

# Comunicación y Sociedad

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## The television spots of Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo: between the name, the blood and the testimony

*Los spots para televisión de Abuelas  
de Plaza de Mayo: entre el nombre, la  
sangre y el testimonio*

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The article analyses the senses that on the appropriation of minors and the restitution of identity build a series of television spots for Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. The majority are configured around the thematic axes of the name, the blood and the testimony. They promote the massive arrival of the institutional discourse of Abuelas around the effects and/or consequences of the last Argentine civic-military dictatorship.

**KEYWORDS:** Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, spots, testimony, television, Argentina.

*El artículo analiza los sentidos que sobre la apropiación de menores y la restitución de la identidad construyen una serie de spots para televisión de Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. La mayoría se configuran alrededor de los ejes temáticos del nombre, la sangre y el testimonio. Potencian la llegada masiva del discurso institucional de Abuelas en torno a los efectos y/o las consecuencias de la última dictadura cívico-militar argentina.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, spot, testimonio, televisión, Argentina.

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THE MASS-MEDIA CAMPAIGNS OF ABUELAS:  
*DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE?*

The year 1997 was the twentieth anniversary of the association Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo<sup>2</sup> (Abuelas). By then, Abuelas had restored the identities of fifty-nine young men and women, and had returned them to their biological families. Many children<sup>3</sup> of the disappeared, recovered grandchildren and siblings of appropriated and recovered grandchildren, who were already adolescents, gathered under the auspices of the association H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio [Children for Identity and Justice Against Forgetfulness and Silence]), where they actively participated in the reconstruction of the story of their disappeared parents and in the vindication of their parents' political activism during the seventies. In turn, the children, grandchildren and siblings who participated in Abuelas took part in the search for their appropriated generational partners through the public display of actions and productions, which included cultural, artistic and communicational elements. This new memorial period, in which the new generations began to actively participate in the publicizing of human rights causes, resulted in a change of institutional search and communication strategies by Abuelas. Such a change signaled the beginning of a new period in the history of

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<sup>2</sup> In 1977, a subgroup of mothers of arrested-disappeared young men and women, who belonged to the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* –founded on April 30 that same year– began to meet with the purpose of searching for their grandchildren. The latter had been kidnapped during military operations together with their parents, or had been born while their mothers had been held captive in clandestine detention centers during the last Argentinean civic-military dictatorship (1976-1983). The appropriation of minors was a unique and distinctive practice of state terrorism in Argentina. The children of parents deemed “subversive” by the military were taken by members of the Armed Forces or by people linked to the repressive apparatus. A few of them were offered for adoption through the judicial system with false information regarding their origins.

<sup>3</sup> Both men and women.

the association from 1997 onward. This fact is acknowledged in their institutional statement:

When the Abuelas realized that their grandchildren had grown up, and that this entailed the possibility that they would seek to find out their own identity, the searching methodology changed; it was no longer a question of looking for children, but of bringing young people over to Abuelas through communication strategies (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2001).

This way, the association came up with the idea that such young people could be approached through the organization of events and activities that took into account the means of socialization, the consumption of culture and the generational partners of the targeted population.<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, even when Abuelas continued to develop search strategies using public institutions, and through data and accusations provided by the citizens, they also began to elaborate in a planned and systematic manner, since 1997 to the present, a series of mass communication campaigns. The latter included artistic installations, graphic and photographic exhibits, diverse venues, music shows, contests (within the realms of literature, photography, choreography, short film and architecture); television and radio spots, and audiovisual productions, some of which were produced for specific dates, such as the anniversaries of the association; lectures, workshops, educational projects and materials; and conferences, seminars, and academic and scientific materials related to the crime of appropriation of minors and the process of restitution of identity.

Within this framework, the association has issued, from that same year 1997 up to the present a number of invitations to personalities linked to culture, the arts and the media, who agreed to actively participate in the planning and organization of these campaigns. However, such

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<sup>4</sup> For Abuelas, sport is “a medium for socialization through which values are transmitted and exercised, especially among young people” (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2007, p. 180), and rock musicians “speak the same language as the grandchildren” (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2001).

strategies are not exclusive to Abuelas, but have been reproduced by diverse public awareness campaigns with the aims of legitimizing certain topics and problems, and increasing the impact on certain audiences. In this case, the most important audience for Abuelas was the generation of the appropriated grandchildren. Thus the association devised the hypothesis that the young people who would watch and listen to the spot TV ads, and/or would attend the activities and events included in the campaigns, might feel welcomed by the presence of those personalities and would feel appealed to because of their habits of cultural consumption.

