Approaching Trauma in Post-Dictatorship Argentina: Using Techniques of Fiction in Documentary Film to Recover from the Past

by

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Introduction:
The Reality of Representation
Documentary filmmaking is often thought to be an entity all its own, with a particular set of stylistic and narrative conventions. Over time, the genre has evolved and theorists have had to expand upon prior definitions in order to cover the wide range of influences present in the documentary. As theorist Michael Renov notes, a documentary may have one of many purposes: to record, reveal, or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyze or interrogate; to express.¹ Recently, Argentina has seen a good amount of directors playing with the line that separates documentary filmmaking from fiction filmmaking. Young Argentine filmmakers are approaching the representation of the “official” truth with different techniques and tools. This new generation of documentarians is faced with a past that persistently eludes them. Most information about the present is obscured by the military dictatorship of General Onganía that lasted from 1976 – 1983, during which casualties are estimated to have been anywhere from 10,000 to 30,000 people. Most official records of the government’s transgressions have been eradicated along with the remains of the dictatorship. The urgency to recapture the national identity and obtain answers about the past is the driving force behind this generation of filmmakers in Argentina, making documentary and the questioning of truth a vital concern.

When it comes to contemporary Argentine cinema, a trend emerges in recent documentary filmmaking that emphasizes the interplay between fiction and reality. The return to democracy in Argentina has had two major implications for documentary

film. One is the development of new tendencies and conventions – questioning the objectivity of documentary and a greater presence of the filmmaker within the picture. The other is an effort to try and recover history and understand the implications of the aforementioned dictatorship.

“In the realm of this cinema of crisis, one could argue that these new filmmaker felt that they needed to see the world differently. They diverged from previous auteurs: many in this new generation embodied the aesthetics of cine pobre signification, but rather than create overtly polemical statements or march under the banner of a political movement, they are working to expand the notion of Argentine citizenship to include subjects and characters who have traditionally been invisible or excluded from Argentine screens.”

The experimental forms that these, and other, films take are representative of this of this search for the personal within the political. The new independent documentaries in Argentina are moving away from the rallying political film and into a more introspective and intellectual realm. While these films did not and do not receive a lot of publicity or press in the United States, they are important to study because they represent issues central not only to Argentineans, but also to an international audience.

The documentaries from this movement do not all share the same stylistic or narrative techniques, but they do have several important characteristics in common. The first is thematic. Most of these documentaries deal with events and figures unique to Argentine history, culture, or politics. There is a true sense of nationalism behind these films and a true commitment to investigating what it means to be Argentinean. Furthermore, the filmmaking process is almost a stand-in for investigative research;

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these young directors are trying to illuminate a recent past that has become nearly impenetrably buried. The second is broad, but deals with how the material is presented cinematically. Contemporary Argentine documentaries all tend to steer clear of expository narration and instead employ a variety of fiction-based methods of storytelling. These techniques include, but are not limited to, a heavy-handed presence of the filmmaker on and off-screen, the use of animation, using suspense and other methods of fiction to cater to an audience, using a three-act structure, and breaking a film down into chapters. These commonalities imply an emotionalizing between the representation of a past and/or present reality and the memories, thoughts, and feelings of the filmmaker. Moreover, the artistry used by these young filmmakers creates a divide between the political and the personal. The traditional documentary format becomes obsolete as the search for political truths become secondary to these directors’ personal journeys for identity and catharsis.

The films selected for this study range in content and style, but provide a solid foundation from which to understand the current Argentinean documentary movement. *Los rubios* (Carri, 2003), *Trelew* (Arruti, 2004), and *La televisión y yo* (Di Tella, 2002) are distinct iterations of similar themes – loss, trauma, and memory. I will evaluate the specific manipulations made by each filmmaker thus making it easier to understand what purpose the insertion of fictional techniques serve in these, and other, documentaries. For each film it is important to delve deeply into a formal

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analysis in order to formulate better comparisons to other films in the movement.

Specifically, I will examine how these subjective documentaries from Argentina form a genre that explores the individual identity of the filmmaker as well as the identity of the nation as a whole.

A secondary purpose of my study is to highlight the relevance of these films not only for other filmmakers and film historians, but for the general public as well. These films all have their finger on the pulse of contemporary Argentine society as well as the development of film history. While these films may not receive big box office numbers, they are supported within their country and have even received a critical reception in the United States\(^4\) (amongst other countries). The influence of the Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival (BAFICI), whose first director was actually Andrés Di Tella (La televisión y yo), continues to grow. Moreover, the Doc Buenos Aires Festival (DocBsAs), the focus of which is exclusively on documentary work, allows for an exchange of ideas for producers and directors.\(^5\) These and other important festivals and competitions fuel a growing interest in the independent documentary film movement. At the same time, these films only make it through this small, regular circuit of showings. It is my goal to raise awareness and broaden the scope of the viewing audience for these documentaries. The young documentarians in Argentina


have a powerful historical message and have innovated stylistic and narrative
conventions of the genre. These films all speak to contemporary cultural and political
issues, and hence are relevant for the population of Argentina in general. Moreover, it
is imperative for students of documentary cinema to add the likes of Carri, Di Tella
and Arruti to the list of important, contemporary filmmakers.

Furthermore, this study will have implications for future considerations about
the study of international documentary cinema as a whole. Based on my research, this
project will be the first extensive discussion of contemporary Argentine documentary
written completely in English. Other texts, such as Tamara Falicov’s *The Cinematic
Tango: Contemporary Argentine Film* have discussed the Argentinean film industry’s
history, with a brief section about independent film in the past ten years. However,
there is only a one or two sentence mention of documentary. There are several essays
written by Emilio Bernini in Spanish that have been compiled into larger books
(*Imágenes reales*), but again these are works that lack the breadth and depth this study
hopes to achieve.

**Argument**

I will make the case that contemporary Argentine documentaries are
representative of a formal shift in the genre that emphasizes a more overt relationship
between fiction and reality. Furthermore, I will argue that these films are central to the
study of film history in Argentina because of certain repeated formal devices as well as
themes of memory, identity, and national trauma. These young documentarians have
had to adapt to the wants and needs of society recently returned to its artistic freedoms by ingeniously employing some of the same techniques used so often in narrative fiction films. By weaving together elements of more than one genre, these documentaries are announcing their departure from the conventional voice-of-God historical-political modes of film and moving towards a more self-reflexive film style. Through a close analysis of three films, *Los rubios* (Albertina Carri), *Trelew* (Mariana Arruti) and *La televisión y yo* (Andrés Di Tella), I will highlight the similarities and differences used in film form across this documentary movement. Moreover, the analysis will highlight how Argentine filmmakers use documentary cinema to address issues of personal and collective importance.

**Summary and Critique of Literature**

While researching the documentary genre, and specifically Argentine documentary, I have found theories and analyses that cover both film form and theme, and that move from the general to the specific. Most of the works I read, though, tend to focus on either one or the other (form or content). Therefore, I feel that it is my responsibility to tie the two together in my own analysis. The analysis of the documentary genre has rather large gaps in it and has often attempted to cover more ground than it is able to. In as much, I found that many of the authors made broad generalizations about documentary conventions without effectively breaking them down. It is clear to me that documentaries do not all serve the same purpose, and that
hence there is no one concrete definition that works for the genre, therefore I will
utilize select parts of three major theorists. I was unable to find full studies written on
contemporary Argentine documentary, so the crux of my research rests on several
relevant articles from which I will expand my thesis.

Perhaps the most useful writing on the documentary genre comes from Bill
Nichols in his book, Representing Reality. This book attempts to examine the styles,
strategies, and structures of documentary film by taking a close look at the form itself,
instead of being simply a generalized overview. Nichols states early on that he uses the
book as an “attempt to locate and identify the ways and means by which specific films
have an effect and to propose categories, concepts, and issues that help us to see how
they do so more clearly.” The ‘effect’ that Nichols refers to is left undefined, but
perhaps refers to the emotional and intellectual impact these films have on the viewers.

It is the search for this specific effect that drives the course of his study. By asking
questions about the qualities of cinema that underpin documentary and the way
rhetorical operations inform it, Nichols brings the reader closer to understanding some
of the major trends in the documentary form thus far. The main way Nichols
approaches this is by classifying documentary films into four basic modes of
representation based on a set of norms and conventions that have arisen over time.

These four modes are expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive.

Nichols acknowledges several different ways to approach an analysis of
documentary: from an institutional or audience-based perspective, for example.

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6 Bill Nichols, Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary. Bloomington:
Eventually he decides to look directly at the films themselves and create definitions based on narrative and style. Importantly, Nichols notes that documentary as a form of filmmaking makes certain claims about its relationship to the historical world, but “it cannot be cleanly separated from the strategies of narrative and the fascination of fiction.” This observation proves to be a key element in the latter two modes that he defines (reflexive and interactive documentary) and importantly, in the films which I am examining.

What I found to be most relevant in Nichols’ text was his chapter on the aforementioned documentary modes of representation, in which he breaks down the four categories and gives an idea as to how to organize films in relation to recurrent features or conventions. The basic outline of the four modes is as follows: Expository refers to a classic “voice-of-God” commentary where editing establishes a rhetorical continuity that eventually moves the film toward a persuasive end. This mode of documentary arose from dissatisfaction with the entertainment qualities of the fiction film. Nichols names Victory at Sea (Kleinerman, 1954) as a familiar example of the expository mode. Observational documentaries can be thought of as direct cinema or cinema verité where the stress is on the lack of intervention on behalf of the filmmaker and editing tends to give an impression of lived-time. High School (Wiseman, 1968) and Primary (Drew, 1960) are classic examples of this mode. “[These films] arose from the availability of more mobile, synchronous recording equipment and a dissatisfaction

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7 Nichols, xiv.
Interactive documentaries allow the filmmaker and ‘social’ actors to acknowledge each other mostly through conversation or interview and editing operates to make a “statement about the interactions themselves and what they disclose about the two.” The veil of illusory absence is not present in this mode. *In the Year of the Pig* (de Antonio, 1969) and *Harlan County, U.S.A* (Kopple, 1977) can be considered examples of the interactive documentary. Finally, the reflexive mode sees the filmmaker drawing the spectator’s attention to the form of the film itself, engaging mostly in metacommentary; this mode sees the least amount of interaction with the historical world and editing works to create a sense of awareness of cinematic form. Nichols considers *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris, 1988) as an important example of the reflexive mode.

I think these modes are best understood when looked at from a macro-level; it is when specific attributes or films are applied to each mode that the definitions become muddled. For example, the differences between interactive and reflexive documentaries, and expository and observational documentaries, become hard to differentiate as films and filmmakers tend to blur established boundaries. Nichols is able to draw upon major conventions and recurrences in documentary films in order to create a way to categorize specific films within the genre. That said, it is hard to operate strictly within these four modes and while Nichols acknowledges that, he is unable to provide a ‘theory’ that satisfies the films that cross over into different modes

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9 Nichols, 45.
of representation. This book is perhaps the most promising as a guiding analysis for my own research. I use Nichols’ four modes of representation to classify the documentaries I will be looking at. While his theory takes into account more recent developments in film history, it does not delve far enough into the influences of national or institutional pressures and circumstances for my work - thus the thematic element is missing. Still, because Nichols attempts a theory of parts over a theory of the whole, I think it is more effective than previous examinations of film form.

For example, John Grierson has long been considered a staple in documentary theory and history. However, I was unsatisfied with the trajectory of his analysis because I felt that while it provides a helpful basis of understanding, it does not necessarily apply to the subjective influences in the form. I found that most of his work applies to the expository mode later defined by Nichols. At the center of Grierson’s argument is the idea that documentary is “the creative treatment of actuality,” and consequently, a “vast and far-reaching use of the film for social comment.”¹⁰ Grierson is primarily interested in film not as an art form, but as a medium for shaping public opinion. This idea is critical and is reminiscent of early 20th century Soviet theorists insomuch as it proposes film’s main function as a means of education and mass communication. While Grierson’s work both on and in documentary is a vital part of film history, it does not necessarily apply to the films I am looking into. New Argentine documentaries do not concern themselves with mass education, and tend to direct themselves more into an interactive or reflexive category,

emphasizing a personal experience between filmmaker and history. There is an apparent rejection of the Grierson model of documentary by these young Argentine filmmakers. The interaction and reflection that dominates in these films represent a self-conscious shift away from Grierson’s prescription for documentary.

More recently, theorist Michael Renov has concerned himself with matters of film form. For the most part, I found his writing obscure, but was able to make use of and draw meaning from the first essay entitled “The Truth about Non-Fiction.” In this essay, Renov discusses the idea of truth and meaning in documentary by looking at several comparisons with the fiction film. He states right in the beginning, “After all, the key questions which arise in the study of nonfiction film and video – the ontological status of the image, the epistemological stakes of representation, the potentialities of historical discourse on film – are just as pressing for an understanding of fictional representation.”11 This statement is bold, and sets the tone for Renov’s text, but is not necessarily true. He believes that viewers, historians, and critics ask the same of fiction and non-fiction film, yet this is not the case. While there is a definite influence and interplay of one genre upon the other, I think there is a separation in terms of the viewer’s expectations. Thus, he raises important questions about how well the camera can capture or represent the domain of real/lived experience versus the changes in the way people or objects react before the camera for creative needs. These same ideas are brought up in Nichols’ text, and I think it is this line of thought that is most critical to understanding New Argentine documentaries. I continue along this

path, and attempt to examine how the Argentine filmmakers ‘narrativize the real’\textsuperscript{12} - how they deal with historical and psychological influences and utilize some of the major conventions of fiction filmmaking.

Renov’s essay also touches on the success of the documentary genre and brings up the question of legitimacy. The essay explores how the genre of documentary is interpreted from the differing perspectives of the viewer and the industry and why it has had such limited levels of success. On one hand, Renov points out that in case after case (namely television shows and fiction films) the value of the image, and specifically the moving image, is dependent upon its ability to inspire belief in the reality it is capturing. This is reminiscent of theorists such as Dziga Vertov who believe that the sole purpose of filmmaking should be the straightforward reproduction of reality. If this is what viewers look for and value in film and documentaries inherently strive to convey reality, why are they still considered subsidiary to fiction films? Still, in today’s culture we see elements of documentary filmmaking within the industry of mass-market entertainment, in its intentions, look, and material (Reality TV, for example).

Renov notes that, “No longer ought we as a culture to assume that the preservation and subsequent re-presentation of historical events on film or tape can serve to stabilize or ensure meaning.”\textsuperscript{13} These qualities of reproduction are still important to film, but they may not be able to stand on their own in contemporary

\textsuperscript{12} Renov, 6.
society. The other important element that film brings to culture is an escape from reality and an entry into a more fantastical world. It is this appeal to both emotion and intellect that filmgoers are expecting not only in today’s society but throughout cinematic history. Renov’s quote highlights the following question: how do we extract new meaning from non-fiction film whose sole purpose is to document the real?

Within this discourse, I believe that Renov is formulating something important to my own argument in the sense that he notes and qualifies the relationship between fiction and non-fiction filmmaking. However, his essay focuses mostly on American filmmaking, popular culture, documentary, etc., but does not consider if this might vary in a different nation or even whether that aspect is important. I apply some of Renov’s modes of thinking to Argentina’s culture and history and investigate how they hold-up.

My research then moved into texts written specifically about the new wave of Argentine documentaries. The first that proved useful was “Political Documentary in Argentina” by Emilio Bernini. In this essay, Bernini traces the history and formation of ‘new’ Argentine cinema and specifically, the emergence of the social/political documentary. He states that this change and the breakthrough of a tradition of political documentary were made by students of film schools and by filmmakers circa the 1990s, who immersed themselves in Italian neorealism. I understood this to mean that the film industry in Argentina was beginning to move away from government-ordained propagandist film and into the hands of students of film as an art form.
From there, the subject of documentary started to change – marginalized populations were beginning to have a voice and history was re-examined.

Bernini gives two examples, using two of the same films that I address in this essay, to illustrate this form of political vanguard: Trelew which articulates an epic story of the past and Los Rubios which reads the past from the subjective point of view of the filmmaker. His point here was to illustrate how contemporary political filmmaking understands and reinterprets the past. Moreover, he emphasizes how the genre gives way to a diversity of articulations in an era following political crisis. Thus, we see the emergence of a series of films more or less about a similar subject, but with unique and distinctive approaches that toy with our understanding of documentary and fiction conventions. The essay strives to point to a trajectory of documentary filmmaking in Argentina and in this way suggests that these films tend to move away from straight representations or tellings of the path toward a more interventionalist, reflexive form of filmmaking, “defined by its own enunciation, by the urgency to intervene.”

This means that documentarians in Argentina saw the need to become active participants in the process of filmmaking, rather than letting action unfold around them or documenting the past simply as it was. Instead, what we see is a shift toward what Nichols referred to as the interactive or reflexive documentary. This change in direction is not necessarily unique to Argentine film since Nichols is able to identify it

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14 Emilio Bernini, “El documental politico argentino: una lectura.” Imágenes de lo real: La representación de lo político en el documental argentino. By Josefina Sartora and Silvina Rival. Buenos Aires: Libraria, 2007: 32. [This quote was translated to English by the author of this thesis]
as a general development in the course of documentary history. Bernini’s essay is relevant for my main argument because it calls attention to the subjectivity in contemporary documentary and the cultural or political reasons behind it. The author tends to see a pattern in content, yet does not delve deeply into an analysis of form.

Another important essay in this vein is “Political Cinema as Memory of the Dictatorship” by Gustavo Aprea. As made apparent by the title, the essay examines certain films that take the military dictatorship in Argentina from 1976 – 1983 as their subject. Aprea decides that a mode of representation has emerged in the past two decades in documentary filmmaking that mixes aesthetics and genres of film. This is evident in the films examined as cased studies in my thesis because they combine elements of fiction with elements of documentary. Important to my study is the way in which Aprea approaches the theme of social or collective memory inherent in these films. He brings up several ways in which filmmakers have approached political filmmaking and these ring true amongst several other articles written about the subject.

One important way that these directors approach reality is illustrating the difficulties in representing what happened through the medium of film, essentially erasing the differences between documentary and fiction. What is important is the way in which these films make the relationship between politics and cinematographic language explicit and visible. Many of them take on an argumentative approach; others speak directly to the spectator; and others make these arguments indirectly through allusion.

From here then, it is important to consider the theme of identity that these films promote, which is what my analysis will focus on. The construction of an ‘us’ by
way of narration and subject matter indicates that these films attempt to include the spectator in the process on some level (this can be directly or indirectly). I am going to be looking closely at these films to better understand how they are able to accomplish this through film form and narrative style. Aprea’s essay is instructive because it speaks directly to the subject matter that I am dealing with and uses films such as Los rubios, Trelew, and Monteneros, una historia as case studies (two of the three that I will be using as case studies). Moreover, it leaves a question unanswered that I hope to answer: “If it is true that political cinema is sustained with a weak base, why does it persist and transform through decades using elements that are repeated time and again?” I propose that this has to do with the construction of an identity, with determining (in the author’s terms) who forms the ‘us’ that shares an outlook on the world.

Furthermore, I delve deeper into the idea of a collective memory and the ways in which documentary filmmaking is a tool used to approach national trauma. The main point though, is that these films are constructing an ‘us’ and a ‘them’ using cinematic tools; this dichotomy exists to align the viewers with these underrepresented populations, and more specifically, with these individual filmmakers searching for their identity. The directors speak directly to the viewer or give us access to their personal thoughts and emotions. At the same time, they keep us at a distance from the tragedies and traumas that the past has imparted on their society and on their personal lives.

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15 Montoneros, una historia is another documentary film by Andrés Di Tella during the era of New Argentine cinema. It is cited in the Appendix of this work under Filmography.
The Cinematic Tango: Contemporary Argentine Film by Tamera Falicov is a useful reference for an in depth discussion of the history of the Argentine film industry. Beginning with the cinema of the Studio Era and the Dirty War, the author covers the trajectory of the films produced until the wave of New Independent Cinema. As she states in the introduction, “My study of the Argentine film industry focuses on the political and economic dynamics of film funding over time, but it is also concerned with understanding how cultural policy shapes film culture.”

The work and research done on Argentine documentary is limited to several small articles, essays and chapters published in magazines, anthologies and books. Therefore, little has been written in depth about specific films. There is a trend in the writing, though, as many of the authors call attention to patterns in theme and subject matter. Moreover, most all of them refer to the style of filmmaking as ‘subjective’ or ‘personal’ documentary, and explain this by noting the introduction of elements of fiction into the genre as well as an emphasis on the presence of the filmmaker. I think because there are many variations and iterations within the broad spectrum of Argentine documentary, it has been difficult to capture the essence of the movement. However, I hope that an in depth analysis of the three films I have selected as case studies will help to link the formal elements expanded upon in documentary film theory with the narrative elements written about by essayists in order to better understand the role of this new documentary style in Argentina.

Outline of Chapters

The first chapter will introduce one of the main subjects central to contemporary Argentine documentary cinema: the dictatorship. In this chapter, I concentrate primarily on Albertina Carri’s film *Los rubios* (The Blondes), which tells the story of the kidnapping and subsequent assassination of the filmmaker’s parents. I conduct an in depth formal analysis of this film while paying close attention to techniques Carri uses, such as the Playmobil animation sequences, the intervention of the filmmaker (both by herself and through an actress), and the role of the interview and demonstrate how these work to represent memory in the film. Through fragments, fantasies, stories, and photos, Carri gives form to a reality of the past that she projects on her own present. I will discuss the film’s episodic narrative structure and how the film is able to convey a coherent story using these repeated and varied motifs. After a look at narrative and style I will move into a discussion about how the film relates this personal history to a national trauma and how it represents a fear of confrontation with a disturbing truth, while also touching on the impossibility of memory.

The second chapter will analyze the film *Trelew* by Mariana Arruti, which tackles a similar theme of national trauma, yet in a distinctive way. This film tells an epic tale of a group of political prisoners held in a maximum-security prison and their failed attempt at escape. The analysis will take on the formal elements of the film while paying specific attention to the lack of a single narrator, the use of the interview, the role of found footage, and present-day location shooting. For example, the theme of
national identity is illustrated through a collection of voices (of people) as each individual’s story is edited into a singular voice that recounts a shared history. These and other elements woven together create a narrative that is at once forceful and thrilling – it draws the viewer in as a fast-paced political thriller might. Trelew uses techniques of suspense and conventions of the genre to attract the viewer’s attention without sacrificing its claim to historical accuracy.

The third chapter’s film takes a more interactive approach, still, and comments on the (potential) futility of documentary. La televisión y yo (The Television and I) directed by Andrés Di Tella attempts to discuss the significance of the television that he missed as a child due to his family’s exile from Argentina. Di Tella and his family were evicted from the country during these formative years, thus his trauma is one more closely related to personal loss. The film announces its failures in the beginning and does not end where it had apparently intended in the beginning. I analyze this film’s formal techniques – the intervention of the filmmaker, the voice over narration, and the narrative structure. I argue that these tools are woven together to create parallels between Di Tella’s family history and the history of Argentina. The film alternates the eloquence of montage with personal story, found footage with unexpected confession, and the plot of public history with familiar dialogue. I argue that the elements of invention and imagination that arise in this film are presented through formal techniques visited in other Argentine documentaries and illustrate a desire to approach a historical event by means of interaction and reflection.
These three films are representative of a larger movement in Argentina to reconcile the effects of inconceivable trauma of the ‘dirty war’ in the era of democracy that followed. Young people, children of the dictatorship, are expressing their dissatisfaction with straightforward, objective retellings of the past. Instead, they fight to insert themselves into national history and find a place for smaller, more personal truths. This thesis hopes to reveal the fragile border between documentary and fiction filmmaking. It will reveal different approaches that individual filmmakers have invented to solving the problem of representing fact with fiction.
Chapter One:

Los rubios

Albertina Carri (2003)

“Today, from a mystic and intransigent point of view, film is an art of the present (in the most ample sense of the word, the present of remembering or evoking) and when it is not, it is not film. Period.”

