

**Filmic Representations of Childhood in Films of Post-Dictatorship:
Kamchatka (Marcelo Piñeyro, 2002) and *The Way I Spent the End of the World* (Cătălin
Mitulescu, 2006)**

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Abstract: *The current paper suggests a comparative consideration of “Kamchatka” (Marcelo Piñeyro, 2002) and “The Way I Spent the End of the World” (Cătălin Mitulescu, 2006) in order to highlight the construction and function of the child figure in the two films. By pinpointing common elements in the two films, such as the consideration of childhood through the affective bond of brotherly relationship, or the demystifying function of humor, these lines endorse the interpretation of the two films as samples of a discourse on a violent recent past shaped from the perspective of a universalistic approach to human rights. It is in this scheme that the figure the child, as embodiment, by excellence, of powerlessness, reveals its force, and unveils the intricacies of the claim of a clear-cut distinction between the concern with aesthetics of “new” cinematic productions and the committed character of preceding cinematic schools.*

Keywords: *Kamchatka, The Way I Spent the End of the World, filmic representation of childhood, film and transitional justice, film and postmemory*

Memory and childhood through cross-cultural lenses

There is no doubt that memory has constituted a dominant preoccupation of the last two decades and that it has shaped the cultural landscape of countries and regions that have experienced a violent past in recent history in significant ways. The reason that explains this deep concern with the past stems out from the belief that present, past and future are inextricably related, and that no overcoming of the “crisis of the future” is possible without coming to terms with the past, with the literary and filmic productions playing a key role in the process of “mourning” (Avelar, 2000). This paper approaches the question of memory from the perspective of the representation of childhood in contemporary filmic productions, aiming to investigate into the synergies between the legal and the artistic, and reassert the importance of the territory of the filmic on the map of the memory-centered discourse. In order to achieve this goal, it adopts an interpretative angle that goes beyond an understanding of the past that is bound to the context of the national filmic productions, in an attempt to adopt a cross-cultural approach to the question of memory. It is therefore based on the belief in the interconnectedness between the legal and the artistic, as well as in the relevance of the cross-cultural perspectives, that the current paper proposes a comparative approach to *Kamchatka*, directed by Marcelo Piñeyro and *How I Spent the End of the World*, directed by Cătălin Mitulescu, two films that belong to different cultural environments: the Argentine and the Romanian, respectively. The rationale of this comparison that defies the interpretative encapsulation within the national is to unveil potential similarities in terms of topic and filmic treatment, and to capture various facets of representation of the child in times of post-dictatorship, in a broad sense. This twofold consideration is based on the contention that the

artistic rendering of the child figure in the two films illustrates an elaboration of issues related to memory and post-transitional justice that is specific to each of the two cultural environments to which the two films belong, to the same extent as it reveals unexpected areas of encounter.

The grafting of the childhood topic onto the memory discourse imposes itself due to the fact that the bringing to court of the perpetrators of violence has been intrinsically related to the concern about the young generation. Children have often invoked as a reason, a final goal of justice-seeking, in a scheme in which accountability, truth-seeking, justice and reconciliation have been seen as landmarks of the post-conflict recovery and development, out of the commitment to prevent the perpetration of the crimes on another generation of children (Machel 2010: X). Also, children have been seen as actors, as active participants to the process of justice-seeking, due to the fact that “having been witnesses and victims of the crimes of war, children have key role in addressing those crimes and in reconciliation and peace-building processes in their communities” (Machel 2010: X). Considered in the light of these reasons, the question of memory proves itself to be an undeniably future/children-oriented one.

On the other hand, it has been emphasized that the creation of the children’s culture gives the measure of the adult projection of the future. According to Rocha and Seminet, the treatment of the child figure can be regarded as a scene where history, memory, and the act of witnessing converge, which enables the cinematic treatment of the figure of the child as a barometer meant “to scrutinize the actions of the adults”. The filmic productions have sensed the instrumental potential of the child figure and have often tended to turn children’s culture into a “commodity” in the hands of the adults, in a scheme in which young characters become “vehicles of adult anxieties over the nature of civic society” (2011: 3). While it acknowledges the wide range of functions played by the child figure in films of post-dictatorship, the current paper sets out to capture the implications of a particular understanding of childhood as an age of moral reasoning¹ (Smetana, Killen and Turiel 1991), given its particular relevance for the justice-seeking process of post-dictatorships.