In 1997, Abuelas held a press conference on the occasion of their twentieth anniversary, in which they announced the launching of their first communication campaign titled *Do you know who you are?*, a query addressed for the first time to young persons, through the use of the second-person singular, urging them to call into question their identities. The campaign included various activities to be carried out during what came to be called the “Week for Identity,” on November 21 to 24. In addition, during that press conference, different personalities from the worlds of culture, the arts and the media (athletes, musicians, media hosts and producers,<sup>5</sup> visual artists, teachers of graphic design<sup>6</sup> and theater professionals) were invited. They contributed their skills to the organization of activities that were part of the campaign. Unexpectedly, in certain cases the invitations resulted in the creation of cultural and collective productions, some of which were ephemeral

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<sup>5</sup> The host of the program *Rock argento* on FM Conrado Geiger “La Rocka”, the speaker Quique Pesa, his wife Leda Berlusconi and the radio producer Paula Nicolini collaborated in the organization and the making of the Popular Music and Rock Encounter for Identity in the Plaza de Mayo.

<sup>6</sup> Professors of the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Urbanism of the Universidad de Buenos Aires, Ricardo Méndez, Raúl Bellucia and Oscar Valdes, participated in shaping this campaign. Belluccia was in charge of devising the poster and naming the campaign; “many told him that they had never carried out a massive campaign based on one question only” (Abuelas, 2007, p. 126).

in nature, and others that continued over time: “Sport for Identity”,<sup>7</sup> “Encounter of Popular Music”,<sup>8</sup> “Rock for Identity”,<sup>9</sup> “Music for Identity” and “Collective Painting”.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to these, other productions, activities and events “for identity”<sup>11</sup> would come years later. The theater professionals closed the week of activities with a “Homage from the World of Theater to the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo.” This included the staging of a text titled *Do you know who you are?*—the same name of the communication campaign of Abuelas launched that year—written by playwright Roberto “Tito” Cossa and directed by Leonor Manso and Roberto Villanueva Cosse in the Teatro Nacional Cervantes. This homage can be considered the first contribution by the theater world to the cause of

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7 In 1997, athletes from different disciplines signed a request in the form of a flyer, in which they demanded the restitution of the appropriated grandchildren.

8 This first encounter counted on the participation of musicians of different genre, such as the murga groups Mozzi and the Murgón, Traficantes de Matracas, and the popular song artists Juan Carlos Baglietto, Miguel Cantilo, Ignacio Copani, Víctor Heredia, Lito Vitale, Liliana Herrero, Jairo, Dúo Malosetti-Goldman, Raúl Carnota, Opus Cuatro, Piero, Néstor Gabetta, Beto Solas, Los Tipitos, Jorge Marziali, Teresa Parodi; it received the support of Joan Manuel Serrat, Sandra Mihanovich, Alejandro Lerner and Julia Zenko.

9 The bands Los Caballeros de la Quema, Los Visitantes, Las Pelotas and Bersuit Vergarabat inaugurated the first rock show in Plaza de Mayo, which attracted more than 50 000 young people.

10 Visual artists Patricia Aballay, León Ferrari, Adolfo Nigro, Luis Felipe Noé, Carlos Gorriarena and Carlos Alonso composed a *Collective Painting* of a canvas and a round piece of wood, together with the Abuelas, the grandchildren and the public in the Centro Cultural Recoleta of the City of Buenos Aires.

11 “Photography for Identity”, “Film for Identity”, “Dance for Identity”, “Architecture for Identity” and “Tango for Identity”.

Abuelas, and a precedent of what would become Teatro X la Identidad (TXI), the “artistic branch” of Abuelas since the year 2001.<sup>12</sup>

In the following sections I shall analyze the construction of meanings with respect to appropriation of minors and restitution of identity in a number of television spots, created by or in cooperation with Abuelas throughout the period 2000-2015. Considering the communication strategy over time, I shall ask: which continuities and transformations of these meanings on appropriation and restitution can be observed in these spots?

