




RESEARCH

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THE REPRESENTATION OF THE DICTATORSHIP IN THE
ARGENTINE ANIMATION CINEMA

La representación de la dictadura en el cine de animación argentino

   **Vicente Fenoll**¹. University of València. Spain.
vicente.fenoll@uv.es

ABSTRACT

Cinematographic images allow the collective construction of memory. The representation of the disappeared is a challenge for documentary cinema that faces this problem in the reconstruction of traumatic memory. The aim of this work is to analyse the characteristics of the animation used in Argentine audiovisual production to tackle the dictatorship of the Military Junta. The corpus is made up of nine works that incorporate animation, wholly or partly, as a strategy of representation: *Los rubios* (Albertina Carri, 2003), *El Tiempo y la Sangre* (Alejandra Almirón, 2004), *La Matanza* (María Giuffra, 2005), *Padre* (Santiago Grasso, 2008), *Infancia clandestina* (Benjamín Ávila, 2011), *Zamba en la Casa Rosada* (Fernando Salem, 2012), *La mirada perdida* (Damian Dionisio, 2012), *La parte por el todo* (Gato Martínez, Santiago Nacif and Roberto Persano, 2015) and *Las muñecas de la Tía Tita* (MaXi BearZi, 2017). From a qualitative perspective, the role played by animation in these works is analysed. The opinion of the authors is also incorporated to determine the elements that support its proliferation in the field of memory and the traumatic past. The results of the study reveal the potential of animation as a therapeutic tool with which to show the disappeared in an allegorical way. Additionally, animation allows the director to establish an emotional connection with the unconscious of the spectator. The link between animation and childhood favours the establishment of bridges that bring the memory of the dictatorship closer to the new generations, with the aim of consolidating democratic values in society.

KEY WORDS: Argentina - animated films - cartoon - documentary - dictatorship, memory - post-memory.

¹ **Vicente Fenoll:** Professor of Audiovisual Communication in the Department of Theory of Language and Science of the University of Valencia. Professional experience in television news and audiovisual sector. Member of the research groups Mediaflows and CRIC.

RESUMEN

Las imágenes cinematográficas permiten la construcción colectiva de la memoria. La representación del desaparecido es un reto para el cine documental que afronta esta problemática en la reconstrucción de la memoria traumática. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar las características de la animación utilizadas en la producción audiovisual argentina para abordar la dictadura de la Junta Militar. El corpus está compuesto por nueve obras que incorporan total o parcialmente la animación como estrategia de representación: *Los rubios* (Albertina Carri, 2003), *El Tiempo y la Sangre* (Alejandra Almirón, 2004), *La Matanza* (María Giuffra, 2005), *Padre* (Santiago Grasso, 2008), *Infancia clandestina* (Benjamín Ávila, 2011), *Zamba en la Casa Rosada* (Fernando Salem, 2012), *La mirada perdida* (Damian Dionisio, 2012), *La parte por el todo* (Gato Martínez, Santiago Nacif y Roberto Persano, 2015) y *Las muñecas de la Tía Tita* (MaXi BearZi, 2017). Desde una perspectiva cualitativa, se analiza el papel que juega la animación en estas obras. También se incorpora la opinión de los autores para determinar los elementos que favorecen su proliferación en el ámbito de la memoria. Los resultados del estudio revelan el potencial de la animación como instrumento terapéutico con el que mostrar de manera alegórica al desaparecido y, adicionalmente, conectar emocionalmente con el inconsciente del espectador. La vinculación de este formato a la infancia favorece también el establecimiento de puentes que acerquen la memoria de la dictadura a las nuevas generaciones, con el fin de consolidar los valores democráticos en la sociedad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Argentina - cine de animación - dibujos animados - documental, dictadura - memoria - posmemoria.

A REPRESENTAÇÃO DA DITADURA NO CINEMA DE ANIMAÇÃO ARGENTINO

RESUME

As imagens cinematográficas permitem a construção coletiva da memória. A representação do desaparecido é um reto para o cinema documental que afronta esta problemática na reconstrução da memória traumática. O objetivo deste trabalho é analisar as características da animação utilizadas na produção audiovisual argentina para abordar a ditadura da Primeira Junta Militar. O corpus está composto por nove obras que incorporam total ou parcialmente a animação como estratégia de representação "Los rubios" (Albertina Carri, 2003), "El tiempo y la sangre" (Alejandra Almirón, 2004), "La matanza" (María Giuffra, 2005), "Padre" (Santiago Grasso, 2008), "Infancia clandestina" (Benjamin Avila, 2011), "Zamba en la Casa Rosada" (Fernando Salem, 2012), "La mirada perdida" (Damian Dionisio, 2012), "La parte por el todo" (Gato Martínez, Santiago Nacif e Roberto Persano, 2015) e "Las muñecas de la tía Tita" (Maxi Bearzi, 2017). Desde uma perspectiva qualitativa, se analisa o papel que joga a animação

nestas obras. Também se incorpora a opinião dos autores para determinar os elementos que favorecem sua proliferação no âmbito da memória. Os resultados do estudo revelam o potencial da animação como instrumento terapêutico com o qual mostrar de maneira alegórica o desaparecimento e, adicionalmente, conectar emocionalmente com o inconsciente do espectador. A vinculação de este formato à favorece também o estabelecimento de pontes que aproximem a memória da ditadura as novas gerações, com o fim de consolidar os valores democráticos na sociedade.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Argentina - cine de animação - desenhos animados - documental - ditadura - memória - pós memória.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to analyze the use of animation in the representation of elements related to the Argentinean military dictatorship (1976 -1983). In this sense, the study focuses not only on animation cinema itself, but also on other audiovisual formats, such as the documentary, in which animation is incorporated as a complementary narrative tool.