- Serge Daney, Persévérance: Entretien avec Serge Toubiana

17 For a complete narrative segmentation of Los rubios, see Appendix. NOTE: All quotations from this film were translated into English by the author of this thesis.
Introduction

Albertina Carri’s 2003 picture *Los rubios* (*The Blondes*) invites the viewer to accompany her on a personal journey in search of the limits of memory and identity. The release of this film placed Carri among the best directors of her generation in Argentina. From 1976 to 1983, the military junta that governed Argentina tortured and killed thousands of Argentineans all under the guise of suppressing terrorism. Led by President Jorge Rafael Videla, the “National Reorganization Process” waged war on its own citizens, detaining them, torturing them, murdering them, and disposing of their bodies. Videla and the succession of presidents after him conducted what would later be known as “The Dirty War” against the political Left. In the end, between 9,000 and 30,000 Argentineans would be named dead or missing. Albertina Carri is part of a generation tormented by these traumatic events and whose artistic endeavors are defined by their losses.

The fact that *Los Rubios* won the audience prize at the 2003 Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival is confirmation that Carri’s story is one with which many of her contemporaries can identify. *Los rubios* was released internationally after being shown at the Locarno, Toronto, Gijon, Rotterdam, and Goteborg Film Festivals. This work challenged the dominant discourse on the bloodiest dictatorship in the history of Argentina and the figures of the disappeared (“los desaparecidos”), marking a breaking point in the manner of the shooting, narrating, and reflecting on memory and its representations. Like contemporary equivalents, Carri’s film is markedly self-reflexive; it
uses interviews, animation, photographs and an actor to reconstruct the past. The film follows Carri, who lost both of her parents during the aforementioned national nightmare, as she travels through Buenos Aires with her film crew. In an attempt to unravel the factual and emotional mysteries of her parents’ lives, disappearance, and deaths, Carri looks for traces of the truth within the confinement of “the official story.” The result becomes confused with sharply conflicting perspectives as she finds that the more she searches for a coherent story, the less concrete the story becomes. “It seeks not to eulogize the disappeared in solemn, self-important terms, but to make them as alive and real in the cultural sphere as they are in the political arena, a Borgesian lesson in the ultimate fiction: that of ultimate certainty.”

Carri’s documentary is constantly doubling back on itself in order to dig a bit deeper, finding room for even the smallest of memories. It is no wonder that the film ends up using such a variety of stylistic and narrative techniques to tell its story; the filmmaker is certainly experiencing a pathological reaction to events that are too atrocious for ordinary coping mechanisms.

The film is an appropriate starting point for an understanding of how other low-budget, post-modern documentaries have been made in Argentina over the past decade. It provides both viewer and scholar alike with clues to help interpret the traumatic past that Argentina and its citizens lived through using a more personal lens. It separates itself from other documentaries about the dictatorship because it is not about the survivors or heroes. Instead, it allows the small stories from the children of

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the disappeared to speak for themselves. Moreover, Carri’s film separates itself from the
Argentine filmmakers of the 1980s, who first explored the subject of the disappeared in
dramatic, argumentative movies such as *La historia oficial (The Official Story)* and *La
noche de los lapices (The Night of the Pencils)*. Carri’s approach calls the certainty of an *a
priori* truth into question. In order to do this, she uses the moving image as a tool to
uncover smaller, personal perspectives on the subject. The official history passed down
from the government to pacify the people does not serve her purposes because she is
still left in the dark regarding the fate of her parents.

While this is not the first film to embark on this path, *Los rubios* brings fresh
perspective to a country whose film history is relatively young. Albertina Carri rejects
the idea of an ‘ultimate truth,’ but still seeks to engage (as others have in her position)
“with a newer, more contingent, relative, postmodern truth- a truth which, far from
being abandoned, still operates powerfully as the receding horizon of the documentary
tradition.”¹⁹ This idea, postulated by Linda Williams, stands as a defense of this new
breed of documentarians. Suggesting that documentary can include relative truths and
engage wholeheartedly with the individual perspectives, Williams broadcasts the
present state of and potential future of the genre. *Los rubios* asks the viewer to step back
and reevaluate the breadth and limits of the documentary genre and its ability to find
one universal truth for all. Carri provides many distinctive avenues to a shared story

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¹⁹ In “Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary,” Linda
Williams makes a similar point about Errol Morris’s *The Thin Blue Line*. (*Film Quarterly,
Vol. 46, No. 3. 1993.*) 11.
and allows her most intimate thoughts and emotions to dictate a large part of the film’s narrative.

Still, Carri is working within a society that is dominated by a singular way of approaching the past, where it is better to forget than to acknowledge the truth. Her ultimate goal is to interrupt this way of thinking and impose her own discoveries on the subject. "I never wanted to do a historical movie about the '70s," Carri says. “I thought it was important to construct a narrative about memory—which is in fact what's left from that past, glorious or not—and to think about memory, you inevitably have to do it from the present point of view. I'm obliged to reconstruct my parents, and that's exactly what's so terrible about this story: They are not reconstructable.”

This acknowledgment of impossibility or failure is a theme that is present in Carri’s picture and in other documentaries from this movement. 

Still, Los rubios is not solely a narrative put together with testimonials and anecdotes; it is also the story of Carri’s experience making such a complicated and emotionally wrought personal film. 

Los rubios frequently blurs the line between fiction and documentary filmmaking. The boundary is constantly overstepped throughout the film. Interjecting moments of fiction becomes an intrinsic norm early on and is woven so tightly into the narrative trajectory that the moments of ‘fact’ become muddled. Much of the film is also about the actual filmmaking process, acknowledging the director and her crew as

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21 Andrés Di Tella is consumed by the idea of failure in La televisión y yo. This film is the case study for Chapter Three of this project.
major players both on and off screen. The whole project becomes a bit more personal in this way. Carri departs from the traditional, expository approach to history wherein there is one narrative thread that suffices for a story. This type of documentary filmmaking is often used to construct an argument or present one specific perspective on the past. *Los rubios* is more closely linked to the reflexive mode of documentary, which as Bill Nichols defines it, raises the viewer’s state of consciousness to acknowledge the cinematic form rather than the historical world. The tradition of the reflexive mode can be traced back to the 1920s with Dziga Vertov’s innovative *Man with a Movie Camera*. Vertov’s goals were not all that different from Carri’s – exposing the distinctive ways to comment on social and political themes while also revealing the process of filming. “It is not so much a documentary as a fictional film about the making of a documentary, or perhaps a documentary about the making of a fictional film about the making of a documentary.” Carri gives priority to her own memories and experiences. She highlights the difficulty of acquiring information in order to avoid making any one particular statement about the information she discovers. The memories that serve as the jumping off point for this film, though, are so obscured by the passage of time and trauma that the elements of fiction prove to be the only way

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23 A.O. Scott writes this in his review of *Los rubios* for *The New York Times*. This confusion about the genre of this film is central to the discussion in this chapter. “Personally Political: Fallout From the ‘Dirty War’” <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9D03E0DE1638F934A35757C0A9629C8B63>. 
that Carri is able to approach the subject of her parents’ death. The film is emotionally charged, yet Carri holds back the powerful punches. Her personal inability to confront the trauma of the past plays out in a variety of different ways that ultimately leave the viewer feeling detached from the events.

**Animation**

As soon as *Los rubios* begins, we are within the realm of fantasy. The film opens with a set made of PlayMobil toys - complete with a farm, animals, people, and a home. Carri is calling attention to film form almost immediately, posing questions for the audience to answer as they watch. How reliable is an account of a past event that is recreated through acting or, in this case, through animation? As we learn throughout the course of the film, Carri was only three years old when her parents disappeared. It is understandable that she should choose to represent these atrocities in the form of children’s toys, embracing simplicity and fantasy. Carri highlights the inability of children to grasp certain realities in the world around them. Reenactments in expository or interactive documentary are often based on the memories of one or more ‘talking heads’ in the film. However, they will often use real actors or location shooting to give the production of the past an air of reality. In Carri’s case, the reality is more personal and linked to her childhood; therefore the avenues of representation become limited. The film, then, is an attempt at filling in the gaps in her memories in order to construct a coherent version of the history. It is not an attack on, or a statement about, the political and ideological components of the atrocities. The animated vignettes are
also an attempt at demonstrating the inadequacy of the documentary. Carri is
constantly reminding the viewer that representing reality on screen is a flawed
endeavor. Moreover, the only access to this very personal past, the lives of her parents
and their abduction, is through her own memory. Through film form and style, Carri
explores the difficulty and above all, the disinterest by society, to access this past that is
at once familial and public.

The opening scene of *Los Rubios* is the first of several animation sequences
repeated throughout the film. The first scene takes place in early morning\(^{24}\) – the lights
are low, birds and crickets are chirping. The camera pans across the set to reveal the
space, showing first plow tools, then farm animals, and finally the exterior of the house.
The shot then pulls back and reveals three figurines – two taller ones and one smaller
between them. The three of them hold hands and walk into the house together. What
is jarring about the scene, though, is the soundtrack. At first it seems diegetic – the
image of the cow is matched with the sound of a cow, for example. There is a shift to
the sound of voices that we assume belong to the figurines in the scene, but that turns
out to be the voices of the director and an actress interacting. The sound does not
match the animated image, leaving the viewer disoriented and confused. At this point,
we do not know if this has any basis in reality whatsoever, or if the whole film will be
animated, or if this is just a dream. The intention of this scene is to introduce the
viewer to an ambiguous narrative style that mirrors the story Carri is trying to tell.

\(^{24}\) Segment 01
The next time Carri uses animation through PlayMobil is about twenty-eight minutes into the film.\textsuperscript{25} This scene is not necessarily a continuation of the first sequence. Instead, it seems to stem directly from the director’s subconscious thoughts of the scene prior to it. This is suggested through the voice-over that continues into the animation. The narration that extends over the scene is as follows:

“Riben says that the necessity to construct your own identity emerges when you feel threatened, when unity disappears. In my case, the stigma of feeling threatened belongs to the era of terror and violence, when saying my last name meant danger and fear. Today, saying my last name still gives way to strange looks from others, a mix of discomfort and pity. Constructing an identity became an obsession, even though the majority of the answers had been lost in memory.”\textsuperscript{26}

The self-conscious monologue by the director outwardly references the main themes of the film: memory and identity. Thus, when the image switches again to animation, it can be understood as an entrance into Carri’s subjectivity. Similar to other forms of art cinema, the director is purposefully ambiguous. She is choosing to leave meaning up to the interpretation of the viewer, imploring him or her to fill in the gaps. This time the image is a singular PlayMobil figurine, whose hair and head dressing continuously change through stop-motion. With the aforementioned voiceover carrying into the animation, there can be no doubt what the viewer is supposed to take away from this scene. The idea of identity as a shifting entity is mimicked here with the children’s toys. Identity is a major theme in the film and extends from the fact that the director grew up as an orphan, under the likes of a government whose strength lay in keeping the truth under wraps. Carri is giving the viewer a direct link to her personal

\textsuperscript{25} Segment 15
\textsuperscript{26} Segment 15. [This quote was translated to English by the author of this thesis]
thoughts and simultaneously relating them back to a traumatic event. Once again she suggests that it is easier to demonstrate a complex issue in a language that children can easily understand.

About twelve minutes later, there is another distinct PlayMobil set.27 This is more or less the midpoint of the picture. In this case, the setting is idyllic. There is a swimming pool, a stereo blasting music, a convertible, and a beach volleyball game. At this point in the film, the sequences of animation have become a motif and the viewer is able to identify them with the thoughts of the director. These scenes do not necessarily need or have a basis in reality, and are present when Carri is either unable to or unwilling to confront the reality of a particular situation. This sequence is distinctive from those that we have seen before, though, because there is no voice-over narration. This is a moment of tranquility for Carri, a moment where her thoughts are not concerned with tragedy but with happiness. It is also significant that the animation follows a scene where Carri is laughing with others in a car.28 In this scene it seems as though the camera has caught Carri and her crew sharing a moment of candid happiness. This scene edited next to the animated pool party creates a tranquil, joyful tone. Moreover, it relates to the idea that the narrative has been carefully constructed in order to correspond with the thoughts and feelings of Carri.

Again, the editing of sequences confirms the idea that the animation is an outlet for Carri’s subconscious on film. About six minutes later, there is a direct

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27 Segment 22
28 Segment 21
continuation of the party in another animation.29 In between these sequences of the PlayMobil party is when Carri conducts an interview with an elderly woman and ex-neighbor of her parents. The interview is disorienting because the woman proves to give misremembered information to Carri and her crew. Instead of correcting her or chastising her though, the cut is to the film crew driving away. There are close-ups of each individual in the car, suggesting that everyone is deep in their own personal thoughts. When she finally cuts back to the animated party, the sun is setting but the overall good spirits and music of before continues. The impending darkness at the party mirrors the increasing difficulty that Carri has with nailing down any kind of truth about her family. By repeating and varying these sequences throughout the film, Carri creates a secondary narrative that the viewer is able to identify and relate to the overall theme of memory.

The final sequence of animation, and perhaps the one that is most directly related to the overall story of her parents’ disappearance, happens towards the end of the film.30 Its connection with the previous PlayMobil set-ups is apparent, but this time the tone is darker – literally demonstrated through the night landscape and the soundtrack. As in the scene before, there is no voice-over here, perhaps indicating a more complete entrance into Carri’s subjective point-of-view. Instead, what we hear is eerie music and exaggerated screams, as if we have entered into a horrible nightmare. In this sequence, elements of science fiction and fantasy infiltrate her nightmares – an alien craft arrives and abducts the two figurines that are representing Carri’s parents. It

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29 Segment 25
30 Segment 37
is at this point that the viewer can identify the sequences of animation for exactly what they are: fantasy. While there is truth and fact underlying the sequences, what prevails is an inability to approach the reality of the past. As a result, Carri must use children’s toys to represent her own childishness and innocence as well as to demonstrate the complicated process of memory and representation.

The use of an alien abduction to represent the kidnapping of her parents is also linked to Carri’s childlike and fantastical way of interpreting events on screen. Patricia Barbeiro, an associate professor of American ethnic literature at the Road Island School of Design, analyzes the role of diverse forms of captivity narrative—from Indian captivity narratives to contemporary prison narratives and accounts of alien abduction. In her essay on the subject, Barbeiro describes “how the physical and emotional traumas experienced by abductees are directly linked to a destruction of a coherent notion of time that leads, in turn, to a destruction of a clear conception of identity.”

If we accept this assertion, then the link to Carri’s own situation becomes evident. The subjects of alien abduction in cultural myth are left traumatized and disoriented. Moreover, the experience of an alien abduction is one for which those left behind have little insight. They are left guessing about the exact goings-on of those who have been transported. In other words, Carri is using this cultural myth – one that is present in other films, novels, and even comic books – to help demonstrate events that are not exactly fully formed or even real in her memories. The abduction of Carri’s parents is

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not a direct violation of her body or self, but it leaves psychological scars that remain unhealed. The idea of being captured and tortured and instead of killed, disappeared, is jarring for not only for the person or people it is happening to, but also for their children. Carri feels dislocated from her own identity. She uses a familiar narrative in popular culture to explain those feelings to the viewer.

This is the fifth and final appearance of animation in the film, perhaps because it is as close to the reality of the sequestration as Carri can come. “The engine of Carri’s documentary is subjectivity...She demonstrates her own fears, her own desires to find her parents, her desperation in a cruel situation.”32 In this way, then, she is able to construct a story that is more about the search for her own identity, recalling memories and bringing up what has been forgotten. By using animation as a tool for representation, the film is demonstrating one of the shortcomings in many documentaries. This shortcoming is the inability to approach truth and reality through visual means. Carri is suggesting that even within the reflexive or interactive mode, the documentary must use a variety of different means to represent the unrepresentable. She uses animation in her film for many different reasons, both thematic and stylistic, but also to serve as a commentary on the genre. The intentions of the filmmaker are intentionally vague, leaving it up to the viewer to interpret them. Perhaps because Albertina Carri was merely a child when her parents were taken, she can only visualize these memories using the vehicle of children’s toys. An active viewer is needed throughout the picture in order to fill in the holes that Carri has purposefully dug out.

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It is important to recall that this is just one small part of the film that interacts with the film as a whole. Animation is just one way that Carri lets us, as viewers, gain access into her subconscious thoughts and emotions, but it is not the only way.

The Actress

Reenactment is central to the way Carri approaches the past in this film. The director casts an actress, Analía Couceyro, to represent herself as the protagonist of the film. The use of an actor or actress in a scene of reenactment is not new to the documentary genre, but Carri is innovative. Instead of having Couceyro act out scenes from Carri’s past, she is used mostly in the present as the creator of the film. On a first viewing of the film, it can be confusing to understand the different roles of Couceyro and Carri, since both appear frequently on screen, sometimes in the same scene. Carri, the director, often leaves from behind the camera and walks into the frame in order to show her own personal experience with filming. This interaction between director and camera is not characteristically found in expository or observational documentaries because it does not serve their fundamental purpose to establish one singular truth about a topic. Instead, Los rubios often presents multiple versions of the same scene or event in order to delve into a more personal exploration of the events, rather than establish an argument for collective consensus.

33 These terms are defined in Bill Nichols’ Representing Reality in the chapter on Documentary Modes of Representation. He names four distinctive modes of documentary filmmaking: expository, observational, interactive, and self-reflexive. See the Summary and Critique of Literature in the Introduction of this text for a more extensive discussion.
Immediately after the opening credits, the actress Anália Couceyro reads from a book by Roberto Carri, the director’s father. It seems that there are parallel themes running through the text and the film, following both father and daughter across generations and mediums. She reads,

“...The crowd becomes the town, the herd transforms into the collective; egoism, private interest, and personal preoccupations all disappear. The individual will is founded and submerged in the collective will and this new electrified personality is pointed straight at its objective like an arrow at the white center.”

The book that she is reading from is titled *Isidro Velázquez, formas prerrevolucionarias de la violencia* (*Isidro Velázquez, Pre-Revolutionary Forms of Violence*). It is the story of a man from the Argentine province of Chaco, hated by the oligarchy, but with whom the countryside sympathized. Roberto Carri was a respected intellectual and sociologist, held at the same high level as other nationally renowned writers such as Rodolfo Walsh. His themes were often political, and the excerpt that Carri chooses to share with the viewer is a comment on the society in which he was living at the time. The main objective of Carri’s film is to explore a subject that is extremely personal, while at the same time a shared experience amongst those of her generation in Argentina. She has effectively reclaimed this political statement as a personal one to suit her needs.

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34 Segment 03
Carri is again demonstrating the ways in which these two threads are constantly intertwined for her and for others of her generation.

While neither context nor explanation is given in the aforementioned scene, it establishes some intrinsic norms for the film. Couceyro stands in for Carri at a moment that is quite personal. This literal substitution for Carri on screen is done similarly with the PlayMobil animation sequences, wherein she is removed from the most intimate and perhaps most emotionally wrought moments.

We are officially introduced to Analía Couceyro in Segment 5 when she explicitly states her name and role in the film. “My name is Analía Couceyro. I am an actress and in this film I will represent Albertina Carrí.” The use of an actor or actress in a film typically indicates a fictionalized representation of some kind and this is what Carri is trying to approach. She is attempting to tell her own story using a character to stand in for a true-life protagonist: herself. At the same time, her directorial choices still separate her film from traditional narrative fiction in that it has the element of self-consciousness. The picture does not limit itself to the actress’ portrayal and Carri frequently appears on screen both as a director and participant in the action. On the other hand, Los rubios does not fit into the traditional documentary mold because it chooses not to have Carri as the central figure exploring her past or constructing an argument. The film repeatedly moves between the two genres, and perhaps uses both Couceyro and Carri as representatives for each. As much as Carri wants to turn the script over to an actress, she is repeatedly drawn in by her own desire to know what truly occurred; to separate truth from fiction.
For the most part, Couceyro is the one in front of the camera guiding the film’s narrative forward. She interviews people, she relays memories, she conducts research, and at one point she even undergoes a blood test. Thus, the actress maintains the present-tense line of the narrative. In the traditional sense, perhaps this is all we would see – Couceyro investigating the disappearance of Caruso and Carri through different testimonials and on-screen exploration of facts or rumors. However, her role is not limited to this primary occupation.

We also have scenes of Couceyro looking over footage of interviews she has conducted and taking notes as if she were in the process of editing for this very film. For example, in Segment 08 a recording of an earlier interview is playing on a television in the back of the shot and it appears that Couceyro is only half listening to what is being said. She tunes in and out, laughing or smiling occasionally; perhaps at a fond memory. Mostly, though, she is taking notes and the camera is positioned so that we can see exactly what she writes: “Exposing memory using its own mechanism. When omitting, you remember.”

By outwardly stating the purpose of this particular documentary, using the camera to reveal truths that may have been forgotten, it enters into the realm of post-modernism and self-reflexive genres. It is also important to note that the meaning of the quotation is ambiguous. Not only is it a remark on the problems of memory, but it is also speaking to the difficulty of representing memory on screen. The words are contradictory and suggest an impossible process of ‘omitting’ in order to remember. What exactly has been omitted from the official history in Segment 08
Argentina, and more specifically from the story of Carri’s parents? It is those moments of the story that seem lost that Carri seeks most feverishly in the film.

Couceyro, the actress, is a major part of the filmmaking process and she is made to overtly address the film’s themes through dialogue and visuals. Likewise, Albertina Carri’s role is not strictly limited to behind the camera. There are many scenes where the major action is Carri directing Couceyro in front of the camera, taking over for Couceyro or even revisiting an action Couceyro has previously completed. In Segment 10, for example, Couceyro is preparing to give a monologue about early memories of her family and the traumatic event of her parents’ disappearance. Carri directs her actress and feeds her the exact lines she wants her to say. This first part of the scene is shot in black and white. It is as though we have access to a behind the scenes moment, something most directors would eliminate from their final product. However, Carri chooses to keep this in the picture as a way of opening up dialogue on the possibilities of documentary. Still another consideration is that this scene itself was completely staged, including the director/actor conversation that we see. The range of manipulation that Carri has over the picture is great. While it appears that the viewer is watching an event unfold naturally before the camera, it is also probable that Carri is only giving the illusion of truth.

Linda Williams makes a similar point about The Thin Blue Line when she states, “Like a great many recent documentaries obsessed with traumatic events of the past, The Thin Blue Line is self-reflexive. Like many of these new documentaries, it is acutely aware that the individuals whose lives are caught up in events are not so much self-
coherent and consistent identities as they are actors in competing narratives.”