For this purpose, a selection of spots will be considered, which have been structured around the topics of name, blood and testimony. The research is based on conceptualizations of the figure of the name, drawn from an anthropological study on appropriation of minors (Da Silva Catela, 2005); secondly, it is based on the examination of the double axis of genetics and family, around which Abuelas has structured its institutional discourse on identity (Gatti, 2011); finally, it is based on the study of testimony in social memory as “one of the most appealing narrative settings ...,” since it “stages a biographical embodiment that diverts the ‘common language’ of historical collective reference toward the singular-personal” (Richard, 2002, p. 192). The methodological analysis of the spots is based on inquiry into the relationship and tensions among image (actions, characters, stage codes, relationship and gesture codes), word (slogans, resources, texts, narrator, dialogue, appeal to the audience, narration, description or argumentation) and music (genre, relation between genre and recipient, relation between elements of the soundtrack); it is also based on semiotic resources, such as the identification of rhetorical figures.

#### THE SPOTS AND DOUBT AS A MOBILIZING PRINCIPLE

Within the frame of the communication campaigns, Abuelas has launched, since the year 2000 and up to the present, a number of TV spots. These spots attempt to provoke doubt in an audience made of the generation of the appropriated grandchildren, and to raise awareness in

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<sup>12</sup> For further information, see Diz (2017).

society as a whole by appealing to well-known public personalities who endorse the cause; the spots also aim at persuading certain social sectors to provide information on possible cases of appropriation. According to Arreche in his study on *A propósito de la duda* (2000), a semi-mounted show that inaugurated TXI, doubt is a *mobilizing principle* “in the search for a path to the truth, which entails the restitution of the stolen identity” (Arreche, 2012, p. 115). The mobilizing principle of doubt aims at arousing suspicion regarding the naturalization of certain basic identity features, such as the name, last name, birth date, nationality and identity of the parents. This mobilizing principle was manifest in the title of the aforementioned first communication campaign of Abuelas *Do you know who you are?*, in which these spots were included.

Clarisa Veiga, Coordinator of the Press and Publicity Section of Abuelas,<sup>13</sup> relates that the spots were the result of teamwork in the area she represents, which is in charge of producing scripts and communication pieces. As well, this aspect usually involves the participation of recovered grandchildren, government agencies, theatrical performers and directors, and professionals in communication and advertisement who offer their collaboration. Each spot has been produced under different circumstances, in accordance with the historical context of the country, the age of the grandchildren searched for, the period of life through which the latter were going, and the dynamics and organization of the association. A few spots were suggested by professionals coming from the realm of film and advertisement, such as *Del otro lado del espejo* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2000), and *Entre todos te estamos buscando* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2014b). Others emerged as a result of ideas provided by the recovered grandchild Sabino Abdala, a professional in cinema, such as *Los nietos buscan a los nietos* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2011), and *Te espera* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2012). The last two spots released, *Resolvé tu identidad ahora* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2013) and *Busca la verdad* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2015), have been elaborated by the Press and Publicity Section of Abuelas with the advice of the Secretariat of Media of the government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, under the direction of actor and

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<sup>13</sup> Personal communication via email, Buenos Aires, April 15, 2016.

theater director Daniel Fanego, one of the founding members of TXI.

The spots began to be broadcasted on open TV channels following the appeal by Abuelas to various local and national governments for advertising funds to enable public welfare campaigns. First, the association obtained monies from the then Mayor of the City of Buenos Aires, Fernando de la Rúa, in the late nineties. Later, it obtained funds upon approval of the Law of Audiovisual Communication Services in 2009, during the government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

Most of these spots have been structured around the following thematic axes: the figure of the name, the rhetoric of blood and the resource of testimony. In the first spots of Abuelas, the message conveyed in a written or oral manner, was addressed to every singular young person through the use of colloquial and at the same time imperative language: “If you believe that you are a child of someone disappeared or you have doubts regarding your identity, contact the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo” (message included in several spots). A few spots included dramatizations, in which young non-professional actors performed the roles of appropriated grandchildren. “The exploration involved in working with non-professional actors is the highpoint in the search for credibility” (Verzero, 2014, p. 4). Other spots drew on the presence and the voice of relatives of appropriated young people, especially siblings. In the end, the spots provided the contact information of Abuelas: the phone number next to the institutional logo and, in some cases as well, the email address and the association website.

