
RESEARCH

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SELF-REFERENTIALITY IN DOCUMENTARY FILM IN LATIN AMERICA

La autorreferencialidad en el cine documental en América Latina

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ABSTRACT

One of the most significant elements for contemporary documentary filmmaking is the issue of self-referentiality. This fact underscores the author's position on the work and reality. In this reality the author looks at himself or re-elaborates the image of others from his point of view. This tendency is shared in the documentary film and literature, as a subjective and personal perspective. This tendency suffers a period of rupture in both sorts from the disenchantment of the cinematographic production and the literary production after World War II. In the decades after this and until today, a clear evolution of this tendency reflected in this article is observed through several examples of the documentary cinematography of Latin America.

KEY WORDS

Documentary; Latin America; Self-referential; Hybridization; Evolution; Look Author; Subjective and personal perspective.

RESUMEN

Uno de los elementos más significativos para el cine documental contemporáneo, analizando el posicionamiento del autor respecto a la obra y a la realidad, es la cuestión de la autorreferencialidad, donde el autor se mira a sí mismo o reelabora la imagen ajena desde su punto de vista. Esta tendencia es compartida en el cine documental y en la literatura, como perspectiva subjetiva y personal, aunque sufre un periodo de ruptura en ambos géneros a partir del desencanto de la producción cinematográfica y la producción literaria tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial. En las décadas posteriores a este hecho y hasta la actualidad, se observa una clara evolución de esta tendencia reflejada en este artículo a través de varios ejemplos de la cinematografía documental de América Latina.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Documental; América Latina; Autorreferencialidad; Hibridación; Evolución; Mirada del autor; Perspectiva subjetiva y personal.

A AUTO-REFERENCIALIDADE NO CINEMA DOCUMENTAL NA AMERICA LATINA

RESUME

Um dos elementos mais significativos para o cinema documental contemporâneo, analisando o posicionamento do autor a respeito da obra e a realidade, é a questão da auto-referencialidade, onde o autor olha para si mesmo ou reelabora a imagem aleia desde seu ponto de vista. Esta tendência é compartilhada no cinema documental e na literatura, como perspectiva subjetiva e pessoal, apesar que sofre um período de ruptura em ambos gêneros a partir do desencanto da produção cinematográfica e a produção literária após a Segunda Guerra Mundial. Nas décadas posteriores a este feito e até a atualidade, se observa uma clara evolução de esta tendência refletida neste artigo através de vários exemplos da cinematografia documental da América Latina.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Cinema; Documental; América Latina; Auto-referencialidade; Hibridação; Evolução; Olhar do autor; Perspectiva subjetiva e pessoal.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As Gilda Waldman points out (2016, p.355), Latin America is “a region of contrasts and asymmetries [and] nevertheless, an extraordinarily rich space in its cultural creation. [...] The panorama of contemporary literature is effervescent, diverse, fruitful and prolific”. In coherence with the social commitment assumed in the cultural sphere, Latin American literature proposes, since the 1960s, the development of a “testimonial literature, in which parameters of critical categories such as mimesis / poesis, fiction / history, author / character, popular culture / high culture, [...] are restated, indicating an alternative directionality in the current Latin American literary production” (Moraña, 1995, p. 114) against the dominant trend.

A process takes place in which “understanding of the other, prior listening to the response is not a reflexive and passive act but an act of reappropriation of the voice of others in a plane of valuations, of ideological accents, perhaps different from those foreseen by the one who states them” (Da Porta, 2013, p. 52). The point of view of the author is reconfigured thus permeating the styles of literary production and proposing a new paradigm. In this evolutionary process, of changing roles with respect to the positions of the past

there is no formal category that allows us to differentiate an autobiography from fiction, [...] the pact is unverifiable, since there are intimate realities only known by the one who has lived and writes them, the commitment of the author with the truth acquires a determining relevance, with what it is demonstrated that, in the end, the contract between the author and the reader is nothing but a statement of the former that the latter has to accept as certain to be able to interpret the text (Sánchez Zapatero, 2010, pp. 16-17).

This process, described by Sánchez Zapatero (2010), transcends the literary plane and involves documentary films, where the treatment of the *self* and references to it will have a great influence on filmmakers in Latin America.

