

Subjective Turn and Staging of the Self in the Ecuadorian Documentary

Giro subjetivo y puesta en escena del yo en el documental ecuatoriano

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Abstract:

In so far this century, the Ecuadorian documentary has built a small tradition of subjective cinema in which the director constructs his story, revealing his place of personal enunciation regarding the facts told. Taking as case studies the films *El lugar donde se juntan los polos* (2002) by Juan Martín Cueva and *El grill de César* (2014) by Darío Aguirre, this paper analyzes the articulation between fictionalization procedures and documentation in autobiographical films. Through the study of cinematographic enunciation and film analysis, the Ecuadorian autobiographical documentary is characterized as a *mise-en-scène* of the self that oscillates between the desire to narrate one's life and the social, discursive, narrative and technological mediations that occur in the contemporary context.

Keywords: Cinema, documentary, biography, subjectivity

Resumen

En lo que va del siglo, el documental ecuatoriano ha construido una pequeña tradición de cine subjetivo en la cual el realizador construye su relato, poniendo en evidencia su lugar de enunciación personal respecto de los hechos contados. Tomando como casos de estudio a los filmes *El lugar donde se juntan los polos* (2002) de Juan Martín Cueva y *El grill de César* (2014) de Darío Aguirre, este texto analiza la articulación entre procedimientos de ficcionalización y documentación en los filmes autobiográficos. A través del estudio de la enunciación cinematográfica y el análisis fílmico se caracteriza al documental autobiográfico ecuatoriano como una *puesta en escena del yo* que oscila entre el deseo de dar cuenta sobre la propia vida y las mediaciones sociales, discursivas, narrativas y tecnológicas que se producen en el contexto contemporáneo.

Palabras clave: Cine, documental, biografía, subjetividad

1. Introduction

Since the 90s, there has been a heavy increase of biographical discourses, literature based on experience and narrations of one's own life. There is a growing importance of personal diaries, confessions, letters, the biographies within the cultural industry, the entertainment show, and in the social sciences that portray it. In mass media, the *reality show*, the tele-reality and pink journalism on the life of celebrities has created a hyper-visibility of intimacy (Imbert, 2003: 109). On the internet and social networks, there is a surplus of blogs, newspapers, posts, texts, pictures and videos that confirm the tendency towards an overwhelming "show of self" (Sibila, 2012: 33). Even in social sciences, there seems to be a turn towards subjectivity that is verifiable in the use of self-ethnographies, in-depth interviews, and life stories (Arfuch, 2002: 177).

This turn towards the intimate in contemporary culture is related to the crisis of the grand narratives, the emergence of small stories explained by post-modernism, the end of the collective utopias, the growing visibility of private life, democratizing effect of technology that allows many people to express themselves. The emergence of the autobiographical story emerges alongside the consolidation of the post-modern discourse, the post-structuralism and the body of knowledge proposed by the feminist and post-colonial critique. Once all these factors collide, we enter the rise of the autobiographic discourses of the decade of the 1980s and 1990s.

The subjective turn in contemporary culture also expresses itself within the field of cinematography. Parallel to what is happening in entertainment culture and the media, in terms of cinema there is also a crisis of the fictional story and omniscient narratives in favor of non-fiction discourses based on self-experiences and the autobiography. In the 90s and in the first decade of the new century, there is talk of a subjective turn in the contemporary documentary: "The subjective turn is widely accepted. In this sense, I think it is the door that really opens to the new documentary. [...] The subjective shift is present in the very biographic films, the interest for family movies. All these examples put us in the subjectivity" (Catalá, 2015, p.2).

2. Theoretical Framework

Starting by considering documentary filmmakers like Joseph Morder and Raymond Depardon, Philippe Lejeune proposed the idea of non-fiction *autobiografilm* to refer to narrations of documentary character in which filmmakers narrate aspects of their private life that create "the autobiographical pact" via the cinematographic dispositive (Lejeune, 2008, p.25). The documentary autobiografilm proposes a complex articulation of autobiographical discourses and non-fictional languages that put the self in the scene via audiovisual narration. These films "are framed in the space of the private –the daily, intimate, affectionate, emotional, confessional– and translate into *mise-en-scènes* that use different self-representational resources to create a space, a time, and a voice that come together to bring about a 'self'" (Lagos, 2011, p. 60).