Culture-specific filmic dialogs

The “New Argentine film” of the last decade has often been considered, along with “the new Mexican film”, or “the new Brazilian film”, as connected with both a particular filmic stylistics and socioeconomic changes (Podalsky 2011). Thus, adolescents have often been seen to illustrate, in an allegorical fashion, the transition from the 1990s to “the new century when globalization has intensified due to neoliberal policies that have been implemented in the region”, and the observation of adolescence has become synonymous with a reflection on the changes at the level of the society (Rocha and Seminet 2011: 10). The adoption of a new filmic stylistics has been interpreted as an increase of the concern with aspects of the life of the youth in the context of globalization, a distancing from the denunciation of social injustice of the previous films.

¹ The recent events in which children and teenagers acted as perpetrators of extreme violence prove the manipulative character of the ideologies of violence, and impose the need to look into the profound implications of the children’s exposure to the ideologies of this type.

The Argentine-Spanish production *Kamchatka*, based on a script by Marcelo Figueras, presents the violent lapse between 1976 and 1983 in Argentina, as seen through the eyes of a child that adopts the name Harry (Matías del Pozo). The “secret of Kamchatka” acquires the meaning of growing into adulthood, and the events presented, of a special initiation. The access to the symbolic territory of “Kamchatka” grants the possibility of an existence governed by the assumptions of *minima moralia*, with the pedagogical implication of this esthetic standpoint being that the adult concern in times of violence should not regard exclusively the preservation of innocence, but should entail an attitude capable of breaking the vicious circle of violence (Vázquez Medel 2008: 52). The film pleads that adults can achieve this by acting as credible examples themselves, in their relations to both grown-ups and children. In an artistic demonstration that cherishes the collective relevance the individual integrity, resistance in times of dictatorship, and opposition to betrayal and political compromise, the film promotes solidarity as a guiding value of the “Kamchatka” territory mostly in silenced, metaphorical, oblique ways. The emblematic importance of the individual is reinforced in explicit ways, as it happens in the case of the lyrics of the ending song, “Palabras para Julia”, magnificently interpreted by Liliana Herrero, which have a long-lasting impact upon the viewer.

In the context of the Argentine filmic productions, *Kamchatka* has been associated with a tradition that builds on the construction of memory rooted in the denouncing spirit of “Nunca más” (1984) regarding the breach of human rights in the Argentina of the last dictatorship, a text which nurtured a great deal of the Argentine films produced in the second half of the ‘80s (González 2013: 48). A case-in-point is *La historia oficial* (Luis Puenzo, 1985), a film which has often been situated, due to its emblematic character, at the core of any comparative approach to *Kamchatka* within the context of the national filmic productions centered on the interpretation of the dictatorship, as Puenzo’s film opened up a filmic tradition which equates the Argentine dictatorship with a period of time when people did not know about the abuse, or were too scared to face it (González 2013).

With regard to the recent Argentine filmic productions, the diverse thematic and esthetic explorations onto which they embarked after the end of the dictatorship had to do with a number of reasons that range from the impact of globalisation (Hart 2010) to the changes in film production and distribution practices. An important criticism directed towards a certain segment of recent Argentine filmic productions concerns its impossibility to move beyond the thematic treatment of the dictatorial repression, or the thematic nuclei which the audience would recognize as “Argentine”, in order to consider the problems of the present (Andermann 2011). In this sense, it seems that little can be added to the interpretative framework of *Kamchatka*, once its insertion into the tradition of the dictatorial repression topic becomes clear, and its genealogy revealed. For this precise reason, the comparative stance proposed here aims to displace the interpretation of the film from the *locus* of the national, in order to discover its possibly trans-national force of irradiation and new latent meanings.

The French-Romanian production *The Way I Spent the End of the World* is, in its turn, a representative post-memory filmic discourse, as it considers the Communist regime and the 1989 episode through the eyes of a young boy, Lalalilu (Timotei Duma) and his older sister, Eva (Dorothea Petre). The tension in the film is largely triggered by the accidental break, in

a high school, of a bust of Ceaușescu, by Eva's boyfriend. Being the son of a supporter of the regime, the boy manages to avoid punishment by blaming Eva, who is transferred due to this course of events to a school where she is expected to improve what is considered to be a disobedient behavior. Eva's experience at that school, which uses teachers as instruments of propaganda, the inoffensive mocking of the regime that takes place at home, among the members of the family, the plot of seven-year old boys against the president of the country, are all filmic instances that give the true size of an absurd regime.