The relationship between cinema and literature, beyond the traditional and recurrent link between fiction cinema and fiction literature must take into account the relationship between “documentary cinema [and] a testimonial and essay-based literature” (Díaz, 2003, p. 472). The overcoming of the constant and omnipresent use of the word that treasures the absolute truth transmitted from a pulpit, contributed to the documentary cinema, with the arrival of synchronous sound, “that window into life that is the unique and unrepeatable *take one* of sound and image that would have made Dziga Vertov envious green” (Díaz, 2003, p. 475). Already in works such as *Hanoi, Tuesday 13*¹ (1965) or *79 Springs*² (1967) of the Cuban Santiago Álvarez, it is observed this new way of doing in which the questions about the role of the director lead him towards a dispossession of the absolute truth in the messages he transmits, adopting a new role for reality but also for the viewer.

In documentary films, this process has contributed to reaching maturity in the genre, banishing the obstinate search for objectivity or neutrality and reaching the story, the narrative imprint and self-reflection. In the documentary cinema made in Latin America, it was necessary to wait a long time for self-reflexive and self-referential proposals to begin to be valued. One of the explanations, points out Ruffinelli (2010, p. 61), may be that, in the motivations to face a certain theme and capture it in a film, “there was prevalence of the collective interest rather than the individual interest, [...] linked to the notion that history is made by the masses and not by individuals” in a context conditioned by the strong social changes and the active militancy that takes place in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. Since the mid-eighties and especially with the arrival of the nineties, this trend is reversed, perhaps also influenced by “ideological and political reasons as strong and powerful as those that had prevented or stopped the expression of subjectivity 20 years before” (Ruffinelli, 2010, p. 61).

The first sign of the manifest intention of moving the *self* to the sphere of documentary cinema is seen in the practices of home cinema, possible because of the

¹ Here Álvarez uses texts by José Martí (the father of the Cuban revolution) to generate a poetic narrative structure through which the filmmaker clearly positions himself with the communist positions in the Vietnam War.

² In this case, the director deals with the militant biography format in the review of the life and death of Ho Chi Min through the metaphorical use of the image, again the texts of José Martí and a very intelligent use of sound editing.

greater ease that the use of video brings, as compared to the film shot with negative, to achieve a more personal representation. This is the niche from which four subtypes of this presence of the *self* in documentary cinema, identified by Ruffinelli (2010 pp. 62-71) in the following categories, supported by two examples, quickly derive.

In the first place is the “*diary*” cinema or the personal diary as cinema, whose pioneer film is the Canadian *Unfinished Diary* (1982) by Marilu Mallet. This Chilean filmmaker in exile documents, from it, the breakdown of her marriage, generating a projection from the individual or personal to the collective sphere in which they refer “conflicts in exile, [...] the dispossession of territories, travel from an original language to the learned language, the difficult communication with individuals of other cultures and habits” (Ruffinelli, 2010, p. 63). Mallet takes as a starting point the literary structure of the intimate diary but, over the course of the film, she surpasses it through the assimilation of narrative strategies characteristic of documentary films such as the off-screen narration or her presence before the camera, through which she establishes what Ruffinelli (2010, p. 63) calls *subjective reflection* with which the self-referential gesture in which she takes a stance on the political situation in Chile is channeled, arriving at global reflection from intimate and particular questions.

The second of the ramifications of the presence of the *self* in self-referential documentary cinema is *the personal look towards the family*, as in *The Paternal Line* (1995) of the Mexican marriage formed by Maryse Sistach and José Buil or in *The Mystery of the Scarlet Eyes*. (1993), by the Venezuelan Alfredo J. Anzola. These titles rescue material from home, family, visual or home audiovisual record, to build a revised account of family memory that transcends the history of the social and national context in which it is made. Although the cinema of memory, without being constrained by the referential question, has developed this type of strategy in films like *Papá Iván* (2000) by María Inés Roque and *Los Rubios* (2003) by Albertina Carri that belong to the next category, the rescue of domestic material to build the story without the filmmaker having to reference his presence and his relationship with the subject dealt with is the strategy used in films like *Santiago* (2007) in which João Moreira Salles combines an extensive interview with the protagonist of the film with the recovery of fragments of homemade recordings made in Super 8 mm that are part of the memory of the director's childhood, or *Amateur* (2011), in which the biography of Jorge Norberto Mario is surpassed by a greater reflection in which Néstor Frenkel reflects on the possibilities of the Super 8 mm - with its three-minute film rolls and the ability to record color images - as a tool to capture family memories in movement and the trauma of technological obsolescence and the arrival of new formats with the consequent death of old ones, as in the case of Super 8 mm with the arrival of VHS video and the death of the latter with the irruption of the DVD.