First, the political and social situation of the period in which the power of the military junta was established is contextualized. Second, the characteristics of the cinematographic production focused on the repression exerted during the dictatorship are reviewed. Third, the characteristics that define the animation used in audiovisual works that use animation as a means to represent or refer to the repression of the dictatorship are analyzed. To deepen the analysis, the opinion of the authors of the works we analyzed is incorporated. Finally, the elements that characterize the representation of the dictatorship through animations and their impact on audiovisual narratives on traumatic memory are set out.

2. THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

On March 24, 1976, Lt. Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera and Brigadier Orlando Ramon Agosti staged a coup in Argentina with which a dictatorial regime that remained in power for more than seven years was established.

Under the government of the Military Junta, there was a strong repression aimed at exterminating political dissent. Guerrillas, terrorists, leftish political leaders, social movement activists or mere dissidents –like Lt. Col. Bernardo Alberte– were kidnapped, tortured or killed in a dirty war directed by the state. According to the report *Never Again*, written by the National Commission for the Disappearance of Persons (Conadep, 1984), there is evidence of the forced disappearance of 8,961 people in Argentina during the civic-military dictatorship, although there are documents in the same report that point to the fact that the number of missing persons was larger than twenty-two thousand.

Regarding missing persons, dictator Jorge Rafael Videla declared in a press conference in 1979: “as long as a person is missing, they cannot have any special treatment, they are missing, they have neither an entity nor are they either dead or alive, they are missing” (Telam Agency, 2013). These statements make evident the advantages of the term *missing* for those responsible for the military junta, because the physical absence of the victims involves the removal of traces of the crimes committed. Thus, the crimes of the regime go unpunished and safeguard its legitimacy, denying the Argentinean society the possibility to see the consequences of repression and the violations of human rights.

The system of disappearance of people has its origin in the strategy of repression and submission practiced by National Socialism during the Second World War. In December 1941, Adolf Hitler promulgates the so-called Night and Fog (*Nacht-und-Nebel-Erlass*) Decree, according to which the practice of disappearances is an effective tool with which to intimidate the population and maintain uncertainty about the fate of the missing persons (Lüthke, 1983).

Besides enforced disappearances, killings and the systematic practice of torture in clandestine detention centers, other violations of human rights take place, such as the appropriation of children who were kidnapped along with their parents or of babies who were born during the captivity of pregnant mothers. These children were deprived of their true identity and handed over for adoption to people close to the regime.

The movement of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo arises on April 30, 1977 when the mothers of the missing persons begin to demonstrate peacefully and periodically in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. This protest, repeated every Thursday, erodes the legitimacy of the military junta, by publicly demanding explanations to the military for their responsibility in the kidnappings and disappearances. The Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo joined these demonstrations since October 1977; they struggle to know the fate of their grandchildren, the children of the missing persons. Until May 2019, out of the 500 reported cases of missing children that were illegally appropriated by the dictatorship, the work of the Grandmothers has succeeded in recovering 129.

The status of missing denies any possibility of representation, lacking iconic references of reality on which to base. In this sense, the work exerted by Argentinean cinema in addressing stories related to the dictatorship is crucial, since they allow us to recover the memory and represent what happened with images, making visible what until that moment had remained hidden by the decision of the military. Next, we review the way in which the problem of the military dictatorship has been addressed and the role that animation has played in this process.

3. CINEMA ABOUT DICTATORSHIP

The power of the Military Junta is weakened after the defeat in the Falklands War and the consequent resignation of Leopoldo Galtieri. He is succeeded as de facto president by Reynaldo Bignone, who began in 1982 a process of transition to democracy that is consolidated with the call for presidential elections on October 30, 1983. Raúl Alfonsín wins the elections and assumes the presidency of Argentina on December 10 that year.

After the dictatorship, a need arises to process the traumatic experience through cinema. The first films about disappearances, murders and kidnappings of children perpetrated by the State present a society that has not been aware of what happened. This type of cinema is based on the testimonial exhibition of some protagonists who face the consequences of repression. This approach is seen in feature films such as *The Official Story* (Luis Puenzo, 1985), the film winner of the Oscar for best foreign film in 1986, which focuses on the theme of appropriated children and legitimizes the work of the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo. As Aprea points out (2008, p. 55): "If you wanted to reach a mass audience, it was not the time to adopt the point of view of the victims or the perpetrators, but that of a society that ignored the existence of a drama that involved it".