Efrén Cueva sustains that autobiographical films are made based on a tension between the genetic aspects (construction of the story) and the pragmatic aspects (pact of truth between director and spectator). In other words

the autobiography supposes in its origin a construction, a transformation of life into a story, and in this sense, it could be considered fiction. But at the same time, this story is presented to the audience as true, as a reflection of the author's life (Cueva, 2008, p.103).

This tension between the construction of the story and the pact of truth is produced because the production of texts from the self is modulated by a group of systems and linguistic, social, and cultural dispositives, as well as narrative structures via which the experience lived is given texture. For this reason, Arfuch proposed the need to avoid romantic and essentialist visions in order to consider that the biographical discourses are determined by the order of the story, the dispersion of the self, the mediatization, the social frames and the intertextuality (Arfuch, 2009). The autobiographical story is built via a series of historical, social, narrative, filmic and technological mediations that modulate the desire to accurately portray one's life.

Starting with recent literature on autobiographical documentaries, we propose five aspects that allow

us to characterize them: a) coincidence between enunciation and enunciated; b) private story over social life; c) visual and audio narration in first person; d) autobiographical pact; and e) performative character of the narration.

Firstly, autobiographical documentaries propose an operation of the cinematographic discourse via which the place of enunciation (the self from which the discourse is structured) transforms into the object of the filmic enunciation (the character narrated in the discourse). There is a reduction of distance between author, narrator, and character that generates an effect of authenticity in the story. From this feature comes the partial point of view, the localized and incomplete knowledge of the subjective narrator (Weinrichter, 2004, p.51). Secondly, the autobiographical documentary focuses on the private life of its filmmaker. The autobiography tends to portray the stories of the self, values the individual stories from a possible point of view that intends to be considered as honest with itself (Rascaroli, 2014, p.152). Autobiographical documentaries favor the private life of the individuals in the context of social and collective life.

Thirdly, the autobiography establishes a mode of audiovisual discourse related to first person, via the modulation of the self within the main plot. For this reason, the narration refers to the partial and subjective dimension from which the story is told (Piedras, 2014, p.22). Via the incorporation of the voiceover, or the filmed body of the filmmaker, a narrative modality is established that refers to the marks of self-experience. Via these procedures, the incommensurable experience of the self becomes communicable in a paradoxical operation of appropriation and expropriation that was characterized by Derrida with the concept of "expropriation" (2015, p.6). It is in this dynamic of expropriation of the self via the procedures of language, the audiovisual staging, and narration that there is a fictionalization of the story of the self.

Fourthly, the presence of the first person produces a biographical pact that generates a particular form of interpretation based on an agreement between the author and audience that starts with the presumed coincidence between the subject of the enunciation and the subject enunciated. This pact organizes the expectations and the protocols of interpretation of the audiovisual work, generating "a

commitment to truth" between director and spectator as Lejeune proposes (2008, p.15).

Finally, within the autobiographical documentaries, both the character and the author are constructions of audiovisual text. Neither one preexists the production of meaning that is given in the act of enunciation. "The autobiography cannot intend to create an exact replicate of the past life in the present, given that its composition features past events of a meaning that it didn't have before" (Cueva, 2008, p.103). For this reason, autobiographical documentaries produce that which they name, their enunciated are performative in the meaning that John Austin (1990) gave this term. The autobiografilm produces both the subject of enunciation and the enunciated subject and the relationship between both on which their existence is based. Within the theory of documentary cinema, the relationship between subjectivity, biography and performativity has initially been studied by Bill Nichols (2013) and by Stela Bruzzi (2003).

Following these five characteristics, it is understood that the documentary practices that the filmmakers make of their own life oscillate between the desire to accurately portray life (non-fictional drive) and the historical, social, discursive, narrative and technological mediations (staging of the experience lived). To this respect, François Niney sustains that the difference between the documentary and fiction must be understood as a gradation and not like a border. For the French intellectual, all films (fiction and nonfiction) combine in a larger to lesser degree the indicative value and the symbolic elaboration of the image. In this conception, between documentary and fiction, there is a graded scale whose absolute values are impossible to reach, which is to say that there are no pure films that are entirely one or the other (Niney, 2015, p.38). The autobiografilm is a wrinkled textuality featuring documentary and fictional procedures that combine the desire to portray one's own life and the social, historical, narrative, discursive and technological modulations.