The third of these visions is linked in the retrospective inquiry in order to settle emotional accounts by working in the present, but researching the past (Ruffinelli, 2010 p 69). Two examples of this type of film are the Argentinean *Papá Iván* (2000), María Inés Roque and *Los Rubios* (2003), by Albertina Carri, which, from two completely different formal constructions, address a common theme, the search for answers about what happened to their respective parents, who disappeared during the years of the Argentinean dictatorship, when they were only girls. Jorge Ruffinelli

establishes in this point a clear connection between the self-referential fact and documentary cinema linked to memory, which, in the case of the two aforementioned films, has a direct relationship with the eyes of a generation of filmmakers who were children in the most violent and more repressive period of the dictatorship in Argentina in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This generation sometimes uses documentary cinema as a tool to look at the historical past and establish an analysis of it, using the perspective that distance gives in the search process, whether with a personal motivation or not.

The fourth and final ramification of this use of the *self* in the Latin American documentary is represented in the classification made by Ruffinelli (2010, p. 71), by *El diablo nunca duerme* (1994), by Lourdes Portillo, and *Intimidaciones de Shakespeare y Víctor Hugo* (2008), by Yulene Olaizola. Both are research documentaries that are self-paced investigations, in which, based on the investigation of personal or family issues, they transcend towards the delimitation of a series of fundamental questions about a social problem, as occurs in films far from the self-referential question such as *¡Qué vivan los Crotos!* (1990), by Ana Poliak, or *Bonanza en vías de extinción* (2001), by Ulises Rosell. Although both approach, from an almost poetic perspective, the life story of their respective protagonists, in Poliak's film one can immediately perceive the constant references to the proletarian anarchist context of Argentina in the mid-20th century. Ulises Rosell, although he tries to circumscribe the attention of the public to the life of the Muchinski family, guides the viewer towards those groups that pass through the margins of society without any intention of integrating themselves into it. If the expression of research as part of the film narrative is very common in various formulas associated with documentary cinema, in films in which the self-referential factor has great importance for history, it allows the filmmaker to position himself and justify numerous issues of the film -such as limitations in time, in resources or in the obtaining of certain testimonies- through the personal experience in the research process.

Once the different categories in which Ruffinelli (2010) frames the treatment of self-referentiality in documentary filmmaking in Latin America have been reviewed, it can be concluded that these personal and subjective proposals demonstrate a great

diversity of discursive strategies, all pointing to the narrative, and the need to negotiate identities between the subject of the statement (the other) and the subject of the enunciation (the narrator). [...] In turn, new relationships are created between what we understood as the subject and the object (the other) and, in turn, between them and the receiver, the new public (Ruffinelli, 2010, p. 77).

This argument is reinforced by the contributions of Leonor Arfuch (2002, p.99) who, without circumscribing herself to documentary cinema in particular, speaks of a

multiplicity in the stories, susceptible to different enunciation, in various registers and co-authorships -the conversation, the history of life, the interview, the psychoanalytic relationship- which builds a warp recognizable

as its own but definable only in relatable terms: *I am such* here, regarding certain others who are different and external to me.

2. OBJECTIVES

There are several objectives set at the time of conducting this piece of research. The main objective is to identify the use of self-referentiality in documentary films in Latin America from the beginning of this genre to the present. Although it should be noted that it does not intend to be an exhaustive piece of research on this concept but rather aims to be a starting point to study self-referentiality in some documentary films representative of Latin America in order to develop and expand this kind of research to more films or even to filmographies of other countries and / or regions. In fact, this piece of research has taken into account the complexity of the field of study because it analyzes documentary films from different countries encompassed in such a wide geographic space with very different realities such as Latin America. These are the secondary objectives of this piece of research, since we intend its methodology and / or conclusions to be extrapolated.