Next to the fiction cinema, we find documentary films that address the dictatorship issue also from a testimonial perspective. The absence or scarcity of archival footage on repression favors the appearance of documentaries such as *The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* (Susana Blaustein Muñoz and Lourdes Portillo, 1985), where they talk about the missing persons through the stories of Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo. In this sense, as Amado points out:

The documentary cinema admits the paradox that the reconstruction of the past and its memory can be accessible through intimate modes of representation, such as those that put into practice, for example, the testimonies and aesthetic interventions of the children of the missing persons, whose content exceeds the subject of private grief and requests to be perceived as historical capital. (Amado, 2005, p. 224).

The first years after the dictatorship are characterized by the fragility of the democratic system, which lives with the Sword of Damocles in fear of a new coup. In this context, the position of Alfonsín's government in the face of human rights violations by the Military Junta is characterized by defending the so-called *theory of the two demons*: "the Argentinean society experienced a confrontation between two antagonistic violent forces, the soldiers and the guerrillas, who left a line of innocent victims who could only be recognized by the population with the recovery of democracy" (Aprea, 2008, p. 54). This approach is present in documentaries like *The Lost Republic II* (Miguel Pérez, 1986), which reconstructs the return of Juan Domingo Peron from exile in 1973 and the context of tension and violence existing in Argentina, with violent actions committed by both left-wing guerrilla organizations – the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) and the Montonero Army – as well as by far-right parapolic groups – the Argentinean Anti-Communist Alliance (Triple A).

With the progressive consolidation of democracy, fiction films appear that offer increasingly crude images of repression, where the protagonists are the security forces and their victims. Unlike the testimonies, where the consequences of military repression are processed without seeing how it is produced, the cinema offers an iconic basis for what the dictatorship had tried to keep hidden: torture and murder. This type of approach is found in the films *The Night of the Pencils* (Hector Olivera, 1986), *Garage Olimpo* (Marco Bechis, 1999) or *Chronicles of an Escape* (Adrián Caetano, 2005), fiction based on real events that reproduce the *modus operandi* of the military by practicing disappearances, explicitly showing how they kidnapped, tortured or disappeared the victims of State Terrorism in clandestine detention centers.

As Amado (2009) points out, among the various processes of significance to address the accounts of dead and missing persons during the military dictatorship, finally, the narrative of *innocent victims* prevails. This process is consolidated since 2003, with the governments of Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (2007-2015), where work from the institutions is actively done to give support and recognition to the victims, judging those responsible for the crimes of the dictatorship, after the elimination of the amnesty laws, and promoting a collective duel in society.

4. REPRESENT THE CRIMES OF THE DICTATORSHIP FROM ANIMATION

The absence of images that directly capture the tortures and murders carried out by the military dictatorship denies iconic references of these crimes. As Jelin and Langland (2003, p. 2) point out: "The representation entails the existence of something previous and external (the initial *presentation*) that will be *represented*. How then to represent the gaps, the unspeakable, what is no more? How to represent the detained-missing persons?"

One of the objectives of art in its commitment to the Argentinean society and the denunciation of military repression has been the representation of this absence. Apart from the fiction and documentary film production, there are movements by plastic artists such as *El silhouettezo*, which put the focus on this problem, through the elaboration of thirty thousand life-size silhouettes reminiscent of those disappeared by the military dictatorship. Similarly, as will be seen below, animation is a representation tool that makes it possible to address these issues both in the field of fiction cinema and in children's documentary or television series.

With the turn of the century, the first documentary films about the dictatorship that incorporate fictional elements represented by animations appear. These are directors who are children of the missing persons, who “from the absence and lack of their own identity, put themselves behind the camera to look for their parents and also for themselves” (Berger, 2008, p. 26). In this sense, the generation that was born after the coup d'état does not have a direct memory of what happened, but - in the words of Marianne Hirsch - a postmemory built on their imagination and on the testimonies of the survivors:

Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow dominated by the stories that preceded their birth, whose own late stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that cannot be understood or recreated² (Hirsch, 1997, p. 22).

The crisis of 2001 in Argentina also represents a turning point in the professional and vital trajectory of some directors and arouses a more critical attitude with the country's recent past, as well as the need to produce works with pedagogical value that serve as a tool for social change (Fenoll, 2016; 2018b).

The Blondes (Albertina Carri, 2003)

This documentary brings together a series of interviews that aim to reconstruct the kidnapping of the author's parents, as well as the impact this fact had on her life: “it could be understood at the same time as a tribute to the parents and as a search for her own identity in a game of tensions between personal memory and the memory of others” (Kaplan, 2007, p. 118). The process of finding testimonies is done by an actress who represents Carri, forming a performative documentary (Page, 2009) that represents a paradigmatic example of the subjectivity that characterizes postmemory (Sarlo, 2007).

The use of interpretation in a non-fiction context draws attention to the impossibility of a truly documentary representation and functions as a distancing device that makes identification difficult (Bruzzi, 2006). In this sense, Carri herself recognizes this way of

² The citations of the texts in English have been translated into Spanish by the author.