According to Veiga, the Press and Publicity Team usually deals with grandchildren who have approached the association themselves, in order to learn which message appealed to them and/or aroused their awareness, so that this information can be used to produce spots and create slogans that speak to the appropriated grandchildren.

In the year 2004, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Abuelas, the association launched a new communication campaign with the slogan “We are all together looking for you.” As opposed to the first campaign of Abuelas, which only aimed at young people who had doubts regarding their personal identities, this new campaign, according to the account of the association, sought to speak “also to their friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, workmates,



relatives: to their whole entourage” (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2007, p. 190). This campaign was based on an institutional experience according to which “the majority of the young people have gone through the painful search with the companionship of somebody who knew how to support them emotionally, but who also provided them with essential information to guide their search” (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2007, p. 190). In this manner, the family and social setting of the appropriated grandchildren seemed, from the perspective of the association, to be another means of communication between the grandchildren and the Abuelas. But, in addition, these spots included a mention of the period in which most part of the appropriations established by Abuelas had occurred: “If you were born between 1975 and 1980 you may be one of the 400 grandchildren we are looking for.” These dates aimed at speaking to the generation born between those years. This campaign and the following ones drew on the participation of Abuelas, recovered grandchildren, personalities in the performing arts<sup>14</sup> media and sport<sup>15</sup> and a number of personalities of the Catholic church.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *El Aplauso* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2006) includes a dramatization in which beachgoers begin to walk while clapping their hands to find the parents of a lost child. Clapping continues until a group of actors and actresses appears, together with well-known musicians, Abuelas and grandchildren who stand and clap. The spot ends with the slogan: “All together we are looking for you”.

<sup>15</sup> In *Hace 10 mundiales que te estamos buscando* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2014C), members of the Argentinean soccer team, together with Abuelas and a few grandchildren, pose for a photograph while they hold a flag with the slogan: “Resolve your identity now,” accompanied by the logo and the contact information of the association. Then, a few players hold a sign that reproduces what is written on the flag and say, while staring at the camera: “Come to Abuelas. We’ve been looking for you for 10 world cups.” The spot was issued during the commercial breaks of the games of the Brazil World Cup 2014.

<sup>16</sup> In *La fe mueve hacia la verdad* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2014d), the archbishop of the Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, Monsignor José María Arancedo, joined on each side by the President and Vice President of Abuelas

## KNOWLEDGE/LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE “TRUE” NAME

The first thematic axis to be analyzed is the name. “The name and the last name [evoke] ... an insertion in space and within specific relationships of consanguinity” (Da Silva Catela, 2005, p. 136). That space of belonging defines someone as a “person/individual at birth: a name, a genealogy, primordial ties and blood” (p. 137). However, the appropriated children of the disappeared were removed from that space, and inserted in a different one, as their appropriators registered them with other first and last names. In case of restitution of identity, a judicial process takes place, but also a personal process regarding the name, in order for the person to be reinserted in that genealogical, primordial and blood space he or she was taken away from. The recovered grandchild replaces the legal first and last names registered by their appropriators, with those given by the disappeared biological parents, unknown to them until that moment. “The names do not always last in the memory of the appropriated children; many times they are uncovered only thanks to witnesses of their births, or when the mothers transmitted the wish of giving such or such a name” (Da Silva Catela, 2005, p. 137). Perhaps because of this, spots structured around the thematic axis of the name generally intend to persuade the recipients of the message to question their identities, drawing on the duality knowledge/lack of knowledge of the “true” name, that is, the name given by the biological parents.