3. METHODOLOGY

This piece of research is based on a more extensive one that is part of a doctoral thesis in which a sample of 100 relevant films of Latin American documentary cinematography has been analyzed in order to identify the evolution of the documentary genre in the region since its first productions in the 1920s and 1930s until 2014, the date of production of the last selected film.

In order to carry out this piece of research, an analysis sheet has been developed in which we qualitatively identify the fundamental aspects of the documentary films that are part of the sample. The sheet contains different items that analyze essential elements of the production context, the cinematographic discourse developed by the director and linked to the theme of each film, the technical and narrative aspects and the discursive aspects of each film. Among these is the concrete identification of the self-referential gesture.

For the selection of the sample, criteria of representativeness and proportionality have been used based on the data provided by authors who work documentary cinema in Latin America specifically such as Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, Jorge Ruffinelli or Julianne Burton³. In addition to the works referenced by these three authors, a criterion of representativeness is used based on the volume of cinematographic production of the different countries of Latin America. Although it has not been possible to obtain relevant data of documentary production in the region, taking into account the general production of fiction and non-fiction feature

³ There are three reference works that address documentary filmmaking in Latin America as a whole and that are taken into account in this study as a reference to outline the selection of the sample: *Documentary cinema in Latin America* (2003) by Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, *Latin America in 130 documentaries* (2012) by Jorge Ruffinelli and *The social documentary in Latin America* (1990) by Julianne Burton.

films as a whole, a profound inequality is already perceived in terms of the distribution of the production of each country in the Latin American context. With figures from 2000 to 2004, Latin American production "is concentrated mainly in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil, ranging [...] from 64 to 92 feature films per year in Mexico, from 50 to 55 in Argentina and from 35 to 45 in Brazil. Chile is emerging as the fourth country in importance, with from 10 to 15 feature films per year" (Caballero, 2006 p. 16). At a certain distance there is already a second group of countries composed of Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, Uruguay, Peru and Bolivia, which do not reach 10 films a year in any case. The volume increases exponentially in the following years, although the ranking remains the same for the countries, with Argentina having the highest volume of production -which since 2009 has gone from 95 to 166 productions in 2013- followed by Mexico and Brazil -which range from 66 to 84 respectively in 2009, 126 and 127 in 2013-, followed, at a great distance, again, by Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru and Uruguay, which range from 31 to 14 titles according to data from the European Audiovisual Observatory.

Finally, also due to criteria of proportionality in terms of the volume of cinematographic production at a general level, together with the possibility of access to the different films to analyze them, the sample intensifies the number of films per decade as the production date is more recent. This fact is also motivated by the emergence in the documentary production that generally occurs since the 1990s with the arrival of the digital means of production.

At the methodological level, the analysis work from which the conclusions developed in this article are extracted adheres to the premises of Jaques Aumont and Michel Marie (1990, p. 18) in which the analysis responds to "a desire to clarify the cinematic language", in this case documentary cinema in Latin America, considering "the film as an autonomous artistic work, capable of generating a text that bases its meanings on narrative structures and on visual and sound foundations, thus producing a particular effect on the spectator" (Aumont and Marie, 1990, p. 18).

From the contributions of Aumont and Marie, but also from those of Gómez Tarín and Marzal Felici (2006, p. 2), a first distinction is drawn from elements that are part of the multiple dimension served by film analysis and composed of objectifiable elements -such as the text and its structure, the environment of production and reception and expressive resources-, non-objectivable elements -such as narrative resources, enunciation and point of view- and elements of interpretation and judgment on the part of the spectator and, in this case, of the analyst. Thus, the different analytical currents have developed their work around three large areas that Montiel (2002, pp. 34-36) summarizes in "the analysis of the image and sound or of the film representation, the analysis of the story or its narrative structures and the analysis of the communicative process and the viewer" which leads this work to focus on three fundamental parameters of film analysis: formal, narrative or narratological - applied to the specificity of documentary cinema - and contextual ones, taking in account that they apply to production processes and not to reception.