Perhaps what Williams is suggesting here is that the documentary now has a new role to give these new, competing identities a space on the screen, where they have room to develop. She continues, “In place of the self-obscuring voyeur of vérité realism, we encounter, in these and other films, a new presence in the persona of the documentarian.” Carri comes in and out of the picture, but her presence is continuously felt because of Couceyro. Oddly, this sort of manipulation has the same effect that vérité had in the 1960s – an appeal to honesty. Carri is admitting that her film is constructed. Showing the viewer that Coucyero is acting the entire time is allowing the film to tackle what it means to tell the truth in documentary. The discovery of the self becomes just as important as the unlocking of the past, its mysteries, and its traumas.

The scenes that take place in the editing room are recurrent throughout and reflect the previously referenced meta-filmic properties inherent in Carri’s documentary. The actual practice of making a documentary is one of the more important themes, as the director is constantly struggling with how to piece together the information she obtains into a coherent format. At one point the crew receives a fax from the Institute of National Visual Arts and Films which essentially states that they will not be submitting any funding to Carri’s project because it lacks a solid script.

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38 Williams, 5.
39 Segments 11, 14, 18
40 Segment 14
The letter states that her film has the following issues, “it needs to be revised with a stronger documentary rigor and it must use more testimonies or interviews.” The problems raised by this Institute are ones that haunt the whole film and are rhetorical questions that Carri and her crew grapple with throughout. Where is the line between documentary and narrative? What is the best way to tell this story? This question truly troubles the film crew, and Carri herself, and, is perhaps is the reason she has chosen to use Couceyro, an actress, to help with the story. The film does not fit neatly into the Institute’s definition of a documentary picture nor does it follow the conventions of fictional storytelling. There is an ongoing discussion by the main figures in the film about the exact parameters of their specific project – what it means to include interviews or reenactment versus representations using animation or an actress. The conversation they have touches on several of these themes, and ultimately Carri is resigned to the idea that, “It is a film that needs to be made by someone else, but not me. They [the Institute or Argentina] need this film and I understand that, but I do not have the means to do it correctly.” Ultimately, the filmmakers continue on without the funding from the Institute, but the issue their fax presents does not fade so quickly from their minds or those of the viewers.

One of the ways in which Carri influences the narrative of the picture is by physically inserting herself into the action. Segments 11 and 12 are sequential in time and are a good representation of the aforementioned intrinsic norms being put to use. In Segment 11, we are limited to only Couceyro and her action, which is calling the

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41 Segment 14, 26:00
42 Segment 14, 28:00
Forensic Anthropology Office to schedule an appointment. The following scene shows everyone – Carri, the entire film crew, and Couceyro – entering the same Forensic Lab. Couceyro has her blood drawn for testing and immediately afterwards, Carri does the same. The idea is to draw attention to the fact that Couceyro, the actress, is a fictional representation of Carri even while she is physically present in the scene. It is a reminder that the actress is doing what she is supposed to be doing: acting. When Carri steps in to have her own blood drawn, an actual first hand documentation of a factual and personal act, we get a different perspective on the scene. Not only is this a highly self-conscious move in terms of the narrative, it is also made stylistically distinctive. At the moment Carri gives her own blood sample, the footage is switched to black and white. The color switch actually helps to clarify the action by unavoidably calling attention to style. As viewers, we understand that Carri is continuously caught between staged versus actual footage.

Interviews

One of the major tools used throughout Los rubios is the interview. Testimonials obtained through filmed interviews tend to add legitimacy through first-hand accounts of a certain event, memories of a certain person, or even an expert’s opinions on a situation. In this case, interviews are used incessantly as a means to approach meaning in the past but seem to repeatedly fail at this mission. Instead of bringing Carri any closer to one uncompromising truth, they seem to steer her farther.

43 Color is discussed more in depth under the Narrative & Style heading.
and farther away. Interviews are conducted in the traditional way but are rarely used to clarify any confusing information. Mostly we find that Carri inserts clips from interviews when it seems the person making the testimonial offers contradictory or confusing material. It is important to keep in mind her own personal context when considering how Carri chooses to present interviews. She never had the opportunity to know her parents and must rely on the memories and words of others in order to construct a coherent narrative. At the same time, Carri is working within a postmodern movement in Argentina wherein the construction of said narrative is believed to be near impossible. The crew talks to people older than seventy and younger than six and interviews an actress as though she were actually the woman she is portraying (Couceyro). Therefore it is no wonder Carri’s film exudes doubt and constantly implores the viewer to question what they hear or see.

The title of Carri’s film, Los rubios (The Blondes), stems from one of the interviews conducted during the filming of an elderly neighbor. This woman claims that the members of the Carri/Caruso family (whose names she can’t recall) all had blonde hair. “The three girls had blonde hair. The wife had blonde hair, the husband had blonde hair. They were all blonde.”44 Since we have seen Carri multiple times throughout the film already, we know this is probably not the case; she has thick, dark brown hair. Carri distances herself and the viewer from the expository or argumentative directives and asks us to engage more openly with the material she presents. In the essay, “The New Documentary: The Act of Seeing With One’s Own

44 Segment 23
Eyes,” by Didier, Listorti and Luka reflects on Carri’s decision to include this misleading interview in the film.

“This from a position of urgency to show, the new Argentine documentary, for the most part, continues to be stuck to conventions of the genre; perhaps because the paradoxical, contradictory, and vertiginous reality impedes a sufficient distancing as a means of arriving at a creative treatment of the form.”

As the authors of this essay suggest, Carri does as others of her generation do, which is to employ conventions of the genre even when they seem counterproductive. Carri is choosing to demonstrate the flaws of the genre through its own mechanisms and tools. In this case, the impossibility of knowing the truth is emphasized again and again using this mechanism of documentary storytelling.

While the film does spend a good amount of its time in dialogue with friends and neighbors, there are also many times when interviews are used as background noise or visuals. In Segment 8, for example, Couceyro is working at her computer and writing in her notebook as a video of an interview plays on the television behind her. The footage shown on the television is new to the viewer because we did not see the actual interview take place. Thus while new information is being revealed, our attention is being diverted by Couceyro’s other actions in the foreground. It is easier to focus in on Couceyro’s facial expressions, occasional laughter, and especially the notes she takes instead of the banter of a ‘talking head’ in the back of the frame. Since the actress does not seem to be paying close attention to the interview tapes, it suggests

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45 P. Félix-Didier, L. Listorti and E. Luka, “El nuevo documental: el acto de ver con ojos propios,” Nuevo cine argentino: Temas, autores y estilos de una renovación. Fipresci, 2002: 86. [This quote was translated to English by the author of this project].
that we as viewers do not need to focus our energies there either. This happens again in segments 14 and 17, thus marking a repeated technique that the viewer begins to identify. This internal treatment of the interview sets a precedent for how we should watch the actual interview process when it is conducted in other scenes.

The aforementioned interview process occurs in a way that seems very much off the cuff and spontaneous. Most of the time it appears that the film crew arrives at a person’s house simply hopeful he or she is available to speak with them. In some cases, it is entirely serendipitous. In segment 20, the crew is leaving Carri’s old neighborhood but is stopped on their way back by a group of children. Instead of turning the cameras off, they continue to roll and Carri asks the children questions about the neighborhood in which they live, whether the houses have always been the same, if they know their neighbors, etc. This interview is conducted purely out of happenstance, but is illustrative of the way Carri approaches her own memories in this film. These children are perhaps the same age as Carri when she was struck with trauma. The innocence and candidness with which these children speak are qualities that Carri no longer possesses. This theme of childhood and a child’s inability to comprehend is carried over into different aspects of the film. It is reiterated through various motifs such as animation and the actual appearance of children. By affording these kids their own moment in front of the camera, Carri is equating their words with those of the sit-down conversations she has with others her own age and older. Testimonial does not have the final say in Carri’s picture as she lets words, events, and
moments happen at their own pace, demonstrating the inevitability of contradiction and coincidence.

Another important way interviews are used in Los rubios was touched on briefly in the discussion of Analía Couceyro's role. There are several instances where Couceyro is being interviewed as though she were Carri, recounting memories of events and people in a supposedly candid manner. In these same scenes, Carri interrupts and cues her actress for specific lines of dialogue to be included. Segments 10, 19, and 28 are good examples of this specific interaction and type of interview. In Segment 10 the take marker indicates that what we are about to see is an “Interview.” Couceyro is sitting in a seat and is being asked questions about the incidence of her parents’ kidnapping, recalling what she can from those days. While she attempts to improvise the answers, Carri can be heard in the background cueing her with the appropriate words. In the end, Couceyro states that she cannot remember the event in detail but that she remembers the police coming and asking for her name. In this moment, the credibility of the interview is completely stripped away in this film. The viewer is now made one hundred percent certain that testimonial may be completely skewed and may not have any credibility within the confines of this picture. It is now up to the viewer to judge each interaction the film crew has with an outsider and to determine whether or not his or her statements contain any truth or validity. We can see first hand in these and other scenes how easy it is for an actress to adopt the mannerisms or expressions of another person. Once again, Carri is asking where the
line exists between truth and fiction. Carri has eloquently manipulated the viewing experience by calling our own presumptions about documentary into question.

In expository or observational\(^{46}\) documentaries, interviews are used as a way to provide confirmation or clarification about certain information. They can also reveal certain truths or be construed in an argumentative fashion. Carri’s intention is to dispel this preconception about the interview in documentary films. “Exposing memory using its own mechanism. When omitting, you remember.”\(^{47}\) This is what Couceyro writes in her notebook while an interview plays on a television in front of her. The same way that Carri hopes to break open memory to reveal what has been omitted, she is attempting to get to the bottom of the testimonial in order to reveal what has been unsaid. By repeating and varying the interview process throughout the course of the film, Carri attempts to establish them as an uncertain means of collecting information. She is not only delivering her perspective on the experience of recollecting, highlighting the inability to be certain about a past event, but she is also commenting on the prior rigidity of the documentary form. Her film functions as a work in progress because it never appears to arrive at one specific conclusion. The idea of testimonial is supposed to add credibility to a filmmaker’s thesis, not to detract from it. In Carri’s case, however, the interview becomes a way for her to expose the flaws of the medium she has chosen to use. The individuals – both old and young – hold

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\(^{46}\) Terms are from Bill Nichols’ text *Representing Reality*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.

\(^{47}\) Segment 08
opinions and interpretations of the past that are not entirely cohesive or even coherent. Instead of furthering the progress of the film, they set it back.

Narrative & Style

One of the most challenging aspects of Los rubios is its episodic narrative structure. For Carri’s purposes, a narrative that constantly jumps in space and time helps promote themes of memory, loss, and doubt. As film theorist Dai Vaughan states, “Realism has nothing to do with totality but involves, on the part of the recipient, a sparking of understanding across gaps in the text; such creative response, such active construction of meaning by the recipient, lying at the heart of aesthetic pleasure.”48 Here Vaughan is suggesting that the organization of aesthetics plays a role in our understanding and enjoyment of the picture. The call for an active viewer is made early in Carri’s film because the gaps in the narrative are many. In documentary, the organization of events is crucial because the purpose is typically to express a truth to its viewers. In the case of this Argentinean director, a disjointed and elliptical narrative emphasizes her search for such a truth, but the impossibility to obtain it.

This film requires an active viewing but it does establish several intrinsic norms and visual motifs to help guide the process. Carri is constantly implementing tools that teach the viewer how to watch the film. Locations, characters, and activities are repeated and varied in a way that helps give the narrative a minimalistic structure.

Motifs gain meaning throughout the film because they become associated with certain

themes. By giving the viewer apparently unrestricted access to the filmmaking process, we gain a perspective usually forbidden in the genre. The film studio and editing room, for example, become familiar locales where characters and plot arcs are developed. This type of discussion is reserved for reflexive documentaries, which Los rubios is aspiring to. This documentary’s approach is related back to its positioning within the Argentine film industry's context. Up until this point documentaries about politics in Argentina, even when oppositional, were made in a more “traditional” style. La hora de los hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces), a four and a half hour trilogy.

“The film employs old prints, newsreels and interviews, as well as clips from the work of Joris Ivens and Fernando Birri (the only other young Argentine filmmaker I have seen who shares...an authentic Argentine vision). On the soundtrack there are lengthy quotations from Sartre and Fanon, slogans, and masses of facts.” The search for the personal is not the motivation for this so-called Militant Cinema.

Los rubios film does not focus on survivors of the dirty war or the dictatorship, but is instead the story of the daughter of the disappeared, told in her own words. In

49 See the Narrative Segmentation in Appendix for examples.
this particular case, there is room for character development: Carri’s own growth and change is documented throughout the course of the film since this is as much about revealing facts of the past as it is about creating an identity for herself in the present.

The narrative often takes a backseat to the overt use of film style in Carri’s picture. Style is made prominent within the mode of reflexive documentaries (i.e., *The Thin Blue Line*). There is never a moment where the viewer forgets they are watching a film, since Carri pushes style to the forefront. Variations in color, film speed, and editing create a hyper-stylized reality where *Los rubios* plays with the conventions of the documentary genre in an openly expressive way. By drawing attention to these aspects it is harder for the viewer to become completely immersed in the story or argument Carri intends to present. Film style in this case can often add to the confusion but it is clear that this is the director’s intention. The open-ended structure wherein any variation of style is permitted, allows her to emphasize the central themes of her picture. Film, like memory, can play tricks on the mind and can lead to maddening, contradictory sentiments about one particular incident.

Color is one way that Carri is able to manipulate the viewing experience. *Los rubios* plays out mostly in full color, but there are moments where the stock changes to black and white. There are patterns to this switch, but for the most part color proves to be another contradictory element in the film. The first time black and white is used happens about eight minutes into the film when the film crew is traveling on the highway and looking through an old photo album. While no new narrative

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52 Segment 06
information is revealed, this quick interjection of monochrome color emphasizes the subjective. We can assume that it is Carri herself flipping through the photos in the car, and that for a moment she is signaling our attention to a personal incident. Up until this point we have seen Couceyro, the actress, but have not been introduced to Carri, the director. This is the first glimpse into the more personal sphere where the majority of the film dwells.

Black and white is used in a similar way in Segment 10 where Carri directs her actress and reflects on the personal dialogue she will recite in the upcoming ‘interview.’ Once again the color change is used to reveal a moment of intimacy where the trauma of the past is affecting her in the present. This scene is also a behind the scenes look at the filmmaking process, so it is doubly intimate. Changing the color in this scene calls the viewer’s attention to the action and dialogue. This type of interaction between actress and director is usually kept from the viewer, so it is truly a moment that sets Los rubios apart from other documentaries. Carri wants to make sure the viewer is aware of these differences and so she uses film style to direct attention and add significance. Moreover, within the same scene the film stock changes back to full color. This occurs once the director moves out of the frame and Couceyro is left on her own to recite the lines for her interview. It is as if the viewer was not meant to see the black and white, and perhaps in a traditional expository documentary we would only have access to the moments in color. In this case, though, Carri has given us the opportunity to experience the process and engage with the filmmaker herself.
Yet another possibility is that the scenes shot in black and white are to be perceived as more truly authentic than those in full color. In the aforementioned scenes where Carri and Couceyro visit the Forensics Lab, the color switch is used as a way to call attention to the difference between the true action and the representation. Black and white is brought out in this scene as a way of clarifying the two women protagonists in the film and the significance of their respective roles. Often, black and white is used to suggest authenticity in film – a more stripped down view of the world. In documentary, archival footage is typically monochromatic, which often registers as both antiquated and realistic. Carri is recalling this same thought process when the film switches between color and black and white. Its role is at once clarifying and revealing.

This same method is repeated and varied throughout the course of the film and a definite pattern is revealed. Upon a first viewing, the use of black and white may seem arbitrary, however it has a specific function within the film. Every scene in which the monotone coloring is employed, we are being let in to share a moment that perhaps normally only Carri and her filmmaking crew would have experienced. Instead of leaving these segments off screen, Carri chooses to exploit them. She emphasizes the personal side of her story and the intention to create her own persona or identity. The history of her country and the shared experience of the dictatorship is one of collective appeal, but this is also a tale of great personal significance. She is pushing this to the forefront through visual style and specifically using color as a motif.

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53 Segments 11, 12
This expressive style helps guide the viewing experience in an, at times, gap-filled narrative. We are able to make connections throughout the film and draw inferences about Carri’s intentions from the repetition and variation in color.

There are obvious moments throughout the film where the speed of the footage is changed. These speeds range from freeze frames to fast motion and are used in a way similar to the use of color. Again the style is pronounced and is acknowledged by the viewer for its break from the norm. Moreover, Carri inserts this mechanism sporadically throughout the film, this time in a not necessarily patterned fashion. This documentary does not limit freeze frames to still photographs, but instead uses them to freeze live action. In this particular scene, the slowed speed introduces us to each member of the crew visually (but with no voice-over or subtitled acknowledgment).

While this lasts for just a brief period, it is clearly a change that the filmmaker is hoping we will notice. Style is once again pulling us out of the moment and distancing us from the actual horror that this story is about. Instead, the film asks us to think about the present – its characters, actions, and events.

Conclusion

Carri’s film is at once a powerful, confrontational look at the trauma of a not far forgotten past while also still choosing to remain detached. Los rubios is able to obtain this balance through its unconventional choices in genre, narrative and style. Thus the director leaves out the most direct emotional punches of the story. She is

54 Segment 24
instead looking to build a narrative in the present about a past she did not live. Hence, she must create a role for herself. This post-modern view on documentary is not necessarily uncommon in Argentina or in other parts of the world. It has been written about by the likes of film critic and historian Linda Williams about Errol Morris and explained in depth by Bill Nichols. However, the self-conscious weaving of fiction and documentary seems to work particularly well for the children of the disappeared. This is a flamboyant moment of auteurism for Albertina Carri, which indeed pushes her as a filmmaker to the forefront. It is not solely about her position as a documentarian, though, but about her quest for an identity within a traumatized nation. The subjective and objective are in flux throughout Los rubios, constantly pushing the film away from arriving at one universal truth about the past. Through the fragmented construction of this story with scenes of animation, scenes of the preparation and process of filmmaking, televised images of interviews, and scenes filmed in the moment, Carri is completely submerging the viewer into a mix of reality and fiction. This collage, or montage, effect acts as a manifestation of a fear of confrontation with the disturbing truths she refuses to confront head on. She emphasizes the near impossibility of a truthful representation through film and the faulty tendencies of memory. For these reasons the film is at times difficult and frustrating, and for these same reasons the film is overwhelmingly successful.

Los rubios is a clear shift from its predecessors in both the narrative fiction and documentary genres. It is one of the first documentaries to be made under a post-modern influence in Argentina and comes from a place of both personal and national
importance. The overt relationship between fiction and reality is approached again and again during this movement particularly because it works well with themes of memory, identity and trauma. Albertina Carri’s *Los rubios* is a perfect introductory film for the study of an emergent national cinema because it embodies the collective spirit through style, narrative and genre. It is interesting that she chooses to use the conventions of the documentary genre to approach these horrific memories because as the film reveals, it is not necessarily possible to reach one singular truth that works for all individuals. This film embodies the documentary’s quest to reveal personal and collective truths. Ultimately, however, the director finds these historical truths to be inaccessible and at times even resistant to representation.

*Los rubios* deals almost exclusively with an event from Argentina’s recent past, but its themes and stylistic tendencies are not unique to one nation. This film is a crucial part of the contemporary national identity of Argentina but also has relevance for an international audience. The break from the expository or observational modes and the shift into the interactive or reflexive modes is a general trend in documentary film as a genre. It is only in the last ten years that Argentina, whose cultural history has been so stunted due to political atrocities, has reached this point in the evolution of documentary. The need to expose the flaws of a medium that prescribes ultimate truth comes from a place of deep personal relevance for these filmmakers, but also as a cry from a wounded nation.
Chapter Two:  
*Trelew, la fuga que fue masacre*  
Mariana Arruti (2004)

“I am now personally satisfied, because the motivation to do this was not only the reclamation of justice. This was a story I wanted to tell from my heart.”

-Mariana Arruti, Interview for *La nación*

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55 For a complete narrative segmentation of *Trelew*, see Appendix.
Introduction

Mariana Arruti’s film, *Trelew: La fuga que fue masacre (The escape that became a massacre)* brings tragic events from Argentina’s past to the forefront. For over thirty-five years, there had been no official recognition of the brutal violence that occurred in Trelew, Patagonia in the early 1970s. Acknowledging the event meant accepting it as the prelude to the terrorism that began with the dictatorship of 1976. On August 15, 1972, during the military dictatorship of Alejandro Agustín Lanusse, a group of prisoners from different armed organizations (ERP, FAR and The Montoneros) planned a massive escape from the Rawson Maximum Security Prison to the nearby Trelew Airport. Their ultimate goal was to take over an airplane that would bring them to Salvador Allende’s Chile and later, to Cuba. Every step of the operation was meticulously planned out, yet a misinterpreted signal doomed them to failure. Only six leaders of the three organizations were able to board the plane while another nineteen prisoners arrived as the plane was taking off. Forced to surrender, the nineteen were sent before a judge who demanded their return to Rawson. This decision was voided, however, and they were sent to the Almirante Zar Air Force Base, where they were murdered on August 22, 1972. Only three people survived the massacre to tell this story, yet during the dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla (1976-1981) they were detained and later ‘disappeared.’ This is the history Arruti attempts to recreate for viewers in her documentary.

Similar to her contemporaries, Arruti works within the documentary genre yet actively draws upon tools of fiction filmmaking to tell the story. The film took over
four years of extensive research to finish, which is evidenced in its style. The story is
told collectively by survivors of the escape, friends of the deceased, lawyers of the
political prisoners, habitants of Trelew, taxi drivers who drove some of the prisoners,
employees of the Prison Guard, and even an employee of a local funeral home who
removed of the bodies. These interviews are punctuated with recovered footage and
present-day footage of the prison, airport, and town. All of these elements were
carefully selected and woven together during the editing process, making this a picture
constructed primarily in post-production. Because of this, Mariana Arruti had a great
deal of control over the pacing and tone of the film. Instead of presenting itself as a
political documentary, Trelew can better be viewed as similar to a political thriller, with
an elevated sense of urgency and suspense. It is almost as if the events were happening
in the present, making them all the more relevant for a modern viewing audience.

This film is another attempt at dealing with a traumatic political event that has
been buried deeply into the subconscious of the nation. Through this medium, Arruti
makes a film that has both personal and collective relevance. When asked why she felt
compelled to make this film, to bring this story to the screen, Mariana Arruti said,

“Trelew because I could not understand and I wanted to explain for myself
the force of those who had lost everything – their children -, and still stood
firm on their two feet in order to fight against the dictatorship of General
Lanusse, scream in his face. In spite of what the official version says, it was
an assassination, a cowardly execution... And also, Trelew because when I
read in an old publication the thoughts of María Angélica Sabelli’s father
(one of the young women who was killed at age 23) who could not recall
where he had kissed his daughter for the last time – on her forehead or on the cheek – I couldn’t not tell this story.”

In her own words Arruti reveals the significance of these events for her and for Argentina. Similar to Albertina Carri, there was something in this story that called out to the filmmaker begging to be explained. In Carri’s case, it was a matter of more immediate personal relevance, but for Arruti it had to do with the hurt she felt on behalf of her country. The documentary genre serves her purposes well as a means to recount moments from Argentina’s past. However, she also pushes the boundaries of the genre and manipulates its conventions in order to make an argument for the significance of the past in the present. Moreover, by focusing on specific tactics of narrative storytelling found in Hollywood prison break films such as *The Great Escape* or *Escape from Alcatraz*, Arruti accomplishes her goal of making this true story accessible to everyone. The format the documentary attempts to employ is one of a fast-paced thriller that leaves the viewer on the edge of his or her seat, and it is clear that this is no accident. It is these bends and stretches of the documentary genre that give Trelew an advantage in the hopes of pushing a once hidden truth to the forefront of a national consciousness.