The spot *Del otro lado del espejo* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2000), constructs the idea of substituted identity as divided identity. The figure of an appropriated grandchild is embodied by a young non-professional actor. As it has been previously stated, the recourse

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respectively, reads a letter addressed imperiously to “those who might have information on the location of children or might know of clandestine burial places,” with the purpose of instilling within them a “moral obligation to turn to the pertinent authorities.” The spot ends by showing the following written statement: “Break the silence. If you have information on children of the disappeared, contact Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo.” This spot was based on evidence that at least two restituted grandchildren had been given up for adoption to the Movimiento Familiar Cristiano.

to a young non-professional actor aims at producing the maximal effect of reality and of self-identification within the young audience of grandchildren that Abuelas tries to speak to. The character of the grandson performs a sequence of routine actions: waking up, getting out of bed, washing up, drying himself and looking at his face in the mirror. The dramatization of the daily act of wakening functions as a metaphor. At the same time, it represents the trigger to the rising doubt with respect to identity. The character of the grandson is doubled in front of the mirror in which he is looking at himself, but the double has the appearance of a different young man. The figure of this young man stares at the grandson, as if waiting for a recognition that fails to occur. The camera moves to the other side of the mirror and the image remains black, conveying an effect of darkness, where it is impossible to see or to perceive, in this case, the status of having been appropriated. The purely instrumental music accompanying the images, performed on classical guitar, creates an effect of suspense. The grandson, both as character and as image, is called by two names: “Pedro exists. Mariano doesn’t know. His grandmother is still looking for him,” we hear in the voiceover spoken by a young non-professional actor. This sentence summarizes, through the use of verbs in the present tense and the image of two different subjects, the persistence of an identity that has been substituted for in the past. The lack of knowledge of the condition of appropriation is displaced and condensed in the lack of knowledge of the “true” name. The name of Pedro refers to the space of belonging and to the relationships of consanguinity to which the grandson belonged before being violated through the appropriation. However, that name continues to exist despite the condition of appropriation and the lack of knowledge on the part of the grandson. The grandmother appears as a third person introducing the broken relationship of blood with her grandson, through her present search, which is headed to an uncertain future of either finding or not finding.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Among other spots that, throughout the years, have continued to draw on the duality knowledge/lack of knowledge of the “true” name, the following two may be mentioned: in *Tatiana* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2006b), Tatiana Sfiligoy, a recovered granddaughter, introduces herself: “I know

## THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND LIFE STAGES OF THE GRANDCHILDREN

The second axis to be examined is that of blood or the rhetoric of blood. Rhetoric refers, among other meanings, to the “art of saying properly, of providing the written or oral language with enough effectiveness as to delight, persuade or touch” (as defined by the dictionary of the Real Academia Española, no date). Blood is a thematic axis that has a dominant place within the discourse of Abuelas, which “when it refers to identity draws on a double axis: genetics and family” (Gatti, 2011, p. 123). In this manner, most of the spots by Abuelas seek to touch the targeted audience and/or persuade them to put their identities into question through the reiterated audiovisual references to genetics and family. Such references are made through formal procedures resulting in the rhetoric of blood (a stroller, a lullaby, a home, a mother, a daughter, a baby, legacy).

In order to prove the genetic identity of the grandchildren alleged to have been appropriated, the Abuelas developed, throughout the eighties, the research and discovery of the index of “abuelidad” [grandparenthood] which has enabled them to reconstitute identities to many grandchildren:

The probability or the index of “abuelidad” is the probability that a particular set of grandparents might actually be the biological grandparents of a particular child. Since genes are inherited by children from parents, it is obvious that all genes present in an individual come from the four grandparents (Penchaszadeh, 2012, p. 269).

Nevertheless, this search policy of Abuelas “has become a policy of identity, which relies on the most conservative definition possible: identity is the preservation of what it is” (Gatti, 2011, p. 132). As a consequence:

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my name, my name is Tatiana and I know my origins because Abuelas have found me;” in *Andy Kusnetzoff y las Abuelas* (2010), the radio and TV host opens the spot with such statement: “My name is Andrés Kusnetzoff, but people call me Andy. You may not be bearing your true name”.

Any definition of identity that should take into consideration its lability (the play of gender, the flexibility of names, the ambiguity of territories, paradox and change) is expelled to the territory of wrong ideas (Gatti, 2011, p. 132).