The analysis of the self-referential fact in documentary filmmaking in Latin America, according to what has been subscribed up to now by the analyzed authors, can be divided into two large groups that use different narrative strategies. If at first two paths were established, one in which the author looked at himself and another in

which he reworked the image of others from his point of view, starting from the parameters that are manifested in literary production since the breaking-off that took place at the end of World War II and especially at the arrival of the 1960s, after the exhaustive analysis of a sufficient and representative sample of Latin American documentaries that includes all the history of the genre, trying to concretely identify self-referential features in the analyzed films, next the distilled ideas of the first path are raised, which path was followed by the different filmmakers, since the re-elaboration of the image from the point of view of the creator is an inherent issue in documentary cinema and is produced, in the immense majority of the films of this genre as they respond to a personal motivation or are an order that always crosses the sieve of the filmmaker's interpretation.

4. RESULTS

Although Jorge Ruffinelli (2010, p. 61) establishes the starting point in the emergence of the self-referential gesture in documentary cinema - looking at the end of the 20th century, the present work tries to identify this feature in the Latin American documentary cinematography since its beginnings to finalize when the 21st century has already begun, covering the entire spectrum of film production.

4.1. The self-referential gesture in the first Latin American documentary cinema

In the first period of those that make up the evolution of documentary filmmaking in Latin America, Thomaz's film *Reis Ao redor do Brasil: Aspectos do interior e das fronteiras brasileiras* (1932) appears. Although in this case and in this period the self-referential fact is going to be purely anecdotal since "the real theme of the documentary is the military expeditions destined to explore the waterways or to inspect [the] borders" (Paranaguá, 2003, p. 274) and the "different potentialities of the northern territory of the country for the distinction between exploitation areas and conservation areas of natural and human resources" (Haag, 2012, p. 74), the appearance of Major Thomaz Reis in the first image of the film carrying his camera denotes a gesture similar to those constantly made by Dziga Vertov in his masterpiece *The Man and the Camera* (1929). Although the Russian film focuses more on the contribution of formal issues such as complex montage of visual intervals recorded by the operator and their correlation, the self-referential fact is seen through different impulses throughout the film. One cannot say that the same thing happens in Reis's work because, although the director is identified in different fragments of the film interacting with several indigenous communities, there is no self-referential intention since it is not constituted as a character nor does it introduce the first person in a film that, on the other hand, has a marked observational, exploratory and scientific character. It is a time when racist conceptions of the purity of the race imported from Europe prevailed and that, in different parts of Latin America, were adapted as a method of nationalist exaltation. The relations with indigenous peoples, beyond the exoticism of the unknown and the wild, go through the cartography of the morphological characteristics and the taking of anthropometric measurements of the members of each town by the white man. Paranaguá (2003, p. 275) here identifies

a paradox in the film when he says that “naturalness and nature are the privilege of the white man, while the inhabitants of the Amazon must bend to the artifice and the conventions of cinema”, submissive before the camera at which they look nervous. Therefore, although one can speak of a self-referential gesture in the first Latin American documentary cinema, following the general lines of its evolution, it will not be until the 1950s when this narrative strategy begins to be glimpsed in a modern and evolved format.

4.2. The self-referential gesture in Latin American documentary films from the 1950s onwards

In *Memories of a Mexican* (1950) by Carmen Toscano, one of the most original manifestations of the self-referential fact is produced by means of a derivation of it and bearing in mind its personal connection with the origin of the images that are part of the film. The film is a masterful editing exercise in which poetic and plot references are introduced to sustain the narrative thread of the story it describes. Carmen Toscano narrates the film in first person but does not do it through her own voice but rather creates a character that opposes, through a subjective position, the objectivity of the images with which certain historical events are documented. This narrative mechanism is constituted as a redefinition of self-referentiality as it moves away from the recent references of the omniscient narrator of the propaganda films of the Second World War, so fashionable in the previous decade, to introduce the personal point of view through a reconceptualized formal aspect, delving into the value of documentary film as a reserve of the historical memory of a country. The character created by Toscano even enters into conflict with his fictitious family, since at first he accompanies his uncle and then takes different paths as a result of the different ideological positions assumed by both characters as the revolution advances in Mexico. This is where “fiction and subjectivity are therefore fairly relative, since they refer to the same cinema. The ambivalence of the literary device ends up being confused with the intrinsic cinematic ambiguity, often underestimated in the documentary” (Paranaguá, 2003, p. 280).