Brechtian distancing, when she states that she wanted to prevent the various elements within the documentary from transmitting the reassuring feeling that the protagonists are got to know, precisely because, as they are missing, they are inapprehensible and there is no possible reconstruction (Moreno, 2003).

Carri uses animated segments interspersed with the testimonies and vicissitudes of filming. The animated sequels are performed by using the *stop motion* technique with Playmobil figures, which serve the author as a tool to represent the events of the past that are linked to the memories of her childhood, linking interiority and fantasy (Aguilar, 2010). Thus, the animation of the figures serves to articulate two narratives from subjective spaces that help to rebuild, in an allegorical way, the lack of a fractured memory.

On the one hand, there are aspects related to the construction of identity and influence in this process of the deprivation of her parents. This issue, so complex to be posed visually, is developed by animating a doll that is trapped in an incessant process of identity transformation, represented by changing the complements of the figure, while listening to Carri's *voiceover* talking about the effects that the kidnapping and murder of her parents have had in the construction of her own identity.

On the other hand, animation enables the visual representation of events that occurred in the past and of which there are no archive images. The kidnapping of her parents, Ana María Caruso and Roberto Carri, is staged allegorically with Playmobil figures that are abducted on the road by a spaceship. In this sense, the film shows that, in the generations following those who suffered or starred in the traumatic events of the dictatorship, "there is no direct memory, but a reconstruction based on imagination, individual creation" (Berger, 2008, p. 26). As the author points out in an interview:

I wanted to clearly show my gaze as a child and rescue that part of fiction, but taken to the nth power. That is, pure fiction. As the memory is sometimes transformed into a hallucinated thing and sometimes as a total invention, animation was the perfect resource to tell that four-year look and not fall back into the low blow (Bianco, 2003).

Therefore, the animated kidnapping scene does not document the event itself but the memories of the director as a child, trying to make sense of what happened (Andermann, 2011).

Time and Blood (Alejandra Almirón, 2004)

This is a live action documentary articulated by the story of the montonero militant, Sonia Severini. The author seeks to rebuild the repression of the military junta in Morón, west of Buenos Aires, with testimonies from other militants and children of missing persons. In addition to the interviews, the film includes images from the personal

archive of the protagonists, drawings and photographs. For Almirón, the documentary makes it possible to conglomerate different audiovisual formats: “The documentary arts help me to tell stories in an ecosystem of chaos and narration, experiments, performances and uncertainty” (Castro Gómez, 2015).

In the work there are also animated fragments with the drawings of María Giuffra and the music of Diego Hobert, both children of murdered militants. It highlights a scene with diegetic guitar music, where the visualization of the wave-shaped sound on a monitor gives rise to an animated sequence that simulates the cyclic movement of the waves; suddenly, the guitar begins to blur and the images become circles and faces that are enclosed within a square and disappear. Then, another animation emerges through the accelerated passage of the pages of a book with red ink stains, which visually remind of drops or pools of blood.

Therefore, animation fulfills a metaphorical function, which reflects the point of view of the descendants of the victims. The author herself acknowledges that “it is a fairly baroque film” with “many encrypted metaphors” (Castro Gómez, 2015). As Amado (2009, p. 200) points out, cartoons serve to illustrate the disappearance of his father, the faces of dozens of dead evoked by his mother's testimony, just as violence and blood emerge in the intensity of the red of his paintings.

Drawings and animation allow the victims' children to visually express the impact of the repression of the military dictatorship on their lives, especially in people who had to face the disappearance of parents during the early years of childhood. As María Giuffra points out:

The last military dictatorship not only killed a generation of brave young people, but also left us, their children, imprints in our blood that in each case behave in a particular and different way. Some of us rearm our history and identity with stories of others, with letters, with photos, with small memories and even with our own imagination. What I have observed is that, in their absence, we desperately try to fill that void. My way of filling it is to paint and tell our story (Giuffra, 2005).

This therapeutic function referred to by Giuffra is evident in the scene where, from the photographs of his childhood, an animation emerges in which he plays with his father, they hug and he grows next to his father until he disappears. This way, cartoons fill “that void” and make it possible to rearm the history and identity of the victims' children, through photos and their own imagination.

La Matanza (María Giuffra, 2005)

La Matanza is a documentary short film made in accordance with a court file of the Argentinean army, found in 1998 by the Argentinean Forensic Anthropology Team, on

the file of the Federal Court. Animation reconstructs the fate of the Montonero militant, Romulo Giuffra, killed by joint security forces of the state in February 1977 in the entry to La Matanza (Argentinean province of Buenos Aires).

The file leaves themselves are documentary illustrations and their content is narrated by a voiceover. The soundtrack serves to underline some relevant aspects of the file, such as the absence of a defender, through variations in the speed of reproduction and noise. The leaves, in black and white, alternate their exposure in positive and negative. Alongside the writings between different official bodies, maps appear to locate the facts, booklets of the magazine *Resistencia* and drawings by María Giuffra, the author of the short film and the daughter of the murdered.