3. The autobiographic film in Ecuador

At the end of the decade of the 90s, Ecuador experienced the failure of nationalist development, the advance of the neoliberal project, and the end of the utopias after the fall of the Berlin wall; while the social and economic crisis worsened, national culture was questioned by globalization and the demands of minorities that did not feel represented (León, 2011, p.406). In this context came the emergence of a new generation of documentary filmmakers that opt to make autobiographical films that narrate aspects of the personal and family memory as well as the construction of individual identities. The social crisis and questioning of national values decisively affect making themes of personal and intimate experiences that the filmmakers live and that become the center of autobiographical narratives. On the other hand, there is “a decrease of objectivity as a convincing social narrative” (Renov, 2012, p.5), expositive documentary language of objective character and social dimension begin to be perceived as limited in narrating the country’s subjective avatars.

Themes of political and social history that had been widely addressed since the 1980s are reviewed from the subjective standpoint of the filmmakers generating new interpretations. The personal documentary narratives occupy a well-known place within Ecuadorian cinema within the last 16 years. In regards to Juan Martín Cueva, Ecuadorian documentary filmmaker, proposed that “the use of the first person is one of the features that characterizes our most important works and those that have been the most successful, including in their reception by audiences” (Cueva, 2016, p.141).

Within the group of works that employ subjective enunciation, that use the first person, and make the filmmaker himself a character, the autobiographical narratives play a central role. Darío Aguirre, Ecuadorian documentary filmmaker, sustains that the global society, social networks, migrations, as well as the revindication of individual rights have generated a redirection of the ‘self’ that has proposed filmmakers with “a permanent exercise with themselves” (Aguirre, 2016, p.4). Both for the number of productions and the level of acceptance and legitimacy, the autobiographical documentary is presented as a powerful strategy

of subjectivation that warns us of the opening of a new moment within Ecuadorian culture, a true “biographic space” according to the category proposed by Arfuch (2002).

One of the pioneer documentaries in the introduction of autobiographical elements is *El lugar donde se juntan los polos* (2002) by J. M. Cueva, epistolary film that combines family memory and Ecuador’s political history. This film is followed by a series of short films, produced in the in the context of film schools, in which family and personal stories take center stage. *Darwin, Henry y Yo* (2002) by Daniel Avilés tells the story of two children with asthma that causes the director to ask questions about his own childhood. *Mi abuelo, mi héroe* (2004) by María Campaña is a story, told by the director while she studied in France, about the hard conditions in which her grandfather lived. *Una bendición de Dios* (2004) by Zulma Chato narrates the condemnation the director feels, as a Catholic woman, for her decision not to have children. *Sin título* (2005) by Cristina Mancero is an experimental film that connects adventurous events with a love story which has an open ending. *Mi último día como hombre ficticio* (2006) by Darío Aguirre tells of the anxieties of the director to obtain residence in Germany while at the same time collecting the testimonials of another two young immigrants. *El triciclo* (2007) by Juan Sebastián Guerrero carries out the reconstruction of a lost family memory based on a sole childhood photo.

A few years later, *Abuelos* (2010) is filmed by Carla Valencia, which is a full-length documentary that reconstructs the stories of Juan and Remo, the director’s grandparents, as an autobiographical strategy. *Con mi corazón en Yambo* (2011) by María Fernanda Restrepo constitutes a story told in first person on the disappearance of her brothers at the hands of the police.

The author who has most consistently carried out biographical documentaries with strong subjective style is Darío Aguirre. In his three feature films -*Cinco vías para Darío* (2010), *El Grill de César* (2013) and *El país de mis hijos* (2019)- this filmmaker has worked with the issues related to the search for his personal identity, in the context of the reconstruction of family relationships and migration. On the other hand, *La bisabuela tiene Alzheimer* (2012) by Iván Mora narrates in parallel form the life of

the director's grandmother and the first 5 years of her daughter's life. Recently, *Huahua* (2018) by Joshi Espinosa has used the procedures of the false documentary to propose a story that explores questions, together with his spouse, about family life and upbringing of children in the context of the indigenous culture to which they belong. This combination of works allows us to identify a small autobiographic documentary tradition in Ecuador that has been scarcely researched. In the following, we analyze films *El lugar dónde se juntan los polos* (2002) by Juan Martín Cueva and *El grill de César* (2013) by Darío Aguirre. Given their discursive complexity and narrative elaboration, these two films represent the best examples within the universe of autobiographical documentary films made in Ecuador.