The tendency to form a collective identity is a major part of this and other films of the same movement in Argentina. There is a consistent attempt made to distinguish

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57 Later, we will see this same situation for director Andrés Di Tella in his film, *La televisión y yo*. 
between an ‘us’ and a ‘them,’ which both helps propel the narrative forward as well as emphasizes a theme of the personal and the shared. In Trelew, the ‘us’ does include the spectator, although indirectly. Although we do not have direct access to the filmmaking process itself, as we do in Los rubios (Carri) or La televisión y yo (Di Tella)\(^{58}\), we are still invited to participate in the action as it unfolds. Consequently, the viewer is still conscious of the manipulations the filmmaker has employed in her documentary as it is noticeably distinctive from the expositional or observational documentaries of the past. The ‘them,’ in this case becomes the government and its official histories. Arruti is countering this oppressive ‘them’ with the histories of individuals, whose collective emotional humanity is relatable to the general viewing public in Argentina.

Manipulations occur on all levels of this film. For example, the narrative appears to have a timeless quality. It as though the action were occurring while the film was playing, which adds a layer of suspense to the events. More dramatically though, the filmmaker has specifically chosen the narrators of the story, and while some include third party observers, there are no first-person representatives of the government present to give their account. It is clearly the intention of the filmmaker to glorify those who were unsuccessful on that fateful day in August. It is also her intention to align the viewer with those characters, thus we are given an almost exclusive inside look into the events as they happened for those involved.

Trelew’s narrative is largely formulaic and calls upon a traditional three-act structure. There are definite distinctions between exposition, conflict, and resolution.

\(^{58}\) Another example is Opus (Donoso)
Interspersed amongst these narrative breaks are complications, goals and smaller beats that constitute the filler. The film is perhaps most closely related to a typical fictional thriller film, and less like any one type of documentary mode. As Nichols points out in *Representing Reality*, the influence of this narrative structure is not necessarily uncommon in the documentary tradition. “Most documentary films also adopt many of the strategies and structures of narrative... Thus documentary fails to identify any structure or purpose of its own entirely absent from fiction or narrative.”

Nichols’ point that fiction and documentary often adopt strategies from one another applies directly to *Trelew*. At the same time, though, it is interesting that he notes documentary’s ‘failure’ as its inability to depart entirely from the narrative tactics used in fiction filmmaking. While Nichols is not using the word ‘failure’ in an evaluative sense, he is still calling attention to the fact that these two forms of filmmaking cannot be completely independent of one another. *Trelew* showcases the work of a filmmaker who is highly aware of generic conventions in narrative fiction films and their effect on the viewing audience. In the hands of a skilled filmmaker such as Arruti, it is this element of choice and variety that allows her to construct a highly formulaic film that reaches out past its original means.

In an interview with *La nación*, Arruti states, “The classical documentary, whose intention is to explain, to be pedagogical and not forget its context, separates you from the historical moment; in the end, it bores you. My objective was not to inform. It was important to me that the viewer understand the atmosphere of the moment in history.

in which the events occurred. This 'historic moment' gives the film soul, not the information itself.”

Arruti explains an almost impressionistic idea that one might find brought to the screen in art cinema. She is hinting that the actual facts or politics involved with this event were not her priority, but rather she was hoping to give a sense of the moment or atmosphere in history to a generation of viewers who were neither present witness it nor alive to remember it. In her efforts to do this, then, Arruti steers away from a forcefully argumentative documentary style and instead constructs a story in a way that contemporary viewers are able to relate to easily. Arruti was able to recognize the components of a thriller inherent in this story of a group of prisoners attempting to escape a maximum-security prison. There is no need to stretch or bend the truth in this case and she does not want to convert the actual events into a dramatized fiction. Still, Arruti notes that the core of these events holds the same potential to generate suspense as a fictional thriller might.

The Genre of the Thriller

“She [Arruti] is not reviewing the past, but is telling it from today. The film does not ask questions about the successes or failures of the prisoners nor does she discuss the politics of the ‘70s in detail. Instead, the film is narrated as though it were

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a police procedural or a thriller.”¹⁶¹ The genre of the thriller is vast and encompasses a variety of more specific sub-genres of films. For example the spy-thriller, the political-thriller, the horror-thriller, or the detective-thriller are regularly classified under the umbrella term thriller. For Trelew, perhaps the best classification would be the prison break thriller. This sub-genre is still considered a part of this overarching genre because it adheres to several general structural elements and patterns that relate it back to other types of thrillers. For Martin Rubin, a genre theorist, the thriller, in a broad sense of the word, “works primarily to evoke such feelings as suspense, fright, mystery, exhilaration, excitement, speed, movement. In other words, it emphasizes visceral, gut-level feelings rather than more sensitive, cerebral, or emotionally heavy feelings, such as tragedy, pathos, love, nostalgia.”¹⁶² It is the repeated interplay of these “feelings” that cause the genre to take on its own form and definition. Various combinations of these and other effects are at work in the many different iterations of the term. The prison break film brings out the feelings that Martin refers to by adhering to its own set of conventions.

Rubin isolates some key characteristics of the genre apart from the manner in which the films impact the viewer. For example, he notes that the thriller is “transformative”¹⁶³ and “gives us a double world.”¹⁶⁴ In the case of the prison-break film, 

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¹⁶³ Rubin, 18.
¹⁶⁴ Rubin, 57.
this is most obviously the prison, which is transformed from a mundane locale to an extraordinary labyrinth that its inhabitants must navigate and overcome. Moreover, Rubin adapts other theorists’ musings and adapts them to formulate his own hypothesis. He draws upon Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) wherein Fry defines the term ‘romance’ as a realm midway between myth and realism, wherein the hero is ‘superior in degree but not in kind to other men and his or her environment.’

Rubin then lifts this definition of romance and places it within the ‘low-mimetic’ realm. “The low-mimetic mode (the term mimetic here indicates a tendency towards verisimilitude) of most comedy and realistic fiction, in which the hero is superior neither to other men nor to the environment – he is “one of us.” Thus, by having the thriller grounded in such a mundane reality and using a hero who is more or less “one of us,” it is plausible to situate these films in the low-mimetic mode. It is the thriller’s transformative properties that enable the hero to elude his dull reality and elevates his environment to that of the romantic adventure.

The aforementioned labyrinth is brought to light by Pascal Bonitzer in his essay, “Partial Vision: Film and the Labyrinth,” and is expanded upon by Rubin. The thought is two-fold. First, the labyrinth is itself the process of storytelling on screen. Film is an art of withholding. It is not only about what we are shown on screen, but also what we are not shown. These properties of cinema are directly related to film’s capabilities of suspense, which is of supreme importance in the thriller. The other way the labyrinth appears in the thriller is physically as a location in the movie world. The

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65 Rubin, 18.
66 Rubin, 19.
environment that the protagonist inhabits is converted into a labyrinth from which he or she must escape. “The structure of the thriller plot tends to be diffuse, digressive, meandering, full of twists and turns and tangles and opportunities to wander into side streets and blind alleys, where one has the feeling of being lost in a maze.”68 The conversion of the space into a maze is just as much an obstacle for the protagonist as it is for the viewer to get through. Rubin gives the classic example from North by Northwest wherein the cornfield is transformed into an ‘unlimited prison.’69 In this sense, the Rawson Maximum Security Prison of Trelew is surely the maze that the prisoners must make sense of and ultimately master.

When examined against the backdrop of the thriller, Trelew shares some of its essential components with the term, yet this formulaic narrative structure does not detract from its ability to portray real or historical events. Specifically, Arruti is using the structure of the prison-break thriller film as a model for her documentary. By adhering to several of these generic conventions, Arruti is actually allowing herself room to invent, deviate, and personalize the genre. The recognizable format that genre provides allows a filmmaker to easily manipulate viewer expectations. Spotting the similarities and divergences of Arruti’s film from a Hollywood prison break film, such as The Great Escape (Sturges), becomes almost like a game for the viewer. In Trelew, a group of men and women are, as a unit, the layman protagonist of the film. This group of political deviants is thrown into prison for expressing their opinions and for at times, acting violently because of them. It is this collective hero who must navigate his

68 Rubin, 27.
69 Rubin, 27.
(or her) way in a world of corruption and conspiracy. The government is portrayed as corrupt on more than one occasion in Arruti’s picture: first as the reason these revolutionaries are sent to a prison at the bottom of the earth and second as the reason almost all of the prisoners are executed without a fair trial. The persecution felt by the hero and the conspiracy surrounding them is tied to the government. This institution takes on the form of the villain. Arruti’s film is entirely plot-driven, but does take the time to invest in certain characters’ psychologies and emotions. As the film progresses, the narrative takes twists and turns that lead the characters into worse predicaments until they meet their fateful end. Just as one might expect of other thriller films, there are very few pauses in the action and the ‘thrills’ are continuous.

**Narrative Structure**

**Exposition/Act 1**

When examining the specific structure of the film, it is possible to divide it into major movements or narrative beats. The exposition lasts for about the first fifteen minutes of the movie where the viewer is given historical and political context, a brief introduction to the major players, and the goals of each group of people involved. The opening of the film is done entirely with archival black and white footage from the 1960s and 1970s in Argentina. The narration is strictly voice-over at this point, and the speaker is not identified until minutes later; in these moments, perhaps, the viewer would imagine he or she is watching a voice-of-God style documentary. We have a voice whose purpose is only to explain the images on the screen and directly dictate the
viewing experience. The opening lines of the film, “In the world there are times of revolution and counterrevolution. Those were times of revolution,” are spoken with an authorial tone in the present tense about events that occurred in the past. This is the first way that the director is immersing the viewer into the action. The scene is set and the narration has begun in such a way that we are almost immediately sucked into the world we see on screen.

Arruti is playing to our assumptions about the political documentary and the traditional modes of storytelling one might be accustomed to. She then shatters this illusion of the third-party authoritative or expositional documentary at around the three-minute mark, when the narrators begin to reveal their personal involvement in the events they are describing. Subtitles indicate that these first three narrators were lawyers who had represented political prisoners. Perhaps, as viewers, we maintain the idea that these three men will guide us through the remainder of the story, but Arruti’s mechanism of multiple narrators soon begins to expose itself more rapidly. Using multiple perspectives is not uncommon in documentary, but Arruti does not separate the voices in a way that is obvious at first. Her strategy quickly reveals itself, though, and the manipulations start to become more and more apparent. Arruti has carefully constructed a singular voice out of multiple narrators. Done almost entirely in post-production (perhaps the reason the film took over four years for Arruti to complete), the story works as one continuous thread passed amongst the voices of different Argentineans involved in the events.

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Segment 01
The political climate is illustrated perfectly with the voice-over combined with archival footage and helps situate the viewer into a more specific context from which to watch the film. Now that we understand the specific stakes and the stances of the groups involved, we are better equipped to jump into the action. Once the narrators begin to mention the prison, though, Arruti inserts yet another type of footage. Now we are given haunting nighttime location shots of the deserted prison and the surrounding area. These images are important because the viewer now has access to the three varieties of shots that Arruti repeats and varies throughout the picture. The interaction between the interviews, found footage, and on-location images is not necessarily foreign to the expository documentary. At the same time, it is the combination of the first-person narrators and the stylized portrayals of the locations that potentially move this film into a different category altogether.

In the remainder of the exposition, the film moves away from speaking in broad strokes and begins to move into the personal recounting of events by each narrator. There are several recurring characters and a few who are present only to give background information or to provide the perspective of an outsider. In the next ten to fifteen minutes of the exposition there are interviews with the citizens of Trelew combined with images of the isolated town in Patagonia. The idea is to provide a geographical context, to paint a complete picture in which the story can occur. It is important that Arruti take the time to incorporate all of these separate details in the exposition because it makes for richer plot and character development along the way.

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71 Segment 04
In an interview with the national newspaper Página 12, Arruti makes the claim, “I tried to make it so the spectator felt like they were part of the history and like a protagonist in the flight.” By giving voices to those who have been silenced for so long and allowing them to speak candidly about these traumatic events, Arruti gives the viewing audience exclusive access to these intimate details. Just as in a Hollywood thriller, the viewer is asked to participate in the action, to try and predict the successes and failures of the protagonists of the film as the events unfold on screen. This is encouraged by the changes in style that Arruti makes. The use of archival footage fades away while the emphasis switches to the ‘talking-head’ interviews. This happens more and more frequently in the second act of the film. Archival footage from this point on is used mostly as a way to mark out various rhythmic or thematic beats in the narrative.

It is as though Arruti is working from the outside and slowly moving in by manipulating the order in which the ‘talking heads’ are narrating. The lawyers open the film, followed by citizens of the town, members of the local police and prison guard team, finally mothers and other family members of the prisoners, and then several of the individual prisoners themselves. In the beginning, the role of each of these players is to explain the arrival of the prisoners into Patagonia and the changes they detected in the atmosphere of their small town. The prison guards explain that they were responsible for “controlling everything that went into and out of the prison... and

maintaining order” while emphasizing that if the guard’s job was done right the prison was extremely safe and no one would escape. This explanation is establishing the rules that dictate the events that happen throughout the course of the film.

Moreover, the point of view of the citizens that Arruti interviews paints the prisoners in a heroic light, as victims of a corrupt government. Testimonials of various townspeople who volunteered to smuggle in food or packages from the outside indicate to the viewer that the prisoners are sympathetic characters. One of Arruti’s major accomplishments in these opening minutes of the film is the way in which she is able to construct this collective character out of the political prisoners whom the audience is more or less told to rally behind. We now have stakes set up for us: these are political dissidents who are sent to a maximum security prison (potentially unjustly), disrupting the otherwise peaceful lives of many small-town citizens, and who are being watched day and night by trained guards and officers.

As a direct comparison, it is helpful to look at The Great Escape and its narrative structure. The first twenty minutes of this influential prison break thriller introduces us to the main characters, their location and their predicament. The goal of the exposition in this film is to set the political backdrop and give context to the prisoners’ situation. In this case, the setting is Germany in 1944. The Germans have built a Stalag, or prison camp, that is designed to house the inmates they most fear will escape. Not only are the opening moments of the film used for purposes similar to Trelew, but the entire scenario is also almost exactly the same. The most dangerous (and most
feared) political prisoners of the respective countries are transported to a new maximum-security facility where the majority of the films’ action will play out. The beginning of The Great Escape does move more quickly than Trelew, though, as the prisoners launch almost immediately into an attempted (and failed) escape. After this initial excitement, however, the leaders of the group emerge and there is a shift in the narrative pacing of the film. The ranking officer of the group, Capt. Ramsey, has a meeting with the German Commandant, who assures him escape is impossible and that it would be in everyone’s best interest if they would all simply accept their situation. This interaction lays out the groundwork for the remainder of the film. Overall, the exposition is kept short and to the point in order to advance the plot and jump into the action that follows in the remaining acts.

**Act 2/ Goal Development**

In Trelew, the plot shifts into a more goal-oriented scenario, where the narrators describe their first attempt to break out of the prison. Instead of briefly laying this out as a failed attempt and moving on, the director dwells on this and the internal conflicts it brings. This is done in order to keep the viewer engaged on a moment-by-moment basis; the action is unfolding as we watch. The film does not utilize reenactments as other historically or politically focused documentaries might, but instead concentrates on the act of telling the story through interviews and first-person narration. In this portion of the narrative, we are introduced to the principal prisoners, the few that remain to tell the story in the present. These include Celedonio Carrizo
(Revolutionary Armed Forces or FAR), Pedro Cazes Camarero (People’s Revolutionary Army or ERP), Fernando Vaca Narvaja (Montoneros), Silvia Hodgers (ERP), Enrique Gorriarán Merlo (ERP) and Alicia Sanguinetti (ERP). The first idea and collective effort made at escaping the prison is building a tunnel. The director allows the prisoners to retell the story in great detail – recounting the tools they found and used and the methods they used to communicate with one another. Just as it might play out in a fiction film, the first attempt is shown despite the fact that it is ultimately unsuccessful. In the end Camarero states, “The tunnel wasn’t working. We had to think of something else.” It is in this moment that the plot transitions into yet another complication.

The Great Escape presents the story of its prisoners in almost exactly the same order. At this point in the narrative the prisoners regroup to determine the most appropriate and effective course of action to facilitate their escape. Coincidentally, the two groups of prisoners in the respective films end up selecting the same method for escape: tunneling. In both cases, though, the plan fails and this is the major point to be made. The first goal of the POW’s in The Great Escape is to dig three tunnels under the fence of the prison. The prisoners are organized into groups and are working together towards this collective goal. During this time, the men are also engaged in preparing documents, uniforms, and other details needed to pull off the covert mission. All in all, the film takes us through the steps of this first official plan of escape but ultimately leaves us where we started. One of the three tunnels is discovered

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74 Segment 08
and hope is nearly dashed. Importantly, both the fiction film and Arruti’s
documentary spend a good amount of time poring over the details of what turns out to
be a failed attempt. This technique not only builds suspense, but gives the viewer more
time to connect with the cause of the prisoners. We grow more and more attached to
the progress that they make. Moreover, the setback fuels the plot forward as it forces a
change in the path of the narrative.

At this point in Trelew, there seems to be a slight digression. There is a pause in
the narration and the image switches from the interviews to location shots of the
deserted prison. Moreover, there seems to be a recording playing in the background of
someone talking in an empty hallway (the voice echoes) as if they were in a prison.
Instead of moving directly into the next moment of action here, Arruti takes another
narrative detour and elaborates on the character relationships. She even builds up a
romance between two prisoners, Alberto Camps and Rosa María, once again
attempting to humanize them and make them accessible to the viewer. When
considering the role of the thriller and its generic conventions in relation to Trelew, one
can see direct parallels in this romantic development. In political documentary,
character emotions and romantic relationships are typically elided over or considered
secondary information. In Arrutí’s picture, these components are brought to the
forefront. Romance is, however, a staple feature of classical narrative. It becomes more
evident that Arruti is utilizing these standards in order to draw comparison between
her own work and that of the thriller picture. The combination of the personal and
the political is made evident in this portion of the film because the viewer can clearly
see the human-interest aspect here. In the same way that Arruti was initially drawn to the subject of Trelew and the Rawson Prison, through small familial anecdotes, she hopes to deliver those same poignant aspects to the viewer.

Goal #2

Another significant change is marked by the audio, which is a recording from archival footage stating, “The only way to combat capitalism is to organize ourselves, creating a military force to beat the enemy.” The images in this moment of transition are of the deserted Trelew Airport, where “22 de Agosto 1972 COMIENZO DEL HORROR” is painted like graffiti to the walls. Arruti is pointing out this date to the viewer and is signaling the beginning of the next section of the film. The main action or drama is cued to begin here, just as it might be in a fiction film – after the major exposition and introduction of characters, locations, and themes. The goal has been established for the prisoners, which is to escape and continue the revolutionary fight for their people and their politics. The narrators use phrases such as, “They prepared for an attack from the outside. They never expected an attack from the inside,” giving the viewer clues and building suspense for the upcoming events. This marked transitional footage prepares the viewer for the action that will follow.

The group of prisoners then takes on their next attempt. “With the support of our comrades we’d leave the prison in trucks, hijack the airplanes and fly to Chile and

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75 Segment 10
76 The graffiti in English reads, “August 22, 1972: THE BEGINNING OF THE HORROR.”
77 Segment 11
It is up to the various narrators to fill in the gaps and bring the plot from point A to point B. By stating the goal explicitly at the beginning of the film, the question becomes whether or not the prisoners will be able to pull off this plan and how effectively it will be carried out. Moreover, Arruti has constructed the film in such a way that in the back of the viewer’s mind is the knowledge that the first attempt was a failure. Thus, this second attempt is looked at both with more anxiety and suspense. With the help of various characters both inside and outside of the prison, they make progress on this second attempt. Arruti uses this time not to make any particular political commentary, but to focus on the intrigue and intricacies involved in planning this escape. The plan is completely laid out step by step before any action occurs. The story becomes extremely involved in minute details that would otherwise be left out of most other documentaries about the same event. The viewer is oriented to the overall plan by the prisoners who were there as they retell the exact details. One man draws out a map and diagram of the prison and the attempted escape route. We are introduced to the prison guard, Fazio, who ends up helping the POW’s from inside. It is all very clear how the events are intended to occur. “What was the excuse for the escape? There would be a military inspection, an army officer would inspect the prison and we would be able to move without arousing suspicion.” Arruti again gives the viewer a meticulous look into the intricacies of the plan in a way similar to the depiction of the first attempt.

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78 Segment 12
79 Segment 13
80 Segment 12, 23:00
81 Segment 12, 24:00 (They are going to be wearing military uniforms)
This method of keeping the viewer at the same level of knowledge as the
protagonists is a distinctive method of fiction filmmaking. In *The Great Escape*, for
example, director John Sturges is highly conscious of this technique. Even though the
first plan of escape turns out to be a failure, the POW’s regroup and consider
possibilities that are almost identical to those considered in *Trelew*. Not only are their
plans similar, but the way in which the directors have chosen to depict their progress
and keep the viewer informed is also similar. Notably, Arruti is adopting from the
prison break films that have come before in order to play with the viewer’s
expectations. She is manipulating the viewing experience in a way that makes us think
that we are watching a fictional film such as *The Great Escape*. This does not detract
from the truth of the events that Arruti is narrating, but it does raise the question of
how truth can be told using techniques of fiction (and vice versa).

Furthermore, the multiple voices truly add a unique element to the narration
during this period; each individual is narrating in the first person so the thread of
dialogue seems continuous. At the same time, each individual is telling their own
version of the events as they remember them occurring. Thus, one would assume that
details would become muddled or confused, but Arruti constructs the scenes in such a
way that one idea flows uninterrupted from person to person. This gives the narration
an added element used in fiction: the illusion of a single story. She allows the action to
unfold at a much quicker pace than perhaps would be typical in a voice-of-God or third
party commentary scenario where the narration of events might be repeated from
different perspectives.
An effective example of Arruti’s editing pattern occurs during this section of planning the second escape. All of the Speakers in this section were prisoners at Rawson. Speaker 1 (Male): “Most of the time we did things related with the escape.” Image: Interviewer talking. Speaker 2 (M): “We carefully watched the prison’s internal routine, the location of the geographic spaces, the rooms, etc.” Image: Interviewee speaking cut with stock photos of the prison. Speaker 3 (Female): “María Angélica was in the cell next to mine, she taught us to assemble and disassemble a rifle with a broom stick.” Image: Interviewee talking cut with stock photos of the interior of the prison. Speaker 4 (F): “...How to use a FAL rifle.” Image: Interviewee talking cut with stock photo of rifles. Speaker 2 (M): “We made ourselves be punished so we could measure the distance between blocks. Every movement was used to obtain information.” Image: Interviewee talking cut with images of the prison. Speaker 5 (M): “The prison had an entrance where they had guards. This is the outside wall...” Image: Speaker drawing map of the prison cut with actual photos of the locations he refers to.82

This brief series of cuts demonstrates Arruti’s overarching strategy for delivering narrative information to the viewer. The speakers appear to finish each others’ sentences or complete open-ended thoughts, when in reality the interviews were conducted independently. The editing helps to smooth repetition and redundancy out of the film, making for a faster rhythm and more engaging style. The combination of the first person narration by the individuals with the stock photos and archival footage

82 This is sequence breakdown of Segment 13
helps paint a cohesive, single story. The identity of one individual becomes obsolete in the context of the group. Here, the personal stories are converted into a collective.