The drawings represent, also in black and white, the facts described in the file, such as the sequence of the murder and the seized weapons. The author incorporates the color selectively to highlight the title of the short film, *La Matanza*, in red, as well as the blood red and gunshot wounds on her father's body shot down on the ground. From postmemory, the children of the missing persons:

They are part of a generation that in today's culture privileges to express itself from artistic languages - video, music, painting, graphic design, animation, photography, theater - and uses images as irreplaceable tools to channel fictions or testimonial documents about their experience with horror (Beloved, 2005, p. 224).

In this sense, as María Giuffra acknowledges: "At this point I am not going to paint colored daisies" (Aparecidos, 2010).

Father (Santiago Grasso, 2008)

Animated fiction works are produced too, whose soundtrack is rooted in the historical world, from speeches, statements and events shared in the collective memory and bring credibility to the story (Nichols, 1997: 52). In the short film, the sound discourse of the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo appears in a new visual context that conditions the reading of the animated images while legitimizing their connection with reality. Since the sounds come directly from the historical world, there is a certain indicatory relationship that is transmitted to history. To the author, the use of animation has expressive advantages and is a format that helps to connect emotionally with the viewer:

The ability to manipulate reality, emphasizing certain elements and diminishing or eliminating others, makes it possible to emphasize what one chooses to highlight to give it an expressive character and a communicational dimension that is not possible in live fiction or works otherwise. People empathize easily

with animation for that ability to connect with something ancestral, deeply unconscious³.

The work animated in *stop motion* places the action in 1982, where a woman repeats caring routines of her father, a military man, who never appears in picture. At the end of the story, it is revealed that the woman lives alone and the supposed room of her father is empty. This way, Grasso highlights the influence that the military has on the woman's life despite not being physically in the house:

This refers to the consequences of the dictatorship, which we still live for more than 40 years. The repression in the character of the woman was already internalized, it is part of her life, and even if her father is not physically present, his repressive imprint continues to work in the mind of the character⁴.

Through the window, the protagonist watches impassively as doves fall from the sky, representing the victims of the dictatorship and agonizing in the inner courtyard of the house. With this metaphor, the author focuses on "the point of view of those who silently collaborated with the genocide. Those who chose not to see, not to know"⁵. These types of works are aimed at what Basile (2017) calls *the other CHILDREN*, children of the perpetrators, who ignored the repression of the military dictatorship and the responsibility of their parents in the detention, torture and murder of fellow citizens. Although these *child victims* have inherited a cursed story in which they did not participate and for which they are not responsible, they have the option of taking a stand against their parents, to stop being victims and become adults responsible for their ethical and political choice.

The story progresses to the rhythm of a clock that marks the rhythm of her life and "determines the stagnation of the protagonist in that circular time, the way in which her life is subordinated to the operation of that clock that guides each of her actions"⁶. Even when the clock stops and the whole action is paralyzed, it is the same woman who returns to wind up to continue in this vicious circle.

Along with the references to the victims, there are also elements that point to those who sustained the perpetrators. On the same clock you can see the inscription *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*, the currency of the Society of Jesus, which serves to denounce the "strong religiosity (catholic) of the military, who committed their crimes in collusion and express support by the episcopate of the Church"⁷. In this sense, as *Father's* writers

³ Personal communication with Santiago Grasso and Patricio Plaza on September 20, 2016 by email.

⁴ Personal communication with Santiago Grasso and Patricio Plaza on September 20, 2016 by email.

⁵ Personal communication with Santiago Grasso and Patricio Plaza on September 20, 2016 by email.

⁶ Personal communication with Santiago Grasso and Patricio Plaza on September 20, 2016 by email.

⁷ Personal communication with Santiago Grasso and Patricio Plaza on September 20, 2016 by email.

point out, animation allows us to synthesize ideas and create metaphors that directly impact the unconsciousness and are related to collective archetypes:

The ability of metaphor that animation allows as a medium makes it a great vehicle to transmit complex concepts without resorting to the textual aspect. Memory is also sensory and audiovisual, therefore, in that link between animation and the human unconsciousness, collective, more or less universal images can be evoked and reconstructed⁸.

***Clandestine Childhood* (Benjamín Ávila, 2011)**

Clandestine Childhood is based on real events and tells the story of a 12-year-old boy, Juan, the son of Montonero militants who return to Argentina from exile in the context of *Operation Counteroffensive* against the military dictatorship. The childhood of the protagonist in the underground is related to the story of the director, Benjamín Ávila, the son of the Montonero militant, Sara Zermoglio, who disappeared in 1979.

This is a live action movie in which four animated scenes appear. The inclusion of animation has to do with the aesthetic and formal commitment of the director, who discovered, in the film *Kill Bill* by Quentin Tarantino (2003-2004), the powerful impact of the animated representation of violence⁹. Unlike other works related to postmemory, where animation plays an allegorical or metaphorical function, Ávila uses this tool realistically and for narrative purposes¹⁰. The author considers that animation makes it possible to establish a connection with the viewer's unconsciousness that favors empathy and identification with the child protagonist:

that reality the spectator builds on animation is something that has to do with his intimate place: these images represent intimate things of the viewer. This generates that the viewer begins to put things of the story and, somehow, it helps his identification with the character, which is the ultimate goal of the movie: to understand and to feel like the character¹¹.