4. The family letter on the story

El lugar donde se juntan los polos (2002) by Juan Martín Cueva is a 54-minute film, organized into 45 scenes of a long letter written by the director for his children. The film shows pictures, documents, family videos, historical archives and news stories that are commented on by the voice of the director himself, who speaks in first person to his 2 children. The aesthetic of the film, somewhere in the middle between cinema-essay and epistolary film, works with the different textures of the archive materials and with the voice of the director himself who never appears directly on camera. In the documentary, the director tells the story of how he met his wife, about their family life in Paris, Brussels, and Quito, alternating with the narration of political events that occurred between the decades of the 1970s and 1990s in Chile and Ecuador.

The narrative structure of the documentary connects the present with the past, the autobiography with the historical story, the autobiography with the historical story. In the first place, the film articulates scenes of a daily present with the past lived by the filmmaker, his wife and his father-in-law in Ecuador, Chile, and Nicaragua. The narrated present is represented by the ordinary scenes that the director records in his house or out the window when he lived in Paris. The past is reconstructed via the documents, photographs and films of family and historic archives that address traumatic events

in the history of Chile and Ecuador. The direct and daily record of the Parisian family life contrasts with the turbulent political life of Latin America that is reconstructed through archives.

Secondly, the documentary proposes a complex articulation between autobiography and historic events based on a montage that alternates takes produced by the director himself with archive materials. In an interview that we conducted for this investigation, the director told us that his project began with the figure of Víctor Romeo, of whom he had read about in the book *La utopía desarmada* by Jorge Castañeda. Later, he met Francisca Romeo, Víctor's daughter, whom he later married; at that moment his project no longer had a merely historical interest. "It is the result of an entire family history, of an entire personal history, which it cannot rid itself of, or disconnect itself from" (Cueva, 2016, p.1).

In various scenes in the documentary, Francisca remembers Allende's Chile via the figure of her father who actively participated defending of the Unidad Popular. Juan Martín evokes memories of the dictatorial regime in Ecuador as well as the massacre of the workers of Aztra which occurred in the 70s via the words of her father who worked as a diplomat. The social history of the two countries is addressed from the family memories and the personal histories of the protagonists via the staging of filmed testimonios and abundant family and historic archive material. Víctor, Francisca's father, has a star role in the story, telling -as an eye witness- about the fall of Allende as well as the struggle of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, where he was exiled after the government overthrow. The story of Víctor interweaves his postponed family life with political activism. He tells how he spent a long time away from his wife and daughter while in hiding. Via the biography of Juan Martín, Francisca and Víctor, narrate the military coup in Chile, the return of democracy in Ecuador, the origins of the Nicaraguan revolution, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas, the indigenous uprising, and the fall of President Mahuad in Ecuador in the frame of a family story.

The film clearly presents the double relationships between the personal biography and the social and historic texts. On one hand, it shows how the individual life stories are conditioned by the disputes

between different forces that make the history of the nation. In the film, we see how the historic events determine the life and destinies of people, generating obligatory migrations and affecting their fates. On the other hand, we can observe how history is constantly given new meanings based on personal and family memory.

Via its epistolary narration in first person, *El lugar donde se juntan los polos* makes a comment about the dilemmas of second-generation migrants and the passing down of memories through the generations, from parents to children. In dialogue with the audiovisual epistolary -genre often used by first generation filmmakers in exile from Latin America in the context of new cinemas-, the documentary is structured like a cinematographic letter that the director writes to his children to explain the family and political history that caused them to be born in France. We remind you that one of the main functions of the voiceover in the epistolary documentary is the interlocution with the images and with the spectator (Font, 2008, p.44). In this sense, the film is an intimate missive that makes a reflection on the images of the past directed at the filmmaker's children and also to the members of the audience.