**Build-Up and Climax**

The night of the escape continues to be dictated in an almost play-by-play fashion, with a much more hands-on influence of the director. Included along with the testimonials of the prisoners are images of the various parts of the prison they refer to. Arruti is giving more access to the viewer in terms of what we are able to see on screen (as the film lacks reenactments), so that we are able to visualize the events more easily. Instead of focusing solely on the narration at this point, the director wants to call the spectator’s attention to the physical layout of the prison and the grandeur of the scheme. This attempt at escape is given more emphasis than the first and manages to work to an extent, but still ends in failure and is the reason for the massacre in the film’s title. Thus it is important for Arruti to allow us to have such a close interaction with these events; the viewer becomes more and more invested in the goings on of the prisoners and their methodically calculated plan to the extent that the viewer begins to feel as though he or she is a member of the group.

The use of the taxi drivers at this point[^1] is a perfect example of how Arruti carefully constructs the way in which the story unfolds for the viewer. Up until this point it has been limited to the prisoners recounting their attempted escape and the response of the guards. The plan begins to go wrong (shots are fired and a guard is

[^1]: Segment 25
killed by accident, the trucks that were supposed to pick the prisoners up from Rawson and take them to the airport at Trelew do not show up, and it seems as though once again their plan has failed. One car makes it into the prison to deliver the news, “Comrades something went wrong, and you must turn back. Until victory always.”

At this point, the mood is that of total despair. Each narrator explains how he or she interpreted this signal as a complete failure (some with tears in their eyes). Yet, the prisoners call taxis at the last minute. Arruti includes statements from the two taxi drivers at this point, adding both credibility to the story and complicating the drama by expanding the narrative to generate suspense.

Once it becomes obvious that not all of the prisoners make it out via airplane to Chile as they had originally intended, the tone of the narrative shifts. There is a brief moment of triumph as the first group of leaders departs followed by a moment of quiet; the realization then sinks in that the remainder of the prisoners will not be able to have the same success. Once again Arruti is playing with the expectations of her viewers, building up to moments of great tension and then releasing them. The pacing of the editing, which has steadily become faster, combined with the step-by-step recounting of the events, gives the illusion that they are occurring in real time. We are constantly kept alongside the prisoners throughout all of their attempts at escape. Arruti has a tight grip on the progression of the narrative. There has not yet been a time when the viewer has more information than what the narrator is presenting at any given time.

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Segment 26
The following is a brief breakdown of the aforementioned sequence of images and dialogue. Speaker 1 (M): “They agree that the first group must leave; they shouldn’t risk making the trip again. They take over the airport, the control tower.” Image: Interviewee talking cut with archival footage of plane taking off. Speaker 2 (M): “…In order to save their lives, which in the time of the dictatorship, wasn’t worth much.” Image: Interviewee speaking. The director then cuts to present-day footage of the Trelew Airport with a slow pan from left to right during which time there is no speaking. This brief interlude lasts for twenty seconds. Speaker 3: “Members of the armed organizations: FAR, ERP, and Montoneros, have said that after this interview and having reached the people through the press, they’ve decided to surrender unconditionally.” Image: Archival footage of prisoners waiting at what appears to be a press conference.

The moment of silence is followed by archival footage, which has become a transitional tool to mark the separation of beats in the narrative. Not only do these transitions give the narrators’ continuous dialogue a break, they also provide a form of confirmation to the story they are telling. In this specific segment we have access to third party reporting on the events. These quick snippets from other members of society – through archival footage and individual interviews – provide the narrative with a seemingly more holistic approach to the subject. If the viewer pays close attention, though, it can be seen that these extra segments are used in a manner that closely resembles the more argumentative traditions. In this specific instance, when

85 52:40-53:00
86 Sequence Breakdown of Segments 28-29
Arruti inserts the footage of a government official interviewed by the press, it advances the narrative by stating the prisoners had surrendered at Trelew. This footage is used to enable the viewer to question the veracity of the government official they have just seen; knowing the characters intimately after almost an hour of interviews, it is startling and seemingly uncharacteristic to hear that the prisoners had ‘surrendered’ to the authorities.

**Mid-Point/ Act 3**

The reliance on archival footage increases again at this point and the narrators have once again changed from the prisoners to other third parties including members of the print and television press, as well as doctors. It is at this point that the prisoners begin to lose their collective voice in Arruti’s film, just as they have lost their agency within the story. By subtly changing those who are narrating, the director is making a broader statement about the events as they happened. Such strong control over her project and the storytelling process is essential in making this film effective as a fusion of the thriller and the documentary. Even though the viewer has prior knowledge that there were survivors of the failed escape (because we have seen them in interviews prior to this point), these same ex-prisoners are kept out of sight for several minutes after the bad news is revealed. The only way Arruti is allowing us to see the protagonists is through archival footage, as if indicating that these prisoners do not survive into the present. It is this interplay of prior access to, and the concurrent denial of, information that drives the narrative forward at this point.
The Great Escape plays with this range of narration as well. The climax is delayed as the rounding up of prisoners lasts for a good portion of the film. Over 70 prisoners did make it out through the remaining tunnels before the German soldiers were able to discover and stop the breakout. Yet, the following scene finds the guards and police scouring the countryside looking for the POW’s. Instead of jumping straight to their fateful end, the director builds up emotional anxiety for the escaped prisoners. Some are using disguises and boarding trains, others are making getaways using boats, bicycles, and small planes. This small glimmer of hope is used to suspend the action and keep the viewer questioning the impending outcome. Slowly, the prisoners are recaptured one by one and it is not until they are all rounded up that we hear the climactic sound of a machine gun firing.

Likewise, the climax of Trelew is built up slowly and effectively by skirting around the main event until the last minute. The narration has come full circle at this point – the lawyers and townspeople of Trelew, who spoke at the very beginning of the film to build exposition, return in this moment to give context to the final events. Just as a fictional narrative might use a seemingly insignificant character at the beginning of the film and call upon them later in the course of the plot to create meaning, so Arruti’s film is taking cues from this strategy. When these familiar faces reappear on screen, the tone has changed from revolutionary, passionate and exciting to solemn, worrisome and fateful. It seems as though this group of representatives act as a Greek chorus, giving background and summary to the events that we have witnessed and guiding the viewing experience further.
Arruti does not dwell on the massacre itself and elides it for the most part. The viewer is given audio-visual clues – old photographs of prisoners lined up against the wall, the sound of babies crying, and gunshots. Slowly, the voices of the prisoners return to fill in the gaps; it is only after the horrible slaughter of the nineteen others that they are given the chance to speak again. Arruti constructs this portion of the film with a heavy dose of sentimentality. Several of the narrators have tears in their eyes, the sound track has shifted into a slow song in a minor key, and there are images of residents in Buenos Aires mourning the dead. It seems clear that Arruti’s goal in this segment of the narrative is to garner sympathy for both the dead and the living. In a more conventional political documentary, it might be unlikely that the director would include the emotions and feelings of the interviewees; the focus would be on the massacre itself rather than on its aftermath. This film is not a ‘call to action,’ which it may have been if we ended with the execution. By shifting the emphasis, Arruti cues the viewer to become more emotionally invested in the personal rather than the political cause of the events.

Epilogue

The conclusion of Trelew brings the entire film full-circle. With the short emotional interlude by the remaining survivors and comrades of those who had been killed on August 22, Arruti has given the viewer a specific lens through which to view the events. It is interesting, then, that she presents the scenes in reverse order: the aftermath before the description of the murders. This has more emotional impact than
just a straightforward presentation of the scenario; the viewer is able to anticipate the
horrifying truth before it is spelled out for them. This technique is often used to blunt
the shock from a violent incident so that the impact remains on the intellectual level.
The violence itself is not highlighted here, but rather the corruption and politics
behind the violence. It is in these final scenes that the official cover-up and
government statements are released on screen; however, at this point the viewer has
learned that their statements cannot be taken at face value. The film has built up the
viewer’s alliance and identification with the prisoners, it has placed us inside the prison
and alongside them at the airport. Thus we feel the impact of the lies that the officials
release to the public. Arruti has let us in on a national secret, at once expressing the
trauma and emotion of the individuals involved while capturing the revolutionary
spirit of a nation at a time of political oppression.

The closing scenes of the film are composed of strictly found footage of rioting
citizens in Buenos Aires, Argentina. While the events of the film are brought to their
conclusion, it is Arruti who has the final word. The actual epilogue that comes in the
final moments of the film acts as a last instance of guidance from the director and one
last authoritative voice. While no opinion is overtly stated, Arruti’s carefully
articulated last words are poignant and pointed when they appear on screen.

“Seven months after the events at Trelew, the growing social and political
tension forces elections and the end of the dictatorship... Salvador Allende,
the socialist president of Chile, who allowed the Argentine combatants
continue their flight to Cuba, died on September 11, 1973 in the coup
d’etat against his government... Until today, there has been no inquiry or
legal process against those involved in the events narrated here.”

87 Segment 46, 1:29:00 – 1:32:00
With these closing remarks, Arruti is suggesting that this is a continuing story in Argentina’s history. Perhaps this film is the first step in achieving justice for those persecuted in Patagonia; at the same time, it adds a long withheld element of veracity to the story. In many narrative fiction films in which part or all of the film is based on true stories, there is an epilogue to remind the viewer that the characters portrayed existed outside of the filmic world. This final push from the fiction director returns the film to the realm of documentary, serving as reinforcement to the testimonials and archival footage. It is interesting that Arruti should need this reinforcement though, since documentary veracity is typically a convention of fiction film. Once again it is clear that *Trelew* is walking a fine line between these two typically distinctive methods of filmmaking. This documentary must remind us that we are watching real events, but this is only because Arruti has built the film in such a way that it *appears* to be fictional. Its structure, story, and style all closely resemble a thriller such as *The Great Escape*.

After a close look at the film’s narrative structure, it becomes more apparent to the viewer where the manipulations of the documentary genre took place and where the tools of fiction filmmaking entered the work. By constructing this film in a way that closely resembles the three-act structure with a clear exposition, complications, and conclusion the plot becomes accessible and easy to follow. Moreover, the characters are portrayed as intellectually and emotionally accessible to the viewer – we are given direct access to specific characters’ thought processes and are asked to sympathize with their ultimate defeat. Suspense is built up and tension is released at different moments in the film due to its seemingly conventional goal-oriented plot. Film critic Cecilia
Sosa for Pagina 12 writes, “It has all of the elements to be a passionate thriller. It just so happens that it is one of the most dramatic and horrifying events of Argentina’s recent history.” Mariana Arruti characterizes the film as testimonial but at the same time as a film that is set on generating a distinctive atmosphere from the classical documentary. In the end, Arruti’s film questions how effective techniques of fiction can be in order to get closer to fact while simultaneously uncovering silenced truths from the psyche of a wounded nation. This is not a political exposé, but a plea to identify on a personal level with this national trauma. The film makes no pretensions of objectivity, and with its outright manipulation of the documentary genre to incorporate modes of fiction storytelling it achieves its goal successfully.

Conclusion

“Above all, Trelew is a film and it must have the best sound and the best photography. It should be made so that the spectator is glued to his seat just as in the best fiction film because ultimately, we have the same responsibility as any other director: tell a story and tell it well because I can’t convince anyone to see Trelew by solely advertising its political content.”

In this quote, Mariana Arruti illustrates her understanding that the relationship between entertainment and education in film is critical. It is clear from the structure


of her documentary that Arruti is an avid student of film and that she has adopted some of the most successful aspects from fiction and documentary filmmaking. It is apparent from various interviews and statements about the film that Arruti is very aware of the filmmaking process and the influence she has over it. It is not a coincidence that many reviewers and film journalists have written about Trelew as a documentary-thriller hybrid, as this is exactly what the director intended.

Moreover, the film has an intensely personal mark to it not unlike the one Albertina Carri puts in her film Los Rubios or Di Tella in La televisión y yo. While the figure of the director is ostensibly absent from the screen, her presence is felt throughout. The subject of the film combined with the narrative structure and style help explain the intersection of the personal and the collective in this film. The multitude of narrators, for example, is a tool that helps unite the two: these people who were involved in a traumatic part of Argentina’s history are given the opportunity to come before a camera, an audience, and tell their story. Once again within this movement of contemporary Argentine documentaries, there is a film constructed mostly out of individual memories. It is these individual memories that are woven together to create one story about the events. Each individual line of dialogue spoken by the interviewees had to be pored over and edited to match both the tone and idea that the previous speaker articulated. This process is immensely tedious, but highlights the level of personal investment that the director had in the process. The film and its story is not only relevant for those who were involved in the events, but for the director as well.
Trelew reaches out to yet another audience: the contemporary viewer. This film was completed in 2004, a full thirty years after the events it depicts. The audiences that will view this film and process its message most likely will not have a personal stake in the events. Arruti draws relevance from film style, then, by illustrating the universality of the prisoners’ struggle and the way their story can be told in a fast-paced, suspenseful, and generic structure. Furthermore, audiences can identify with the film in a way similar to that of Arruti herself. “The story moved me a great deal and I realized that the human dimension is much stronger than any intellectual construction.”\textsuperscript{90} Ultimately this is one of the many things about this history that Arruti is able to highlight in her film: a story about the qualities that make these political dissidents, kept hidden from most of the population for years, empathetic and relevant.

The direction this film takes in relationship to other documentaries made at this time is a bit different. The interplay between fiction and reality is much more subdued in this case, and it is attached to the viewing experience not separate from it. By this, I mean to say that style does not obscure narrative; it is not a flashy film by any means. Instead, it is by manipulating narrative and narration that the director is able to make a statement about truth and fiction in documentary film. She has chosen a traumatic event from her country’s past, but has told the story in a way that completely breaks from the filmmaking tradition that came before. Moreover, this film barrels

through the four modes of documentary as laid-out by Bill Nichols. It is at once a blending of many of the modes: self-reflexive, observational, and expository. An absolute truth is found to be unobtainable once again, and instead there is a consolation through the relative truths of individuals. Documentary has proven to be an effective medium for filmmakers to explore this possibility. *Trelew* is an attempt at reconciling the two variants of filmmaking - documentary and fiction - and bringing them together into a coherent and cohesive picture. Unlike *Los Rubios*, which is often jarring upon a first-time viewing, this film works in a wholly recognizable format.

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91 Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. [*Trelew* is not necessarily influenced by the interactive mode]
Chapter Three:

La televisión y yo

Andrés Di Tella (2003)

“There is no reason why documentaries can’t be as personal as fiction filmmaking and bear the imprint of those who made them. Truth isn’t guaranteed by style or expression. It isn’t guaranteed by anything.”

-Errol Morris

92 For a complete narrative segmentation of La televisión y yo, see Appendix.
Introduction

In the film, *La televisión y yo* (*Television and I*), Andrés Di Tella approaches the tenuous themes of loss, memory, and identity through documentary film in a way that is distinctive from his contemporaries. Di Tella is emerging from a similar position of political circumstance in Argentina that ends up dominating all artistic and historical creations of his generation. He is obsessed with knowing the unknowable, with confronting a terrible truth, and exposing this information to the world. In order to do this, Di Tella begins by making a picture about television and its influence in Argentine culture. On the surface this subject does not seem like it would lend itself to political or even personal avenues in the way Albertina Carrí’s or Mariana Arruti’s films did. Instead, Di Tella’s themes emerge from beneath a tangled web of superficialities; he uses the history of television as one avenue from which to address the traumas both he and his nation have suffered. In *La televisión y yo* Di Tella feels that his identity as an Argentinean is incomplete because of his family’s forced exile during the Onganía dictatorship (1966-1970).

This film, not released to the general public, was shown at various museums around the city (the MALBA, Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires) and as an attachment to another of his films, *Fotografías* (*Photographs*). Thus *La televisión y yo* is in and of itself more of a personal endeavor and artistic consideration for the filmmaker. Unlike Arruti’s picture *Trelew*, Di Tella is not manipulating the documentary genre for mass appeal but instead for more selfish reasons. The story that Di Tella weaves together is disjointed and on a first viewing, even appears disorganized. He states
plainly at the beginning of the film, “I wanted to make a movie about television... but I ended up with something else.” This kind of ‘unfolding of events’ strategy is not necessarily new to the genre, as it has been done before by the likes of Ross McElwee in *Sherman’s March*. For McElwee’s purposes, a historical documentary takes a personal turn after his long-time girlfriend ends their relationship. He sets out to make a film about the lingering effects of General Sherman’s march through the South during the Civil War, but is sidetracked by his encounters with women and his prospects of falling in love. Di Tella adapts this technique to serve his own purposes. He lays out one particular story line for the viewer and then changes it; however, unlike McElwee, he employs this device again and again. It becomes harder and harder to trust the narrator/director/protagonist of the film because of this endless game of misdirection.

The plot can best be outlined through the structure given to us by Di Tella and supplemented by my own analysis. The film is organized into chapters that are discussed in greater detail in the following section of this paper. It can be argued that within *La televisión y yo* there are several mini film projects that the director embarks on. It is the combination of these two structures that help clarify the narrative and its themes. In broad strokes, the documentary is a personal endeavor from beginning to end. It starts as an attempt to understand the role of television in the lives of his peers. He feels that he is missing these formative emotions and experiences due to his family’s

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93 Segment 01

exile from the country during that stage of his life. Simultaneously, the presence of Di Tella’s father and his patriarchal history lingers in the background. When the first plot line about television proves unsuccessful, this second plot about Di Tella’s family moves to the foreground. The history of the Di Tella family, and the factory that the filmmaker’s grandfather constructed around the turn of the century, is one of the central plot points in the film. Similarly, the director becomes fascinated with the Yankelevich family. Jaime Yankelevich is the man accredited with bringing the television to Argentina. By chance, Di Tella encounters Yankelevich’s grandson and from that point his original interest in the television and Argentine nationalism returns. For Di Tella, these two concepts become intertwined in a crucial way. The television is a stand-in for a discussion about his country’s political past. In the end, though, these individual histories prove to lead nowhere and the director is forced to look inward at himself. The plot is divergent and, at times, confusing, but this is the goal of the filmmaker. A seemingly chaotic story is actually a stand-in for a larger narrative on the effectiveness of documentary.

If this documentary does not end up being a history of television in Argentina and an exploration of what television means in an individual’s life, it must use the same material to a different end. Di Tella explains early on that his first personal memory of television, at age seven, is of General Ongania’s military coup and the violence that followed. “I missed seven years of television. I don’t have half of the collective memories of my generation.”95 With these questions and parameters, Di

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95 Segment 02
Tella embarks on his filmic journey and attempts to repossess these memories that he lacks. When it turns out that the archives of the most popular Argentine television programs have been destroyed and no longer exist for the general public, the documentary is forced to change direction. A series of coincidences lead the film into its next two failed segments, an attempt at filming the director’s own family history and another about uncovering secrets of Jaime Yankelevich’s family. Both of these paths turn out to be dead-ends since Di Tella’s father claims he was never interested in the television and furthermore that he made a conscious decision to separate himself from his own father’s successes as a businessman. These comments inherently question the role Di Tella’s father would serve in his son’s film. Di Tella mirrors form with content by constantly scrutinizing the purpose and direction of his film and of documentary. At the same time, hardly anyone close to Yankelevich will reveal any useful memories. Di Tella states, “Desperate, I turned to my son.” Once again the film switches into a different project, this time about lineage and legacies.

La televisión y yo is a confrontation between the political and the personal, the collective and the individual. It is an attempt to reconcile the trauma of childhood loss spurred by political circumstances. At the same time, it pulls the documentary genre under the microscope, continuously questioning its limits and boundaries. Elements of narrative storytelling enter this picture repeatedly in ways that are both similar to and different from other movies made during this same movement in Argentina. Once again, this film seems to dance between two of the modes of documentary proposed by

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96 Segment 17
Bill Nichols. Di Tella is an active participant in the film on screen and off, as a voice and a protagonist, classifying it as ‘interactive.’ It also engages in a form of metacommentary, often speaking less about the historical world than about the process of representation itself, classifying it as ‘reflexive.’ There is a definite interplay between this heightened sense of consciousness given to the viewer and the desire of the filmmaker to tell a historical story relevant in the present. The film is a definite attempt to regain authority and voice in a nation that has suffered from silence for so many years.

Ultimately, then, *La televisión y yo* is, as Di Tella notes in an interview, “a construction, a fiction about the impossibility of reconstructing history, particularly in Argentina. The failure of the filmmaker, the character whom, in a sense, I play, echoes the failure of documentary as a genre that pretends to narrate history.” Since the film begins with such a faulty foundation, it is the filmmaking process that works more and more as a tool to repair or fill in the gaps. Similarly, gaps of authentic history exist outside of the filmic world in both the narrator and his country’s pasts. In a way that is reminiscent of Carri and Arruti, Di Tella endeavors to reconcile the rupture between authoritative ‘official’ histories with more personal or relative truths, “because he [Di Tella] is a child of military dictatorship—an era in which the relationship between voice and authority was meant to be received by the citizen-spectator as naturalized and

97 Terms and definitions from Bill Nichols’ text, *Representing Reality*. These modes of documentary are explained in depth in the Introduction.

transparent." This quote highlights the distinctive quality of this and other subjective documentaries made after the dictatorship. Prior to this new wave of self-reflexive documentary, the relationship between the filmmaker and his or her audience was much more cut and dry. With the coming of democracy, though, the documentarian is given more freedom to explore this relationship. By constantly shifting the subject, tone, and direction of La televisión y yo, Di Tella is able to muse on documentary’s limits and storytelling abilities from the perspective of a man (himself) whose life is defined by loss.

Narrative Structure

1) The Meaning of Television

Despite the fact that Andrés Di Tella presents a film that seems as though it is haphazardly constructed, La televisión y yo does contain a structured narrative. There are times, though, when Di Tella struggles as his story changes repeatedly throughout the hour and a half running time. He implements numbered intertitles labeled as chapters might be in a book, in order to break the film down into smaller sections. This becomes a helpful tool for the viewer as it attempts to mold segments into related themes and topics. I find it interesting that he has taken an almost literary approach to organizing the film. Others have noted this quality in the film as well. Lazzara notes

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that the film is perhaps Di Tella’s own type of personal “essay.” The chapters each hold their own individual significance, but taken together they form a commentary on documentary. Since many of the story lines he explores do not pan out, this idea holds some weight. This commentary questions the validity of the expository mode and instead suggests an alternative, self-reflexive narrative style. It is as though Di Tella has assembled several small vignettes, which are held together by this overarching concept, into one larger narrative. At its core, this film is about the trauma of a man after exile from his country and the years he lost as an Argentinean.

It may also be helpful to think of the film’s organization in terms of how a child might attempt to understand such an intense loss. Small chapters help divide up a larger text and often delay the effect of a blunt emotional impact. This same technique of adopting a child’s frame of reference also occurs in Los rubios. In Carri’s picture, we saw animation as a stand-in for the memory of her parents’ abduction, for example. Essentially, La televisión y yo is structured around the various attempts made by Di Tella to formulate an argument about these lost years.