4.3. The self-referential gesture in the documentary of the New Latin American Cinema

It will not be until well into the 1970s when we can speak of a self-referential fact as the one that marks the theoretical line analyzed in this work. The first film in which this aspect is identified, although not without a strong dose of ambiguity, is the Colombian *Agarrando pueblo (Vampires of Misery)* (1978), by Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo. We can observe the features of self-referentiality in the false documentary approach⁴ that the film makes, where the directors represent a team of

⁴ Since the 1970s, narrative alternatives that seek a fictional construction of a reality on which they want to make special emphasis, especially linked to the controversy, become popular within the genre worldwide. They are called false documentary or mock. Some notable examples are *Zelig* (1983) in which Woody Allen uses the parody, *Citizen Bob Roberts* (1992) in which Tim Robbins uses criticism or *The Falls* (1980) where Peter Greenaway uses narrative deconstruction as a tool to structure his message.

documentary filmmakers who exploit what Ospina and Mayolo define as “porno-misery”. It is clear that Ospina and especially Mayolo represent characters far removed from their own mood as documentarians criticizing an attitude they want to distance themselves from, that of the group of western television documentary filmmakers who, for several years, dedicated themselves to capturing the misery of citizens of underdeveloped or developing countries in order to project images in First World countries⁵. This act of visual and social pornography is the target of the criticisms of Ospina and Mayolo through their immersion in the story, where the self-referential gesture converges - in Mayolo's interaction with the people who criticize him during a shooting in which some children plunge into the water of a fountain for the money thrown to them by team members - with the hybridization between fiction and non-fiction - by direct confrontation with the viewer in numerous sequences of the film as when Mayolo agrees to a testimony with a couple of actors who represent a poor married couple or when the owner of the ranch they raid to shoot a scene rebukes them and then is interviewed, unmasking the tacit collaboration to reference the fact-.

4.4. The self-referential gesture in the 1980s

Since the 1980s, the self-referential strategy will be consolidated by the presence of the director in a more obvious way although assuming different narrative formulas. In this sense, films appear that, without having self-referentiality as a central narrative element, introduce a conductor into an image, who may or may not be the director himself, as in the Argentinean films *Juan as if nothing had happened* (1987), by Carlos Echeverría⁶, and *I do not know what your eyes have made me* (2003), by Lorena Muñoz and Sergio Wolf⁷. In the case of the *General Act of Chile* (1986), by Miguel Littín, this process is specified in the experience that motivates the film and that is shown in the film. Littín clandestinely enters his native country from the exile to which he is forced when Augusto Pinochet comes to power through a coup that would kill Salvador Allende. Littín enters to shoot a film that transits between the chronicle of the situation of the country and the reflections of the director himself, constantly present in the image and in the narration in off but that does not interact with reality or with the testimonies recorded by the filming team but that is present and, at the same time, hidden due to his clandestine condition at the time of filming. He even managed to interview Mónica Madariaga, “Pinochet's legal advisor, then Minister of Justice, later Minister of Education. Accomplice of the dictatorship, she is

⁵ This modus operandi of many European filmmakers has been intensely criticized by Colombian directors such as Ciro Durán in *Gamin* (1977) or the most recent *La sociedad del semáforo* (2010) by Rubén Mendoza.

⁶ The director, in this case, uses the journalist Juan Buch as a host of the story and an element of confrontation of the testimony of the interviewed subjects and linked to the disappearance of Juan Marcos Herman.

⁷ In this case, it is Wolf himself who appears constantly in image and, while in the first part of the film his presence seems unnecessary, once the team finds singer Ada Falcón, the protagonist of the film, his role as a facilitator is essential to register such a valuable testimony.

the paradigm of the social base of the satrapy, one of its servants and ideologues" (Ruffinelli, 2012, p. 86). At an intermediate point between the symbolic presence of Littín and the revitalization of Wolf is Eduardo Coutinho in *Cabra marca para morrer* (1984), where the recovery of the original project started in 1964 motivated the realization of this second film, two decades later, to find the survivors of the original project and place the director of both tapes in that search process.

