity of the situation through the actions of the parents. The mother is constantly smoking, the viewer sees the worried looks on the parents faces, and it is possible to catch troubling information through “Harry” overhearing some of their conversations. The change in their everyday life due to them fearing for their safety, takes a toll on everyone in the family. The youngest child, nicknamed Enano (meaning dwarf in Spanish), begins to pee in his bed at night. The viewer is not an all-knowing viewer in the film. The audience is only told what Harry knows. There are many other instances of symbolism present within the film. At one point, a bird is depicted trapped in a cage, a traditional way of symbolizing that the characters are trapped. Another scene shows the children fascinated with a dead toad in the pool, this scene serves as a tool to symbolize danger and death.

There are instances in the film where the family is able to escape the reality of the situation through play and visiting the grandparents, who don't know the extent to which the children's parents are subversive. The family is also portrayed as being able to escape through music. In the film, the father chooses one night to put on music, where the entire family gets up and begins dancing, one of the few instances within the film in which joy is portrayed through the actors laughing and smiling. This scene is a continuation of a previous scene, in which the family is having dinner after the boys had their first day at their new school. Lucas asks Harry how his first day at school went, and Harry leaves the dinner table and runs outside upset. In this scene, Lucas plays a guiding older brother figure, giving Lucas advice. Harry returns from outside and is happily

surprised to come back to his parents and brother dancing to *Son tus perfumes de mujer*, a bit of normalcy brought back to a period of high stress. This scene allows the viewer to see them as a regular family as well. In a sense, the viewer escapes the story with the family forgetting about the threats that the family is facing. It humanizes the family in a way we haven't yet seen in the film, most viewers can relate to the scene and the joy that the family shows. Throughout the film viewer is not shown this family committing any specific clandestine activities, or committing crimes, contrary to the beliefs that are circulate among those who deny the dictatorship, this family is relatively "normal" in a sense. Their normalcy humanizes them and helps the viewer question their reason for being targeted. It connects us to the larger narratives of the childhood of the children of the disappeared, the film serves as a type of testimony. This testimony validates the experience of children who survived the dictatorship, who see their families within this film. Another factor that plays a main role in the film is the emphasis on the map boardgame TEG and the place on the boardgame labeled *Kamchatka*. This game also serves as a sense of escape. In the end of the film, Harry narrates while his parents are driving away, telling the viewers that his father whispered "Kamchatka" the last time he saw him. *Kamchatka* becomes a metaphor for resistance, survival and confronting terror (Kaiser). Emphasizing the resilience of the children of the disappeared, as well as their current fight for their narrative to be represented in their fight for justice.

After a scene of the family dancing, the viewer sees Henry, Lucas and Enano in their room, Enano the youngest son drank what seemed to be Coca Cola or Fernet and Coke, which has made him hyper and perhaps a bit tipsy. Enano is jumping on the bed in the background singing the national anthem, while Henry is asking Lucas questions about his true identity. This scene brings our subject back to reality, however, there is a sense of hope after such a happy scene of the family dancing. Lucas is offering some information about himself for the first time in the film, adding to

this sense of home, and humanizing him more for the viewer. This substantiates not only his alias Lucas, but who he truly is and was before the dictatorship began. However, Enano is jumping on the bed in the background, singing the national anthem. The presence of the national anthem in this scene has a dual purpose, it reminds the viewer that the dictatorship and unrest is still occurring in the background of this scene and this film, though we never truly see violent actions within the world of the film, the dictatorship omnipresent throughout. From historical accounts from victims of that period, it is possible to know that the military junta and their death squads were operating all hours of the day, often kidnapping people in the middle of the night. The national anthem serves as a reminder of the situation the family and the children find themselves in. Having a child sing the national anthem emphasizes the innocence of these children, as well as highlights the child's lack of knowledge regarding the meaning of nationalism during a time of dictatorship.

Enano also only seems to know the tune of the song. The only words he knows to the national anthem are “Libertad, libertad, libertad” [Freedom, Freedom, Freedom], in a sense, it turns into a cry for freedom, freedom for his family and his parents, freedom for the subversives, freedom from the repression and power of the military dictatorship. Enano falls off the bed while singing “Libertad, libertad, libertad”, a loud crashing noise ensues, which seems to be mimicking the sound of a gun being loaded then shot and the sound of something falling on the floor afterwards, mimicking a bullet case. Enano then gets up from behind the bed, quietly holding his head, smiles and says, “me mate”, which means, “I killed myself”. Clear correlations can be drawn between this part of the scene and the Argentine dictatorship. The national anthem is a direct index and symbol of the Argentine state, having Enano then say, “I killed myself”, can be interpreted in a variety of ways. First it could be understood that it plays to the military narrative at the time, claiming that the subversives were terrorists, and did not deserve to live. Secondly, it could

emphasize the killings carried out by the military and death squads, taking the lives of innocent people. Finally, in relation to the children, it could be read as a nod towards the stolen children of the Dirty War, their identity and lives disappeared by the military, killing their old identity, replacing it with a new one. Enano then gets back on the bed and continues to jump and sing the national anthem, singing “Libertad, Libertad, Libertad”, and then continues to sing incorrect lyrics that he is making up. The parents rush in worried that someone has been hurt, but then start laughing at Enano’s rendition of the song and sing along jokingly. It is difficult for the viewer to tell if that is a way of making fun of the dictatorship or if they are happily celebrating their national anthem. Their nationalism can be interpreted as the opposition’s nationalism, not in favor of the military rule, because they are singing at home in privacy rather than government owned property, in contrast to some of the other films that portray the national anthem in a much more institutional setting.

Another important aspect of the film, that is a constant theme within the other films, is the responsibility placed on the children especially Harry. Contrary to *La historia oficial*, who uses the main child as a tool to bring awareness of the truths of the Dirty War to the main character, *Kamchatka* uses the child in the film as a direct connection to the viewer. Harry is the viewers only source of information from the film since everything is from his point of view or scenes where he is present or narrating, emphasizing the child's gaze. Harry’s parents put an immense pressure on the boys to remember their fake names and new family story. When the parents get tense or worried, they drill Harry and ask him what his name is and what their family story is. The boys are also taught what to do if their father “calls for action”, if the family is in danger. However, the boys aren’t directly told why he would call for action, and when the father is teaching them the plan and showing them how to escape, he shows them how in a very playful and fun way and ends

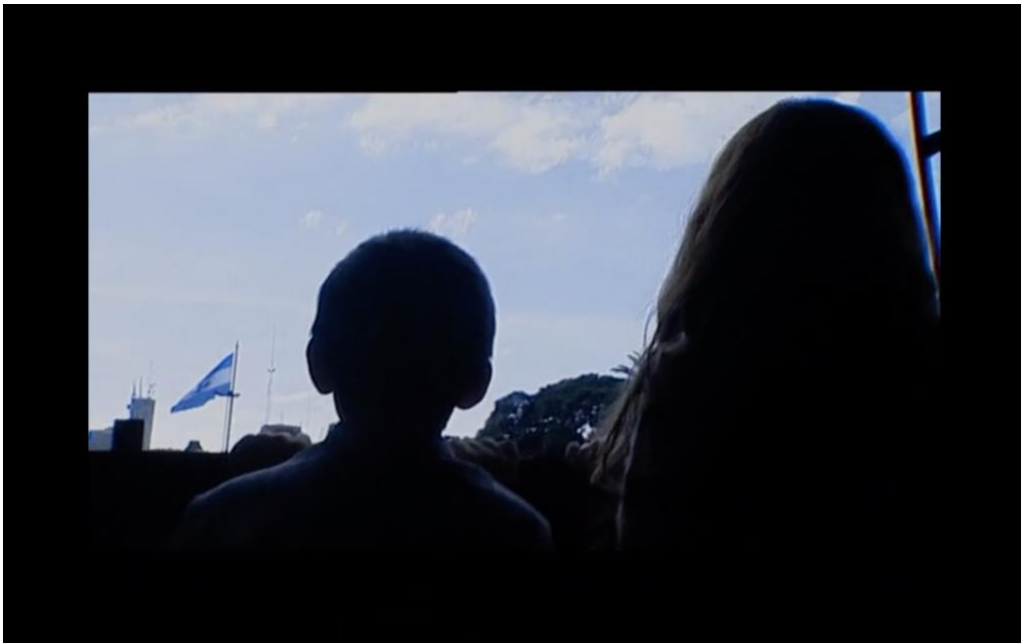
in a very serious manner (Dufays, 272-273). This has been seen in other films that emanate historical memory and the gaze of the child, turning a serious situation into child's play, so that the children are more easily able to understand it, while shielded from reality. Finally, Harry is constantly asked to take care of his brother and make sure he is okay, a job we often place on the parents of a child in everyday society, a large amount of responsibility to put on a child.

A common trait within these films with the child at focus, is that the viewer often sees attempts by the child to return to normalcy, trying to escape and attempt at a normal life. Harry attempts to visit his best friend from his old school at home, however, the mother turns him down at the door. Harry's attempt to return to normalcy ultimately failing, brings a harsh realization into reality for him, emphasizing how different his current situation is in comparison to his old life that he longs for. This film, through this scene, and multiple others, highlights the disruption of daily life for the children who have no choice in the matter, and are forced by their parents' actions to be in a situation where they aren't always able to just be children. Unlike *Infancia clandestina*, there is no scene of violence within the film, however, the presence of the horrific infiltrates the film. The exact scene in which Henry is not able to access parts of his old life attempting to reconnect with his best friend, emphasizes that not one person could feel safe (Kaiser). The persistent threat of violence and atrocity brings their childhood to an abrupt end. Though Harry's parents attempt to provide a form of daily life by sending their children to school and try to keep the boys protected from the intensity of the situation, they fail to do so. Ending the film with Harry's parents leaving him and his brother behind.

Ghosts of the Absent Parent: *Veo veo*

Veo veo [I Spy], a short film directed by Benjamín Ávila, who also directed *Infancia clandestina* and a documentary *Nietos. identidad y memoria*. *Veo veo* can be seen as a prelude to

Infancia clandestina. The film centers on Juan, the protagonist, which is also the name of the boy in *Infancia clandestina*. Juan is 8 years old and moves to a new house with his mother and sister. His name can be considered a reference to Juan Perón, the founder and leader of the Peronist movement. Many of the Montoneros, a leftist urban guerrilla group, were originally Peronists. During the dictatorship, being in support of Perón especially by carrying posters and booklets by Perón was dangerous, as the rightwing militias targeted anyone who slightly resembled a left-wing supporter. The opening scene of the film has Juan and his sister playing “I spy”, while in the back of their moving truck driving to their new house. The use of “I spy” in this scene emphasizes their childhood innocence. They are fascinated by their surroundings, peeking out above the back of the truck, and passing the time by playing a typical childhood game. As they play the game, Juan is attempting to guess what his sister is thinking of, as he lists the objects, the camera cuts to those objects. It is possible to see the boxes and moving supplies, which makes it clear to the viewer that they are in the process of moving.



Veo veo (Benjamín Ávila, 2007)

As they play the next round, an over the shoulder shot is used, allowing the viewer to see the silhouettes of the children as well as the Argentine flag flowing in the distance. The scene then switches to the title page, as the viewer continues to hear the children play “I spy” it overlaps with the sound of a door being unlocked. It is then that the film essentially begins with the mother opening the door to their new home. The flag within the shot during the children’s game of “I spy”, is a direct decision by the filmmaker to include it. In many of the other films on the dictatorship, including Avila’s film *Infancia clandestina*, the flag has a great presence, especially as it represents the military rule. In other films, the young protagonists will often have a hostile relationship with the flag. This reaction to the flag is usually influenced by their parents, often getting these children into trouble especially in school settings when asked to perform tasks that involve the flag.