The first chapter reads: ‘1. My First Memory’ and comes in Segment 02. The first segment might then be interpreted as a sort of prologue or introduction to the story. In the first labeled chapter, though, Di Tella begins the process of relaying the first part of the story to the viewer. In voiceover he states, “My first memory of the

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101 However, in Trelew, the use of fictional narrative techniques is used to a different end all together. In Mariana Arruti’s arresting thriller Trelew, the delay of emotional impact is not necessarily occurring for the viewer’s benefit, but for purposes of suspense.
television is from when I was seven years old.”

Significantly, the actual narration matches the chapter title. Just as chapter titles are usually taken from a noteworthy moment in the text – a line of dialogue or a key revelation – Di Tella is bringing this idea to film. Within this first chapter are other important introductory moments. We meet several key players in the story: Di Tella’s father in Segment 03 and several of Di Tella’s friends who give interviews in Segment 04. These characters make up only part of Di Tella’s world, which is the one that is related to his personal history. We are also given a brief introduction to Di Tella himself, both to his character on-screen and to his voice off-screen. Segment 05 gives insight into his childhood memories and desires that have, in a way, carried over into the present. This scene is significant because it highlights the central theme behind the film as a whole. Clips of the first men landing on the moon in 1969 are intercut with Di Tella’s friends talking about their memories of the event. While all of his Argentinean friends can share this as a collective experience, Di Tella is, and has to be, notably silent. This important moment both in the history of television and in the formative years of his youth is unavailable to him.

At the end of this scene, one of Di Tella’s friends remarks that he has a “very intimate relationship” with television. He then refrains from making further comments about his take on the role it plays in his life. This same friend continues to state that television is a “depression.” This hesitation that Di Tella encounters during this conversation is a reflection on the inability to approach the past. Even

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102 Segment 02, 1:47
103 Segment 05
104 Segment 05
though he is using conventions of the documentary genre, he is kept at a distance from
the material he seeks.

It is this type of guarded intimacy that hinders Di Tella’s study of the meaning
of television in the course of a person’s life. Even though the first section of the film is
titled “My First Memory,” the real focus is on his lack of memory. His very first
memory of the television is a political one: “That day my parents didn’t let me go to
school; they said the tanks were on the streets.” Here, he is recalling a moment that
resounds in the whole nation’s consciousness, General Onganía’s military coup. Aside
from this initial point of reference, however, the moments that Di Tella can claim he
shares with others in his generation are practically non-existent. The director uses this
first chapter title to guide the viewing experience, but consequently leaves the issue
unresolved. Interviews may prove useless, the film’s narrator is often unreliable, and
the chapter titles are often insufficient. The mix of documentary and narrative film
style here sets the tone for the remainder of the film and establishes the rules for how
to follow Di Tella’s seemingly jumbled story.

The next chapter comes rather quickly, only seven minutes into the film, and is
titled “Children of Television.” In this section of the film, Di Tella is expanding the
threshold and moving a bit further out of the personal and into the public. He is
continuing on with the original premise of the film, which is to capture what television
means in the life of an individual, but he is finding it more and more difficult to do so.
The main reason for this difficulty is his absence from the country during his youth,

105 Segment 02
which has left him no point of reference. “What were the consequences of missing those years of television? I was missing part of my identity. As if I wasn’t entirely Argentine and I didn’t belong to my own generation.” Contrasted with this quote is the image of a man hypnotized, nearly comatose, from watching television. Di Tella, absent for all of television’s important moments during his youth, therefore cannot share these memories. Both he and his peers are hypnotized by television’s influence, but for different reasons. His group of friends has come to represent the greater population of Argentineans alive during the so-called ‘golden age’ of television. This hypnotism that Di Tella witnesses overcoming his peers is likened to the group watching a soccer match together. The director, on the other hand, is once again distanced from a collective experience. He is, in turn, hypnotized by the simple act of watching television, rather than remembering it.

This chapter also establishes the generational divide that haunts Di Tella and that eventually causes him to become so intimately involved with a past even more foreign to him. In Segments 07 and 09, Di Tella’s father figures prominently and reminisces about a country that sounds much more innocent and prosperous than the one Di Tella and his contemporaries know now. Segment 11, for example, highlights this obsession. Images of comic books and old TV guides are shown while the narrator explains this innate fixation with “everything he missed out on.” Not only is he searching for these television shows that he cannot find anymore, but he is also searching for remnants of this cultural past in other forms. This section of the film

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106 Segment 08
continues with Di Tella’s original premise, but the avenues that he is attempting to explore seem to be closing around him. He is forced to broaden the scope of the picture and to ask questions about a more distant past. This process, then, includes interactions with his father about an era in Argentine history Di Tella was not alive for.

2) Di Tella’s Family History

Chapter three is a perfect segue into the next major topic for the film. Aptly titled, “A Legacy,” the process of weaving in the history of Jaime Yankelevich with the Di Tella family’s past begins. Coincidence is the main agent in the development of this storyline, something Di Tella readily admits to this. He meets Sebastian Yankelevich (Jaime Yankelevich’s grandson) by chance and immediately bonds with him after discovering the significance of his lineage to Di Tella’s quest. It is during this same chapter that Di Tella stumbles upon stock certificates and receipts from his own grandfather’s (now defunct) company. While much of these events are in fact rooted in coincidence, it is no accident that they are joined together in this final edited version of the story. When Di Tella states, “I now realize I should be making a film about my own family,” he is purposefully changing the direction of the film and undermining his own authority as narrator. This manipulation of the filmmaking process is intentional but appears as though it is unfolding before our eyes. This editing process should not be taken for granted. Di Tella arranged the final order of images and the corresponding voiceover for the events to appear in a disorderly manner. Thus it is a

107 Segment 14
counterintuitive process: Di Tella is making it seem as though events are occurring in a
random order, but in reality he has arranged the order through the editing process; no part of the film’s order is coincidence.

One of the major issues in this same section of the film is that of personal
distance to one’s own history. The decision to change the course of the narrative to
focus on his family’s personal history is influenced by the similarities Di Tella sees
between his grandfather and Jaime Yankelevich. “I realized that my interest in
Yankelivich was in part due to unsatisfied curiosity about my own grandfather, another
immigrant who made good, became an industrialist, and whose enterprise eventually
floundered.” Perhaps he realizes that since his peers are not willing to speak openly
about their conception of national culture or memory, he must turn the focus more
inward and investigate his own roots. Di Tella’s father confronts him directly, though,
and begs him to wait several years before making this family history project. His father
argues that Di Tella would not have enough distance from this personal history to
reveal any objective truths. This conversation prompts the director to take a step back
and ask, “Could I tell the truth if I had to tell my family’s story?” Di Tella is not
certain about film’s ability to reconstruct the past, let alone a past that is so inherently
close to home, and therefore subjective.

It becomes his job to question his own narcissism; how can he make sure to
remove the temptation of creating a film purely about himself? His ‘solution’ to this
problem, then, becomes a major part of the subtext and, in a larger sense, it becomes

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109 Segment 16
the modern adventure of the documentary in Argentina. He is attempting to find the hidden “yo” (or the “I”) and put it into dialogue with the collective “we.” Moreover, by including these moments of pause or doubt in the course of the narrative, Di Tella is revealing in his investigation an aspect that is usually concealed (purposefully) in other histories and documentaries. These moments of self-doubt and self-reflection help to solidify the filmic process that Di Tella has embarked on. He brings the experience of making a personal documentary to the forefront of the viewer’s consciousness as he or she interprets the events on screen.

At the end of chapter three, Di Tella approaches Jaime Yankelevich’s sister, asking her to divulge information about her late brother. The interview is fruitless however, as she insists that these memories are too painful and personal to divulge. “I can tell you stories and say things to you, but there are things that are very special and that are only mine, and those things I will not tell you.” Throughout the film, we learn that Di Tella tends to agree with this sentiment articulated by Yankelevich’s sister. The idea of exploring if one’s intimate memories can be communicated and if so, whether or not they are relevant to a larger national history forms an overarching theme in the film. If neither of these is possible, Di Tella is asking if these memories should just remain private. The official histories obscure the smaller stories, making them impossible to stand on their own. In the context of a larger project such as La

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111 Segment 18
televisión y yo, though they gain significance through their relationships to the other small, personal stories. In this final scene that closes out the chapter, Di Tella is reminding the viewer that the relative truths of individuals do hold some weight when compared with the grander historical narratives. At the same time, these memories that Yankelevich’s sister refuses to share on camera relate back to the quest for a singular truth about the past. Documentary until this point proves unsatisfactory to retrieving those answers, but Di Tella insists on continuing with the project.

3) The History of Yankelevich

Chapter four is titled “Empire of Ether” and serves more or less as a continuation of the subject matter introduced in chapter three. The emphasis on the television has begun to dissipate and the obsession with individuals and their stories has taken over. Di Tella notes that the story of Yankelevich has become irresistible; this is partly due to the sister’s unwillingness to relate family secrets. The word ‘secrets’ is used because for all intents and purposes, the history of this individual remains elusive to Di Tella. Yankelevich, as far as the viewer knows, was not involved in any kind of spectacular intrigue. Instead, it is the mundane facts and the personal memories that have begun to consume the director of this documentary. While the doors leading to the answers he seeks seem to close around him, Di Tella is not deterred from his project. Instead he attempts a distinctive style to answer his questions. It is during this period that Di Tella attempts to approach the past from a

112 Segment 19
different angle. He uses a brief montage of photos and archival footage, which gives the film a more recognizable expository documentary approach. Still, this does not last long and the following cut is to Di Tella, his son, and his father asleep on the couch in front of a television. This juxtaposition of images could be interpreted as a negative commentary on the expository mode of documentary. Not only does it imply that traditional documentary style has put the men to sleep, but the entire segment lasts only a few short minutes.

In the following chapter, “Two Historical Figures,” the political subtext emerges and again it appears the film’s original subject matter is under scrutiny. This section’s purpose within the overall narrative is to weave in the larger national commentary. Since the attempt to come as close to personal history as possible has continuously failed him, Di Tella opts to broaden the scope of the film once again to look for answers. It is here that he introduces comparisons to Eva and Juan Peron - comparing the likes of two relatively mundane businessmen (Yankelvich and Di Tella) to the greatest national heroes Argentina has known. Moreover, this section highlights many of the traumas the director’s nation has incurred and Di Tella cleverly broadcasts those through archival television footage (yet another tool of expository documentary).

Segment 23, for example, shows images of exploding cars, political riots, and masses of people rallying at distinctive moments in Argentine history. The point is not to distinguish from which era each specific uprising is from, but instead to get a better understanding of how often these images were appearing on television screens. As we have learned, Di Tella’s only true associations with the television have been political.
On a national level, the people of Argentina’s first true association with the television is also political and traumatic – the funeral of Eva Peron. This chapter in the narrative is really an attempt to tie all the various story lines together, but at this point they still seem quite jumbled.

This type of documentary – one ripe with political commentary or an argument about the nation’s political past – is not what Di Tella has set out to construct. He includes these segments of alternative film style in order to assert his control over the production. The documentary as most viewers know it, is accustomed to a singular discourse, but Di Tella has incorporated several. It is established near the very beginning of La televisión y yo that the style will be self-reflexive. There is no guarantee of universal truth, instead there is a guarantee of failure. By inserting these stock images of the past at this point in the narrative, Di Tella is reinforcing how these other modes of documentary (namely expository) are not able to reveal the personal histories that he is after.

4) Legacies

It is for this reason that he jumps right into (a very short) chapter six, titled “A Great Loss,” wherein he takes a step back from this stewing pot he has assembled. Immediately Di Tella states, “I wanted to talk now about legacies.”¹¹³ He quickly finds out that this will again be next to impossible because his father reports that it was too much pressure for him to carry on the Di Tella legacy. Interestingly, instead of

¹¹³ Segment 28
omitting this chapter and its dead-end storyline, the director has chosen to keep it in
the film and to label it as a failure. His emphasis illustrates the troubles and
roadblocks he ran into in telling his story. Once again Di Tella employs a semi-staged,
semi-verbatim conversation with his father in order to make a statement about the
direction of the film. Di Tella notes that this film might really have been a pretext to
speak with his father. In front of the camera, he finds that his father is revealing truths
that he had been previously unaware of. It is this ultimate irony that he discovers
about the documentary genre, and specifically about the futility of approaching an
objective truth, that drives the filmmaker forward, but that in the end leaves the project
inconclusive. While some people may be more inclined to share certain intimacies
before a camera (for example, his father), others remain forever guarded (Yankelevich’s
sister).

“A Great Loss,” could be the title of the entire film since it is in fact the loss of
so many important years in his country that motivates Di Tella to confront this
unfamiliar past. It is also the loss of coherence or a structured ‘script’ that leaves La
televisión y yo in a similar spot with Albertina Carri’s Los rubios. These documentarians
are forever questioning the legitimacy of documentary and the best available methods
to tell a story. The history that Di Tella is hoping to relay is buried within the minds of
individuals who are not necessarily willing to share with him. For this reason Di Tella
allows some of these histories to remain where they are-buried within the
consciousness of their owners. Again, it is this decision not to cover-up these ‘failures’
that gives his film its true self-reflexive quality.
In the closing chapter of the narrative, Di Tella attempts to bring the stories of Yankelevich and his grandfather to a close. The title is “Last Recollections,” and he strictly adheres to this label. He gives the floor over to his father as they stand in the middle of the old Di Tella factory and he explains his instinctual bond with the place (and with its legacy). The camera tracks in circles around Di Tella and his father in the factory and at one point the director stares right into the lens. This is another quick wink at the viewer and a final acknowledgment that these candid moments of personal intimacy are at the core of his film. He then allows his father to explain his final memories of his late father (the director’s grandfather). As his father speaks, he says things that indicate he has never had the opportunity to share these feelings or memories with anyone before. Di Tella’s film has thus become a project whose main purpose is telling individual histories.

5) Epilogue

Finally, it is clear that two young people whose names we learn and are able to identify on screen, Andrés Di Tella and Sebastian Yankelevich, are both characterized by what they have lost. For each of them, and perhaps each member of their generation, there is a part of their personal or collective histories that has been eradicated or manipulated to a great extent. The past that Di Tella idealized so much at the outset of the film proves not to exist in the present. All that remains of these years he lost are individuals and their personal memories. At the end of this chapter Di Tella reads from the memoir that his father wrote about his grandfather. His father
reads aloud from these pages as Di Tella walks away from the camera in slow motion. It is a story about a man and his children, a story about generations. In the end, this is what captivates Di Tella most of all and we see that visually as he looks outside into the yard while sounds of children playing are heard.

Novels and fictional films will often end with an epilogue to give the viewer a sense of closure. It is sometimes used, as was seen in Trelew, to add credibility to the story or to catch us up on the status of the main characters. In the case of Di Tella’s story, he is playing with both of these ideas perhaps as a way to review what we have just seen and heard or in order to defend its validity. Right before the official epilogue, Di Tella’s father takes ice cubes out of the freezer and pours himself a glass of scotch on the rocks. The inclusion of such a scene right before the film’s ending segment is an ode to the act of eradicating pain and hurt. The memories he had just been discussing with his father throughout the course of this project have been difficult to talk about because mostly the subjects were never spoken of before. When the transition to the epilogue occurs, we need the director to step back in and remind us of what we have just seen. He brings us back full circle to the themes and ideas the film opened with. The epilogue in La televisión y yo may also be seen as a justification of the project for Di Tella, himself. “That image of General Onganía, my earliest memory of television, can also be seen as an image for the end of one Argentina and the beginning of the Argentina that came after. In my personal life, it marked the beginning of a

\[114\] Segment 35
feeling of having missed out on something, a feeling I never shook off.”115 Forever haunted by these feelings of exclusion and isolation, Di Tella has started the process of creating a narrative that belongs to him, as well.

**Intervention of the Filmmaker**

“Often in documentary, the decision is to erase the filmmaker’s participation and just show a window on the world. I grew tired of this artifice. I don’t believe, for instance, that there is such a thing as an interview in a documentary. A documentary is a film just like any other film: there are scenes and encounters. And in those encounters the fact that I’m making a film is a crucial element.” 116 This quote summarizes Di Tella’s personal view on his role as documentarian and gives a context to the various ways he intervenes in his own film. Di Tella openly believes that the interview, typically thought to be a convention of documentary, is merely artifice. The director’s intervention in the film, then, does not come through interviews. Instead, he steps directly into the project and shows us the process of encounters, which are edited into scenes. The acknowledgment of this manipulation on Di Tella’s part demonstrates a highly self-aware and skilled filmmaker, well-versed in both narrative and documentary cinema.

*La televisión y yo* opens with Andrés Di Tella – the film’s narrator, protagonist, and director – looking through old photographs with a man named Sebastián, the grandson of Jaime Yankelevich. Di Tella reintroduces himself to the viewer at various

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115 Segment 36 1:09:00
points in the film, as he occupies each of these three roles. We have access to Di Tella on screen as he talks to various people and also off screen through voiceover narration. He is manipulating the viewing experience on many levels, but does choose to leave the editing and filming process off-screen (unlike Carri in Los rubios). Di Tella communicates directly to the viewer mainly through voiceover, but his voiceover seems also to comment a lot about the struggles of making the film.

As we hear in the first segment of the film, “I wanted to make a film about television; everything that television means in someone’s life. But I ended up with something else.” At the same time, he also uses this tool to narrate the various historical stories in the film, much like conventional fiction and documentary films might. Di Tella is speaking from a position in the present and reflecting on events that have occurred in the past. While his is not the only perspective we have access to, it is the most authoritative. Thus it is interesting that this use of a ‘voice-of-God’ narration (or something that seems similar) is not entirely confident or authoritative. At one point, he seems to officially resign himself to the thought that, “A story is made up from what cannot be told and coincidence.” This type of voiceover narration, one that is constantly questioning the truth and its own authority, is the overarching strategy for La televisión y yo and seems to dictate Di Tella’s various roles in the film.

117 Segment 01
118 Segment 12
The Filmmaker as a Character

Unlike in Carri’s picture, the director in La televisión y yo enters the filmic world not only as a filmmaker, but also as a character. We see him having conversations with his father, with his friends; we see him in home videos getting married to his wife and playing with his son. In Segment 03, there is a first-person point-of-view shot of Di Tella flipping through old postcards and photographs from his childhood. This is followed by home video footage of Di Tella as a child with his family. The viewer is learning to identify the voice of the narrator with this man on screen; we are allowed to watch him grow up in a sense as we are given access to parts of his personal history.

Since the film’s proposed subject is television – at least from its title and in the early stages of the film – it is clips from Argentine television that dominate screen time at first. The second part of the film’s title though is ‘Yo’ or ‘I’ so it is the interaction between the television and himself that becomes essential. Seemingly digressive episodes of Di Tella and friends watching television together119 are illustrative of the film’s intentionally haphazard attitude and tone. Moreover, they help to confuse the role of Di Tella for the viewer – we understand that he is present constantly throughout the film as the storyteller, but he is also present as a character within the filmic world.

At these moments, there is little separation between Di Tella and the others he is interviewing. A subtle manipulation, it functions to address the faulty boundaries that documentary film has traditionally set for itself up. As Nichols points out in his definition of Reflexive documentaries, “It [Reflexive Documentary] prompts the viewer

119 Segment 05
to a heightened consciousness of his or her own relation to the text and the text’s problematic relationship to that which it represents.” In this sense, the film is continuously pushing the viewer to question his or her relationship to the narrator of this history. What is the narrator’s goal in the film? Is the narrator a reliable source? These questions are complicated by Di Tella’s choices to confuse his own relationship to the story he is telling. By not limiting himself to one specific task, he allows himself to jump in at various moments as different kinds of storytellers, which can be disorienting to the viewer.

As a character, we also see Di Tella in the present interacting with various members of his family. This is shown in Segments 06 and 07 when he is speaking candidly with his father. This segment is significant because it is an instance of a casual interview rather than a formal sit-down. Moreover, Di Tella’s father is not revealing information that propels the story forward in any way. Instead, he recounts the first time he ever saw a television in person. It comes off more as a conversation between father and son rather than an interview made for a documentary; it could just as easily be added to their collection of home videos.

In the same vein, Di Tella transforms from young boy to family man before our eyes and we see this through video footage. Segment 12, for example, highlights this change by showing video of Andrés and his wife getting married. Not only are the clips sentimental, but it is also at this point that the viewer feels a kind of attachment to the protagonist. Di Tella has manipulated his presence as documentarian into a more

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identifiable character, one we are used to seeing on screen (albeit not often in documentaries). Moreover, there is a streak of authenticity in these moments: after the wedding, Di Tella and Sebastian Yankelevich carry boxes into the couple’s new apartment. Again, this footage seems to be merely a distraction or a digression; one not related to the principle storyline. There is a form of intimacy that is being nurtured between the viewer and Di Tella as the film progresses.

The film’s pacing further enhances this feeling of intimacy, as events seem to just unfold without any real overarching structure. In Segment 14, for example, Di Tella speaks with two older men about his deceased grandfather’s business. In this moment he decides, “I now realize I should be making a film about my own family.” His character has become vulnerable to the volatile tides of making a documentary that is not really flourishing in any particular area. The viewer, then, is able to identify with Di Tella in these moments of weakness because we have begun to identify with him and his cause as a writer and a director. Di Tella’s filmic persona, so-to-speak, has invited us to share personal memories and intimate details. Segment 16 plays into this a great deal. Footage of Di Tella, his wife, and their son playing on a summer day in the backyard runs for several minutes uninterrupted. This relationship is very well controlled by the filmmaker in post-production, of course, but it unfolds in a very natural and inviting way.

In Segments 17 and 27 Di Tella once again steps into the picture as a main character and this time, also as the director of the film. In 17, Di Tella is frustrated

121 Segment 14
and seemingly grabbing for straws, begging his son to say, “I want television!” Nothing seems to be going in the direction he planned, but he is purposefully stepping in to help move the picture in one way or another. Even though his attempts in this scene are failed, it is essential that he include them in the final cut. Failure is a major theme in Di Tella’s documentary and is tied in elegantly with the theme of loss. The two run parallel to each other throughout the course of the film dictating the course of images and sounds that are played. “Failure, in effect, constitutes a metanarrative that feeds Di Tella’s project: the “I” who speaks constantly questions its own authority.”\(^\text{122}\) This ‘metanarrative’ runs throughout the entirety of the project and its presence is constantly felt (as in Segment 17).

In comparison with the aforementioned scene, Segment 27 provides another look into Di Tella as character/director. The purpose of this scene is different though, as it is not intended to shape the outcome of the film. Instead Di Tella is seen talking with his father as the viewer has grown accustomed to during the film. This dialogue is different however, because it is used as another device to strengthen the relationship between the viewer and Di Tella. He states that he is collecting footage of his father for a later film and suggests that \textit{La televisión y yo} is merely a stepping-stone for that film. In other words, at almost the very end of the picture, which we have just invested over an hour watching, the protagonist asserts that it may not be enough. Failure has once again crept up on Di Tella and the viewer feels a sense of disillusionment with the filmmaker and his documentary.