However, the project “Biographical Family Archive of Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo,” which has the purpose of reconstructing life stories of the disappeared parents through the compilation of stories from family, friends, partners of militancy and captivity, photographs, letters and objects belonging to the parents, in order to make all this available to the children-grandchildren who recover their identities, counterbalances the essentialist conception of identity. “Balance prevails: the biological [element] meets the cultural. The family, the lineage, the saga and finally, the powerful rhetoric of authenticity, come to complete what is inscribed in everyone in a permanent manner: the genetic trace” (Gatti, 2011, p. 145).<sup>18</sup>

Among the group of spots structured around the rhetoric of blood, we may observe that the passage of time is taken into account by Abuelas. This process entails the acknowledgement of a change in the biological age of the grandchildren, and the ways in which the biological family continued to look for them, while due consideration is given to the passage of time.

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<sup>18</sup> There are wide discussions on the interrelations between the biological and cultural dimensions of identity, especially within feminist criticism and gender studies, since the crisis of the “politics of identity” in the nineties. For example, since the appearance of Judith Butler’s works onward, it has been stated that the “biological” can be narrated or “read” culturally: the possibility of finding new meaning to who we are. This is very important in the case of the children of the disappeared, who have been appropriated and recovered. In this respect, discussions took place within the association H.I.J.O.S., whether it should only include the biological children of the disappeared or anyone who might sympathize with their political struggle. In the case of Abuelas, in the mid-nineties other people joined their institutional work; not only biological relatives of the disappeared and of the appropriated children, but also people who felt close to them and personalities associated with culture, the arts and the media, in order to render publicly visible the cause of the association.

In the spot *El cochecito* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2002), the camera progressively moves closer until the present image of an object belonging to the childhood past comes to the forefront: a stroller located on the right side of an empty and dark space, but still illuminated by a twilight area that comes from a window that remains outside the frame. In this spot two new dualities are configured and articulated: absence/presence and darkness/light. The stroller has a synecdochic relation to the grandchild, as if it were the part present of the absent whole. The darkness of a past of persistent repression and absence contrasts with the light, even though shadowy, aiming at making such absence present. In the background, a melody played on a piano, resembling a lullaby, reinforces the evocation of the past time of childhood. The voiceover by a woman, personifies a grandmother who addresses, in a colloquial manner through the use of the second-person singular, her appropriated grandson for whom she is looking: “Even though you do not fit in your stroller anymore, there will always be a place for you in our home and in our hearts.” By this means, the sentence condenses and reaffirms the transformation of the image held by Abuelas of the grandchildren as infants, into the new image of them as young people. However, the use of the future tense refers to the permanence in time of the expectation and affection of the “we,” the biological family, as regards the possibility of finding the grandchild.

Over time and after generational renewal, the image built by Abuelas of their grandchildren as young people would be replaced by a new image of them as adults; more specifically, as parents. The spot *Resolvé tu identidad ahora* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2013) includes a dramatization in which there appear the characters of a female appropriator, now a grandmother, her appropriated daughter, already an adult with a baby of her own, and a woman pediatrician. The latter asks a number of questions to the appropriator and to her appropriated daughter, with the aim of finding out whether there have been cases of serious disease in the family.

In addition, this spot presents two innovations: firstly, Abuelas pretends to speak to the audience of appropriators; secondly, it aims at conveying the idea that genetics may transmit not only identity in biological terms, but also susceptibility to certain maladies. The

spot ends with the following statement, uttered by a well-known broadcaster: “Do not leave your son the legacy of doubt.” Meanwhile, instrumental music performed on a piano and resembling a lullaby, accompanies the image of the daughter-mother rocking the baby in her arms. The statement addresses, in an imperative and colloquial manner, the generation of children born between the years 1975 and 1980, who have become parents and are now urged to resolve doubts regarding their identities.

Here the duality knowledge/ignorance reappears but, in this case, in respect to the familial legacy in biological terms. The spot configures a sort of warning to that generation of children-grandchildren who have become mothers and fathers, but also to the appropriators who, in the past considered themselves “good parents” because they were able to give a “proper upbringing” to the children of the “subversive”—an upbringing that involved preventing the latter from transmitting the legacy of “subversion” to the children, and in raising and educating them within Western and Christian values. Thus the (lack of) knowledge of genetic identity entails (ir)responsibility as mothers and fathers for the present and future health of their children; and, in the case of the appropriators, for the present and future health of their “grandchildren.”