The director himself, whose father was a career diplomat, confesses that Paris is the place where he was born and where he worked. However, he has deep nostalgic feelings for Ecuador. It is particularly that distance from his country of origin that brings the director to research his family and national history. In the film, this feeling of uprooting is the one that brings the director to return to his country with Francisca and their children.

Via the use of the subjective voice of the director and the use of testimonials of his family members, the documentary proposes a constant giving of new meanings to the archive materials to consider the function that the memory has in the processes of construction of individual and collective identities. This construction references the relationship between personal biography and national history, but also how these stories are passed from generation to generation. The film traces two inter-generational vectors: one in relation to the previous generation and another in relation to the later generation. On one hand, it reflects on the previous generation, symbolized by Victor, whose utopic horizon was the revolutionary transformation and

socialism. Based on that heroic and transforming past, it sustains that his generation was the one for whom "the cards were already dealt" and characterizes it as apathetic. At one moment in the film, the director -who supports socialist ideology- says he arrived late to the revolution. In one of the film's scenes, there is a long shot of a grocery store located across the street, filmed through a window, the voiceover of the director accompanies the images:

When I could finally make my own choices in life, the cards were already dealt, therefore committing to things that are no longer there. I try to become involved in a current that no longer flows. I don't know if it is that or if I found an easy argument to justify the indifference of my generation (Scene 33).

Via the disruption between image and testimony, the film portrays the asynchronies between the individual biography and the social history embodied in the feelings of the director of having arrived late to the revolution that the previous generation carried out.

On the other hand, the film is openly built as an intimate reflection of the passing down of memories for those to come. The director confesses that his generation has few strong memories, that its memory has been built via pictures and films, from "memories of memories", that it is a generation that inherited the defeat of the utopia and the uncertainty of contemporaneity. At one moment of the documentary, there are archive images of Cuban revolutions and protests in Ecuador, while the voice of the filmmaker plays talking to his children: "There is my generation, about to pass without leaving a trace, tranquilly situated between the nostalgia of what it never experienced and the chastising look on the previous generation. And you are here and I ask myself: What am I going to show you? Doubts, uncertainty, frustration" (Scene 38).

Alain Bergala has proposed that "all autobiographical filming forms, more or less part of a filmmaker strategy at act -by the presence of the camera and the consequences in the real of that filming- on his own life and relationships with others (2008, p.29). *El lugar donde se juntan los polos* constitutes an emblematic film of a story in first person that allows us

to understand the intersections between the personal autobiography and the historical story for an entire generation of filmmakers that via their work try to find their place in national and family history. Via epistolary form and essay cinema, the film narrates the subjective anxieties caused by migration and dilemmas of passing down memories through the generations, in a constant re-creation based on memory, desire, and invention.

5. Performativity, parent-child relationship, and masculinity

El grill de César (2013) by Darío Aguirre once again uses the autobiographic impulse that his previous works had. Via the documentary narration, the filmmaker causes the processes of self-awareness and personal conflict resolution to acquire social legibility. "Over time I came to understand that there are elements of personal stories that have a universal weight. What is valuable about this is understanding the universality of our microcosms" (Aguirre, 2016, p.1).

The film, 88 minutes long, is organized into 35 scenes in which the director performs both the role of the narrator and character who interacts and dialogues with the rest of the characters. In its staging, the film uses resources like irony, humor, theatricalization, music and intersubjective interpellation among the characters -characteristic of contemporaneous aesthetics of the documentary that establish the film like a production of reality and not like its register-. Frequently, the documentary uses forms of fiction narration: in some occasions a montage parallel that reveals the scene's created character; at other times the filmmaker -who is also a musician- plays a song that is the musical correlative of the events narrated in the film; in the final scene uses a German folkloric celebration in Ambato as a spectacular closing of the film.

The process of film production lasted 3 years, one of which was dedicated to filming. The film participated in 30 festivals and won 8 international awards. Contrary to *El lugar donde se juntan los polos*, this documentary does not use archive images and the entire work is filmed in Ambato, Guayaquil, Baños (Ecuador) and Hamburg (Germany). The

story is based on a specific event: Darío Aguirre has been living in Germany, place where he had gone to film school, for 12 years when he receives a call from his father asking him for a loan to save his grilled meats restaurant business. For the director, this request serves as a pretext to reflect on the distant relationships he has with his father and recover the communication and relationship lost.