The first animation appears in the opening sequence of the film, when the family is gunned at night in the doorway of her house, still in 1975. At the time in which the attack begins, the live action gives way to animation and, this way, the violence of gun shots, machine gun bursts, wounds and bullet impacts is projected from the child's gaze. At the end of the animated sequence, the yellow of the child's urine converges on the sidewalk with the red of the blood from the father's wound. In this sense, as Andy Riva, the author of the illustrations of the film, recognizes, the director emphasizes the incontinence of urine, to look for the connection with the viewer's unconsciousness:

⁸ Personal communication with Santiago Grasso and Patricio Plaza on September 20, 2016 by email.

⁹ Interview with Benjamín Ávila on January 25, 2018 by videoconference.

¹⁰ Interview with Benjamín Ávila on January 25, 2018 by videoconference.

¹¹ Interview with Benjamín Ávila on January 25, 2018 by videoconference.

“following Benjamin: the yellow color as representative of fear - that is why he pees in fear: Juan peeing in the street during the shooting at the beginning - it is something personal of him” (Animated Nightmares, 0212).

The second scene with cartoons serves to emphasize that the story is focused from the child's point of view. Several drawings of Ernesto “Che” Guevara, made with children's strokes, serve as an illustration for the sequence in which Juan decides to use Ernesto's name to return to Argentina secretly. In the animation, graphic elements typical of children's drawings are used, such as crossings out, erasures, repainting and children's strokes.

The third animation has a dream component, representing a dream about the death of Uncle Beto. Like the initial sequence, the animation begins when the action becomes violent and the shooting begins. As the author points out, apart from the savings in the production of the film, the physical violence of this era in the live-action cinema was already shown, so from that format nothing new was going to be contributed ¹². The illustrations of the combat, with the shots, the blood and the explosion, are systematically interspersed with the horrified look of the child, reiterating that it is a projection of his memories.

The last animated sequence serves to stage another violent action, just when the house where they take refuge is assaulted and a detonation occurs. Among the images of the explosion and the detention of the child, drawings appear that summarize the story of the protagonist of the film at different times of his life: baby photos in the arms of his parents, proclamations of Montoneros, his girlfriend or the image of Ernesto Che Guevara killed in Bolivia, which affects the identity problem of Juan - who lives his clandestine childhood under the name of Ernesto. The alternation of animated images highlights the consequences of detention, ending his family life, as well as their dreams and loves. Thus, by combining present and past, animation puts the focus on the effects that the violence of police repression has on the future of the child.

Zamba's Amazing Excursion in the Pink House (Fernando Salem, 2012)

Zamba's Amazing Excursion is a series of cartoons with a historical background, which is broadcast on the Argentinean public television channel for children, Paka Paka, under the Ministry of Education of the Argentinean Nation. The protagonist of the series, Zamba, goes back in each episode to a relevant moment in Argentinean history, to narrate events such as the May Revolution, the Falklands War or the last military dictatorship in a childlike and pedagogical key. Zamba “is built by material and

¹² Interview with Benjamín Ávila on January 25, 2018 by videoconference.

symbolic elements that propose an Argentinean identity identification" (Murolo, 2013, p. 93).

The analyzed episode focuses on the stage of the military dictatorship. Zamba travels through a magic urn to 1976 with his friend Niña in search of a missing companion, who has been kidnapped by the military. There they meet the members of the Military Junta, who explain the difference between democracy and dictatorship. After a persecution by the Pink House, in which the military try by all means to assassinate Zamba and Niña, the children find a way to defeat the Military Junta: ask questions without fear. The ravaged and gray world with which the dictatorship is represented is transformed into a world of color thanks to the questions of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, who manage to expel the military from power.

During the sequence in which the members of the Military Junta flee, a song sounds in which proclamations are heard such as "it's time to ask, it's time to claim, they have to answer us" or "we can't wait". The climax of the song is put by children who join in singing "we want to live in freedom!"

Finally, Zamba finds the missing companion and together they discover the urns that the military had hidden, who turn into bats and disappear flying. With the appearance of the urns, the dark landscape in which the Pink House was wrapped is transformed into a sunny day full of color, in which the sun and the rainbow shine. The song that accompanies this sequence insists on the need to ask about and know the truth, and ends with a "dictatorship never again!" and "we have democracy and freedom!"

Upon returning to the present, the children remember that March 24 is the national day of memory for truth and justice, where people who suffered persecution, imprisonment, torture, disappearance or death during the military government are remembered.

In the episode, two antagonistic worlds are visually contrasted: dictatorship and democracy. While the military rule, it is night and everything has a gray, dreary and sinister appearance. The military themselves are characterized as monsters, vampires and demons, with bloodshot eyes and large black bags with dark circles. Instead, the democrats appear singing, characterized in a friendly way. Also, where the democrats go, the sun and the rainbow come out, the grass grows again and everything recovers its color.