The film is set in the winter of 1977 in Argentina. At his new school, Juan is tasked with bringing a photo of his father to school for Father’s Day, however, the viewer quickly learns that his father hasn’t been around for a while. Having the film emphasize the timestamp of 1977, utilizes the year as an index, which the viewer can then begin to assume that his father's absence is related to the dictatorship. The task of bringing a photo of his father to school emphasizes this absence, burdening Juan with a reminder of his absence as he longs for the normalcy of having a physical image of his father. Juan asks his sister if she has a photo of their father; his sister states that their mother said there are no photos of his father, but she is able to tell him about his father. His sister ensures him that his father is like Robin Hood, a character whom he admires. She tells the story of their father like a fairytale, their father worked for the poor, and one day, the bad people came to their house and his father attempted to escape over the wall. As she tells this story, Juan is shown with his school uniform walking up to a brick wall in the backyard of their new house, contemplating and envisioning this story. Juan hears a girl through the wall, Eva, who

becomes his friend and they walk to school together. When back in class, every student is asked to speak about their father. Each student tells the class what their father's occupation is, as well as what they do together. Eva, his new friend, states that her father is a photographer, and that he has photos of every man in the world. When Juan's turn arrives, he states that his father works for the poor, he hasn't seen him in a long time and he misses him, while saying this, he hangs up an image of Robin Hood. To his confusion, the children laugh at him and his teacher does not understand why he has chosen Robin Hood and why he does not have a photo of his father.

Eva brings Juan home to her house to play with the photos her father has, they are looking to see if Eva's father has a photo of his father. They are not able to find an image of his father among the collection. Eva plays with a music box and tells Juan that her mother passed away. This connects the two characters, Juan's father has been missing for years, while Eva's mother passed away a long time ago. This scene cuts to the next, where his mother is reading a report that Juan brought a photo of Robin Hood to school instead of his father. She becomes worried and upset when she realizes Juan has been searching for answers regarding his father. He knows his father exists, and he is curious about him. The film is essentially Juan's search for his father, he is searching for answers regarding his own identity and the identity of his father. The element of Juan's search for answers is a new aspect of the childhood of the children of the disappeared that hasn't previously been introduced or explored. Juan's search for answers and images of his father begins to threaten their families' safety without him realizing. When his mother goes and looks for an image, Juan assumes it will be a photograph of his father and follows her. He is able to see how she enters the locked room containing their documents and photos. Juan longs to enter that door, a world full of answers and information on his family and himself, may give him the answers he is looking for. As Juan discovers the possibility of where the photos may be hidden, a high-pitched

piano sound is played, adding a dreamlike and fantastical quality to Juan's discovery. As he slowly walks closer to the forbidden door the frame closes in on his face, his eyes light up, as the music continues, the light on his face becomes warmer. This creates a mystical element surrounding the mysterious room full of photos that he does not have access to. The next day at school, his mother gives his teacher a photo to hang up. Juan waits in suspense, excitedly receiving the image from his teacher believing that it will be an image of his father. To his dismay, it is a photograph of him and his grandfather. He protests insisting that the photograph is not of his father. His teacher suggests that he not worry and that his mother told her everything, highly likely a fake story explaining the absence of his father.

Juan's infatuation with the idea of a photograph of his father persists. After school Eva and Juan get the key to the door at his house that has all the photographs, the mystical music ensues as they enter the room looking for photographs. They search frantically throughout the room and Eva discovers a gun. As they look at the gun, their images are reflected in a mirror. The mirror may serve in a similar way to the mirror in *ALUAP*. Though this was a short instance that included the gun and the mirror, the choice was intentional to include it. The mirror serves as a way to juxtapose the innocence of the children with the immense danger and threat. They are quick to close the drawer, not allowing the gun to disrupt their innocence, while not fully understanding the magnitude of its presence. The discovery of the gun and the reflection of the mirror, can be considered a turning point in the film. Similar to *ALUAP*, the children enter an alternate world, one in which they will continue to learn and become aware of the greater situation that surrounds them. They move on and are quick to discover a box of photographs, though Juan's father's head is cut out of all of them. It is as if the door to the room has transported them into an alternate universe where his father does not exist, and the dangers of the dictatorship are constantly present.

These photographs are a strange visual to be exposed to as his father is cut out of every single image, while the rest of it is still intact.



Veo veo (Benjamín Ávila, 2007)

Eva, having the knowledge of photography through her father, discovers a negative that has not been tampered with, they proceed to develop it at Eva's house, so Juan can have an image of his father. Juan returns home with the image, proud that he was able to create a photo of his father, something that he didn't understand was non-existent for a reason. His mother, worried and anxious, proceeds to ask Juan how he got the photo and who developed it. She then explains that it is dangerous for there to be a photo of his father, both for his father and for their family. She emphasizes that bad people don't need to know what his father looks like, exactly like the book *Robin Hood* that he likes. The emphasis on having a physical image of his father, is one that is present within many of the films from this period. As the children attempt to cling on to their identities, they are able to retrieve these identities through photographs. Photographs play a vital role, especially in the documentary films, in which they are able to revive the identity of a person through a photograph.

The presence of Robin Hood throughout the film, continues to emanate the absence of Juan's father. Robin Hood, a character known for standing up against authoritarianism, oppression and injustice, is used as a symbol throughout this film for those who opposed the authoritarian military government of Videla, especially Juan's father. It is not a coincidence that this book makes an appearance in *El premio* as well, where Cecilia attempts to bury it while her mother buries their important documents and books that could cause them trouble. Robin Hood is used in both these films to emphasize the presence of subversive thought. Though in *Veo veo*, Robin Hood plays a more central role. After Juan's mother explains why there are no photographs of his father, since there are dangerous "bad" people looking for him she parallels his father with Robin Hood, similar to Robin Hood, the "bad guys" don't know what he looks like, which is how he stays protected. In the film, the military forces are unaware of what Juan's father looks like, the lack of photographic images of him, is the only way the mother is able to control their safety, as well as the father's safety. In addition, when Juan first learns of his father's death, he is dressed up as Robin Hood playing with Eva and her father. An image is shown on television of his father, and in that moment, it is clear that he has been killed. Similar to *Infancia clandestina*, Juan is not told that his father is killed, he learns through an image on the television. The juxtaposition of Juan dressed as Robin Hood, while the very identity of "his" own Robin Hood is revealed, adding to the confusing world of his childhood. The invincible Robin Hood, Juan's hero, has been captured and killed. His father's identity, an image that he was not allowed nor able to obtain and keep for himself, is there for the world to see. It is stated that his father was a high ranking Montonero, the image flashes on the TV as Eva's father understands the story of Juan's father as well as Juan's family, their familial identity is revealed placing them in a compromised position. Juan returns home dressed in his Robin Hood outfit, to an empty living room with the TV. He finds his mother in the room, moving boxes still

present throughout the house. Without any words being exchanged, his mother begins to sob, where Juan/Robin Hood comforts her. The family burns all their documents and subversive books supporting Perón as well as photographs and the last negative image of his father, the family is forced to move on. His father no longer exists and will cease to exist as a part of their lives. He discovers that Eva has left the music box that her mother left her, a parting gift to help him cope with the loss of his father. Juan leaves Eva an image of himself, taken from the photograph they developed of him with his father. His family is on their way again, in the back of a bus, as Juan plays with the music box, a song that sounds similar to a children's lullaby plays as the three of them, Juan, his mother and his sister enter a new phase in their lives, one in which their father no longer exists. The childhoods of Juan and his sister are forever altered by the loss. Their childhood now be tainted by the shadow of the dictatorship. The final image of the film is an image of the wall in the backyard of their house. An homage to Robin Hood and an homage to their father who had initially escaped from his persecutors by jumping over a brick wall.

The Omnipresent Threats of the Dictatorship: *El premio*

El premio [The Prize], by Paula Markovitch, is a semi-autobiographical film that plunges into the dark years of the last dictatorship in Argentina from 1976-1983. The director, Paula Markovitch, is from Argentina but lives in Mexico. The film is largely based on Markovitch's life, but there are a few things the director altered for cinematic purposes. When asked about the film in an interview with *Canadian Jewish News*, she states, "It is a film about memory", "Not about the facts that happened, but as I remember them". Within that interview, Markovitch also mentions that during that historical period in Argentina, not only the political activists were afraid, but everyone in society was afraid, this is reflected within the film (Kirshner). *El premio* enjoyed success at the international film festival in Berlin, where it received two awards, and won the

fiction category at Guadalajara International Film Festival. Many critics praised Paula Galinelli Hertzog for her performance as Cecilia, the protagonist of the film (Bennett). They also praise Markovitch's grim portrait of the dictatorship through the eyes of a child, without ever truly addressing the country's political situation, similar to *Kamchatka*. With a slow pace the film centers on a daughter of a militant and her mother, who have moved to a small rural town in the Plata region north of Buenos Aires, and the difficulties they face during this transition.

The film centers on a girl, Cecilia, and her mother, who live in a secluded beach shack among the sand dunes. It takes place during the winter in Argentina, the grimy shack seems to have been abandoned as it is in a dilapidated state, disorganized with run down beach furniture everywhere. Through Cecilia's questions and dialogue with her mother, the director is able to communicate to the viewer that Cecilia and her mother are in hiding from the military government. The film begins with a long scene, where the audience is introduced to the protagonist Cecilia, an extreme wide shot of a small girl walking slowly by the sea. The viewer sees the strong forces of nature against Cecilia's story as the first element in the film, the wind and rain nearly blowing her over as she slowly walks closer to the camera. In the landscape, Cecilia is small, as she gets closer, it is possible to discover that she was attempting to roller skate on the sand. The first scene sets the tone for the film. It shows from the start that Cecilia is misplaced in her environment. The forces of nature are against her which will make her journey throughout the film more difficult. She is surviving a "relentless assault from the elements" (Maguire, 3). The environmental factors that are aspects of everyday life now pose a threat as they attempt to adapt to their new environment, slowly infiltrating their home, similar to the military threat. This scene also emphasizes how she is denied the childhood that she has grown accustomed to, where she was able to roller-skate, due to the political actions of her parents.

Cecilia begs her mother to allow her to attend school, which her mother reluctantly allows her to after preparing her by having her recite to her classmates if they ask her about her family. While practicing with her mother Cecilia responds with a mocking tone, “my dad sells curtains and my mom is a housewife”, clearly not understanding the gravity of the situation emphasizing her innocence. Within the assumed historical context, one can assume that the reason Cecilia has not been attending school recently is most likely due to the military dictatorship. The reintroduction of school into Cecilia’s life, emphasizes that the two characters are beginning to adapt to their new situation by slowly reintroducing normal things that are typical in the daily life of a child. Cecilia makes a friend, does well in school and builds a strong relationship with her teacher. She spends her days playing in the sand dunes with her new friend and dog, teaching them how to read. However, though the new life that Cecilia and her mother are playing into is convincing, Cecilia is constantly reminded of the abnormality of her situation. For example, when her friends persistently ask her about her family she continues to answer, “my dad sells curtains and my mom is a housewife”, reminiscent of a robot, a stranger in her own life. When Cecilia comes home from her first day of school, she laughs because she was able to trick her classmates into believing the fake story her mother created about their family, this highlights that she is also unable to understand the gravity of the situation and reason why she must lie to her classmates (Maguire, 6).

Another instance of reality creeping into Cecilia's fragile utopia, is when her mother leads her to a structure in the sand dunes and begins to bury their important documents and books to hide any evidence that may point to subversive actions. Cecilia continues to ask her mother for answers as to why they are burying the evidence in the sand and her mother refuses to tell her. The tension between mother and child continues to increase. It can be assumed by the viewer that the

mother does not have a plan, it is as if she is waiting for Cecilia's father and does not know what her next move will be. Cecilia often imitates her mother's actions, as a girl would. When her mother goes to bury papers and books that could jeopardize their safety, Cecilia asks if she can also play, and has brought her Robinhood book to bury. This scene emphasizes the wickedness of the game, Cecilia interprets life as a game, though it is important for her safety that these items remain buried. Another example of how the filmmaker emphasizes child's play, is the constant imagery of Cecilia and her friends imitating indicators of the dictatorship, for example Cecilia and her friends sleeping and burying each other in the sand. The image lingers for a few seconds, emphasizing their motionless bodies, mimicking the dead. This imitates and refers to the era of the last dictatorship, in which death flights were common and bodies were often washed onto the shores and beaches of Rio de la Plata (Maguire, 8). Contributing to Cecilia's loss of innocence is the constant infiltration of the issues her mother is dealing with into her own existence. There is friction between her and her mother, because the mother is nervous and anxious about their safety. As the movie progresses Cecilia's relationship with her mother becomes more difficult since Cecilia becomes increasingly assertive and demanding. At one point, her mother screams "I hate you!" at Cecilia, a severe reaction to the harsh situation the two characters find themselves in.