As a film that strives to constitute itself in a filmic interpretation of the recent past, *The Way I Spent the End of the World* is relevant for the concern of the Romanian "new wave" filmic productions with the change of the regime in 1989. It is an artistic preoccupation based not only on an attempt to understand and define the nature of the events that took place at a turning point, and to challenge and re-write, in times of freedom of artistic expression, the version of a "unique truth" imposed by the authoritarian voice, but also to grasp and define the relationship between the times of dictatorship and the ones that followed. In the same cinematic context, other films that belong to the same tendency, such as *12: 08 East Bucharest* (Corneliu Porumboiu, 2006), question the very occurrence of a change.

In its focus on aspects related to childhood and teenage in times of dictatorship, the film restates a constant preoccupation of other representative Romanian filmic productions of the post-dictatorship. Among them, *Children of the Decree* (Florin Iepan and Răzvan Georgescu, 2005) and *If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle* (Florin Șerban, 2010) focus on the child as instrument of propaganda, or on the teenager as a possible victim of a violent system. From the point of view of the underlying influence exerted within a national framework, Mitulescu's film counterbalances in many ways *The Graduates* (Nicolae Corjos, 1987), a popular film among the teenagers before 1989. While the latter explores the romantic relationship between two high school students and promotes an idyllic image of youth as an age of warm relationships between peers and teachers, *The Way I Spent the End of the World* moves away from the concern with romance or the shaping of citizenship, in order to promote an understanding of the past that is observant of the domestic, rather than the public, and underscores the apparently insignificant details in the daily life of a number of Romanian school children and teenagers during Communism.

Cross-cultural intersections

A striking element that *Kamchatka* and *The Way I Spent the End of the World* share is the fact that they both focus on the tense, short-circuited human relationships at the societal level, from the perspective youngsters that are part of harmonious, humane affective constellation at brotherly level. Both films are articulated around powerful bonds between the siblings, which become even stronger as the youngsters have to face the hardships of the times: seclusion, in *Kamchatka*, and exposure to an authoritarian and coercive school system, in *The Way I Spent the End of the World*. They address in captivating ways the relationship between two youngsters that experience the challenges of their own age: two young boys, in Piñeyro's film, and a teenage girl and a young boy, in Mitulescu's.

In Piñeyro's film, the ten-year old boy's relationship to his younger brother, "El Enano" (Milton de la Canal), is affectionate and full of care. His reading of the book about Harry Houdini, and his adopting him as a role model, has been read in an allegorical key,

given the youngster's belief in the fact that Houdini is an "escapista", not a magician. This literary reference, along with the set of rules of the TEG game played by the father and the son, has been seen to play an important role in establishing the motif of dissidence through escape as one that gives substance to the film.

In *The Way I Spent the End of the World*, the pain inflicted by the regime upon young Eva consists in her being enrolled in a school where students become brutalized, due to the pervasiveness of propaganda, and the lack of the instructors' interest in the subject they teach, or in their students as human beings. Surrounded by rude male teenagers who approach her in obscene ways, Eva appreciates the presence of a cultivated student who was sent to that school for reasons of "disobedience", as his parents opposed the regime, whom she supports in his endeavor to take extreme physical exercise and train in order to illegally cross the Danube. The circumstances to which Eva is exposed throughout the film reveal a rebellious young female who refuses to accept the faintest political compromise in order not to be excluded from school. She is aware of the mystification proliferated by the official public discourse of the regime, and she blatantly opposes it.

In contrast to the unwillingness to comply with the rules imposed by the regime, Eva has a warm relationship with her younger brother, whom she treats with mother-like care. She takes care of him when he is sick, plays with him, and affectionately teases him. It is this special communication between the two which gives the film a subtle lyrical note that touches the viewer and leaves a strong impression. The film contrasts the atmosphere marked by ideology in public places, such as schools, with the human interaction in the domestic area, by means of the special relationship between Eva and her brother. The depiction of the affectionate brotherly relationship in Mitulescu's film suggests that survival throughout the Communist period was possible due to people's manifesting their sense of humor, which helped them preserve their humanity and prevented alienation. It is this unexpected bringing together of the lightness of humor and the inhumane repression of a regime that taints the film with tragicomical tones.