**Voiceover Narration**

Highlighting the on-screen ‘performance’ of Di Tella is his own voiceover narration, which becomes a staple characteristic of the entire film. The use of voiceover in *La televisión y yo* is by no means revolutionary or even innovative, but it does become a very useful tool for Di Tella to manipulate the viewing experience. While it never disagrees with what is presented visually, it often calls what we see into question and provides an outlet for Di Tella to bring these issues to light. As Linda Williams points out, “In these films, the truth of the past is traumatic, violent and unrepresentable in images.”¹²³ For Di Tella, the private histories of both his and the Yankelevich families are filled with secrets, intrigues, and gaps just as the political history of Argentina is. It is these inexplicable holes in the past that the voiceover tries to fill. This film is a constant struggle between a personal loss and a national loss; the attempt to draw parallels between the two is Di Tella’s woeful duty as narrator. The voiceover narration in this film is distinctive because at times it feels untrustworthy; its original purpose is to guide the viewer, and to help them understand the images they are seeing on screen. In this case, the narrative voice often discredits what may have just been shown. It is a technique that Di Tella has employed to affect his own commentary on the genre of documentary and the impossibility of one singular way to narrate the past. The idea of failure or of questioning the legitimacy of these conventions of documentary is central to Di Tella’s choice of narrational style.

He states openly in an interview,

“Obviously it [the film] is constructed, but we make an effort to include a lot of mistakes and moments of doubt. I always have a plan, but I really believe that the best part of the plan is what fails. Our plans are so limited and pathetic, anything that reveals this brings us closer to the truth.”

This method, he believes, brings the film closer to truth than a straightforward documentary. By acknowledging the fact that documentary has as much capacity to be constructed and manipulated as fiction film, Di Tella highlights the role that mistakes and doubt play throughout the course of the project.

The voiceover narration is a confusing element of La televisión y yo. Di Tella’s role as narrator seems to be somewhat separate from his character that is seen interacting with others on screen. For one thing, the narration is completely in the past tense. This gives the impression that he has had time to reflect upon not only the experience of making the film but also the themes and subjects the film hopes to address. This element of reflection gives the voiceover a ‘voice-of-God’ quality found typically in expository documentaries whose main goal is to advance an argument about the historical world. In these pictures, commentary is the main element and images seem to serve mostly as illustration or counterpoint. It is commentary that moves the film forward and services its persuasive need. 

La televisión y yo does call this mode of representation into question because within the realm of the expository documentary, one expects a rational world linked by cause and effect. Di Tella does not give into this

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convention so easily and is instead constantly bringing us out of a more linear past and into a tangled present. In this present, the narrator is not limited to one method for retelling the past and instead is demonstrating the versatility of options inherent in a single story. In Di Tella’s case, the narrative of one history – that of television in Argentina – spurs a discourse on his own family, the family of Jaime Yankelevich, the decline of Argentina, and the significance of national vs. personal identity.

Di Tella defines his role as narrator from the very beginning of the film. In Segment 01, he lists several other possible titles for the picture we are about to see and finally settles on “La televisión y yo.”\textsuperscript{126} From the outset he is inviting the viewer to pay careful attention to what the narrator offers to the film. His tone is emotionless and his speech is carefully pronounced, but his words are not necessarily the most knowledgeable or reliable source. What the narrator does seem to know for certain are personal thoughts and it is from the personal realm that the first storyline begins.

Segment 02 is introduced with an intertitle that reads “My First Memory” in which he recalls the first time he remembers watching television. The voice does not explain exactly what we see on screen, but instead fills in the gaps. The image is broadcasting archival footage of the military coup that brought Onganía to power. The voiceover states, “That day my parents didn’t let me go to school; they said the tanks were on the streets.”\textsuperscript{127} It is not the case that the narration is misleading, but rather it is purposefully vague at various points. In an expositional documentary, for example, the narrator might explain or give context to the politics behind the stock footage. For Di

\textsuperscript{126} He tries, “Notes on Television” and “Notes for the Television.” (Segment 01)
\textsuperscript{127} Segment 02
Tella, this use of narration does not contribute to his intended effect, so he leaves it out and experiments. Instead of constructing a political argument, Di Tella is focused on constructing a filmic argument. He leaves out key historical and political information at this point, and is thus asking the viewer to engage more intimately with his storytelling process.

The narration in *La televisión y yo* is as much a way into Di Tella’s personal subjectivity as it is a clarifying tool for the film as a whole. As stated above, the moments when the narrator sounds most authoritative are when he is relating his own personal memories of events or feelings. This is ironic, though, because the premise of the film is the quest to gain access to memories that Di Tella does not have. The manipulation of film form and content is definitely present throughout the picture, specifically when it comes to the voiceover narration. In Segment 05, for example, Di Tella offers a moment of personal intimacy when he shares his childhood dream of becoming an astronaut. Stock footage of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landing on the moon is shown – images that Di Tella never had the opportunity to see as a child. The following scene shows Di Tella’s friends reflecting on this same event. Here it seems as though Di Tella is appropriating his friends’ memories of television, and specifically the lunar landing, into his own subconscious. The voiceover misleads us to believe that we have access to the narrator’s memories, but in reality they are not his at all.

The other use of voiceover is perhaps more conventional. Di Tella uses it to narrate third party histories, as well as his own. As an example, Segment 19 is when
the story of Yankelevich’s empire moves to the forefront. The narration in this segment describe Yankelevich’s rise to power from his days at Radio Belgrano to his move to television. This is done over a montage of old photographs and clips of archival footage. Di Tella, acknowledges the ways that an expository documentary might reveal the same story. He is paying homage to this form of narration, but at this point in the film it is a very self-conscious move. It is an obvious transition or departure from the way Di Tella has been using voiceover until this point. While the tone seemingly shifts from personal to objective, there is still evidence that Di Tella is inserting his own beliefs in order to shape the images to fit his goal for the film. In this same segment, for example, while the photomontage is flickering by, Di Tella casually compares the crowds for Radio Belgrano to those for Eva Peron. “The photos look like they are out of a political rally with Eva Peron.”128 The narrator has purposefully asked the viewer to identify this cultural icon with a political one. It is the same way he, himself, associates the media and television with the military coup of Ongania. Moreover, this sharp transition in narration forces the viewer to question the distinctive modes being used to tell the same story. Is the traditional ‘voice-of-God’/expositional narration effective? Does it reveal the same valuable narrative information as a more personal or humanized voice might?

The ‘voice-of-God’ style of voiceover used in this picture is another way that Di Tella is actively intervening in the outcome of his film. I use this term typically associated with the expository mode of documentary because Di Tella limits his

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128 Segment 19, 33:06
approach to narration by providing only one main voice. It is this narrator whom the viewer associates with a final word of judgment. Di Tella is undermining this assumption on the viewer’s part, though, by constantly calling his own authority into question. He is constantly reminding us about the difference between what he wants to tell and/or show us and what he actually ends up presenting on screen. The end result is a very insecure narrator who feels most comfortable discussing his most intimate details off-screen. His venture into strict observational narration lasts only briefly and is interrupted with his own thoughts and obsessions. Di Tella’s closing remarks about the subject highlight this sentiment of doubt and anxiety.

“Now that I am finishing, I think I maybe embarked on the wrong project. Perhaps I should have restricted myself to reviewing the seven years of TV that I missed and in some way try to recreate the childhood that I didn’t experience. But, maybe it was too personal, a project that would only interest me... It is also true that when I watch those shows now they mean nothing to me. They are lost. And what is lost...is lost.”

This self-doubt is a reflection of the inner turmoil felt by other directors of his generation, as well. Similar to Carri and Arruti, filmmakers who are attempting to expose personal truths buried deep within a national consciousness, Di Tella discovers that approaching this past can be painful and deceptive. The resignation to failure is indicative

The film does take a political turn and dwells within this comparison of television and politics. At one point, the narrator states, “In Argentina, you can’t talk about anything without talking about politics.”

Most of the trauma his nation has

\[129\] Segment 32
\[130\] Segment 23
suffered has been related to corrupt politics – the long line of dictatorships and military coups make it seem like a never-ending saga. This is one of the major threads that runs throughout the course of this film and Di Tella works hard to draw it out towards the middle and end. Voiceover aids this particular goal especially when he begins making a more forceful comparison to television as propaganda. The first collective memory of most Argentineans about television is the broadcast of Eva Peron’s funeral.\footnote{Segment 30} Di Tella actively muses over the idea of television as propaganda and specifically the relatedness of these two memories. The narrator’s role in this particular moment is to bring these relationships to the forefront of the viewer’s mind; he is weaving a personal thought into the narrative framework of documentary.

In the end, he accepts the fact that his voice and his film have limits. “In a post dictatorship era in which voices and political actors of all stripes try to sell truths about the past as if they were incontrovertible, La televisión y yo reminds us yet again of the age-old truth that every narrative, every history, is, in fact, a subjective construction and therefore problematic, partial, and, in a sense, a “fiction” of memory.”\footnote{Michael Lazzara, "Filming Loss: (Post-) Memory, Subjectivity, and the Performance of Failure in Argentine Documentary Films." Latin American Perspectives 36 (2009): 153.} The interplay between his presence on screen and his voiceover gives the viewer a more active role in the film. He constantly asks the viewing audience to help identify the failures each of these specific tools or conventions creates in the storytelling process. The voice is not the only part of Di Tella to which we are given access. We see him as a young child and as a grown man, we see him as a filmmaker and as a conversationalist. This
dynamic adds to the argument that Lazzara is documenting in his essay (quoted above), which is that *La televisión y yo* is a form of 'essay' for Di Tella. He is approaching these themes from a number of different angles and finding that the only truth available to him is from histories that are made up of a number of different smaller stories and perspectives. He offers this to the viewer in a firsthand way and while it may seem confusing and off-putting; it is really a display of a man who truly understands cinema and its many ways of communication. Moreover, Di Tella offers an alternative to the Expository documentary and dives headfirst into the realm of both the Interactive and Reflexive modes.

**Conclusion**

Di Tella invites the viewer into a world that at first seems exclusively his own yet as the film progresses, he slowly opens it up in order to speak about shared experiences and memories. Driven by a sensation of loss after being ostracized from his own country, he embarks on a project that is wholly personal, but with larger implications. At the same time, he is forever questioning the limits of his craft. Documentary is the medium he chooses to uncover these histories, but he demonstrates again and again that the genre suffers from a very rigid approach to truth. As an alternative he submits a variety of smaller, more intimate stories to stand for a larger narrative about Argentina and its history. It is a bold decision and one that marks a shift in style and subject matter from the expository mode of documentary. Di Tella’s *La televisión y yo* does fit in nicely with other films of his generation from
directors such as Albertina Carri and Mariana Arruti, and other documentarians who are searching for the personal within the collective.

By constantly doubting his own authority as narrator and protagonist, Di Tella is asking larger questions of his viewer. Who holds the authority when you read or tell a history? Can there be more than one way to tell the same story? While these questions are not answered outright, Di Tella’s opinions do show at various points throughout the film. The stylistic and narrative techniques that he uses throughout the course of the project suggest that he has put in a good amount of time reworking and manipulating the final product. While at times it appears that events occur haphazardly and for an unknown reason, the hand of the director can always be felt. Moreover, as we have seen in the previous two films, he uses techniques of fiction in the way that the film is structured. In this case, it is organized into chapters, which simultaneously help break the subject matter down into smaller parts, and makes it more clearly organized thematically. Viewers are able to relate to this form of organization easily and are able to identify recurring characters and motifs as the narrative progresses.

La televisión y yo is a very self-aware film that attempts to reconcile the traumas of the past with the vacancies left in the present. The line between fiction and documentary is once again blurred through manipulations by the filmmaker. It is his conscious decision and desire to expose memories that have been hidden under the surface for so long. Moreover, it is a personal quest to define his own identity in the context of a fragile nation.
Concluding Remarks &
Thoughts for Continuing Study
The research conducted for this thesis was designed to answer important questions about the state of contemporary documentary cinema in Argentina: How do filmmakers of post-dictatorship Argentina approach the themes of loss, trauma and memory in documentary? How do these filmmakers express their dissatisfaction with the expository or observational modes of documentary? What elements of narrative and style are shared amongst documentaries made after the shift from dictatorship to democracy in Argentina? The answers to these questions derived from my research lead me to the following conclusions.

The films Los rubios, Trelew, and La televisión y yo are representative of a larger movement in Argentina to uncover and reconcile truths from a past that has been obliterated by a corrupt government. Although the subject matter of these documentaries is essentially political, the themes are all presented as apparently personal. Each of the three filmmakers studied in this project has made a conscientious effort to reconcile these seemingly disparate entities. The grand, all-encompassing realm of the collective is broken down by the small, relative truth of the individual. By focusing our attention on the collective and personal traumas as well as the absence of objective history resulting from the dictatorship, these documentaries make an important statement about the impossibility of realizing an objective truth. The filmmakers Albertina Carri, Mariana Arruti and Andrés Di Tella all approach this national trauma in distinctive ways. Yet when studied together, the films reveal similar conclusions.
Firstly, these films are labeled as documentary, but they encourage the viewer to question the scope and limit of the genre. While Bill Nichols has outlined a clear definition for other documentaries that resemble the ones that I have chosen (The Thin Blue Line or Sherman’s March), the move to a reflexive style is new to Argentina. This important shift in the documentary mode forces viewers to watch these films in a new way. For example, in these documentary films ‘truth’ is shown to be elusive. By contrast, in documentary films made using the expositional mode during the 1950s and 1960s in Argentina the mission is to present a history that is objective and knowable. In Los rubios, however, it is the unknowability of the past that drives the film forward. It is the search for truth, rather than the presentation of truth that becomes the film’s sole purpose. For this reason, the filmmakers provide explicit access to the filmmaking process in an appeal to veracity (Los rubios, La televisión y yo). This shift in method and tone represents a distaste and distrust for the perceived righteousness of expository documentary. As a result, these directors are using new methods to try to get to an unavailable set of truths and history that were made more readily available to them.

In addition, techniques of fiction are used in the documentaries as a tool to make the past more attainable. Although it is seemingly counter-intuitive, I have shown how these directors use conventions of fiction filmmaking to aid in documentary’s quest for truth. In Trelew, the narrative structure Mariana Arruti uses to organize her film is almost identical to that of the fictional Hollywood thriller The Great Escape. The decision to tell a true story using elements of fiction, whether it be the
animation in Los rubios, the use of numbered chapters in La televisión y yo or the
structure of The Great Escape in Trelew, is representative of two different ideas. First, it
reveals the director’s inability to directly represent trauma on screen. Second, it
signifies the directors’ interest in appealing to a different viewing audience: one that is
more likely to be influenced by the entertainment, or even artistic, aspect of film.
While all three of these pictures are political in nature, none of them signify a call to
action on the part of the viewer. Instead, these artistic endeavors are personal
statements created as mechanisms for forceful confrontation with the past; a past that
has been hidden.

The dictatorship of General Onganía and the Dirty War are topics in history
that are little known or cared about outside of Argentina. These political themes are
illuminated on-screen by lesser-known filmmakers. Los rubios, Trelew, and La televisión y
yo were not given large screenings, but instead were limited to independent film
festivals and museum showings. The lack of publicity these films received within their
own country is problematic for researchers because it resulted in a shortage of analysis
on the material. These documentaries, as one would expect, are even less widely
known outside of Argentina, but very occasionally are seen by a critic at an
independent film festival in the United States. When this has occurred, the critic has
more often than not been perplexed about the goal of the documentary. A. O. Scott
(film critic for the New York Times), for example, reviews Los rubios and comes to a
mixed conclusion about the film. “Too much of the film is in a mood of chin-
scratching detachment, and this creates a vacuum in which its powerful,
confrontational moments lose their force, the trauma of the past pushed nearly out of
reach.”¹³³ However, when Los rubios is examined alongside its contemporaries Trelew
and La televisión y yo, as I have done in this paper, patterns begin to emerge that reveal
Carri’s intentions (the same ones that may have seemed maddening to Scott) and give
new and important meaning to the film.

There is a definite intention on behalf of the filmmakers to confuse and
disorient the viewer. For Carri, Arruti and Di Tella, a goal of their films becomes
sharing the pain and confusion caused by events they barely remember or even have no
recollection of whatsoever. Each of these three documentaries attempts to form a close
relationship with the history they are representing on screen, but ultimately they
remain distant. The traumas their nation has experienced are too painful to tackle
directly, so they must invent ways that seem less confrontational. This device, however,
becomes part of their overall argument. Who is to judge whether these methods of
documentary filmmaking are less valid than the objective, expository methods? In the
end, their truth is subjective and can never be entirely knowable. These films come
close to revealing the effects of the trauma, but they can never reach its core.
Subjective emotions, thoughts and memories stand in the way of an ultimate, objective
understanding of a past carefully buried by the dictatorship.

¹³³ A.O. Scott, “Personally Political: Fallout From the ‘Dirty War’” The New York
<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9D03E0DE1638F934A35757C0A962
9C8B63>.
While each of the films I have chosen as case studies has been individually discussed by critics, this is the first time an analysis has studied them in conjunction with one another in order to synthesize a main argument. I have shown that not only do these films cover similar themes and subjects, but they also utilize similar aspects of narrative and style. Studied together, these films are seen as a part of a national history. They reveal individual reactions to tragic historical events while simultaneously making bold statements about the trajectory of documentary cinema. They use innovative techniques to try to reveal hidden histories, both national and personal. Ultimately, when confronted with an oppressive government and its consequently political cinema, the next generation of individuals chooses to respond in reactionary ways. I have chosen three films to analyze in depth, but these are not the only examples from this new wave of documentary. Lorena Muñoz and Sergio Wolf’s Yo no sé que me han hecho us ojos (I don’t know what your eyes have done to me) or Mariano Donoso’s Opus use the same politically charged past as a backdrop to discuss personal issues of identity and memory. The recurring themes of these documentaries interrelate loss, trauma and memory, and make a specific argument about the best way to articulate them using elements of both nonfiction and fiction. These films provide more support for my argument that this new mode of documentary is necessary to the quest to reveal seemingly unknowable truths.
Thoughts for Continuing Study

Other research questions have emerged since this project began that might prove valuable for continuing study. Firstly, how do contemporary documentaries look in countries that have had similar political histories to Argentina? A comparative study on the documentary film movement in other Latin American countries with histories of dictatorship would prove valuable. It might reveal that this strategy of melding fiction and documentary is part of an overall coping strategy by a nation. I have found that in Argentina, the transitional generation between dictatorship and democracy has many questions left unanswered about their country, and their personal identity. Some of these people have decided to express themselves through film, and specifically, through documentary by questioning the given modes of representation. On the other hand, we might find that other countries are less interested in rehashing the past in such an emotionally profound way or use other artistic techniques and devices.

Secondly, how will documentary cinema change within Argentina over the next ten years? The country is still reeling from a severe economic crisis (circa 2001) and has only recently begun to recover. At the same time, Buenos Aires, the country’s metropolis, has seen an influx of national art and culture as the dictatorship recedes into the past. The film industry may continue to grow and change over time, and it would be interesting to compare how certain aspects of narrative and style change within the documentary genre.

As a result of this research project, a more comprehensive understanding of documentary film in Argentina has emerged. This study sought to compare three
distinct examples of contemporary political documentary and it has led to a deeper comprehension of not only a national film movement, but of documentary cinema as a whole. The reflexive mode of documentary has gained prominence in Argentina as a coping mechanism for these young filmmakers. As a consequence, the films are more inclined to question their own positioning within the documentary genre. The genre’s goals have always been an attempt at uncovering and representing reality. Since standard documentary truth is unknowable for these filmmakers, they have created other means to combat the perceived inadequacies of their medium. Argentinean documentary film is only now gaining any small form of international recognition, but it has valuable lessons to teach critics, theorists, and viewers from all parts of the world. My work and synthesis has been an attempt to move the conversation about, and study of, Argentinean documentary cinema forward in hopes that others will find new meaning, relevance and excitement in this burgeoning artistry.
Appendix: Supplemental Materials

Los rubios (Albertina Carri, 2003)
Primer Plano Films & Women Make Movies
Narrative Segmentation
89 min.

00. Opening Credits
01. [Playmobil Set-Up of House & Farm]. Camera moves from L to R, revealing the play-landscape. The Playmobil ‘family’ holds hands and move into the house. There is voice-over of Albertina Carri (the director) talking with her film crew.
02. [El Campito. Ext Landscape/Field]. Various shots of an empty field, swamp, river, trees, and a road. Cut to...
03. [Ext. City Street, Buenos Aires]. Couceyro as Carri reads from a book called Isidro Velázquez by Roberto Carri. The major themes of the reading include the collective and personal consciousness, the community and the individual. The title, “Los Rubios” is interjected in a cut in the same set up as Segment 00. Cut to... Carri holding the camera walking down the street with a member of the crew. They begin speaking with a woman who is in her home about the family who used to live next door. The Woman says she remembers them, but she has no idea what happened to them (They are speaking of Carri’s family, of course). Followed by various cuts of the neighborhood and its residents.
04. [Title Card]: February 24, 1977. Ana María Caruso and Roberto Carri were kidnapped and later, killed. They had three daughters: Andrea, Paula and Albertina.
05. [Ext. El Campito] Analía Couceyro introduces herself and states that she is an actress who will be depicting Albertina Carri. The camera then tracks past her (the same shot repeated) while she stands stationary about 10 different times. It appears the camera is in a moving vehicle.
06. [Int. Car] The crew is traveling on the highway and looking at an old album of family photos.
07. [Int. Apartment Building, Ext. Park] Couceyro as Carri travels to see a woman who she asks questions to. The woman recalls fond memories of the family. Most is told in voice-over while Couceyro smokes a cigarette in the park.
08. [Int. Editing Room] The tape of an interview plays in the background while Couceyro writes notes down in the foreground. She writes, “Exposing memory using its own mechanism. When omitting, you remember.” She works on reviewing the tapes of interviews. She does not seem to be watching closely, and instead works on the computer or writes in her notebook. In each of the interviews on tape, the people describe the Caruso/Carri family to the best of their memories. Couceyro occasionally acknowledges the tapes and smiles or laughs.
09. [Int. Car]. Couceyro travels through the city. Her voiceover narrates/describes the location where the government officials work.

10. [Int. Studio] Carri is directing Couceyro. The Marker indicates that this is a take for an Interview. Couceyro is interviewing as if she were Carri and describing how she imagines the traumatic event taking place. Another crew member says that being described as ‘blonde’ (rubio) really means nothing and is a generic statement. She says she can’t remember in detail, but she remembers the police coming and asking her name.

11. [Int. Editing Room] Couceyro calls a Forensic Anthropology office and says she is looking for information about her parents. She gives her last name and her mother’s maiden name, Caruso. She asks when she can stop by. Meanwhile, she is looking through old photos of the family.

12. [Int. Forensics Lab]. Carri, film crew and Couceyro enter the Lab and examine the medical posters. The scientist explains some information to her but the audio track is muted. Couceyro has a consultation with the scientist and has her finger pricked for a blood sample. After, Carri gives her actual blood sample in the same way.

13. [Int. Home]. The camera pans over various old photographs that are pasted on the wall. A voiceover of the woman from Segment 07 plays; she describes the political affiliation of Carri’s parents. Cut to... footage of an interview with an older male describing the political atmosphere of the time.

14. [Int. Editing Room]. Couceyro works at the computer and receives a fax. She reads from the fax, which says that the Institute of National Visual Arts and Films will not issue funding or support for Los Rubios because the script is not well developed. They require a more rigorous documentary format; they require more testimonials, etc. Cut to... The crew reads the fax together and dissects the various stipulations the Institute has laid down. They decide to keep working because they are not making a film for them (the institute), but for ‘us.’