With regard to this spot, Mirtha Legrand, a well-known Argentinean television host who sympathizes with the last military dictatorship,<sup>19</sup> once said in her show *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand*: “There is a very good spot on diabetes running on TV”.<sup>20</sup> When one of her guests explained that it was actually a spot of Abuelas, she dismissed that fact and did not express any interest in it. This example shows that these spots did not confront significant political resistance or communicational difficulties, since Abuelas has succeeded in the construction of social legitimacy around its cause throughout the years. This construction of legitimacy had much to do with the development of an institutional policy by Abuelas with respect to the media, which consisted in creating

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<sup>19</sup> In 1978, two years after the last Argentinean civic-military dictatorship begun, Mirtha Legrand called dictator Videla “president” and denounced an “anti-Argentinean campaign” by human rights agencies.

<sup>20</sup> Program issued on April 21, 2014.

its own archival materials to be made available to all those who wished to know about the appropriation of children and their search.

Also, most of these spots were produced during the period labeled as the “institutionalization of memory” or “institutionalization of remembrance” in Argentina (2003-2015), when claims for memory, truth and justice by human rights agencies were gradually incorporated into public policies within the national State. Such a memorial context enabled the official re-legitimization of the cause of Abuelas as a cause that went beyond any partisan scenario, since it was a case of grandmothers’ looking for their grandchildren, promoting the right to identity of all men and women who, due to different factors, might have suffered the violation of such a right.

#### SINGULAR-PERSONAL STORIES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE “WE”

The third thematic axis to be studied is that of testimony. The first-person account articulates the voice and the image of a protagonist or a real witness of the facts narrated, and seeks to transmit a singular-personal experience with the purpose of persuading a certain audience to believe in the truth of such account. Nevertheless, in the spot *El que busca a su hermano* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2014a), the voiceover of a female narrator who tells in the first person the story of the kidnapping of her parents and her brother is disarticulated from another image in which we see a young woman who does not talk. Here, the fact that the voice and the image correspond to the same person is called into question; moreover, the fact that the voice and/or image might correspond to the protagonist or real witness of the story narrated is subject to suspicion:

My name is Mariana, I am 27 years old. I am looking for my brother. He was kidnapped together with my mom and my dad at the beginning of 1977. Now he is 25 years old already. Maybe my brother is afraid. Afraid to face the truth. Afraid that something might happen to him or to the people he lives with. But I need to talk to him. Because I am afraid too. I am afraid that we might never find each other.



In this spot we observe that the passage of time is also registered; in this case, through the figure of the siblings of the appropriated children of the disappeared. The grandchildren continue to be represented as young characters and addressed to as a young audience. In the voiceover, the female narrator does not mention her last name and there is no reference to the names or to photographs of her disappeared parents and/or her appropriated brother. There is only an archival image of a moving Ford Falcon reflected on a mirror, which dyes the whole surface to green and functions as symbol of kidnapping operations during the last Argentinean civic-military dictatorship. Hence, it could well be stated that this spot uses testimony as a device to construct a particular story, but void of singularities, with the purpose of representing in a universal manner the diversity of stories of young people looking for their siblings.

In this sense, the spot also includes a dramatization incorporating the performance of young non-professional actors. The young woman looks at herself in the aforementioned mirror, on which the image of the car is reflected. This action creates the idea of giving the back to that traumatic past, of which the effects and consequences, however, persist in the present through the absence of and search for the brother. There also appears a young man embodying the appropriated sibling. Images of the faces of both characters appear in an alternation, which connotes separation. Their faces externalize a feeling of sadness in the corners of their lips and in their heads, bowed down at times. In the background, instrumental music, performed on a violin, reinforces the effect. An interplay of gazes between both characters is reproduced: the gaze of the young woman seeks out that of the young man, which is addressed somewhere else, looks down, is diverted or wanders off. This interplay evokes the meaning of a failed search for recognition. In the end, even though the close-ups of their faces are set together, the young man faces the camera, while the young woman remains with her eyes nearly closed. This image creates an effect of encounter and non-encounter at the same time. A play of lights and shadows is set against the black-and-white clothing worn by both young persons. This sequence generates a sensation of simultaneous possibility and impossibility of rendering the appropriated brother visible, of understanding where or how to search for him, or resolving the doubt around identity.