Mitulescu's film is at the same time a criticism of the notion of literature as an instrument of propaganda, as it has been often been used during the Communist regime. The film opens with a scene in which children rehearse for a school performance dedicated to the political leader, and ends in a circular way, with the show prepared in the beginning of the film, which coincides with the broadcast of the political leader, followed by the uproar of the masses. In addition to these two scenes which serve as a structural frame, the film explores other moments in which children are involved in school performances meant to praise the regime, or the president. A grotesque character in this sense is the music teacher, who zealously selects children who presumably have artistic gifts, in order to make them perform in front of the president, a show which will never take place. She is the victim of pranks staged by the children, as they decide to make efforts to be selected, so that they can participate in the performance and attack the president, or create mock poems dedicated to the presidential couple, by randomly associating words that rhyme, which is appreciated by the music teacher, who interprets their gesture as an expression of elevated feelings.

Episodes of this kind reiterate the discrepancy between the atmosphere at school, imbued with propaganda, and the daily life at home, which is marked by warmth between the members of the family and a constant parody of the president. Thus, the film is articulated

through a constant shift from the public sphere and bombastic discourse to the minute daily moments that take place at home. These two poles are agglutinated in the figure of the president and that of the child, where from the sharp contrast between the two worlds, which represent power and powerlessness, in its extreme hypostases.

Along the same logic, contrast between the carelessness of childhood and the solemnity of doctrine is established in a dialog that associates the authoritarian figure of the political leader with that of divinity. When Lalalilu's mother suggests that the boy should not mention the name of the president and that of God, the boy promises to keep his mouth shut, which is immediately followed by the boy's opening his mouth to eat. A scene of a similar nature takes place in *Kamchatka*, where, in response to the father's explanation of the cross as being a form of greeting, the younger crosses himself and "greet": "¡ Hola Dios ! ¡ Ciao Dios!", which has a humoristic effect. By means of scenes that include gestures of this type, the two films associate the political with the religious, and use the nonchalance of childhood in order to challenge and delegitimize, through humor, the authoritarian versions of manifestation of the two.

The school that Eva attends epitomizes the coercive nature of a regime that brings together, as the viewer can note from several indications, whatever it considers "deviant". Eva's universe reveals the tragical occurrences of the Communist regime, such as the lack of access to education due to political views that oppose the regime, the constant ideological pressure to fit the mould of an obedient citizen, or exposure to life-endangering situation, in the exercise and desire to escape the regime. On the other hand, although the younger brother's responsibilities are less important than Eva's, he is sensitive to his sister's problems, where from his attempt to commit suicide. Several scenes in the film which allude to the boy's attempts to put an end to his life: one of them takes place at home, when he seems to want to take his life by touching the end of the iron's cable, after plugging it in. The humoristic twist occurs immediately after, with the viewer's realizing that he was in no danger, as the electric power was off, in one of the habitual blackouts imposed on the population during the Communist regime. Others occur outside, under the burden of having witnessed his sister's preparation to leave the country, when he would rather inflict pain on himself than give her away.

The tragical notes in this tragicomical film suggest that over the life of both Eva and Lalalilu lingers the constant peril not only of a life of deprivation, but also of death. Not only are they denied the right to education, freedom, or proper care, but they are also confronted with situations in which they can die, such as crossing the Danube, after a physically exhausting training (reminiscent of Harry's exercises) in order to escape and run away from the regime, or with the exposure to depression and experience of suicidal thoughts.

Mitulescu engages the character of Lalalilu in a constant game between earnestness and playfulness, between mature understanding of the events and innocence. Embracing the values of adulthood, Lalalilu is attached to his sister up to the point of willing to kill himself, due to worry, and plans, together with his peers, to overthrow the president. The film avoids the idealized image of the child figure that could result from such aspirations by counterbalancing these "serious" moments with playful turns of situation, in an act of complicity between the character and the viewer. Capitalizing the affection of the family that surrounds him (and that of the viewers), Lalalilu is presented in a light of playfulness, in

accordance with the film's understanding of the Communist regime as a time in which people survived due to their sense of humor. The film includes several childhood-specific events or games, such the tenderly presented loss of a tooth, or what seems to be the torture of a frog. Just when the alluded cruelty is to become explicit, the viewer realizes that the stone "torturing" the frog had a hole in it, which allowed the frog to escape safely, in one more instance of the film's double-edged and open play with tragedy and comedy. Similarly, in *Kamchatka*, the two brothers help the frogs run away, in a scene that intertwines, in symbolic ways, childhood, care, and the value of freedom.