Another of the formal or narrative derivations with which the self-referential fact takes shape is the voiceover of *Chapucerías* (1987), by the Cuban Enrique Colina. This documentary, produced from the particular universe of creation of the Cuban Institute of Art and Cinematographic Industries (ICAIC), provides the self-referential gesture through the conversation, present in the narration in off, between the director and the editor. They talk about their position in relation to the way of producing the film, mocking the process and applying to themselves the thesis that runs through the film, which is none other than the sloppy way of acting of the Cuban society in many moments of their daily work. The film, together with *Vecinos* (1985), also directed by Enrique Colina, is one of the greatest examples of the evolution of Cuban documentary cinema produced by ICAIC. It reflects, through ugliness, the audiovisual collage, the documentary experimentation and the self-referentiality of the criticized fact, the drift that public services have taken and the action of the State with the Cuban citizenry.

4.5. The self-referential gesture from the 1990s to the present

It will be already in the 1990s when a much clearer and defined practice is exercised in which the director's point of view combines with his presence, as in *Carmen Miranda. Bananas is my business* (1995), by Helena Solberg. A parallelism is established here between the biographical revision of the life of Carmen Miranda and the experience of the director of the film, an admirer of the artist, who immigrated to the United States as she did, but at the same time of a different family origin since Miranda came from a humble family that migrates from Portugal to Brazil and then to the United States and Solberg grows up in a middle class family that allows her to be trained in the United States, where she then settles to develop her audiovisual projects. In addition, she introduces her own voice in the offline narrative, establishing a process of searching for the meaning that had to her the presence of the figure of the artist in her childhood and the relationship that the director has with her country of origin, Brazil, from which she distances herself in her youth. When Miranda dies and her mortal remains are transferred to Brazil "Helena Solberg, then a teenager, could not be one of those thousands [who bid farewell to her] because her parents did not allow it. [...] Her frustration became an obsession; the obsession in *Bananas is my business*" (Ruffinelli, 2012, p. 122).

In a cinema with a much higher degree of experimentalism, as in *Del olvido al no acuerdo* (1999), Juan Carlos Rulfo carries out a search process of the figure of his father, the Mexican writer Juan Rulfo and takes the self-referential gesture as a strategy to establish a dialogue between the director and the subject documented through the interpretation made by some of the characters that appear in the film introducing clear references that escape from non-fiction to address other narrative

discourses complementary to the purely documentary one. The presence of the director's point of view is redefined here, as the theme of the film is personal and family-related and it is also a search process, as will happen in the following examples in which the distance with historical memory and the familiar linkage with the documented fact take on great importance. The unique universe of his father leads Juan Carlos Rulfo to explore areas and characters closely linked to the childhood of the writer who stands out as one of the main exponents of the generation of 1952 in Mexico (Fell, 1996, p. 78). With *Pedro Páramo* (1955), his main work, Juan Rulfo becomes one of the references of Latin American literature, establishing a moment of breaking-off with the revolutionary novel and introducing experimental narrative models.

Documentary films in Latin America are strongly linked to social and historical events, especially those that occurred during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, when a wave of dictatorships truncated the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in different countries. Decades later, a new generation of documentary filmmakers tackle the subject, in many cases, from a personal motivation. The film *Papa Iván* (2000), by María Inés Roqué, is a process of searching for the identity of the filmmaker based on the investigation into the events that led to the disappearance of her father during the Argentinean dictatorship. There are traits of self-referentiality regarding the treatment and the background of the story, since María Inés Roqué uses the first person in the off-line narration and her own voice for the delivery of a letter that her father wrote to her and her brother in 1972. This text serves as a plot thread in the search process, thus generating a particular look at her family and her past as a daughter, posing various questions about reality and exploring the emptiness and pain of loss and absence to end up generating questions in the spectator himself about the value of life and his renunciation for ideological reasons.

Following this line is *Los Rubios* (2003), in which Albertina Carri also deals with the issue of family disappearance, in this case her parents Roberto Carri and Ana María Caruso, two militants of the Argentinean organization Montoneros. Carri, director of the film and at the same time protagonist to the extent that the motivation of this production involves the search for an important part of her family identity, incorporates the actress Analía Couceyro to represent her role in the search both at a symbolic level - as a reference to express different plot tropes - and at a formal level - as a guiding thread at a visual level when the narration expresses questions proper to the director. There are different moments in which the director herself appears in the film interacting with her alter ego and also holding a meeting with the team to discuss the vicissitudes of the production, but the self-referential feature is identified, above all, in Couceyro's voiceover through which the director expresses her positioning in front of history through her texts. She makes here an original use of the first person represented by a third.