The story's complexity and the filmic enunciation that the film proposes can be addressed based on a plot of four characteristics: a) migration as source of subjective problematization; b) acting and staging of the self; c) reconstruction of the parent-child relationship; y d) the new models of masculinity. Firstly, we can establish an approach to the film based on the place of enunciation of the filmmaker marked by a conscience and a work done based on his condition of immigrant. Darío Aguirre recognizes himself as a double migrant subject: at age 9 he moves from his hometown of Guayaquil to the city of Ambato, at age 17 he travels to Hamburg to study film, where he resides until today. These events had an influence on his life and his film production, the uprooting makes him aware of his differences and cause him to constantly question himself as to his individual identity. *El grill de César* is a reflection on the family and cultural uprooting proposed by migration, but at the same time the symbolic road back home woven by cinema. We dare to say that the autobiographical poetic of the director is visibly marked by a migrant place of enunciation. The split that the autobiographical film requires between the director and character, coincides with the coming out of one's self that migration proposes between one's place of origin and one's destination. Just as the director himself states:

This is an exercise that has been developed thanks to my previous works: being in front of and behind the camera, taking that almost schizophrenic distance, to come out of one's self to understand what you are doing as a director. This type of exercise, of also having migrated, to come out of yourself to understand what is going on around you. You observe yourself almost obsessively, given you are confronting cultural issues; you are always asking yourself who you are (Araya, 2015).

Secondly, the film works with a staging and acting of the self. In terms of the discourse of authenticity

that some autobiographic films propose, *El grill de César* is made based on an experimental conception that supports explicit and theatrical construction of subjectivity. Many moments have a complex staging that includes dramatizations, gags, created situations and music numbers composed and played by the director. Like in other works, the documentary combines subjective expression with the performing of actions that are done for the camera. In this sense, we dare to characterize films by Darío Aguirre via the concept of performative modality theorized by Nichols (2013, p.228). The experiments and actions carried out in front of the camera do not seek to portray a previously existent subjectivity to the film but rather, on the contrary, generate subjective effects that are produced in the very act of recording. Both Darío and César seem to be the result of the connection and affection portrayed by the documentary.

The film is a performative documentary in the sense proposed by Bruzzi (2003), as it not only describes but also executes an action via acting that operates in a non-fiction context where the truth has become a construction (p.187). Therefore, the central theme of the film is not about the characters but rather the transformations they undergo in the act of filming itself. For this reason, Pablo Gamba's perspective seems particularly accurate to us when he states "it is not a film about a family, but rather how each one presents himself to his family members in the way that he wants or is interested in presenting them to everyone else, which includes the performance that each one of them makes in these circumstances (Gamba, 2014). It is for this reason that we say that the documentary poetic of Aguirre is based on the theatrical intervention of the self and on the performativity of the family identities.

Thirdly, one of the vectors of the documentary is the rebuilding of the parent-child relationship, the story presents the paradox of a reversing of father and son roles. Thanks to this reversal, a theme is made of the particular way that the relationship with the father is resolved, he being the symbol of cultural order and authority. In a text written on the film, the psycho-analyst Iván Sandoval stated: "If there is something that defines the masculine condition and its position in life, it is the singular solution that each man builds to make his relationship with his father work, in that it is different

from the supposedly natural relationship we have with our mother from birth" (Sandoval, 2015). In societies like that of Ecuador, the father-son relationship is influenced by the distance imposed by the authority and the repression of loving gestures characterized by machismo. The film narrates the profound communication on which the relationship of Darío and his father is built, based on silence and the non-expression of love. The mother performs the role of loving-communication mediator that increases the scarce relationship between father and son. In one scene, a set of long shots shows Darío and his father doing the accounting at a table in the restaurant, while the voice of the director is heard: "My father and I are the masters of non-communication. My mom was always the mediator when my father wanted to ask or tell me something. Luckily, now with the restaurant, we have something in common" (Scene 18).