Within the framework of national filmic productions, *The Way I Spent the End of the World* is to a certain extent related thematically to the documentary *Children of the Decree* (Florin Iepan and Răzvan Georgescu, 2005). Building on the fictional and the documentary, respectively, the two films testify the impossibility of a regime to completely subdue its citizens, to objectify them and to suffuse their most humane traits, such as the sense of humor, or the aspiration to freedom. *Kamchatka*, on the other hand, as a film that treats childhood in relation to dictatorship, has been related to *Botín de guerra* (David Blaustein, 2000), which focuses on the efforts to find the children born in captivity (Aguilar, 2011).

Between the national and the cross-cultural

The initiatives to plea for a relevance of memory that transcends the national realms, and impose the practice of approaching memory from a transnational perspective, lead inevitably to the questioning of the extent to which a comparative consideration of *Kamchatka* and *The Way I Spent the End of the World* is feasible, given the profound difference separating the historical contexts which serve as a reference in the two films. Can such association be made without risking it being received with the raise of a brow, due to the different ideological nature that informed the cultural settings implicit in the two films ?

In the context of the countries that aimed at coming to terms with their violent past and laid thus the foundation for reconciliation, Argentina has established itself as a landmark, due to its being the first country in Latin America which managed to bring its military to court for violations of human rights committed during military rule shortly after the end of the regime of violence. This process of justice-seeking and claim of accountability in relation to the violation of the human rights committed before 1989 has been to a great extent absent in the Romanian case (Stan 2009). Given this different positioning to accountability, one expects that the role played by a condemnation by the literary and filmic means be, as a result of a compensatory mechanism, more virulent and extensive in contexts in which accountability was not endorsed judicially. Whether this is the case, it is difficult to state, due to the boom of the films that explore the recent past on both the Argentine and the Romanian cinematic scenes.

In spite of its speculative character, a challenging question raised by such expectations involves the nature of the intergenerational negotiation of memory and the extent to which the existence of the director's direct experience of the regime should alter the interpretation of the film. This dilemma is relevant with regard to the artistic trajectory of the directors of the two films considered here, as Piñeyro (born in 1953) belongs to a generation of directors that experienced the times framed in their films as adults, while Mitulescu (born in 1972) had no other direct experience of the Communist regime than as a child and

teenager. Moreover, Mitulescu confessed on various occasions that he had made the film out of nostalgia, where from the film's being often defined as a nostalgic retrospective look on the times of childhood. Had the confession been made by a director who belonged to an older generation, it would have probably been regarded with suspicion, as the audience would have seen in it a desire to revive times of repression of the human rights, and a longing after that practice. However, given the fact that it was brought to life by a young director that was engaged with the times evoked in the film but as a youngster, proves valid, once again, the logic of *non idem est si duo dicunt idem*.

The attentive consideration of the two films reveals that they have been substantiated by different reasons in terms of the director's motivation to produce the film, and they insert themselves in cultural practices of claim of accountability that are have certain elements in common. Also, they implicitly bring along questions related to the extent to which the generational criteria are to be taken into account when assessing cultural productions that strive to impose themselves as possible narratives of the recent past. Although the two films been have been shaped by the specific thematic, esthetic and production contexts, they both spark controversies derived from questions such as: can the extreme physical pain and the impact of political oppression be rendered by artistic means ? How should one arrange the pieces of the jigsaw that can constitute a possible narration of the past in order to not to do injustice to the victims ? Who is entitled to tell the story ? Are those who lived in times of the dictatorship more/less legitimate narrators of the past ?

In relation to these questions, Marianne Hirsch argues that “descendants of victim survivors as well as of perpetrators and of bystanders who witnessed massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrance of the past that they identify that connection as a form of memory, and that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory can be transferred to those who were not actually there to live an event” (2010: 3), and defines “post-memory” as a specific inter and transgenerational act of transfer. Her remarks acquire a special significance in relation to the Argentine filmic productions, where the productions of the “hijos del retorno” have reshaped the debates around the construction of memory by filmic tools, as the filmic productions of the generation of the “post-memory” have been regarded as fundamentally different as compared to the ones proposed by the generation of “memory”. In contrast to the productions of “memory”, which articulate a coherent interpretation of the past, the more recent films of the “hijos” are defined by stylistic features that celebrate, in accordance with the characteristics of the process of remembering, the fragmentary (Lazzara 2013). Illustrative examples in this case are *Los rubios* (Albertina Carri, 2003), *Historias cotidianas* (Andrés Habegger, 2001), and *M* (Nicolás Prividera, 2007).