15. [Playmobil Set-Up]. Couceyro types notes into her computer, a voice-over narrates about the difficulties of constructing an identity. In the Playmobil world, a figurine stands outside the house while its head dressing changes over and over again.

16. [Int. Car, Ext. El Campesito] The film crew drives to El Campesito. The car gets stuck in a muddy patch, so a local farmer helps them move out of the ditch. Carri sets up the camera and Couceyro is given instruction on the camera movement where to stand, and what to say. The camera moves in 360-degree motion around the exterior.

17. [Int. Home]. Couceyro is in her home looking at the wall of photos. Voiceover of an interview plays in the background, presumably from a recording. Cut to... The television plays a tape of a different interview.

18. [Int. Editing Room]. Couceyro writes in her notebook and says in voice-over that her sister does not want to participate in an interview. She says she needs to think of something resembling a movie, but that every attempt at getting closer to the truth really moves her further back.

19. [Ext. Neighborhood]. Carri walks with Couceyro, giving her direction; scene then begins with Couceyro walking down the street alone, looking for something familiar.
She walks up to a house and waits outside. She says that this house is the last her family lived in all together. “I was only three years old, so there’s a lot I don’t remember. I remember crossing the street with my sister Paula when two men arrived... These men put me in a car and I think it was a red Ford... I don’t know if these are my own memories or those of my sisters. The men showed me photos of my family and asked who they were, I answered.” The crew do a second take of this, almost as if the scenes shown are outtakes.

20. [Ext. Neighborhood]. Couceyro talks to children (maybe five years old) who live in the neighborhood now. The crew interview the children, asking if the house has always been the same or not, who they remember living there, etc.

21. [Int. Car] Couceyro and a crew member look through a scrapbook and drive away from the neighborhood. They laugh and enjoy each other’s company.

22. [Playmobil Set]. The figurines are having a party outside by the pool with music and games.

23. [Ext. Neighborhood] The crew talk to an elderly neighbor who tells them what she remembers of the family. She shows them where she hid neighbors in her home. Her son remembers them, as well, and says their names. The elderly woman says that the whole family was blondes. INTERTITLE: “I don’t think my family knew anything and most likely you are a daughter of your parents. Also believed in being the son of King Solomon, of Rasputin, of Mata Hari and of nothing. You will see. It happened that I am the son of my parents.”

24. [Int. Car]. The crew drives away and talk to each other. This scene is shown in stills, concentrating for a few moments on each person in the car and some exterior locations. Day changes to night. Cut to...

25. [Playmobil Set]. The party from Segment 22 continues, but it is dark outside.

26. [Photographs] A montage of old photographs are shown.

27. [Int. Home]. A member of the film crew plays the guitar; Carri directs Couceyro for the next scene. Couceyro looks for something on her desk and then stops at a photograph. She talks about when she first saw this photo. She then works at her computer, her voiceover reveals that she spoke to her sister again who still does not want to be filmed.

28. [Int. Studio] Take Marker reads Interview with Paula: Couceyro says she spoke with Paula. She recounts some of the memories of the family that Paula shared. Carri (off-screen) prompts her, helps her to remember what else she needs to say.

29. [Ext. El Campesito]. The crew films a man herding cattle.

30. [Int. Wig Shop]. Couceyro tries on various blonde wigs.

31. [Ext. El Campesito] Same as Segment 29. INTERTITLES: “First we will kill the subversives, later their collaborators, later their sympathizers, later those who remain indifferent, and finally we will kill those who are indecisive.” Close-up shot of Couceyro turning her head. sped-up and repeated cut together with that of a cow doing the same.

32. [Int. Wig Shop]. Couceyro examines the blonde wig, and voiceover begins that says she moved to the countryside after the incident. They received letters until December 1977. She tries the wig on again.
33. [Ext. El Campesito] The voiceover continues from the scene before. Couceyro helps the herders mark the cattle. She says she enjoyed moving to the countryside, but her sisters did not. Two life-size Playmobil figures (superimposed) ‘walk’ down the road in El Campesito towards the camera and then go in separate directions.

34. [Int. Studio]. Couceyro cuts out pieces of photographs. Her voiceover says, “The countryside is the place for fantasy or where my memory begins.” On her desk are actual Playmobil figurines. She seems to be making a collage.

35. [Ext. Neighborhood]. An elderly woman talks about the officers who came to the neighborhood. She also says the family was blonde and that the sisters were thin.

36. [Ext. Neighborhood] Couceyro puts on the blonde wig and her voiceover says that no one in her family was ever blonde. She walks through the streets.

37. [Playmobil Set]. The family of figurines are traveling in a car when an alien ‘ship’ abducts them. Dramatic, horror sounds are heard. Three blonde figurines walk on the street.


39. [Ext. El Campesito] Couceyro screams in the middle of the outdoors, over and over again. Her voiceover asks rhetorical questions about her parents’ decisions.

40. [Int. Car] Crew driving, they look exhausted. There are shots of each member looking tired or sleeping. They review some footage on the camera.

41. [Int. Museum] Couceyro explores the building with the film crew. The officers show her some of the rooms that were used. It looks like a prison.

42. [Ext. Neighborhood] Couceyro walks with the blonde wig on and adjusts it in the car mirror. She waits on the side of the road and seems to be taking in the scenery.

43. [Int. Studio] Carri talks with her film crew and looks through various notebooks, photographs, etc. Couceyro is interviewed again (as though she were Carri); Carri is interrupting her with instructions while filming. Various takes of the same are shown.

44. [Ext. El Campesito] It is night; the only image is the crew’s shadows on the ground. INTERTITLE: “If the whole world could be this way, as memories, I would love all of humanity. I would die for her with delight.” The sun rises.

45. [Int. Apartment/Hotel, Ext. El Campesito] The crew wakes up, has coffee. They all put on blonde wigs and walk out into the field. They set up the camera on top of a post and film themselves. Couceyro walks away wearing the blonde wig, looking back occasionally. Fade to black.

00. End Credits
Trelew, la fuga que fue masacre (Mariana Arruti, 2002)
Fundación Alumbrar
Narrative Breakdown
98 min.

Exposition/ Act 1

01. Opens with archival black and white footage of from the ‘60s and ‘70s in Argentina. There is brief background information given about the political climate. “This was a time of revolution.” Viewer is introduced to the narrators (lawyers for the political prisoners), who are filmed in the present and in color. The soundtrack is this newsreel style/breaking news beeping.

02. Images of the deserted Trelew Airport with a radio broadcast as the soundtrack. “The dominant class needs to maintain power over the others whom they are exploiting.” Archival footage from the day after the events in August.

00. Title: Trelew

03. Continuation of the archival footage mixed with the opening credits. Military officials are interviewed by the press about the events.

04. Interviews with the citizens of Trelew. Images of the isolated town in Patagonia. Distinctive shots of landmarks, houses, the ocean. The citizens explain the way they remember the arrival of the prisoners. Families of the prisoners ended up living with the citizens of Trelew, in their homes. Many of the town citizens began working as ‘agents’ for the prisoners on the outside.

05. Mothers of different prisoners speak.
Police guards speak

06. Prisoners begin to speak – first person perspective – about their arrival. They start describing the other prisoners who were there with him. Tosco, for example, Santucho and Ulla who were the leaders.

07. Prison guards describe their job – to control everything that went in and out of the prison and to maintain order. Refer to the prisoners as ‘terrorists.’ They explain that the prison is extremely safe and that no one escapes.
Act 2

08. The first idea is to build a tunnel. They explain the process of building weapons and digging the hole. Cooperation between the men’s block and the woman’s block is detailed. This plan falls apart because the tunnel started to flood. Image of the prison are interspersed with the interviews. “It was a lovely idea, but hard to materialize... The tunnel wasn’t working so we had to try something else.”

09. The prisoners made a hole between the two blocks (the female and male prisons) so that they were able to communicate. Romance is introduced between Alberto Camps and Rosa María. Spanish guitar music plays. “Really, it was a party.”

Goal #2


11. “Our leaders were in jail and our priority was to free them.” The revolutionaries describe the circumstances of escape from Rawson, which was extremely isolated. The only thing that was remotely close was the airport and the military base. Speaker 1: “They prepared for an assault from the outside.” Speaker 2: “They never expected an attack from inside.”

12. The plan is laid out in detail. The prisoners were to take over the prison from the inside, escape to the airport, take over an airplane and fly to Allende’s Chile. They describe the guard, Fazio, who helped them from the inside. He was interested in the money he would receive, but ultimately he was afraid of getting caught.

13.*Sequence Breakdown, P 21* They explain the routines that the prisoners would engage in to prepare for the escape. Every movement was carefully planned out. The attention to detail is crucial. The editing between archival photos/footage and the interviews increases. Each prisoner or group of prisoners was assigned different tasks in order to prepare. This included building weapons or sewing fake military uniforms.

14. Aerial shots of Trelew. The description shifts to the process of leaving the prison. The prisoners would use other members of the revolutionary groups present present in the town in order to escape. They were to drive into Rawson and take the prisoners to the airport. “The signal was to wave a handkerchief.”

15. Lawyers – said they knew beforehand about the escape. Archival footage of government officials shown with the lawyers stating that the escape would make the Argentinean government look foolish.
16. Prisoners discuss Tosco, who said he supported the escape but would not participate. Archival footage of Tosco as a youth. He believes that the government has an obligation to free him. Finally, he gives in and the prisoners have 100% support.

**Build-up and Climax**

17. The day of the escape. “We were calm, waiting for the escape to take place.” The escape was for 6:00PM.

18. The town members who were to participate in the escape say that they were in place, waiting for the signal. The signal is made from the outside, the prisoners respond with a confirmation that they are ready for action. Each prisoner involved states how convinced they were of success. (34:00)

19. Transitional footage of the prison at night is shown. The attempt at escape begins. Brief reenactments are used, but no faces are shown. The prisoners narrate the details of the escape: they lock up the guards in the cells. The comrades begin to take over the prison. Archival footage of Pedro Nicora, the Rawson Prison Chaplain, giving a testimonial of the events. Everything appears to go correctly. A guard describes how the prisoners forced his surrender.

20. The prisoners gain control of the weapons. Archival footage of Nicora shown again. At this moment, a shot is fired that creates a panic. A guard, Valenzuela, dies. Images of the deceased guard is shown. The prisoners have to adapt from the mistake. One of the prisoners feels nervous that the plan will not be able to go through anymore.

21. The prisoners each recount their last moments in the prison. Emotional interlude.

22. “We waited and waited and waited, but no vehicle arrived.” The plan begins to fall apart due to miscommunication with the townspeople. Only one vehicle enters the prison and the rest of the vehicles drive away instead of helping. At this point, the prisoners realize that something is wrong and that the plan is failed. The prisoners place the blame on those on the outside for not being able to effectively handle the responsibility.

23. The prisoners begin to turn back, realizing they had failed. Moment of silence referenced in text. The image is a slow pan of the prison without narration.

24. The tone shifts and the prisoners decide that the new goal is to get the leaders of the group out. This group leaves in the only car that came in. The rest (19) decide to call taxis to drive them to the airport.
25. Taxi drivers describe driving into the prison and the experience of taking the political prisoners to the airport.

26. The leader of the townspeople realizes that he had misinterpreted the signal from before and decides to take the cars into the prison at this point, thinking they still had an opportunity to rescue them, but the place was now surrounded by military vehicles.

27. Image of car driving down dirt road to the airport. No narration is heard. Then narration shifts to the takeover of the airport by select prisoners. The plane is shown taking off using archival footage.

28. Taxi drivers return to say that the prisoners instructed them to take them as quickly as possible to the airport without killing them. These 19 others arrived 25 minutes late, and by the time they get to the airport the plane is about to take off. It is agreed that this first group should just leave rather than risk landing again to take the other 19 with them. Another moment of silence, camera pans the length of the airport.

29. Archival footage of a press conference. The prisoners are shown here while the reporter states they have surrendered. During this conversation with the press, the convicts state that the attempted escape did not go as planned.

Act 3

30. Trelew doctor speaks on the behalf of their physical health. He mentions that one of the women, María Angelica was pregnant. But, he confirms that the remaining 19 were in good condition.

31. A government official states that General Lanusse had asked to keep these nineteen prisoners at the military base for the time being. Archival footage shows the airport surrounded by military personnel.

32. Image of the prisoners turning over their rifles. The prisoners got on a bus and were transported to the Navy base close to Rawson.

33. Trelew towns person says she heard the news via the television. The lawyers say they attempted to drive into the base to visit their clients, but they experienced extreme difficulty by the military officials. “The prison was off limits for the lawyers and nobody knew what was happening inside.” The images are less focused on the talking-head interviews at this point, and more emphasis is given to archival and location footage.

34. It was clear they were preparing a big reprisal against the prisoners. Through archival footage, there is an interview with various government officials denying any
embarrassment felt by the attempted escape. There is an attempt at justification by the government prior to the inevitable execution of the prisoners.

35. Montage of images and sounds. Scenes of the beach and a flock of birds flying away. Minor-key violin music is heard, sweeping images of the landscape. The town is quiet. Footage of the massacre is shown, but machine gun shots are heard off-screen. A baby is heard crying. There is no narration at this point.

36. The prisoners regain their voice as narrators and one states that they had no news of the 19 until after the events had already happened. All they know is that something had happened at the Naval base. Finally, they receive confirmation of the dead.

37. Various relatives of political prisoners explain the overwhelming anger and sadness they felt upon hearing the news. Word that Santucho’s pregnant wife was killed.

38. A description of the massacre is given through archival audio. The personal reaction of each interviewee is given.


40. “Then came the explanations…” The townspeople and lawyers describe the ‘official story’ that was released after the massacre. The government stated the prisoners had attempted a violent escape from the military base.

41. Three of the prisoners at the base survived, who spread the word to the others (those telling the story now). From here, specific details are given about the week spent at the military base and of the night of the execution.

42. A funeral worker states he was employed to take the bodies out of the base. He describes the trauma of witnessing all of the dead bodies. “The 16 bodies were on the floor, eight on one side and eight on the other side. Santucho’s woman was about to give birth and she had 3 bullets in her womb.”

43. Description of the Argentinean government meeting with the Chilean ambassador about the prisoners who had escaped into Chile. In this meeting that the officials decided to carry out the massacre.

Epilogue

44. Archival footage of the three prisoners who survived. They are interviewed and asked why they are alive. “Once we were injured, a group arrived and they asked what happened. From then, no more shots were heard.”
45. The prisoners’ names and ages at their time of death is shown in silence. Archival footage of people in protest after the massacre. “They will see when we avenge the deaths of Trelew.” The revolutionary spirit continues. National song is played that covers themes of memory and loss.

46. Epilogue: Titles over black
La televisión y yo (Andrés Di Tella, 2003)
Cine Ojo
Narrative Segmentation
75 min.

01. Men looking through boxes of old photographs (intercut with opening titles)
   “I wanted to make a film about television. Everything that television means in
someone’s life, but I ended up making something else” Little boy watches TV. The
director suggests different titles for the film, settles on “La television y yo.”

02. “My first memory.” (Chapter one) Old television set broadcasts the news. First
person narration of the director, DiTella discusses his first memories of the television.
They are political memories from when he was a child. Found footage is broadcast of
the military coup. “That day my parents didn’t let me go to school; they said the tanks
were on the streets.”

03. History of father. University professor. Shot in the present of dad reading the
paper. First person perspective flipping through old postcards and photographs of the
family. Home videos played. “I missed out on 7 years of Argentine TV! The collective
memory of my generation is half lost to me.” Clips of old (classic?) Argentine TV
shows play.

04. Interview with friend. They are talking about television memories, how much they
remember from the shows. (Theme songs, etc)

05. Astronaut. Clips of the astronauts landing on the moon. His childhood dream.
Thinks he has distinctive memories than his friends. Friends discuss the way they
remember the moon landing. One says it was terrifying. “Television is
depression...Very intimate relationship.”

06. “Children of Television.” (Chapter Two) Mex Urtizberea – child of the television,
doubly so. Clips from his show, which is a parody of old Argentine TV. He talks to
the camera about what he loved from this era of television. He is trying to recreate it.
His father is Raul Urtizberea “The Devil’s Advocate” – candid interaction between
father and son.

07. Father and Son interacting at home. “I wish my dad had been on TV.”

08. Same as 04, interview with friends. “It’s as if we all had two lives.” Clips of soccer
match and another old television show (possibly thriller or horror). “What were the
consequences of missing those years? I was missing part of my identity. I wasn’t entirely
Argentine, didn’t belong to my generation.” In the clip, there is a sick man who has
become hypnotized by the television.

09. Father discusses the first time he remembers watching television. Candid
interview, the two are walking through the house, recorded with a handheld camera.
Clip of show – two men walking discussing how every modern family must have a TV
in their home.

10. Footage of the first television with voiceover on how it works. This is the news
broadcast shown in Argentina. Interviews with an elder woman, man discussing the
introduction of the TV in the country.
11. Images from comic books, images of TV guides. Narrator explains that he is obsessed with everything he missed out on. Collects comics from era before he was born. Searched for oldest TV show, only found one clip. News broadcast, coverage of political protests. Clips from newspapers, magazines, books indicating the thought of TV before it is invented.

12. “A legacy.” (Chapter 3) Shifts to home videos of narrator/director’s wedding. Coincidence led him to meet Sebastian, grandson of the entrepreneur who brought TV to Argentina, Jaime Yankelevich. The two men are carrying boxes through an apartment building. In the Yankelevich family, there is a hidden secret no one wants to discuss. They go up to the empty apartment which used to be Jaime’s office. “king of radio and television.” Images of the present intercut with still images from Yankelevich’s past. Long-winded testimonial of Sebastian about the family’s empire.

13. “A story is made up from what can’t be told and coincidence.” San Telmo Antique’s fair. Director finds a TV Guide from 1944 and flips through it. He also finds old stock certificates from his father’s company and purchases them. Comparison of his grandfather with Yankelevich.

14. DiTella and his father walk through empty factory. DiTella working in a projection booth, reflecting about history of television. Interview with two old men, pointing out their old homes that they later donated to the DiTella Institute. Images of the houses from 1936. “I now realize I should be making a film about my own family.” Father weighs in, addresses camera, and says he should wait several years before making that film because DiTella is too involved to have ‘any kind of distance.’ Addressing issue of documentary subjectivity.

15. Several men shows DiTella his grandfather’s old office. Explain how the work was delegated, look through the building.

16. “Could I tell the truth if I had to tell my family’s story?” DiTella sits in front of the computer as if about to write. Home video footage of his wife and son. This house no longer exists, indicative of the fact that memories are filled with emotion.

17. Project a failure before it has started. He can’t get any of the information, was absent for most of the actual history. Tries to get his son to say “I want television!” He sits in silence.

18. Approaches the sister of Yankelevich, she says these memories are painful. The memories she has are very personal.


20. Rise to power. “He was really self-made.” Descriptions of interactions with other people. Images are of interviews, found footage, and still photos.

21. DiTella, son, and father on the couch watching the television. The three of them are watching a children’s show, but his father falls asleep.

22. Yankelevich no longer in television. DiTella on the phone asking to have an interview with Sebastian’s uncle (remaining legacy).
23. “Two Historical Figures.” (Chapter 5) DiTella and his father ride in the car. Voiceover narrates his grandfather’s ruthless business attitude. Indicates that there is another direction Yankelevich’s story can go: the political route. “In Argentina, you can’t talk about anything without talking about politics.” Images of exploding cars, riots, and masses of people.

24. American news footage about Nazism and Peronism in Argentina. Problem is that Yankelevich is Jewish, political problem at the time. Anti-Semitic film footage (perhaps from a fictional film), interviews with friends and relatives. Yankelevich uses radio station to back Peron.

25. Empty factory. DiTella and the two men look around at the deserted building. The voiceover explains that his grandfather also set about changing society. Lives intersect with those of Eva and Peron, “Eva was the product of Yankelevich.” Clips from Evita’s films.

26. Narrating about Eva and Peron, filmed images of them together.

27. DiTella filming his father. Says he got footage of his father for a later film and suggests that this is a stepping-stone for that film.

28. “A Great Loss” (Chapter 6) “I wanted to talk now about legacies.” Man says that it’s a long story but that it was too much pressure to carry on (DiTella legacy).

29. Discussion of politics, power, money in regards to Peron and Yankelevich. Peron eventually buys out the radio station. Yankelevich’s daughter says he fell ill the next day.

30. “Last Recollections” (Chapter 7) Found footage, news broadcast about Yankelevich. Peron and idea of visual propaganda. Evita’s final speech broadcast on television. Memories of people about the day of mourning when Eva Peron dies – first big event on Argentine TV. Many people’s first recollection of TV. “Politics and Business”

31. Both DiTella and Sebastian characterized by what they have lost. DiTella in the empty factory/foundry. The manager explains a dream he had about the factory, feels responsible, a certain bond to the place (to his legacy). Camera constantly moving in this sequence, around the two speakers.

32. DiTella looking through old family photo albums. Reading from his father’s memoir about his grandfather. Industrialized nation does not exist anymore.

33. DiTella and Sebastian Yankelevich look through old photographs. Similar to 01.

34. Similar to 32, Di Tella and his father flipping through photo albums and scrapbooks and discussing family history. Father explains his final memories of the grandfather.

35. Di Tella’s father pours himself a glass of scotch.

36. “Epilogue” Images that have all appeared previously in the film are replayed. Voiceover narrates his last thoughts on the project.
Works Consulted


Case Studies:
Extended Credits

**Los rubios, 2003**
Directed by: Albertina Carri
Written by: Albertina Carri
Producers: Barry Ellsworth, Pablo Wiszina
Production Company: Women Make Movies, Primer Plano Films
Assistant Directors: Santiago Giralt, Marcelo Zanelli
Sound Direction: Jesica Suarez
Original Music: Gonzalo Cordoba
Cinematography: Catalina Fernandez
Film Editing: Alejandra Almiron
**Cast:** Analía Couceyro (Albertina Carri), Albertina Carri (herself)

**Trelew, la fuga que fue masacre, 2004**
Directed by: Mariana Arruti
Written by: Mariana Arruti
Producers: Fundacion Alumbrar, Martin Mujica, Maria Pilotti
Original Music: Bernardo Baraj
Cinematography: Javier Miquelez
Film Editing: Miguel Schvedfnger, Mariana Arruti

**La televisión y yo, 2002**
Directed by: Andrés Di Tella
Written by: Andrés Di Tella
Producers: Marcelo Céspedes, Carmen Guarini
Production Company: Cine Ojo/Andrés Di Tella
Script Collaboration: Cecilia Szperling
Cinematography: Esteban Sapir, Goran Gester
Sound Design: Gaspar Scheur
Original Music: Axel Krygier
Film Editing: Alejandra Almirón
**Cast:** Andrés di Tella (himself), Torcuato Di Tella (himself), Sebastian Yankelevich (himself)
Additional Filmography


La televisión y yo, Andrés Di Tella, Cine Ojo, 2002.


Yo no sé que me han hecho tus ojos, Lorena Muñoz, & Sergio Wolf, Cinematica, 2003.


Opus, Mariano Donoso, Storyopolis, 2005.

Cándido López (Los campos de batalla), José Luis García, Ana Aizenberg Producciones 2005.