The account of the young woman draws on the feeling of fear caused by uncertain identity. According to the information drawn up and spread by Abuelas, the young people who express doubts regarding their identities are afraid to prove not only that they have been appropriated, but also that their appropriators might be responsible for or accomplices in the death and disappearance of their biological parents; afraid of losing the affection of their appropriators, or that these might go to prison after the crime of appropriation is proved. But the account also configures the idea that such feeling is not limited to the young ones who express doubts on their identities, but it is also present in their siblings. This spot draws on the feeling of fear in order for those young people who doubt their identities to feel identified and persuaded to overcome apprehension and resolve their doubts.

A similar procedure of drawing on the articulation between singular/universal representations may be observed in the spot *Los nietos buscan a los nietos* (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2011). As opposed to the previous spot, this one draws not only on the articulation between voice and image, but also on performances by real protagonists instead of actors. This spot features the faces and voices of a number of recovered grandchildren, in order to target the audience of appropriated grandchildren as young adults who might identify with the recovered grandchildren, since they may share their age, doubts and fears. This spot can be conceived as a *performance*<sup>21</sup> (Taylor, 1997, 2011), that is, a strategy enacted on the stage to render the figure of the recovered grandchildren publicly visible, with a script prepared in advance by Abuelas. Its purpose is to transmit the association's knowledge, memories and construction of meanings with regard to the crime of appropriation of minors and the restitution of identity.

This spot establishes an interplay of shots and colors that configures an equation between the past and the present. The equation produces the image of the destroyed blood relationship between the generation of

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<sup>21</sup> Taylor conceives *performances* as strategies reenacted on stage, following a certain script (1997), which “function as vital transference acts transmitting social knowledge, memory and sense of identity through reiterated actions” (2011, p. 20).

the children-grandchildren (present faces and voices in the foreground and in color) and the generation of the disappeared parents (faces photographed in the past are displayed in the background in black and white). The figures of the grandchildren are individualized through the appearance of their faces alternatively on the left and right side of the screen, through self-presentation in the first person while they face and stare at the camera, and through the mentioning of the names given to those speaking by their disappeared biological parents: “I am Mariana”, “I am Carlos”, “I am Manuel”, “I am Juan Pablo”, “I am Matías”, “I am Victoria”, “I am Marcos”, “I am Francisco”, “I am Sabino”. This choral format of faces and voices realized in a coordinated manner is repeated in order to configure and transmit an institutional message. The phrases that are part of this message are pronounced by each one of these grandchildren as if they were the pieces of a puzzle: “We are grandchildren who have recovered our identity thanks to the struggle of Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo”; “the dictatorship has stolen us from our families”; “there are still 400 unfound grandchildren who do not know their true identity”; “nor do they know with how much love their families are still looking for them”; “knowing the truth has given us the possibility of choice”; “learn your truth, come to Abuelas”; “we are all looking for you”. This message is accompanied by the sound of single chords played on a classic guitar; in the end, chords come together to create a melody. This device reinforces the choral format and the image of puzzle pieces. The image not only points to the verbal institutional message, but also to the grandchildren pronouncing it, as pieces of a puzzle that is being completed with recovered grandchildren, but remains incomplete because of those still unfound.

In this manner, the singular-personal element of each story is diluted in favor of a construction of a “we” that unifies them in order to render a collective story publicly visible: that of the appropriated grandchildren who have been recovered thanks to the institutional work of Abuelas.

## CONCLUSIONS

In sum, we may observe that the spots structured around the thematic axis of the name draw on the duality knowledge/lack of knowledge of

the “true” name, that is, the name given by the biological parents. In the case of the spots using the rhetoric of blood, the themes have changed throughout the years while following the changing life stages of the addressees, the appropriated grandchildren. Finally, the spots drawing on testimony produce a displacement from the fictional realm to the real and articulate singular/universal modes of representation. These spots seek to make the figure and the collective story of the recovered grandchildren publicly visible, as well as those of the siblings of recovered grandchildren as mediators and transmitters of the institutional messages of Abuelas to the audience of the appropriated grandchildren.

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