In comparison with the films based on a poetics of the fragmentary, *Kamchatka* and *The Way I Spent the End of the World*, as solid, coherent interpretations of the past, engage the audience less, due to the fact that they provide “prefabricated” versions of the past. From this point of view, they have a less powerful impact on identification than the filmic productions of the “hijos”, according to the logic which claims that “films and literature that disidentify—that is, that interrupt the process of identification—are more effective in disturbing the spectator or the reader” (Franco, 2002: 247). However, their focus on the

events from the perspective of youngsters enables identification through compassion (Sarmiento-Pantoja) due to the charisma of the child characters.

It has been remarked that the debates around the question of memory in Argentina have permeated the way memory is addressed in Spain, and that a process of “Argentinization” of memory practice has been taking place (Elsemann 2010). One of the tensions at stake in the comparison suggested here regards the extent to which the “Argentinization” of memory practice reverberates in the realm of the artistic. Rather than grant answers, the purpose of the comparison proposed here is also to set the analysis of the representation of childhood in times of post-dictatorship against the background of the synergies between the judicial and the artistic. Considered from this perspective of the judicial difference *vis-à-vis* the condemnation of the past, it might not be accidental the fact that Mitulescu’s film, as a production of a cultural context which lacks a vehement judicial condemnation of the past, inserts itself in a tradition that “freezes” the last year of dictatorship, and ends, ironically enough, with a reference to present, which is symptomatic of the desire to grasp the behind-the-scenes of the violent events which put an end to dictatorship, and claim that the perpetrators of violence be named and punished.

Common instances in the two films, such as the fact that the events are observed from the angle of brotherly affection, the children’s endearment with the world of the animals, the tender sense of humor among the members of the family, which pervades the two films, the presence of the voyage metaphor and the concern with the exercise of escape, the striking difference between the powerlessness of the child and the absolute power of abusive regimes, all converge to shape an image of a child figure that is to denounce authoritarianism and violence, in a general sense. The child figures, as *tabula rasa* on which ideology can be inscribed, serve to celebrate the fundamental human rights and a freedom of thinking and acting that exceeds the frame of a specific ideology. Beyond the scope of particular social and cultural contexts, the childhood perspective demystifies the authoritarian narrative, by making it ridicule, due to the force of humor.

It is this denunciation of the authoritarian regimes that sets the two films in a universalist horizon which allows the comparative treatment, in spite of the specific cultural contexts to which the films belong. Approaches such as the ones proposed by Piñeyro and Mitulescu demolish common places of the representation of life under dictatorial regimes as a prison deprived of the manifestation of affection and laughter. As mentioned in relation to the general production context of *Kamchatka*, the effectiveness of the two films’ denunciation of violence consists in the fact that they manage to surpass the politicized message, in order to present a touching story that speaks about fundamental human values, and enable an affective identification between the audience and the child figure that transcends the particularistic interpretations, in order to speak to the people that are not actively engaged with an ideological trend (Aprea 2008: 56).

Kamchatka is released in times marked by a certain lack of incisiveness as compared to the initial Argentine incrimination of the past and the bringing to justice of the perpetrators of violence, a moment of strong civic advocacy for the human rights which led to an increased awareness of the need to bring to court the culprits of the violence induced (González 2013). Seen from the rigors of particularistic approaches, the film has been criticized for being a “soft” discourse on accountability, one that eludes reference to post-

dictatorship, or specific denunciation. The focus on the growing into adulthood serves to tense a narrative of the dictatorship from pieces that are densely humane, articulated by meaningful human bonds, and to a lesser extent by *engagés* tones.

Nevertheless, in the light of a universalistic bet on the values of human rights, Piñeyro and Mitulescu prove to have sensed the great potential of the figure of the child in evoking the dictatorship, and use its force astutely to articulate films that condemn the past, in the absence or feebleness of the judicial decisions. The two films considered here, as paradigmatic cross-cultural associations, among others possible, prove problematic the clear-cut distinction between the concern with esthetic refinement of the “new” cinema and the preoccupation with the social of the preceding filmic productions, as the films, far from eluding a reparatory stance, rely on a universalistic engagement of the audience and show significant ties with other national emblematic filmic productions. While the “Argentinization” hypothesis is difficult to demonstrate based on the limited thematic elements that have been mentioned, it is undeniable that the two films coincide in their advocacy for the children’s accurate understanding of the situation, and their refusal to sympathize with the dominant ideology, while they impose themselves as filmic examples that cherish the children’s moral reasoning, and provide childhood and teenage figures that are definitely inspiring characters to identify with, regardless of time and place.

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