The parent-child relationship appears distantly-connected, generating an intergenerational communicative conflict, worsened by the mother's passing. The need for mutual recognition between father and son defines the main plot of the documentary. The saving of the business and the filming of the movie become ways of renegotiating the relationship in a complex dissemination of authority, prestige, and love.

Finally, the documentary is built on the base of the opposition of two models of masculinity that proposes different paths to becoming a man. On one hand, we have César, a solitary man, of few words, owner of a grilled meats business, who likes soccer, soap operas and action movies. On the other, we have Darío, a sensitive young man, who likes music and painting, who makes films, is vegetarian and practices yoga. They are two models of masculine construction separated by a generational abyss and cultural distance caused by migration. In a way that is tremendously honest and critical, the film focuses on the crisis of these two models of masculinity. Upon exploring their vulnerabilities, it manages to propose forms of empathy and solidarity. Due to the financial crisis and the loss of his family, César has lost the role of father and breadwinner. Despite his pride, he has to turn to his son with whom he has lost communication. Darío, who lives in Germany, confesses he is willing to forget all about Ecuador and adapt to his new country and situation; when he receives the call for help from

his father, he enters into conflict with himself upon realizing that he always sought approval from his father without ever getting it. The crumbling of the relationship between the two characters -worsened by the financial crisis, pain and distance- is the prelude to the reconnection and resilience. In one scene, Darío is talking to his mother on her deathbed, and they have the following conversation:

Darío: When I left it was like my father was disappointed because I was not going to continue with the family business. Is that true? Because I left with that feeling. Could that be true?

Mother: Yes, it could be that he wanted you to help him. He felt terribly alone. He suffered a lot when you left. He felt abandoned when you left. That didn't happen with his daughters... You left and he...really felt it. Alone. That is why he didn't speak to you much by telephone because he would cry. I mean he really suffered (Scene 31).

At the point, Darío understands that the lack of communication with his father was not due to indifference but rather due to pain. During the film, father and son come to realize that although each one has become a man via different paths, there are many things they have in common and it is not too late to build a loving relationship.

Using resources like humor, theatricalization, and staging, *El grill de César* exhibits in a performative manner a family story from the self and that works with the mutual recognition between father and son in a context marked by conflicts arising from migration, generational differences and the construction of masculinities. Via a series of narrative resources that include dramatic construction, humor, masquerade, music, the film renews the autobiographical pact generating a powerful empathy with the spectator.

6. Conclusion

Since the 90s, society has had a growing concern for subjectivity, the story of the self and family memory. This reality, characteristic of contemporary societies, has led human and social sciences to theorize about the "subjective turn" in all instances of social life (Sarlo, 2006). This emerging paradigm causes us to question the positive focuses with which reality and the documentary have been considered and that anchored their truths to a naive objectivism. The subjective turn and the inflection towards the autobiography in the field of documentary cinema indicate indiscernibility between description and action, between truth and art, between procedures of documentation and staging.

Biographical documentaries produced in Ecuador in the last 16 years show a new form of documentary story that is radically different from the social and nationalist documentary. Upon incorporating the biography and family story, these films manage to build a new epistemology from which to narrate and perceive the personal, cultural and historical reality. In all of these films, subjectivity is no longer a value that threatens the documentary truth and has become a filter from which reality can be reinterpreted (Weinrichter, 2004). It is plausible to think that this shift came about given that within the Ecuadorian cinematographic field and culture, the conditions were ripe for the construction of a staging of the self that oscillates between the desire to show one's own life and historical, social, discursive, narrative and technological mediations.

These documentaries make the biography a trigger of self-awareness and personal conflict resolution related to the anxieties and desires that can only be resolved in a performative manner via a dispositive that operates between the documentary drive and the staging. From here we can conclude that the autobiografilm is a dispositive of subjectivation that combines memory and desire, fictional and non-fictional procedures, expressivity, and cinematographic art. The subjects that emerge in films like *El lugar donde se juntan los polos* and *El grill de César* are the expression of a new form of documentary narration that combines the personal and the historical via the use of formal procedures like the essay, the letter, and performance.

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- How to cite:

León, C. (2019). Subjective Turn and Staging of the Self in the Ecuadorian Documentary. *Comunicación y Medios*, (39), 136-146.