The Lost Look (Damian Dionisio, 2012)

This short film claims the issue of appropriation of minors from the fiction. The story represents the *modus operandi* of the arrests and murders carried out by the last military dictatorship.

The story starts with a live action scene in which you can see a family that lives in hiding, consisting of a father, a mother and their daughter. While the girl paints a drawing in the family home, located in Buenos Aires City, a phone call without response warns parents of danger. After the arrival of the kidnappers in a green Falcon - a Ford-branded car model commonly used in the detentions of the task forces (Conadep, 1984) -, the mother paints a landscape in the girl's glasses, to prevent her from seeing the impending detention.

After the shooting the father and kidnapping the mother, the captain who coordinates the operation enters the room where the girl is. From this moment, animation and live action intermingle, providing a subjective interpretation of what is happening. First, the door opens and strokes appear on the walls that represent the faces of two soldiers, while listening to "Rafael Videla, Lieutenant General, General Commander of the Army". On the backplane, the strokes are transformed into two claws that stalk the girl on both sides. When the camera approaches this, the animation captures the whole picture in a scene in which the girl is represented as a little red riding hood and the attacker, threatening, like the fierce wolf.

However, the sun on a green and blue background, painted on the lenses of the girl's glasses, acts as a protective shield and the girl seems to remain oblivious to the scene. Finally, the image returns to live action and shows a close-up of the girl's lost look, on which there is an overwritten text denouncing the systematic plan of appropriation of children, indicating that, still in 2011, there were over four hundred appropriated boys who still live with their stolen identity.

The Part for the Whole (Gato Martínez Cantó, Santiago Nacif Cabrera and Roberto Persano, 2015)

In the field of documentary cinema, there are also references to the systematic plan for the appropriation of minors by the military dictatorship, by means of which the children of missing women in clandestine detention centers were stolen, held and hidden.

The film incorporates live animations produced by MaXi BearZi, to illustrate the testimonies of three restored grandchildren. The drawings are made *in situ* and projected simultaneously on a screen installed behind the interviewees. As Santiago Nacif points out: "From MaXi's animation work we were able to *get away* a little from the most documentary and classic story of the testimonies of Belén, Guillermo and Carlos about their life story and thus generate a warm climate that accompanies the story" (Arahuete, 2015).

In addition to this live illustration technique, animations were projected on the walls of clandestine detention centers that functioned as maternity hospitals. As Roberto Persano points out, the objective of projecting the images in the centers was to clarify the horror and illustrate very strong testimonies with images.

Animation makes it possible to work with greater freedom to be able to tell all the horror of what these stories and that life in the detention centers meant without falling into low blows or fictionalizing, which implies an increase in the budget and the incorporation of acting work and interpretation in the documentary¹³.

Likewise, the projected images give these places a new layer of significance and configure them as a memory space, by establishing a visual link that anchors them with the events that occurred there in the past. It is, therefore, performative testimonies that reconstruct the criminal acts in the spaces where they were committed, but from the present, with “the aspiration to inscribe the imprint of the past in the places and bodies of today” (Sánchez-Biosca, 2016, p. 13). As one of the authors points out¹⁴, this aspiration is evident in the projection of animations that illustrate the testimonies of the survivors on the walls of the detention centers to resignify these spaces. Recreations give life in the present to the experiences lived by others in the past: “They take the past tense and make it present” (Nichols, 2008, p. 88).

Aunt Tita's Dolls (MaXi Bearzi, 2017)

Aunt Tita's Dolls are directed by MaXi Bearzi, the illustrator who works on the drawings and animations of the documentary *The Part for the Whole*. To the author, animation is a versatile format that allows us to tell “things that do not exist materially or that exist in the memory. Therefore, I believe that it will be increasingly used. Both as support for the reconstruction of a documentary and in the story of a fiction”¹⁵.

This is a live action fiction short film that shows a girl's visit to her aunt's house after returning from exile. The young woman takes out a doll that she carries in her purse, with which an animated scene is set in motion that recalls the past and is made with a mixture of techniques that combine *stop motion* and 2D animation. Through animation they represent dolls working on a production line and they claim their boss for an increase in wages. The appearance of a green Falcon, from which an armed man emerges, contextualizes the action during the period of the military dictatorship and evokes the repression suffered by social movements and people who fought for the improvement of workers' rights.

¹³ Interview with Benjamín Ávila on January 25, 2018 by videoconference.

¹⁴ Interview with Benjamín Ávila on January 25, 2018 by videoconference.

¹⁵ Personal communication with Maxi Bearzi on October 18, 2017 by e-mail.

During the escape from the task group, the girl (a girl then) loses three of her dolls, which remain in the custody of her aunt¹⁶. After this *flashback*, the short film returns to live action in the present, through a sequence where Aunt Tita returns the dolls to her niece, in a reunion that is highlighted and framed by the embrace of the two women.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Cinema provides iconic references to the collective construction of memory. As Halbwachs (1995, pp. 218-219) points out, collective memory “presents the group with a picture of itself that undoubtedly extends over time, because it is about its past, but so that it is always recognized in those successive images”. However, the absence of images of the victims and the secret way in which the disappearances occurred in Argentina complicate the representation of this painting. The films that deal with the repression of the dictatorship offer society the possibility of accessing images of these hidden crimes. This way, the missing person ceases to be an *unknown* -as the military regime intended- and acquires a different entity and treatment: a victim of State Terrorism. The cinematographic images of the kidnappings, the tortures and the murders committed by the military dictatorship stand in for the lack of these iconic elements in the collective memory of the Argentinians.