The danger that the military junta poses to Cecilia and her mother seems distant, until Cecilia is selected to read a poem about the national flag for flag day. On the same day a colonel visits her school and tells the students about an essay contest the army is holding about the Argentine flag while speaking positively about the army in celebration of flag day. Knowing nothing more than what little information and warning her mother has given her, Cecilia writes the truth. In her essay, Cecilia details that the army sometimes kills people and that her cousin was killed. She writes a copy of the essay, takes it home, and insists that her mother read it because she

believes she did the assignment wrong emphasizing her slight understanding of the danger she and her mother are in. Her insistence for her mom to read her essay emphasizes that Cecilia that she can already sense that the content of her essay may jeopardize her family's safety. Once her mother reads it, it is clear that the essay is dangerous for their safety. An innocent child's honest opinion of the military government quickly turns into a safety threat for her family. Her mother frantically packs their bags. In the next scene they are at a train station where Cecilia is desperately begging for forgiveness for not sticking to their promise to never tell anyone the truth. Cecilia happens to mention that her teacher still has all of the essays at her house, leading them to walk to her teacher's house in the middle of the night in a panic to ask if she can rewrite it. At first, the teacher refuses and they leave the teachers house defeated, though the teacher quickly changes her mind and calls them back in to allow Cecilia to rewrite it. This emphasizes the immense pressure placed on the child. Though unaware, the child is constantly representing militancy, whether they know it or not. By simply being a child of their parents, they are surrounded by language and thoughts that can jeopardize safety if they leave the sanctuary of their house. Simple exchanges on the playground and at school can lead to a dangerous slip, revealing the truth. The simplest things can bring harm to their families, playing with the child's conscience and perception of the world, leading it to be a world filled with danger and threats, confiscating the innocence of childhood once again.

Once the film returns to the school setting, the viewer learns that Cecilia has won the award for the best essay, leading to a conflict with her mother. Her mother is afraid that the award ceremony is a trap, while Cecilia who is just a child and has won an award, cannot comprehend why her mother would discourage her from taking pride in receiving the award. Cecilia doesn't understand the severity of the issue, until her mother conveys to her that the military may have killed her father. Cecilia attends the cheerful awards ceremony in frightened and in shock, dressed

in her finest clothes and her hair brushed for the first time in the film. She approaches the stage and solemnly accepts the award, expressionless. At the award ceremony, she does not sing the anthem, and when her friend asks her what is wrong, she states “my shoes are too tight and my mother said my father might be dead” (Maguire, 6). The pain she is complaining about from her shoes, could be a way for her to deal with that information and deflect onto a different topic, not fully being able to understand the concept of death and not fully understanding her feelings, she reverts to something she knows. The film ends with Cecilia begging her mother for forgiveness, one cannot help but assume that Cecilia may believe her actions played a role in her father's fate. In the final scene, the viewer sees Cecilia sitting on the sand dunes with her hood on, heart wrenchingly sobbing as the wind blows sand on her. There is no music, solely the sound of a sobbing Cecilia, the wind and the ocean waves as the credits and dedication to the Markovitch's directors are shown on the screen. This final image is the ultimate sign of a child's loss of innocence.

Finally, the school plays a large role in representing the state and the military. A realm of discipline, there are a variety of scenes in which the director has the children mimic the themes and images of the Dirty War. An example of this is when the teacher is attempting to figure out who helped their classmate cheat on a spelling test. When no one responds, she demands that everyone walk in the rain. They lower their heads, wear their uniforms and slowly walk single file in circles in the rain. This appears to mimic a setting in which the children are trapped, a hint towards the torture and detention centers known to have been used during the Dirty War. Another example of the school representing the military is that once Cecilia's friend confesses to the teacher that Cecilia helped her classmate on the test, her teacher ends up teaching her a lesson. The teacher explains that the students should feel free to reprimand one another when someone is doing

something wrong, so they can learn to behave well. This imitates the military once again, this time emphasizing the repression that was experienced during that time. When the soldier arrives at the school, the children are asked to stand still and greet the soldier, once again, this time more directly, showing the influence of the military and the presence throughout Argentine schools.

The title of the film, *El premio* emphasizes the theme of interruption that characterizes the character Cecilia's childhood on screen, and it symbolizes the military, which is at the root of Cecilia's suffering. The film, similar to others, shows a child in a high-risk atmosphere with adult circumstances and expectations. Cecilia is only 7 years old, but she carries the weight of her family's life on her shoulders. Throughout the film, there are instances at which her mother forcibly places Cecilia in the adult sphere, such as when she is taught to lie about her family. Unlike the early 2000s films that focus on children as the helpless victim, Cecilia is portrayed as a child of agency, demanding responses from her mother. Rather than feeling safe inside the house and protected from the outside forces like *Kamchatka*, the film shows that the domestic sphere is not protected from confrontation. This is shown both directly through Cecilia's heartbreaking questions about her father and mother-daughter clashes, but also by the natural elements that surround them constantly destroying the only refuge they have (Maguire, 6).

In its plot, the film is quite similar to *Kamchatka*, since there's no direct portrayal of a conflict between Cecilia's mother and the military and the viewer is never told of her parents' activity or stance on the military government. As other films have easily demonstrated, children become part of the adult realm and are no longer simply innocent children. Similar to other protagonists, Cecilia is asked to perform adult actions and is a vital player when it comes to the survival of her family. The slow pace adds a strange element to the film, as if the danger is slowly creeping in. Ending in a heartbreaking scene of Cecilia sobbing in the sand, similar to *Kamchatka*,

the viewer is subject to the loss she faces, the likely death of her father. Through a subtle and direct symbolizations of the dictatorship, the film does not utilize cinematic aspects from mainstream films and functions at a slow pace. There is constant repetition of Cecilia walking home and playing with her friend or dog in the sand dune. One must appreciate the purpose of these prolonged scenes and the constant repetition as a symbol of Cecilia who begins to create a daily routine for herself once again. This daily life interrupted by external forces, be it nature or the military regime, which leads to the alteration of her mental state, confiscating her innocence and leaving a scar on her childhood forever.

Forced Militancy of the Child: *Infancia clandestina*

Infancia clandestina [Clandestine Childhood] was directed by Benjamín Ávila and produced by the director of *La historia oficial* Luis Puenzo. The semi-autobiographical film received international attention, being the official submission from Argentina to the Academy Awards in 2013, though it did not make the shortlist. The film is very similar to *Kamchatka* as it centers on a child by the name of Juan, whose parents are part of the resistance towards the Argentine military government of 1976-1983. Juan's parents are more instrumental in the resistance, and are high profile Montoneros wanted by the military, which escalates their situation more than *Kamchatka* and *El premio* invites the idea of violence directly into the story. The film starts with a traumatic scene from 1974, where Juan and his parents get attacked outside their home. The two times anything violent in the film happens are at the beginning and the end of the film. These scenes of violence are depicted through comic book style drawings of the event, that create a stop-motion like affect to the viewer. During these stop motion reenactments there is an extreme emphasis on the sound of Juan's breathing, and allowing the drawings and animation to highlight him crying, blood, and the various factors from that memory that made a long-lasting

impression on him. The viewer then hears a voice recording from his parents, telling him their next move will be to go back to Argentina. The way they explain what he will do is similar to the way the parents in *Kamchatka* teach the boys what to do if their parents “call for action”. It is explained as a game of pretend to Juan, whose alias name is now Ernesto. He is to pretend he is someone else to get back into the country. Here we see the innocence of a child’s game being used for a serious matter (Dargis). Similar to *Kamchatka*, there is an immense amount of responsibility placed on Juan. However, Juan parents have not hidden their cause or actions from him, contrasting *Kamchatka* where the boys are never fully told what is threatening their family. Juan is seen as a part of their militancy helping them hide bullets and guns. Whenever the family faces an instance of high intensity due to the threat of their safety, Juan is questioned and drilled angrily by his parents about his new identity.

The film focuses on Juan and his family attempting to have a daily life, while his parents are running an operation of resistance from their house. Juan, similar to Harry in *Kamchatka*, must give up his name, story and identity and take over a new one. This new identity allows him to be in school, make friends, have a crush- things considered normal for a boy his age. Similar to *Kamchatka*, there are tools used to escape the reality of the family’s situation. For example, they have Juan’s grandma come visit them at the safehouse and play music on Juan's birthday which enables them to escape their situation for an evening. After the unexpected event of Juan's uncle Beto getting killed, the family is forced to flee and go into hiding for a few days. The film continues with the intensity of the situation escalating within Argentina. Finally, ending with Juan seeing his father on TV as one of the people the military was able to detain, leading him to panic. This scene echoes *Veó veó*, also directed by Benjamín Ávila, where the main character also learns that his father was killed by seeing it broadcasted on TV. His mother comes home, and they prepare for

the military to arrive. Juan's mom burns all their documents, papers and pictures. Their entire new and old identities are burned in the fire. Juan then hides in the hiding space, while being able to hear a shootout going on with many gunshots. The film ends with another cartoon-like drawing scene, showing that the military finds him and his sister in their hiding spot, takes Juan into interrogation and ends up dropping him off at his grandmother's house without his sister. The usage of drawing and cartoons in correlation with this scene could also have been purposely done to represent the mixture of horror with Juan's childhood, since these cartoons are solely used in scenes that are extremely traumatic for Juan (Arfuch, 554).

Much of *Infancia clandestina* seems to be about Juan's search for normalcy. He is simply attempting to have a childhood. He adjusts to his new school and life easily, and is able to make friends, have a crush, and go on a camping trip with his classmates. On the camping trip, there is symbolization of how his childhood is still tainted by the military dictatorship and his parents' actions. The children play a game using blindfolds, a common element used on during kidnappings carried out by factions of the military junta. After his fieldtrip, we learn that the simple daily life that Juan seeks, with friends and school, cannot coexist with the militancy of his parents (Villari, 115). His new school life never becomes his true reality. His reality is still tainted with constant visits of other Montoneros who are working with his parents, as his parents continue covert operations from their home.

A scene that disrupts his fake reality with his real identity and story, is when his parents accidentally do not realize that it is his birthday and he is pressured into having a party at home by his schoolteacher and classmates. His parents' reactions to the idea of a party are a disappointing reality check, emphasizing once again, that his life is not normal and is not within his control. Although his uncle Beto convinces his parents to ultimately have a birthday party for him, his

parents are reluctant throughout the party constantly worried by the attention it may draw from the neighbors, exposing their safehouse. There are many factors similar to *Kamchatka*, such as the presence of a mentor-like figure for Juan and the narration of the film. Similar to *Kamchatka*, Juan also has a person in his life who acts like a mentor, his uncle Beto. Similar to Lucas who has to leave “Harry”, uncle Beto gets killed and abandons Juan, not allowing Juan to have closure. His parents do not initially tell him what happened to his uncle until he insists. This plays into the idea that Juan is still a child and not a part of the adult realm, though he sometimes is included in his parents militant operations within the house. The pressures of adulthood are placed on him as his parents please, but he is still treated as a child. These lines between childhood and adulthood are constantly blurred within these films. *Infancia clandestina* also uses a form for narration that comes and goes, during the important points of the film, just like *Kamchatka*. However, this narration is done by his parents, and is introduced as a tape recording to the audience at the beginning of the film. The presence of this tape recording throughout various points in the film could be considered a way for the film director to show that the film is a memory, and there are certain points of that memory that stand out. In *Kamchatka*, the narration is in past tense, therefore it can be considered as if the story is being told as something that has already happened. Since the viewer does not know what happens to Juan’s parents until the end of the film, it can be assumed they will never reappear in his life, the voiceover in *Infancia clandestina* can therefore be compared to the past tense narration in *Kamchatka*. The film demonstrates how a family would experience being directly persecuted by the government a situation of high intensity. A mixture of emotions, his parents often laugh, yell at him, or leave him to fend for himself. Similar to the other films, the ending is quite abrupt, leaving Juan behind without his parents, abandoned, as the film alludes to the fact that the military may have illegally kidnapped his sister. Using drawings to emphasize the

most shocking moments in his life the viewer is constantly reminded that the film is being shown from the child's gaze. It is clear to the audience that Juan wishes and desires to return to normalcy. However, due to his parents' choice to be involved with the Montoneros, the military government and his parents equally take part in forcing him to give up his childhood and innocence for the safety of his family, and later, his own survival.