Beyond the cases of disappearance and murder perpetrated by the military and police apparatus of the dictatorship, but also addressing the issue of repression, in this case of homosexuals during the period of government of Stroessner in Paraguay, is *Knife of stick* (2010) located. In it, Renate Costa uses the first person in the off narration as a narrative tool in a personal and family story. This self-referential gesture is evident throughout the film but is particularly important in the scenes

Costa shares with her father, in which they talk about ideological and family issues, confronting the director's more progressive and tolerant view and her father's world view, which is much more conservative and linked to religion, her father uses the Catholic argument to find justification to any vital circumstance.

The theme in the following examples surpasses the arguments related to the search of missing relatives during periods of dictatorship in different countries in Latin America during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s to introduce more varied themes in which the self-referential strategy is used. This is the case of *Santiago* (2007) by the Brazilian João Moreira Salles. The film arises from a personal motivation of the director himself who wants to capture the figure of a singular character who was the family's butler for several decades. But, beyond this intention lies a clear self-referential attitude, shared with his brother Fernando, present in the off narration. This referentiality is a memory of past times through the life of Santiago, of the tour of the camera by the family house, now empty, and of the inclusion in the montage of a brief scene recorded by a very young Salles with a Super 8 mm camera. These images, of a house in which social acts were abundant, are the representation of the director's gaze towards his own past and memories in which Santiago is present on many occasions.

In the case of *the city of photographers* (2007), Sebastián Moreno establishes a relationship from the current vision of a transcendent group for the history of Santiago de Chile in the 1980s, press photographers. He uses the off narration to remember the historical facts that happened when he was only a boy and to position himself within the film, thus declaring the motivations that make him realize the film.

Finally, the Argentinean director Andrés di Tella uses, in *Photographs* (2007), the self-referential strategy within a catalog of maneuvers to redefine aspects of contemporary documentary cinema. The film is a process of personal search of the origins of his mother - born in India - denied in his childhood by the director himself. The presence of Andrés di Tella is constant throughout the film, which differentiates it from other films in which search processes are addressed, such as *Papá Iván* (2000), by María Inés Roqué, in which the director remains outside the framing throughout the film and only her voice is referenced. It also overcomes the hegemonic presence of historical memory, redefining themes and formats through the use of the self-referential fact, as in the case of the aforementioned *Santiago* (2007) and *The city of photographers* (2007).

5. DISCUSSION

This tour of some examples of Latin American documentary cinematography offers insight into the clear evolution of the self-referential fact in the genre. Although it takes several decades to consolidate as a narrative tool, since the 1950s and the original technique developed by Carmen Toscano in *Memories of a Mexican* (1950), self-referentiality becomes a fundamental part of the catalog of narrative formulas that build documentary films in Latin America, especially since the late 1970s. The diversity of languages and formats provided by the audiovisual narrative introduces different strategies to show the self-referential fact, taking into account that the

director's point of view is a matter practically inherent to the approach that documentary cinema makes of the different topics that it deals with through the eyes of its filmmakers.

This study fundamentally provides a review of non-fiction cinematography in Latin America that puts it in value from the perspective of its creators. Although, as part of a broader and cross-cutting work, it has faced different challenges such as lack of specificity or the difficulties in managing a sample of the dimensions of the selected one, when identifying, through the application of the analysis sheet, specific issues such as the self-referential gesture, precisely the volume of analyzed films and the fact of being able to approach a sample from a regional perspective have been what has made it possible to identify the relevant films and strategies developed by filmmakers of different nationalities.

Although, from the period prior to the Second World War, in documentary filmmaking "the question of the truth of images is the characteristic of the century" (Berschand, 2004, p. 24), the period immediately after the war forced filmmakers to become aware of issues such as objectivity, point of view, militant involvement or self-referentiality, which will cause a strong change in terms of the positioning of many with respect to the documented stories.

This article has taken into account the path through which the documentary maker looks at himself, redefining his role as an active agent within the narrative discourse. With this premise, different strategies that provide documentary cinema great wealth have been identified, taking as a starting point the self-referential gesture within a genre in which the introduction of the point of view is considered inherent without its being deprived of the documentary value and of the value of recording the world and the different societies that compose it.

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