In this sense, animation is offered as a tool with which to display allegorically the images of absence and gives the missing person a space to reappear, in a plane that is more related to memory than to the real world. Since the appearance of *The Blondes* in 2003, there are different formats and genres in which animation is used to address the issue of the memory of the dictatorship in Argentina. It is a film that marks the beginning of a new paradigm in the documentary field and in the representation of traumatic memory. It is the first work that uses animation as a legitimate representation tool in the documentary genre, ending the dictatorship of the indicating image as the only valid document authorized to document reality and paving the way for its use in subsequent audiovisual productions in the field of memory.

The results of the study reveal the potential of animation as a therapeutic instrument to evoke the trauma of the past and overcome the failures of individual memory. It is a format with which the families of the victims can metaphorically represent the missing person and face the impact of the deprivation of their parents during their first years of life. The authors of *The Blondes*, *Time and Blood*, *La Matanza* or *Clandestine Infancy* undertake the staging of the disappearance with representation objects linked to childhood, such as dolls or cartoons.

¹⁶ This sequence has its origin in a video clip that was recorded to be part of the play *Little Cruel Life* (Miriam De Luca, 2013).

These works represent a generational threshold in terms of the representations of the dictatorship, in which the children of the missing persons acquire a leading role. The change of narrative perspective implies an evolution in which the memory of the victims gives way to the postmemory of the children and grandchildren of the victims, with all the emotional and subjective burden that this entails. This evolution in the narrative is also accompanied by an evolution in the formal aspect, where animation plays a key role.

The new formal and narrative paradigm in representation strategies coincides with the coming to power of Kirchnerism, which encourages and favors public discussion about the traumatic memory of the dictatorship. In this context, which begins to judge those responsible for the crimes of the dictatorship, animated works appear, such as *Father*, in which an inquisitor finger is present that points directly towards the passive complicity of that part of society that looked away as the Military Junta kidnapped, tortured and murdered.

With the consolidation of democratic institutions, the Argentinean public television also uses *Zamba's* cartoons as a pedagogical instrument to address the issue of dictatorship in children. The linking of this format to children makes it possible to establish bridges that bring the memory of the victims of the dictatorial period to new generations, in order to consolidate respect for human rights and democratic values in society, especially in those who were born without knowing repression and lack of freedoms.

In addition to this allegorical, therapeutic and pedagogical function, the authors of the works we analyzed point out that animation is a narrative tool that allows them to establish an emotional bond with the viewer, connecting directly with their unconsciousness. *Father*, *Clandestine Childhood*, *The Lost Look* or *Aunt Tita's Dolls* are examples of how animated representation favors identification and empathy with the victims. Likewise, animated scenes make it possible to visually evoke elements that come directly from the minds of the protagonists, such as dreams and memories, offering authors greater creative and adaptive freedom. This way, certain problems related to the staging of live action cinema on memory, such as the production budget and the replacement of victims with actors, are overcome.

The road initiated by *The Blondes* in Argentina finds ramifications in other countries of the Southern Cone, such as Chile, where the animated format has been gradually incorporated since 2008 as a representation tool to deal with the traumatic past related to the repression of the Pinochet's dictatorship (Fenoll, 2018a). We also found this trend to hybridize documentary, animation and memory in other continents, as the Israeli documentary *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008), on the slaughter in Sabra and Shatila, the Cambodian *L'manquante image* (*The Lost Image*, Rithy Panh, 2013) on the genocide of

the Khmer Rouge, or the Spanish *Els internats de la por* (*The Boarding Schools of Fear*, Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis, 2015), on the abuses suffered by children in boarding schools during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco. The proliferation of this practice confirms the consolidation and legitimization of animation as a valid representation instrument in this area and predicts a greater presence in future productions both in Argentina and in other countries that face the challenge of visually documenting issues related to traumatic memory.

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AUTHOR

Vicente Fenoll

He has a degree in Audiovisual Communication (2007) and a PhD in Communication (2015) from the University of Valencia. He is currently a professor in the degrees of Multimedia Engineering and Audiovisual Communication at the University of Valencia and teaches online for the Blaise Pascal University, Clermont-Ferrand (France). He is a member of the Mediaflows (CSO2016-77331-C2-1-R) and Cultural Narratives of Crisis & Renewal (RISE-2014-645666) research groups. In the field of research it focuses on the analysis of digital communication and the convergence of cinema, animation and memory. He has conducted research stays at universities in Germany (Erfurt, Ilmenau, Münster and Mainz), Argentina (Córdoba) and Chile (Valdivia).

vicente.fenoll@uv.es

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5851-4237>

ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Vicente_Fenoll

Academia.edu: <http://uv.academia.edu/VicenteFenoll>