Conclusion

The collection of these films and their commonalities allow the filmmakers to regain a sense of agency, as they are able to tell stories of their childhood for the first time at the national level through cinema. These films all taking place during the dictatorship, focus on family life and the interruption of it, rather than narrating the aftermath. Through the hints and historical context of the films, the viewer is able to piece together a narrative focusing on families and the consequences of the parent's militancy on their children. Neither telling a heroic account of their parents, nor directly portraying the military junta and the dictatorship, these films do not serve the purpose to criticize the state or give credit to their parents, they are meant to educate the audience of the difficulties and grief that the forgotten generation of children experienced. The protagonists within these films all face hardships inflicted upon them by the dictatorship, which place them in a position where they are forced to grow up, ending their childhoods abruptly. Common experiences and events within childhood are forcefully taken away, not to mention the additional grief that many of these children experience due to the loss of a parent at the hands of the military dictatorship. Through these films, the viewer is able to understand a more personal account of the time period from an entirely new perspective. Using children as the forefront of the narrative and their gaze, these filmmakers are able to create sympathy among the viewer and invite the viewer into the nonsensical world of confusion and disruption that they experienced as children.

Chapter 3: The Restoration of Identity and Justice

The repercussions of the tumultuous era of the dictatorship have left a long-lasting scar on the Argentine public. This scar is evident in a variety of mediums and forms. The current culture, the collective history, the arts, and graffiti reminders throughout the streets of Buenos Aires continuously remind Argentine citizens of the unfinished past and its presence in the current future. The injustices of this period have not fully been dealt with, there were slight attempts in the 1990s, but those were reversed shortly after, as many of the military generals that had been put on trial were pardoned. As with other instances of unfinished justice, populations will turn to other mediums to create justice for themselves. Within the genre of hundreds of films that handle the dictatorship as a subject, it is possible to find a whole sub-genre of documentary films regarding this topic, exploring the questions left behind by lost loved ones. Directors such as Gabriela Golder, Andres Habegger, Albertina Carri, Natalia Bruschtein and Nicolas Prividera, are all children of disappeared, and they have been able to question the actions of their parents, as well as the governmental system regarding the last dictatorship. The films they have made, *En memoria de los pájaros* (Gabriela Golder, 2000), *(H) Historias cotidianas* (Andres Habegger, 2001), *Los Rubios* (Albertina Carri, 2003), *Encontrando a Víctor* (Natalia Bruschtein, 2004), and *M* (Nicolas Prividera, 2007) all exemplify the general struggles of identity and closure for these children, who are now adults.

Trauma, memory and identity are all central themes within the documentaries created by children of the disappeared. The Dirty War films that have been directed by children of the disappeared have often had common traits and styles. Many of these traits and styles draw directly from either childhood focusing on factors such as toys, children's songs, games, etc. Or the styles draw on indicators of the dictatorship such as the ocean, waves, water, and airplanes. These

instances are common among all Dirty War films made by children of the disappeared, however, the documentary genre in particular, has spawned its own recurring themes and styles. These films, asking questions regarding the choices of their parents, are the only possible way these children, now adults, have been able to deal with the lasting effects of the dictatorship. Their films are essentially a new form of serving justice and reclaiming their own narrative. They do so by exposing the injustices of the government and their parents' actions, that have too easily been ignored. Though the documentaries are not necessarily all one certain type of documentary, they borrow from a variety of genres to create their own common traits within Dirty War Films and films on memory in general. In the following paragraph these exact elements which are particular to Dirty War films will be analyzed in depth in conjunction with their relationship to the first-person documentary.

In the following section, I will analyze what I call the key elements of this subgenre:

1. Archival footage
2. Elements that indicate the presence of water
3. Airplanes
4. Indications movement and traveling

Many of these films follow the first-person documentary style. In these documentaries about the disappeared there is constant usage of archival family photographs, archival footage, water and airplane sounds, movement and traveling, voiceover, black and white images and videos, among many others. These commonalities between films are able to help emphasize the lack of control and the hazy memories they have been left with. Throughout the documentaries that deal with the dictatorship, there is a general use of archival footage, however, unique to the films by the children of those who disappeared, this footage is often home movies. This archival footage

serves as the memory of these children, as they are unable to recall direct memories of trauma and disappearance, they utilize the archival footage and give their memory and childhood a new meaning (Quílez Esteve, 13-14). The footage that these filmmakers use are inherited, home movies are repurposed to tell a story. Photographs are another tool greatly used within documentaries made by children of people who disappeared is not solely to illustrate or give an example of what their parents looked like, but also a way to keep their memory alive and retell their history on their own terms. Photography, especially family photos, the photographic image is an integral part of the documentary tradition. It essentially creates an archive of images for these filmmakers to draw upon and give evidence of existence. All of the selected films use photographs in one way or another, whether it be in the backgrounds of scenes, as props for the main character to look at, or as contextual evidence to explain to the viewer who is being talked about. The four films are therefore able to use photographs to reconstruct the personal relation between the disappeared and the child.

In addition to the use of photographs, these films also all use sound in a similar way, in which there are instances of non-diegetic sound that mimics the sound of airplanes or the sound of movement underwater. This seems to attempt to address the often discarding of bodies through mechanisms using an airplane and dropping the bodies into the Rio de la Plata or the Atlantic Ocean off of the Argentinian coastline. Another type of sound that many of the films use is the voiceover, often first person, used when they are reading a letter from a family member or speaking about their own experiences. This voiceover is often perceived as close to the viewer, giving an intimate insight into the filmmaker's life, a tactic also utilized in the fiction films. In addition to sound all the films have movement involved, movement meaning the portrayal of going from one place to another. Travel by car or train is very common imagery in these films, often there is

footage shot looking out the window, handheld camera footage that captures the movement of driving by something. This seems to emphasize the search for answers regarding the fate of the parents and family members of the directors. It also refers to the journey that the director often must complete to reach the final answers that they are searching for, leading to a journey of growth. The movement present in these films has been referred to by Pablo Piedras as a new subgenre of “docu-road movies”. Documentaries in which there are many similarities with road movies, such as the emphasis on mobility, displacement and character growth, in this case, the filmmaker's journey to find answers (Piedras, 217-236).

These documentary films bear a heroic significance, as they are some of the only public representations of these points of view within Argentine society today. Compared to the various documentaries made by filmmakers who are not children of the disappeared, these filmmakers are able to self-represent their stories on the national stage, stories that have previously been excluded from the narrative. Now that the children of the disappeared are of age to defend and represent themselves within the film industry, they are able to reclaim their identities from their previous portrayal as victims or children of heroes. Their activity within filmmaking allows them to communicate their experience directly to the public without being lost in the interpretation of someone who is viewing their stories as an outsider. Many of the films sparked debate and discourse regarding the human rights abuses during the dictatorship period (Sims). *En memoria de los pájaros* was one of the first instances of artistic expression, in which the dictatorship was examined through the perspective of a child of the disappeared. Not many years after, *(H) Historias cotidianas* was one of the first feature length documentary films made by a child of the disappeared, and in this film Andres Habegger interviews fellow children of the disappeared, giving personal stories a place on the national stage. *Los Rubios*, was one of the most influential

films, it plays with the idea of constructed collective history versus personal memories. *Los Rubios*, and all the documentary films listed, deconstruct this history that has been repeatedly told to them. They dig to the bottom of the personal memories that are projected onto them, and the identities that they do not know, but have been placed upon them by people who knew their family and parents (Stites, 161). The films toy with the idea of memory, challenging the interviewees to explain their perception of their parents. In the films *M* and *Encontrando a Víctor*, the filmmakers investigate beyond the projected history and image of their fathers. They ask questions beyond the answers that are being given, realizing that the truths of their parents, is not necessarily their story. The films allow the filmmakers to question the narratives they have been told their whole lives, to take their father's down from the heroic pedestal and challenge that image to bring them back to a parental level rather than a heroic militant.

The Juxtaposition of Childhood and Terror: *En memoria de los pájaros*

In this following section, *En memoria de los pájaros* [In Memory of the Birds] the first known documentary film by a child of the disappeared will be analyzed. This section will focus on how the previously mentioned key elements of the subgenre inform the topic of the dictatorship from the perspective of a child of the disappeared. Utilizing footage, non-diegetic sound and text in an impactful manner, the director Gabriela Golder is able to explore the dictatorship in her film *En memoria de los pájaros* through a surrealist lens. Golder is able to create a world in which both the dictatorship and the daily life of a family exist side by side, while the text creates a narrative that exemplifies how one affects the other (Quílez Esteve, 47-75). The juxtaposition of footage from the dictatorship, with warm family home movies and children singing nursery songs, creates a haunting world, emphasizing the impact of the tragedy on the childhood of these children and their memory. This documentary, rather than using a typical talking heads strategy, unites the

film's narrative with its experimental and surrealist style, by not confining it to a certain location or structure (Garibotto, 1). Presented as a fading memory being interrupted by footage of the dictatorship, the short film places two windows of footage side by side. This side by side tactic recreates the dizzying effect of a memory, instead of relying on witness statements and talking heads, Golder chooses confusions and disruption as the main narrative. The content of one window focused on archival footage, as if taken from the filmmaker's own home videos using sepia tones and warm colors for most of the film to emphasize the familial experience during the dictatorship. The other window is often showing black and white found footage, depicting military violence, and attempting to allude to the military actions during the dictatorship. The sound and text within the film add an additional emotional component, while not explicitly telling the viewer exactly what they are watching, leaving it up to interpretation. The title refers to birds, it can be assumed that the birds in this case symbolize the disappeared. Birds can often symbolize a spiritual power and are often also utilized to express freedom. Therefore, it can be assumed that the undertones that come with the symbolism of birds was intended. In memory of the birds, is therefore in memory of the disappeared, those who were fighting for freedom, and those who are no longer with us, though their spirits are present. Some of the other motifs that the film employs, similar to other films, are the sound and footage of airplanes, the ocean and the portrayal of the flag. All of these motifs are constant throughout fiction and documentary films that focus on the dictatorship.

The experimental documentary that Golder creates, starts with an image of someone holding film, rolls of film surrounding a camera, as it fades to black, the title page comes forth. This beginning image can be seen as a way to acknowledge the found footage technique and the recontextualization of footage. Though the footage may seem as her own home movies, they are found footage, the family being shown on the screen is not her own, but the viewer is tricked into

believing it is, as the combination of text and imagery comes off in a personal manner. Though she does not share blood ties with the story of the family whose footage she is using, she is generationally close to them and the world which she creates, a world of children's games and songs parallel to totalitarian terror (Quílez Esteve, 14-15). This juxtaposition of childhood and terror emphasizes the impact the dictatorship had on her childhood, as an overbearing omnipresent force, continuously influencing the creation of her identity. Leaving her in limbo between her own fragmented memories and the official state narrative of the disappeared. The following opening scene begins with images of a road that then begins to move. As the two images continue in movement, the voice of a young child is singing a children's song to the tune of *Frere Jacques*, while the images. Similar to the other films, these images depict travel. The lyrics that are being said and repeated by the child singing "where are you? Here I am, here I am! Nice to meet you, nice to meet you! Now I'm leaving, now I'm leaving". There is no instrumental music, it is solely the child singing as the images continue across the screen. This non-diegetic sound creates an eerie effect, directly combining these images that are being associated with the dictatorship to a child's song. It is not a coincidence that this song was chosen, having these lyrics continuously repeated, emphasizes the loss that this child has experienced, along with many others. The song highlights the search for the truth and her parents, a map is visualized, airplanes are shown on screen, home movies where families pose, and children play. Golder utilizes text just as much as the other elements in her film. As the image changes from airplanes to footage of a map and a home movie of two children with their mother, the text reads, "look around me", "some people are no longer there" referring to her mother. as archival footage of the dictatorship is paired with home movies of her childhood.



