

Néstor in the Sky With Diamonds

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FILM REVIEW

To say that Argentine society, as things stand right now on the Political front, is fragmented into multiple splinters wouldn't be close to the truth. There are some who prefer the term "polarized," more assuaged but rather euphemistic. There's a third option, much harsher but perhaps more accurate: the country is not fragmented or polarized — it's fractured.



These days there seems to be no middle ground in Argentina: you're either pro-K (even ultra-K) or anti-K, easily equated with "gorila" or "gorilazo" (slang for ultraconservative).

Reflecting the rift between hardliners on either side of the divide, the dichotomy comes to the fore today with the release of the documentary *Néstor Kirchner, la película*.

Right or wrong, biography as a genre, when tackled by a writer or documentary-maker with a clear affinity with the subject, is often dismissed as hagiography (i.e. foregrounding the positive aspects and downplaying the negative sides, or simply obliterating the inconvenient truth).

Perpetrators of this kind of elision would rather call the process "editing out." Editing, of course, is inevitable and inherent to the craft of filmmaking, the usual ratio being 1:3 — one take used for every three shots, mostly in the days, not so far removed, when 35mm negative was used and there was no possibility of "recycling" the film stock that ended on the cutting floor.

The arrival of digital technology is not without its advantages: unlike analog film, the digital format allows directors, editors and technical crew to manipulate the images as needed, and there's no waste of valuable film stock.

Editing is of paramount importance in weaving the narrative thread of a film. Good editing enhances a good product or turns a wreck of raw footage into a fairly watchable movie. Conversely, a botched editing job may ruin the disassembled pieces of a potential masterpiece.

Editing is put to very clever use in *Néstor Kirchner. La película*. Directed by Paula de Luque — a self-avowed Kirchnerite — the documentary, which rolls into 120 movie theatres across Argentina today, was put together using over 600 hours of home footage and public recordings compacted into a 100-minute movie that reads more like a series of flashbacks rather than a piece of linear narrative.

An intelligent choice, this one, since director De Luque had to distance herself from the previous, unreleased (rejected, perhaps?) version first commissioned to and eventually made by renowned filmmaker Adrián Caetano.

This is mere speculation on the part of this critic, since Mr. Caetano's film was never made available to either audiences or reviewers, and is likely to remain in the dark until historical revision calls for full assessment of former president Néstor Kirchner's likeness and

legacy.

Fully aware that, in political terms, there are no grey areas and perhaps no room for debate at a time when you're either for or against a controversial political-economic model, director De Luque has articulated the narrative of *Néstor Kirchner, la película* around a vertical axis, with a series of zigzagging testimonies and documentary footage.

Her strategy, then, wisely eschews linear development and emphasizes concept over strict chronology. As Ms. De Luque herself assertively states, reaction to the movie will depend not so much on cinematic value but rather on political affiliation. Kirchnerites will certainly love this flattering portrait. Flattering, but almost never over the top, save for a few instances in which the movie's political message is blatantly thrown in your face.

But for the most part, the personal testimonies and film footage strike a balance – provided that you're on the “right” side of the track, or that you're equipped with the capacity to discern propaganda from narrative device.

De Luque's carefully calculated approach to the subject is clearly aimed at creating empathy with the man, not the politician, bringing him closer to the people and, on occasion, eulogizing his deeds in isolation, ignoring parallel criticism or diverging views. As stated before, Kirchnerites will love this meticulous selection of key moments in the personal and political life of Néstor Kirchner, his family, friends and comrades.

On the opposite of the spectrum, non-Ks will viscerally reject what may be viewed as a sanitized, highly idealized version of Néstor Kirchner's life and his mission on Earth.

What neither side will be able to properly assess — not for a long time — is the artistic and technical approach Ms. De Luque has gone for in her depiction of Néstor Kirchner, necessarily emphasizing the good while bluntly ignoring the potentially negative side of things.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Néstor Kirchner, la película. Argentina, 2012. In Spanish. Written by: Paula de Luque and Carlos Polimeni. Historical research: Ricardo Forster. Cinematography: Marcelo Iaccarino. Editing: César Custodio. Music: Gustavo Santaolalla, Iván Wyszogrod. Distributed by: Distribution Company. NR. Running time: 100 minutes.