En memoria de los pájaros (Gabriela Golder, 2000)

The film continues to portray images from childhood, a happy laughing girl in black and white, children playing, a birthday party captured on home video. The song sung by the child continues as the images on the screen are the birthday party and a laughing girl in slow motion, text goes across the screen “neither us, nor anyone could imagine what would happen next”. The song by the child stops, across the screen words read, “this is not a dream”, the screen goes black, as a new image appears of a woman looking out of a car window, the text reads “the story begins”. Loud noises and sounds occur, it is difficult to contextualize where these sounds are sampled from, similar to the sound of wind, airplanes taking off, when a camera is dropped into water, or the sound of a film beginning, it is abstract, as if the viewer is being transported back in time. The title reads, “I am 5 years old, Year 1976”. As the film progresses, the left window on the screen seemingly takes on the position of showing and visualizing the dictatorship, or images, while the right window begins to function as a testimonial space, a man speaking of his experience and the cruelty of the dictatorship.

The juxtaposition of these two images contextualizes the time period for the viewer, it creates a realistic approach, in which the viewer is able to fathom that these two narratives and memories coexisted in the same time space and their memory continues to coexist. As the man

speaks, the text reads “the memory as a tunnel, a spinning movement and a feeling of dizziness” as the non-diegetic sound continues. Black and white images of the disappeared are being shown in the left box, as a sepia-tone image of a child eating ice cream is depicted in the left box. The sounds of airplanes ensue, as the text reads “I mean, I don't understand, they blindfolded us, they tied our hands with cables, and they beat us and they beat us, they loaded us in a plane and they hit us at 3000 meters above sea level”, alluding to the death flights that occurred during the dictatorship, in which the military would throw their prisoners into Rio de la Plata. There are also other instances within the film, similar to other films, in which the river is used as an index and due to the context to the history, the viewer is able to assume its meaning. The use of the water and footage of waves reinforces the eerie meaning of Rio de la Plata and the Atlantic Ocean as places where the military junta discarded bodies, serving as a constant reminder of the dark fate of her parents. *En memoria de los pájaros (2000)* specifically uses non-diegetic sound as a main factor in the film. A combination of a child singing, a woman counting and sound footage from what seems to be a home movie catching someone saying “20th of June, 1976, today is father's day”, while text flows across the screen saying “listen” and “I am without an identity”, highlights the struggle for this generation of children. The sound combined with the text creates an idea of a faded memory being interrupted by dictatorship footage, as well as implements the experience and narrative of the childhood of someone who grew up during the dictatorship. The text in the film is used cleverly to add context and information to the footage, that otherwise would not be assumed. One of the most impactful statements that the text serves to deliver in conjunction with the footage, is when the footage on the right is focused on the image out of the window of what can be assumed is a car, while on the right there are images of splashes in the ocean. The text reads “corpses are seen”, immediately after, the footage of the ocean switches to footage of children on a seesaw.

This haunting text combined with the footage, creates a strong contrast between the two images, similarly to the juxtaposition of home movies and footage of the dictatorship discussed earlier which emphasizes the combination of children's games and totalitarian terror existing in the same space. Another haunting statement, that encapsulates this generation of filmmakers, is “end of innocence”, as footage of the dictatorship contrasts children playing on the playground, underlining the disruption of childhood that these children endured. As these images are shown, it is possible to hear a woman counting, this can be read in a variety of ways, but in terms of the dictatorship and childhood, this reminds the viewer of hide and seek, as if the children are waiting for this nightmare to end.

The two frames that carry two different images throughout the film serve a variety of purposes. The footage within the film is found footage of the family in which children are playing, birthdays are celebrated, Father’s Day, children visiting the beach, etc. While the archival footage used is taken from the time of the dictatorship, footage from television news broadcasts in which excessive violence and repression is visible through arrests, persecutions, beating, brutally contrasting the physically and visually warm images of a family. The presence of footage of the dictatorship, creates an alienating effect, similar to the fiction films which combine the nonsensical with the factual, creating a nightmare disguised as a dream or memory, this footage. There are instances in which the two windows juxtapose each other, creating a universe in which the two images are connected, demonstrating to the viewer that the dictatorship and the home movies occurred at the same time. This links the public occurrences with the private, having the repression present within the formerly protected world of childhood. There is also footage that mimics one another, black and white images of people running in the streets of a city compared to children running on the beach. This emphasizes childhood mimicking the dictatorship, creating the

everlasting imagery of the influence of the dictatorship on the filmmaker's childhood, emphasizing the shadow cast by the dictatorship on her childhood. The disappeared are able to survive through the platform of memory that Golder creates, tying the personal and the historical into a claim for memory by affiliating the social and political memory with one another (Quílez Esteve, 16).

H.I.J.O.S. and their Everyday Stories: (*H*) *Historias cotidianas*

Through interviews with fellow children of the disappeared that are also members of H.I.J.O.S.,¹² Andres Habegger attempts to explore the perspective of these children and their battles regarding their identity and the loss of their parents. The title of the film, (*H*) *Historias cotidianas* [Everyday Stories], insinuates what seems to be the conclusion of the film, namely that these stories are not just isolated among the few people Habegger interviewed, yet they are much more common than realized. The film deals with non-activist sons and daughters. The questions by Habegger to the protagonists are framed to discuss the impacts that the disappearance of their parents has had on their lives. Habegger's main goal was to not investigate institutional expressions of memory, and rather personal accounts and memories of those who experienced some of the worst tragedies, without being fully able to comprehend their experience at the time, and the aftermath of their later comprehension (Ros, 32). As one interviewee emphasizes, it is not just the 30.000 disappeared that are affected by the atrocities of the Dirty War, but also all of their friends and family, tripling the number to 90.000 or more people who are directly affected by the aftermath of the dictatorship. The film explores the children's losses (now grown up) created by the disappearance of their parents, and the continued effect of the atrocities from the Dirty War on their identity. (*H*) *Historias cotidianas* was one the first feature length documentary films made by a child of the disappeared, and in this film Habegger gives personal stories a place on the national stage. Using talking heads style interviews, Habegger is able to dive deep into the losses

of these children, now all grown adults, and relate it to the present day. These children dig to the bottom of the personal memories that are projected onto them, the identity that they do not know, but has been placed upon them by people who knew their family and parents. Habegger deconstructs the history of the families, emphasizing how the identity of those who survived is not created by the person holding the identity, the child of the disappeared, however, it is created by the narratives that are placed upon them by associating their identity with the disappeared (Stites, 161). The film has been criticized by some of the H.I.J.O.S. members who participated, stating that since H.I.J.O.S. is a political organization, they were uncomfortable with the separation of their experience from the political and that the filmmaker was solely interested in the emotional aspect of their experience. Especially Gemetro, who states that the process of making the film and hearing of other non-activist children's experiences, forced her to confront her own pain and deal with it in a new way. This interview with Gemetro specifically touches on the ethics of documentary filmmaking, reminding us that though Habegger went through a similar experience, it does not necessarily mean that everyone whose parents disappeared would like to identify with the narrative he has created, emphasizing the fact that though these documentaries are based on personal histories, it does not mean that the story portrayed is the one and only "truth" (Bianco). The film toys with the idea of memory, challenging the interviewees to explain their perception of their parents.

The title, (*H*) *Historias cotidianas*, translates to "everyday stories", the title in itself is an affirmation that these narratives of the children of the disappeared are common and a part of everyday life for these people. In addition, the title could also allude to the disappearances that were such a frequent occurrence, as well as the militancy of the parents which essentially entered the personal sphere and became the militancy of the family. One of the protagonists recounts the

drills his father would do with him, “my father taught me how to use a gun”, making sure his son was prepared for any situation, he taught him to hide under the bed, drag his body along the floor, “sometimes I thought he was crazy” the son states, while the scene emphasizes the militancy of the children through their parents. The choice of Habegger to place the “h” in parentheses, is to highlight that it is a phantom letter, not present in our pronunciation of the title. The film is broken into chapters, where all of the chapters begin with an “h”, huellas (footsteps), historias (stories), hijos (children), hoy (today) (Amado, 151). This could have been done to emphasize the silence surrounding the topic, and the missing piece to the national memory, namely the testimonies of these children, now adults. It is clear through this documentary, that Habegger and the subjects of the documentary are attempting to right past historical wrongs, as Argentine history has not reflected many of the personal experiences of the recent past. The investigations have failed, and the memory altered by the national narrative, not including the narratives of the children of the disappeared. The film emphasizes that the ghosts of the dictatorship are still very much present at the time of the documentary, especially being the first documentary film to tackle the subject from the perspective of a child of the disappeared. These shadows and ghosts are present in the everyday lives of Argentines, whether they are aware or not. This documentary intends to present the various stories of these children, bringing their narratives into the reality of Argentine history as well as giving them a platform that they haven’t previously enjoyed. Through the film, the director is able to address the disappearances as well as the non-existent justice process at the time. The film interviews six children of the disappeared who are now adults, their stories intertwine to create a common narrative, namely the search for identity.

The film combines archival footage from the 1970s, as well as the testimonies from the subjects, in spaces that play a significant role in their personal stories. For example, a building in

which the parents of one of the children were taken to, for another, the park where the family used to go before the dictatorship, etc. Some of the similarities found within (*H*) *Historias cotidianas* and the other films, is that the common motifs and sounds of water and airplanes are utilized. In addition, movement is emphasized in this film, bringing it along the lines of the idea of docu-road movies. Finally, the main similarity is the use of photographs as they play a central role. Each interviewee displays a couple of photos, which they use to identify their parents, these photos often serve as a way for these children to connect to their past and their parents' past, who are now absent. These photographs are archival images and serve the purpose of putting a face to the stories being told, creating a more visual narrative for the viewer along with the revisiting of certain sites and archival footage from the years of the dictatorship.

This film explores the variety of relationships with photographs and the importance of these photographs to the subject, as ways in which we form our memories. For example, in the film, there are instances in which the *hijos* attempt to find the site of a photo that they or their parents are in. This search to find the location, may add to the memory of this person, as well as help them contextualize the photograph. Another prime example is how these people relate photographs to their identity. Family members will tell them they resemble their father or mother, but their only reference is a photograph. A grandma explains that for one of her grandchildren, the only memory he had to cling onto were the images of his parents, she states that his parents were able to keep him company through his possession of their photographs. These images are also in some instances the only memory the *hijos* have. One of the protagonist's states, "I'd love to remember, remember my father talking or walking... his touch, his hair, but I don't, I just have pictures". This statement emphasizes the loss these children faced, their only memories being pictures to hold on to, reduced

to photographic records of the relationships with their parents, replacing memories with photographic images.

Many of the protagonists of the film recount what life was like in school after their parents were killed or went missing, their stories are quite similar to those portrayed within the fiction films. Cristian accounts that in 4th grade they switched schools and were instructed by his mother to not tell his friends at school that his father had passed away, though he accidentally told his classmates and teachers, which threatened his family's safety. Florencia, another interviewee, tells how she believed her father had been killed in an accident and hadn't learned about the truth until much later. For this to be the first film made by a child of a disappeared, the talking heads style interview as well as the testimonials, are crucial to starting off this wave of documentary film. The experiences of these people are directly related to the stories told in the fiction films, creating accounts with a strong indexical bond to the lived historical world of the general public. Claudio was a child of the disappeared who had been appropriated by the military government and adopted into a new family, his story adds a different perspective, one of coming to terms with the concept of being an *hijo*, as well as questioning his entire identity. These quite personal accounts leave the viewer understanding the struggles that these children had with their family's history. Similar to *Encontrando a Víctor*, some question if their parents thought about the consequences and the effect it would have on their children, others tell stories of struggling in high school and the feeling of loneliness, not being able to share that side of themselves after having been told to repress that side of their identity their whole lives.

The use of Reenactment in Reclaiming Identity: *Los Rubios*

With a somber pace and investigational content *Los Rubios* [The Blonds] directed by Albertina Carri, focuses on the director exploring what happened to her family during the

Argentine Dirty War. The film is among one of the most well-known within this genre of Dirty War documentaries, and has participated in international film festivals and won awards on the world stage.¹³ The film serves as the introduction to the topic, though not the first film, it discusses topics that had traditionally been considered taboo within the public debate. Carri looks into a variety of conflicts within the militant left. Issues surrounding the armed struggle against the military junta, the disagreements within the leftist movements, and the overrepresentation of the middle and upper-class students and professionals who participated in these movements, not the working class. The critical lens employed to investigate the militant left decomposes the memory of the dictatorship that has often been dominated by the same groups of 1970s activists. These groups often disagree with the narratives that frame the militant activists in a non-heroic light leaving no space for other perspectives on the dictatorship, claiming ownership over a narrative that is not solely theirs to tell. Through this critical lens, Carri is able to reframe her memory and history from her perspective and not through the stories of others. In the film the daughter of a disappeared couple named Albertina Carri revisits multiple locations such as her childhood home and the detention center where her parents were held, attempting to piece back together a history and identity that is so distant, it seems as if it isn't quite her own. Years after her parents were abducted as Ana Ros writes, "Albertina realized that she could not remember the events but had created filmlike images based on her sister's descriptions, in which she saw herself as the protagonist" (Ros, 38). This helps emphasize the common traits within the fiction films, where memories are combined with stories and fairytales, creating a false version of the event, though seemingly real to the person who that memory belongs to. As Carri grew up, and was told the truth about her parents, as Ana Ros states she was surrounded by the "heroic narrative of 1970s

activism”, as her family continued to recount stories of her parents, they became fantastical unrealistic beings (Ros, 39).

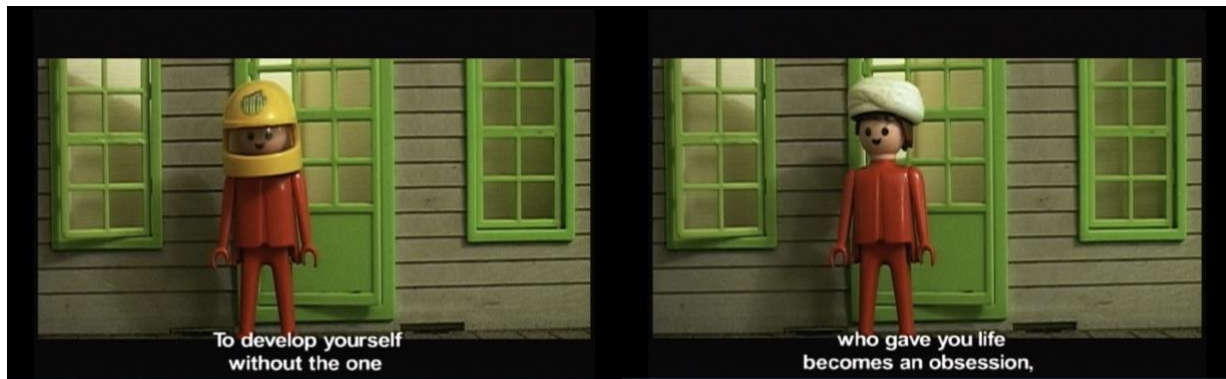
The revisiting of locations and emphasis on moving throughout this film, truly highlights Piedras’ idea of the docu-road movie, as the protagonist travels to seek closure and find answers about her parents’ militancy, leading to personal growth. In addition, Carri utilizes her senses as a way to tell the story and trigger her “involuntary memory” (Llantada Díaz, 2), adding to her complicated memories of the past. Through interviewing old neighbors and friends of her parents, she is able to create a narrative from their contrasting answers, about a family she has no recollection of. Within the first few minutes of the film, Carri and her team go to where her old house used to be before her parents were kidnapped. They attempt to interview an old neighbor, who insists she knows nothing about the family who used to live next door, however, once she discovers Carri was the youngest daughter of that family, she begins to offer the crew more information. The neighbor is reluctant to tell the camera crew about the family, though she insists that Carri’s parents were good people and then tells Albertina, though referring to the Albertina of the past in third person, that she used to take care of her. It is a strange instance, in which Carri is searching for answers through this neighbor that clearly had a relationship with her when she was little that Carri does not remember, however, this neighbor is reluctant to speak about Carri’s family, as well as continues to speak as if Carri is not “Albertina”. The neighbor had taken care of Carri as an infant, held a birthday party for the girls at her house, and celebrated a Christmas together. This neighbor was clearly intertwined with her family’s life, though when being asked the hard questions, that were still taboo at the time, she avoided them offering lame excuses as to why she could not remember. Especially in regard to the fate of Carri’s family, this neighbor insists that she knew nothing, worried about where the footage would be shown. After this impromptu

interview, a caption floats across the screen, conveying information about Carris' family. Simultaneously sound effects mimic the noise of being underwater, framing her parents' fate with the implied assumption that water means in this sub-genre of films, alluding to the death flights over Rio de La Plata. The text states that on the 24th of February 1977, her parents Ana Maria Caruso and Roberto Carri were kidnapped and killed the same year, and that they had three daughters, Andrea, Paula and Albertina. This information both mentioning the parents and the children, shapes the way the viewer interprets the rest of the film. Highlighting that the story will be told from the perspective of Carri, as a child of the disappeared.

The main way in which Carri portrays her story is through reenactment. The director doesn't often appear within the film but has a stand-in actress that is playing the part of Albertina Carri. Carri appears within the film, however, she appears when the footage is black and white, creating two stories within the film, the one in which her character exists, and the one in which she herself exists. After the actress that plays Carri in the film is first introduced, a scene follows in which it seems to depict a car continuously driving past the actress, until it continues on. During this scene, the sound of what seems to be cello music continuously builds up, as a faint voice is heard, the voice seems to be addressing a rally or protest, though it is not audible at all, that is what one can assume. In addition, there are a variety of scenes in which the filmmaker has decided to use Playmobil toys to reenact a certain scene or emphasize an aspect of the voiceover playing in the background (Wilson, 91). The actress stand-in for Carri continues the investigation through multiple interviews. In one scene, she is seen in her home office working on the project, surrounded by old images, as well as a television on which one of the interviews is playing. As the interviewee tells Albertina about her parents and their characteristics, the stand-in Albertina is writing on a piece of paper, "TO REVEAL THE MECHANISM OF MEMORY. OMITTING, ONE

REMEMBERS”. Later in the film, the actress playing Albertina is shown getting her DNA tested, right after, Albertina is shown getting her DNA tested in black and white footage. It is as if the viewer is watching the making of the film, as well as seeing the actual actions that are happening within the world of the film which seems to reinforce the constant friction between documentary and fiction.

The title, *Los Rubios* [The Blondes], alludes to an interview with a different neighbor. She shares her memory of the night Carri’s parents were abducted, sharing that the military broke into her house and her family hostage, until she was finally able to convey that they were not activists. The title refers to this interview, in which the neighbor confesses that she had told the soldiers that the activists were blond, and that the whole family was blond. In this case, calling someone a blond is not based on their appearance, more so their socio-economic class, they were considered outsiders, “the others” (Ros, 41). Along with the extensive interviews, the title creates a sense for a viewer that the subjects of this film, Carri’s family, and more specifically, parents, are so distant from her memory they almost become fiction. The film starts with a scene reenacted using Playmobil toys, non-diegetic sounds of farm animals and cows are played. Discussions between what seems to be Albertina and her film crew and the actress playing her, play as the viewer sees images of a farm and the Playmobil toys moving about the farm. The footage switches to actual images of a farm, open plains and car tire tracks. The use of Playmobil figures becomes a common trait throughout the film. Utilizing toys from childhood to tell her story, Carri creates confusion among the viewer, similar to her own confusion with her memories. This emphasizes how for the children of the disappeared, play begins to mimic their memory.



Los Rubios (Albertina Carri, 2003)

Carri uses a Playmobil scene to emphasize the discussion of identity that takes place within the film, connecting child's play to the formation of identity, and the difficulties she faced as a child attempting to form her identity in the context of her parents' disappearance. It is shown while the actress playing Albertina discusses the idea of identity. She quotes Regin Robin, a historian, stating, "one needs to create one's own identity when that identity is threatened", she tells the viewers that her identity was first threatened during the period of violence under the dictatorship, "when saying my name meant danger and rejection". Through this quote, one can begin to understand the impact of the dictatorship on the identity of these children often forced to give up an identity, and later claim a new one. The dictatorship forced many of these children to take new identities, their original identities stolen by the government, as the very use of their identity could threaten their family. Carri connects this part of the film with the present day, having the actress state

"Today saying my name in some circles means strange looks, a mixture of confusion and pity, to develop yourself without the one who gave you life becomes an obsession at odds with daily life, disheartening. Since most of the answers have been lost in time."

As this monologue regarding identity is spoken, the Playmobil figure continuously changes hats, a metaphor for switching identities, as well as testing various identities out. In the search for her identity, it is clear that Carri has faced a variety of experiences in which she has difficulty identifying with. The search for answers throughout the film, becomes the search for an identity that Carri has never known.

In *Los Rubios*, photographs are used in a variety of ways. In some instances, images are seen in the background of a scene, in others a camera panned across them and gave closeup shots of the images of children and babies. Though *Los Rubios* doesn't utilize as many photographs as the other films, when it does use photographs it decides not to show the entire face, cutting the faces out of the frame, and therefore uses photos in a completely different manner than the other films (De Hauwere). In the images of her family, the photographs often solely focus on the children, cutting out the images of her parents. This way of using photographs contrasts the other documentaries, as it keeps the identity hidden, the viewer doesn't necessarily focus on the image of Carri's parents and has no idea what they look like, therefore rather than the film being about the people that Carri's has lost, it is more about Carri's own experience being a child of the disappeared and the process of making a film about it. The focus on not including her parents also emphasizes that the film was made from her point of view. This use of the photographs also questions the possibility of recovering people who are no longer present, in addition to the Playmobil scenes, it emphasizes the detached memory Carri has of her parents as well as exploring the fantasy of the child to explain their absence (Chaudhuri, 107). Most of the children were too young when their parents disappeared to be able to have clear memories of their parents, often creating stories and fantasies that their parents were absent because of work or travel, with Carri,

she was told that her parents were working in another country before being told the truth, emphasizing the confusing fantasy world that many children found themselves in (De Hauwere).

In the film, we learn that Carri had applied for funding from INCAA (the Argentinian National Institute of Film and Audiovisual Arts), for her film, but was rejected. The committee rejects her proposal on the basis that the absence of her parents seems to be at the core of the film, though she does not include many testimonies of her parents' comrades about their efforts during the 1970's. The fax states that "Roberto Carri and Ana Maria Caruso were two politically engaged intellectuals in the 1970s whose tragic destiny deserves to be appreciated by this work". After reading the fax, Carri states "they are thinking about the film they need as a generation, and I understand that they need it, but I am not the one to do it, I mean, I just don't feel like doing it." The statement by INCAA is a clear indicator that not only did they misunderstand and disagree with the purpose of Carri's film, if they are rejecting funding on the basis of such particular aspects, it could be possible that the documentary production regarding topics such as the dictatorship was directly shaped and managed by the INCAA committee. Creating a discrepancy among narratives, whereas Carri's narrative would have been underrepresented, as INCAA seemed to cater to narratives which continue the fetishization of the disappeared as heroes of a revolution (Chaudhuri, 41).

Los Rubios, was one of the most influential films, as it plays with the idea of constructed collective history versus personal memories and identity. *Los Rubios*, and all the films deconstruct this history that has been told for them. They dig to the bottom of the personal memories that are projected onto them, the identity that they do not know, but has been placed upon them by people who knew their family and parents. The filmmakers deconstruct the history of their families, emphasizing how the identity of those who survived is not created by the person holding the

identity, the child of the disappeared, however, it is created by the narratives that are placed upon them by associating their identity with the disappeared (Stites, 161). The films toy with the idea of memory, challenging the interviewees to explain their perception of their parents.

Confronting the Militancy of Parents: *Encontrando a Víctor*

Directed by Natalia Bruschtein, *Encontrando a Víctor* [Finding Victor] is a personal inquisition into what happened to the filmmaker's father. Centered around interviews with family members and archival family photographs, the viewer is able to understand the implications of the militancy of an entire family on the generations to come after. The film follows Bruschtein, who returns to Argentina when she is 25 years old to look for her father. The last time she had seen him was when she was one year old. The film is the story of her journey to find the answers to questions she poses about her past, through the tradition of a roadmovie, it can be connected to the concept of docu-roadmovie by Pablo Piedras (Piedras, 219-221). Within this film, Bruschtein is on a journey, leading her to mature and grow as she learns about the history of her family now that she is willing to pose the questions. She attempts to answer some of the questions he left open ended, specifically why he chose to stay in Argentina and not join her and her mother in exile in Mexico. In this film however, she explores her father's past and her own identity through extensive interviews she completes with her mother, uncle and grandmother. The film follows a classic talking heads interview style, with talking heads interviews as well as revisiting the sites of memory where her father was held, such as the Club Atletico which was a detention center in 1977-1978, as well as utilizing archival images of her family. The film begins with the image of her father, as well as his words to her, a note he left on the back of the photo saying, "so my daughter won't forget me and will recognize me when she sees me again. So the others won't forget what I'm like. It feels good to think you think of me. I love you all very much. Victor." The

film, similar to many of the others, then states historical facts about the dictatorship. Bruschtein states that 30.000 people were disappeared by the military, and within those disappeared were her father, her aunts, their husbands and her grandfather.

Bruschtein opens the film by showing footage of graffiti throughout Buenos Aires, dedicated to the disappeared, a similar image seen in *M* by Prividera. These images of graffiti serve as a way to emphasize the continued presence of the absences of these 30.000 people within society, though they have disappeared, they are not forgotten. They are remembered by activists and loved ones through declarations spray painted on walls of buildings, the only way in which the public can constantly be reminded of their history. Graffiti is a form of citizen rebellion, a method to constantly remind people, that does not require endorsement from the state. Bruschtein revisits the location of “Club Atletico”, the detention center where her family was held, now located underneath a highway overpass. Benches with the word “forget” are crossed out, signifying that society will not forget the atrocities and should not forget them. The title, *Encontrando a Víctor*, appears, as it seems that the viewer gets an overview of the detention center as footage is shot out of the window as a car drives away. The film essentially begins where her father's story ends, the rest of the film traces his actions backwards from that point at which he was held in the detention center, as Bruschtein attempts to retrace his steps and understand his choices she learns more and more information of who her father was like as a person, the Montonero, the viewer doesn't learn much about who he was as a father. Music is utilized throughout this sequence, a piano, playing two keys as each image appears on the screen. It is as if the music is accompanying the story, though not necessarily sad, the score is somber. Once the title sequence is shown, the music picks up the pace, creating the soundtrack for the rest of the film. This music is utilized in the instances at which Bruschtein is not interviewing family members, but filming locations of

memory as well as the city of Buenos Aires, it functions as a way to separate her family's story from the story of the greater population of Buenos Aires, and show how intertwined this history is within the city. Bruschtein tells the viewer through text, the story of the documentary.

The main interview in the film is with her mother. This interview allows her to ask questions regarding her parents' choice to be active militants. It has an accusatory and questioning tone within it, demonstrating the clear generational differences between the generation of children and the generation of militants. The militants focus was to ensure a better world for their children, while the children see it as a type of abandonment. She has a true desire to understand her parents' choices by putting themselves in harm's way even though they had a child, yet can't make sense of them (Ros, 69-70). Her interview with her mother takes a heartbreaking turn as she answers that, "for him, you were not more or less important than his compañeros, his party, his activism or his dreams".¹⁴ When questioning her mother about her choice to go into exile, she states that if she had belonged to the Montoneros she would have stayed in Argentina, "my life was like a black hole: what was I doing in Mexico?" Ana Ros describes this instance perfectly, Bruschtein realizes that she was part of that "black hole" for her mother, and if her mother had returned, she would have grown up without a mother as well. Ros corresponded with Bruschtein in 2010, in which Bruschtein described that the material for the documentary was quite difficult for her to work with, taking her 3 years until she felt comfortable editing the footage (Ros, 70). The interview with her uncle, explores the guilt he experiences from being one of the few surviving family members as well as the eldest. The film creates a picture of a family, extensively broken throughout three generations, due to the military dictatorship and the loss and longing that remains.

In *Encontrando a Víctor*, Bruschtein utilizes photographs in a variety of ways. The photographs are all black and white, often an indicator of history, these black and white images

invite the viewer into the history of her family and more specifically, the history of her father. The first image shown is of her father, along with a note that he left for her on the back in hopes that she won't forget him. The film shows the photo and the text of the note he left behind for her. Through this method, Bruschtein invites the viewer to recognize the absence and loss of the father figure that plays a central role in the film, restoring his voice through this image. The viewer sees an image of Victor as a child with his siblings and father, as teenager with his siblings, as a father, and the final image used of him as well as the beginning of the film can be seen as Victor the Montonero (De Hauwere). Bruschtein uses this same image in the end of the film and projects it on a wall full size and stands next to the image of her father. It is as if she is attempting to unify past and present, not solely insert the photo in the film, but essentially create her own version of a home video that she was never able to truly have because her father disappeared (De Hauwere). This image serves multiple purposes, forgiveness, tribute, understanding, longing, all these feelings can be read from that scene, most of all, it seems as if she is at peace with the result of her father's actions, though she may not agree, she has reached a certain understanding. She is shown reaching towards his hands, a gesture to hold his hand though he is not physically present. The other photographs utilized in the film are all photos of her father's side of the family, the photographs replace the presence of the disappeared, inviting us in to hear their testimonies spoken by their loved ones. Though Bruschtein's mother was active during the dictatorship, not once do we see a photo of her with Bruschtein's father, which also serves as a way to completely disconnect their narratives.



Encontrando a Víctor (Natalia Bruschtein, 2004)

In a later instance, a photo of Bruschtein's father with his siblings is held up in front of the camera next to the filmmaker's grandmother. It is almost as if they are in the frame with her. The images function as a way to recall and evoke the deaths that faced this family. The memory of their lives is brought back to the present, relating it to Bruschtein and her surviving family. It emphasizes the presence of their disappeared family members in their everyday lives, a story with a continuous open ending as they continue to remain disappeared. The photographs show the difficulty in seeing the disappearances, as the photographs continue to keep them alive as the only instances of evidence that these people existed (De Hauwere). The filmmaker investigates beyond the projected image of their father and asks questions beyond the answers that are being given. Bruschtein has also explored the topic of her family's militancy and the disappeared through another documentary by the name of *Tiempo suspendido* (2015), in which she looked at the disappearances of her father, aunts and uncles from the perspective of her grandmother, who is an

active member in the Madres de La Plaza de Mayo organization. The film *Encontrando a Víctor* allows Bruschtein to question the narratives she has been told her whole life, to take her father's down from the heroic pedestal and ask questions that bring them back to a parental level rather than a heroic militant.

Creating a New Identity: *M*

M directed by Nicolás Prividera, explores Prividera's search for answers regarding his mother's disappearance. His mother Marta Sierra was a Montonero, a left-wing political activist who worked at National Agricultural Technology Institute (INTA) where many of her coworkers were associated with the Montoneros. Marta Sierra was disappeared in 1976 by the military dictatorship, when Prividera was six years old and his brother was an infant. As seen with the other documentary films, it follows a personal story of the filmmaker and his investigation into his mother's past in an accusatory light, searching for the person who is at fault for his mother's disappearance. Prividera dives into finding answers to pinpoint the responsibility of her disappearance and fate onto someone. The film opens with a quote by William Faulkner that has been voiced by the filmmaker, stating "his childhood was full of names, his very body was like an empty room full of echoes of sonorous defeated names. He was not a being, a person. It was a community." This opening quote sets the tone of the film. It highlights the struggle that one may forego throughout childhood to fully understand where one belongs, in the case of Prividera, this quote relates to the formation of an identity based on missing history. It emphasizes Prividera's search for identity and struggle to find answers about the fate of his mother. Exhausting every method possible to complete his identity. Finally, the film underlines that Prividera's experience is not a singular experience, he is part of a greater generation of children, children of the disappeared.

Within the film, Prividera is on a journey to discover the past of his mother's memory, but also complete an investigation as to why she was taken, instead of her surviving comrades. Why was Prividera's mother singled out, or was she targeted? These are the questions he aims to answer, though he embarks on a journey that slowly reshapes his own history. Similar to the other films, this journey can be seen as a docu-road movie. Docu-road movies are initially described by Pablo Piedras as a film where there is an emphasis on mobility and displacement. Prividera explores sites of memory and returns to scenes within his personal history as well as his mother's history. By doing so, he dives into the collective history of the Montoneros and the personal history of their children, reconnecting the ties that had been broken after the dictatorship due to the disappearances (Piedras, 219-221). The film's opening scene is quite alluring, it starts with the sound of an airplane and the imagery of water and waves, the camera looks on through a fence, the water continues to flow and becomes more and more blurry, morphing into static on a television. This first opening image, as in many of the other films touches upon airplanes and the ocean, symbolizing the fate of many of the disappeared, as they were taken on death flights and dropped alive into the Rio de la Plata. The sound and image of water combines with the static, to bring the viewer to the present day. This scene could allude to the lack of answers that the filmmaker desires to have regarding the disappearance of his mother, he knows she ends up killed, but is looking to explore the route that led her to her fate (Holland, 46-47). As the camera utilizes a dolly out shot, the television static gets quieter, and testimonials speaking about whom we can assume to be Prividera's mother begin. Multiple people speak to who she was as a person, their impression of her, and her fate. The shot dolly out from the television is a reflection of the television in a mirror located next to it. The location of the mirror and the choice to include it in one of the first opening shots, emphasizes that this film is meant to serve as a reflection on the dictatorship and the actions carried out during

that specific time period. This reflection will be from a different perspective than previously, since the entire scene is shot at the eye level of a child, suggesting that the story will be utilizing a different gaze than before. The camera continues, and the viewer is given an overall view of a room in a house, as the camera continues, more and more information about the house is given to the viewer, ending on a framed image of what seems to be a young boy and his mother. It can be argued that the camera is positioned at the height of a child, who fixates on the image of what seems to be Prividera and his mother. The title page is then shown, a large M on what seems to be a puzzle piece. This children's toy is used to emphasize the idea that the story of his mother's fate fits into a greater puzzle and narrative surrounding the dictatorship that hasn't previously been accounted for. This sequence sets up the film for its main purpose, namely a son who is looking for answers regarding his mother. We are meant to think of the child in the final image, a child who is wondering about his mother's whereabouts, her fate, and how she was involved in subversive and militant actions. Prividera is looking for answers to his personal story, a story that is part of the greater recent history of Argentina (Peller, 49-63).

Similar to other films Prividera employs symbolization of the dictatorship as well as materials to tell the story of his mother. The film utilizes the indexes of airplanes and the ocean to emphasize the presence of the dictatorship, as well as engaging photographs to recreate the presence of his mother. One exact similarity between *M* and *Encontrando a Víctor*, is that both films utilize the projection of an image onto a wall or screen in which the child, in this case Prividera, enters the frame and stands next to his mother, creating an image of them both, bringing her memory into present day. He does this with multiple images, while one of his mother's activist friends states that everything has changed, an image of Prividera and the projection of his mother stare directly at the viewer. Through this image and interview, the past and present are combined,

in the image, Prividera and his mother are around the same age, attempting to remake the photos that he never was able to create with his mother. Unlike Bruschtein's images, Prividera's photos are all in color. Black and white images are often used in a historical context to speak of the past, while color can often signify the present. This emphasizes the directors' attempt to keep his mother's image and memory alive as well as highlighting that the fight for justice has not ended (De Hauwere). However, Prividera has extensive amounts of home movies and photographs. Bruschtein utilizes exclusively few and they are in black and white, which could also solely be a coincidence, as Prividera's mother seemed to be keen on documenting her life as well as Prividera's childhood through film and photography.

Another factor which Prividera is able to use to keep his mother's memory alive and insist on her existence, is the constant presence of legal documents and identification papers and cards, emphasizing that she cannot be erased. Multiple identification documents are shown to the viewer as well as letters, to demonstrate the history of his mother's life. This connects the first half of the film, in which Prividera visits sites of memory where his mother used to work and commemorative plaques in Buenos Aires for the desaparecidos, where Prividera's mother is not directly commemorated in any of these locations. His mother is in very few of the national military documents that are available to the public, and her name is not mentioned in any testimonies by survivors, there is no mention of her presence, nor an explanation for why she was abducted. The hundreds of photographs, documents of identification, letters and other personal artifacts, serve as Prividera's way to prove his mother's existence, though she may not exist in the national collective memory, she is still very much present in his thoughts and life (Ros, 56).

In the final minutes of the film, Prividera burns documents, letters and photos, before the final scene arrives, the viewer is able to see a paper being burned that says, "open end",

emphasizing that the film is open-ended. The film ends in a similar way as to how it begins, the camera goes through the rooms of the house, ending on a television that still has static. This television has served as a way to keep the memories of his mother alive throughout the film, contextualizing her for the viewer, by having the archival family footage framed by the shape of the television in each instance that it is used. In the final scene, the camera ends on the television, which goes from static, to images of his mother throughout the years she was alive, creating a montage of her life. While this montage plays, there are sounds of waves crashing that get louder and louder as the montage continues. The wave sounds get to a maximum volume, an unbearable level as the final wave crashes and the montage ends. The screen turns white and all sound ceases, leaving the viewer with a ringing tone in their ears as the credits roll. Throughout the film, his mother is connected to the water, the beach and waves. The filmmaker depicts the mother next to the beach as well as begins and ends the film with the image of waves being seen through a fence. The ambiguity of the water and waves, adds to the lack of answers regarding his mother and what happened to her. The end of the film, though no verbal or written information is given, can serve as a dedication to his mother and the unanswered questions surrounding her disappearance. Though the director didn't receive answers as to what happened and why his mother was kidnapped and disappeared, through his journey of investigating the case, and being able to meet his mother's former friends as well as learn about the early years of his childhood, Prividera is able to create a sense of closure for himself. In the ending of the film they dedicate a site of memory to his mother at her former workplace. A ceremony is held that seems to serve as a celebration of life of those who disappeared and a reclaiming of justice for those people, the film is able to end with answers. In the epilogue, Prividera's mother's former comrades discuss the state of Argentina and the political history since the dictatorship, emphasizing that the fight is not over, though his

mother's memory is now able to rest in peace, as she is and will always be remembered through her memorial site.

Conclusion

The films all together, face the collective memory of the Argentine population. It is a strong medium in which the filmmakers are able to criticize the military government as well as create their own form of justice. The common traits throughout the documentaries emphasize the fact that these stories aren't solely one instance, but multiple that have impacted an entire generation of Argentinians. Through the questions that are posed during interviews, the filmmakers search for identity becomes apparent. The self-reflexive documentary practice enables the filmmakers to create identity, one that is a non-state, non-family identity, allowing for self-representation. Often learning new information about their parents' past lives, as well as their own childhoods, the filmmakers are able to reconstruct their identity. The difficulties of the reconstruction of these identities are shown through examples of disassociating themselves from the past, for example through the reenactments using childhood toys present in Carris *Los Rubios*. These films are important to note, and their common traits are necessary to take into account because it emphasizes that this genre of films is the only avenue available for these children of the disappeared to deal with the issue of the absence of their parents. The only way they have been able to get any type of justice is by questioning the system and their parents themselves. These films are not asking necessarily to commemorate their parents and claim justice for the disappeared but attempt to correct the difficulties that the children of the disappeared have silently faced. By uncovering the stories of their family's lives, from memories, images and places that they cannot remember, they are able to emphasize that this issue is still relevant to Argentina today. These documentaries have been able serve as an alternative archive in comparison to the official narratives of the state or of

militant organizations (Lattanzi, 15-16). They are meant to provoke thinking among the public, making it personal and adding an intimate tone to the stories so that there is no way the topic of the children of the disappeared can be ignored. Many of the children had to hide their true identity and lie about it, and in a way, they are taking back their own identity. Not the fake one they had to adopt during the dictatorship, not the projected one from family and friends that they cannot remember, but the one they have been able to create themselves, through their documentary filmmaking process.

Conclusion: The Necessary Inclusion of Childhood Narratives

During the post-dictatorship period there have been conflicting efforts in dealing with the past atrocities of the dictatorship. After the return to democracy, Raúl Alfonsín took office in 1983, his main goal was to tackle the previous horrors committed during the dictatorship, however, trials had been cautioned by scholars as it could destabilize the recently restored democracy (Crenzel, 150). Alfonsín created a commission to examine the human rights abuses of the military dictatorship, the report of the commission was called *Nunca Más* [Never Again]. Human rights trials were executed in 1985 and 1986, holding the powerful military leaders accountable. 481 military and police officers were indicted, only 16 trials were carried out and 11 convictions were put in place. General Jorge Videla and Admiral Emilio Masera, masterminds behind the dictatorship, were both sentenced to life in prison. However, these were quickly upended by the president when he encouraged the congress to pass amnesty laws in 1986-1987, after great opposition and pressure from the military at the time. The opposition by the Argentine public ultimately led to his resignation, leading to the election of Carlos Menem in 1989. Menem had been a supporter of the amnesty laws. Once in office, Menem decided to grant pardons to members of the military instead of amnesty laws, as they were presidential decrees and he did not have to

go through congress. Menem both pardoned almost all members of the military as well as members of guerilla groups, in total, 277 people were pardoned, including 40 generals who hadn't yet been tried. These pardons were greatly opposed by the general public. Menem's reasoning for the pardons was to use them as a way to close the chapter of history and mend the country through forgiving and forgetting the atrocities, disgruntling many human rights organizations, as Menem had completely invalidated the human rights crimes committed during the era. Since the justice trials had been upended, human rights organizations implemented truth trials, as a way to give answers about the disappeared people and push for justice. At the end of Menem's presidency, the worst economic crisis Argentina has faced ensued creating political instability. In 2003, the economy stabilized once again, Nestor Kirchner brought new hope in regard to human rights in Argentina (Delgado, 20-24). The era of Nestor Kirchner refocused the government efforts back onto completing the trials against the members of the military that had committed human rights abuses, and desired to reverse the amnesty laws that had been put in place by Menem, however, was only able to deem the amnesty laws unconstitutional through lower courts (Rohter). In 2005, the amnesty laws that had been previously put in place were finally deemed unconstitutional, reopening the human rights trial process in Argentina (Elias, 629-630).

Concurrently with the difficulties of prosecuting individuals for human rights violations, there have been positive initiatives promoting cultural expression and production within Argentina. The main function of INCAA (the Argentinian National Institute of Film and Audiovisual Arts), is to promote the national film industry, however, a new initiative was created in 2017, CINE.AR TV. CINE.AR TV, is a television channel that broadcasts 24 hours of films, short films, documentaries and the latest news regarding national film production without commercial breaks. It services all the country's cable services, and it also has a streaming platform

in which all the films shown on TV are available for streaming.¹⁵ In 1994, the Argentine cinema law, 24,377 was put into place, creating a production fund for Argentine cinema, protecting it from the regulation of national cinema activity.¹⁶ A year after the law was put in place, the first initiative by INCAA called *Historias Breves* was formed. Since 1995, INCAA has also produced *Historias Breves*, which is a group of short films every year. These short films are selected from a contest, in which directors submit their project proposals, INCAA then funds the making of the film if it is chosen. In 2019, fourteen winners were chosen, and each was given \$ 1,500,000 as a budget for their short, as well as advice from advanced professionals within the field. The purpose of *Historias Breves* has since 1995 been to promote the production of short films, so that filmmakers are able to employ and practice new cinematic trends and styles. Anyone can apply for the contest, and the application is done through a digital platform online, making it easily accessible to the public.¹⁷ A film that was produced through this *Historias Breves* initiative was *ALUAP* directed by Hernán Belón, Tatiana Mereñuk in 1997.

Through the filmmaking practice by the generation of children who grew up during the dictatorship, the losses that they incurred during their childhood are able to be restored. The stories of exile, militancy, and the disappeared are being told from the perspective of a generation that has not previously been represented within the national history in Argentina, let alone the genre of Dirty War films that have continuously been produced since the return to democracy in 1983. The production of films by children who grew up during the dictatorship and the new ways in which these films shed light on the narratives previously portrayed within the earlier films, emphasize the importance that film has on the national stage as an agent for creating justice. These films, both documentary and fiction, serve as a way for the filmmakers to reclaim their narratives. This generation experienced the state terror firsthand during the dictatorship, their roots often

completely torn away by the disappearance of their parents. They were then simultaneously being excluded from the narratives of the dictatorship through the government's failure to recognize their grievances, and are now able to come face to face with those struggles within their films, serving as a vehicle for identity formation and synthesizing now that they are old enough to communicate their hardships. In the future, it would be an important step to include the filmmaking of this generation. Including the filmmaking of this generation in the national narrative through school curriculum and greater acknowledgement on the national scale, could allow for the generation that was previously lost within the history and cultural representation, is now able to be included in the national memory and history of the dictatorship.

Notes

¹“To cry without wanting it. Not to cry, although we want to. To not be able to breathe. To not be able to stop in the frantic search of the identity. Some images distant, a sordid fight, a lost total of sense. The year is 1976. The military dictatorship takes power in Argentina. I was 5 years old. Hundreds of faces dissolve. I meticulously recompose some pieces of my past. My own identity is impossible to find”, Text is taken from the description of the film by Gabriela Golder. All translations are done by the author unless stated otherwise.

²Disappeared in this case, refers to those who the military junta kidnapped during the dictatorship of 1976-1983, often, it is not known what happened to these people, hence, disappeared. However it is stipulated that they were killed by the military junta, often after being tortured in detention centers located throughout Argentina.

³In this project, the word *hijos* will refer to the children of those who disappeared due to the dictatorship. The terms “children of the disappeared” and “hijos” will be used in an interchangeable manner. Not to be confused with the organization by the name of H.I.J.O.S, an acronym for Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio <http://www.hijos-capital.org.ar/>

⁴ Montoneros refers to an Argentine leftist guerrilla group active during the 1960s-1970s, though most active during the military dictatorship, and often the target of military violence during the dictatorship.

⁵ In this thesis, the terms military junta, military dictatorship and last dictatorship will all be used interchangeably. These terms all refer to the last dictatorship that Argentina experienced during the period of 1976-1983.

⁶ While studying abroad in Argentina and completing an internship, this topic was constantly brought up by my professors who had childhood friends and acquaintances that had recently found out about their identity as well as friends that had questioned their identity but not wanted to explore the possibility of them being one of the missing grandchildren. Stated from the Authors own experience in the Fall of 2018 and the Summer of 2019

⁷ Memoria Abierta, a group of Argentine human rights organizations that promote memory in regard to the recent human rights violations that were committed during the last dictatorship.

⁸ This database La dictadura en el cine, does not include every single film that has been made focusing on the dictatorship, but it includes most up until the year 2011. Therefore, the graph serves as a way to visually present the trends within the film industry in correlation with the topic of the Dirty War, though not necessarily every film that was ever produced was included.

⁹Southern Cone countries in this case refers to a geographic and cultural region comprising the southernmost territory of South America, these countries are Uruguay, Argentina and Chile.

¹⁰ESMA refers to the former center for detention, torture and extermination during the last military dictatorship in Argentina. The former Navy School of Mechanics located along the main road in Buenos Aires.

¹¹Death flights refers to the dumping of Dirty War captives into the sea by the military junta. The captives were taken from clandestine centers. They were often weak from torture and being held captive, once they were in flight an Argentine navy doctor would inject them with a sedative and they were shoved out of the plane to their deaths. They would fly over the Atlantic Ocean or Rio de la Plata.

¹²The organization by the name of H.I.J.O.S, an acronym for Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio <http://www.hijos-capital.org.ar/>

¹³¹³ London Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival, Buenos Aires Int'l FF - Audience Award, Best Argentine Film, Special Jury Mention, CLARIN - Best Documentary, Best Actress, Best Music, Festival Int'l del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, Havana Festival Int'l del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, Havana, Latin Beat, Film Society of Lincoln Center, Princeton Film Festival, Gijon International Film Festival, SIGNIS Critics Award “The Blonds (Los Rubios).” *The Blonds (Los Rubios) | Women Make Movies*, www.wmm.com/catalog/film/the-blonds/.

¹⁴ Compañeros means comrades in Spanish. Many of the Montoneros referred to each other as compañeros.

¹⁵ Press Release from the Casa Rosada (executive office of the President of Argentina) titled, “INCAA launched CINE.AR, the new brand of your screens”, <https://www.caserosada.gob.ar/informacion/actividad-oficial/9-noticias/39100-el-incaa-lanzo-cine-ar-la-nueva-marca-de-sus-pantallas>

¹⁶ Argentine Cinema Law 24.377, on the Promotion of National Cinematography, <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/0-4999/767/norma.htm>

¹⁷ Press Release from INCAA titled, “Short Stories Open Call 2019”, <http://www.incaa.gov.ar/historias-breves-abre-la-convocatoria-2019>

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