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***Cultural Repression and Artistic Resistance: The Case of last's Argentinean Dictatorship***

Mathilde Arrigoni, PhD Candidate, Sciences Po Paris (CERI)

[mathilde.arrigoni@gmail.com](mailto:mathilde.arrigoni@gmail.com)

Elodie M. Bordat, PhD Candidate, Science Po Aix-en-Provence (CHERPA)

[bordat.elodie@gmail.com](mailto:bordat.elodie@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT**

In this paper, we propose an analysis of the types, methods and justifications of cultural repression during Argentina's last dictatorship (1976-1983). Through the example of book repression, we demonstrate that the State's cultural repression was organized, systematic, fierce and well financed. We will also see that its methods had been previously developed during Onganía's dictatorship (1966-1973), and the last democratic regime (1973-1976).

During Argentina's last dictatorship, the regime justified its recourse to cultural repression mainly by drawing on the arguments of fighting "subversion" and the Marxism threat. Two types of cultural repression actions can be distinguished: legal and clandestine. The regime looked for legal justifications in order to ban, forbid and burn thousands of books (Invernizzi, Gociol, 2007; Rodriguez 2010). On the other hand, it carried out undercover operations to persecute, threaten and "disappear" hundreds of writers. The scale of "Clarity Operation" (which identified, spied and "disappeared" teachers, artists and writers) shows the importance of the culture for the regime, a domain particularly prone to "subversion".

This paper analyses the mechanisms of cultural repression, led by the Home Office and the Education and Culture Secretariat. These bodies followed a procedure of censorship: examination of the books by intellectuals; evaluation of their degree of dangerousness; publication of a decree banishing them; withdrawal of copies in libraries and bookshops; and, sometimes, outright burning of the books.

Subsequently, we will focus on a new experience of artistic protest under the authoritarian rule: *Teatro Abierto*. The Argentinian playwright Osvaldo Dragun created in 1981 with twenty of his colleagues a festival of theatre which lasted two months and released twenty-one plays. Each one tackled the *Proceso* and its drifts with different practices – metaphors, time and space shifts, etc. In order to analyse this experience, we chose to combine two new methodological approaches in social science. First, we will propose a dramatic art analyse to understand how the theatre can be political: which elements the playwrights used to get round the censorship? Which stage elements the directors gave priority to? Secondly, we will link this analyse with the approach developed by James Jasper, who reintroduced the emotions in the studies of collective action. But we will move away his conception of the emotions, considering that they are not only the reason why the actors commit themselves, but that they are a protest. The emotions are not only a factor of explanation; we will see that they are the protest we must explain. We will ask which emotions *Teatro Abierto* produced in order to protest in a society paralyzed by anxiety.

## Cultural Repression and Artistic Resistance: The Case of last's Argentinean Dictatorship

### Introduction

Since its independence from Spain, Argentina has known a pendulum system that alternated dictatorship and democratic governments<sup>1</sup>. However the last dictatorship was somewhat exceptional. The regime expressed its will to remain in power indefinitely, its main goal being to reorganize the entire society<sup>2</sup>. This transformation came with an arsenal of repressive measures. The State became a terrorist. According to Human Rights associations, there were more or less 30 000 victims or *desaparecidos*<sup>3</sup> between 1976 in 1983. Beside workers, the most severely affected citizens were students, journalists and intellectuals<sup>4</sup>.

In this paper we will shed light on the procedures of cultural repression, especially on books and writers, which left a lasting mark on the Argentinean subconscious. We will illustrate how the regime systematically organized a severe cultural repression on art works and artists. This repression had well-defined objectives, substantial human resources and an important budget. We will underline the fact that artists and their productions were criminalized and punished as severely as political opponents. Even cultural practices as idiosyncratic as tango, literature and cinema were censure, leading to the decline of many industries<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, thousands of writers, intellectuals and artists were condemned to silence, forced to exile<sup>6</sup> and “disappeared”. Despite of this fierce and systematic repression, a protesting cultural movement managed to emerge: *Teatro Abierto*.

In 1981, spurred on notably by Osvaldo Dragun, twenty-one playwrights joined twenty-one stage-directors to defend their right of speech, show the dynamism of Argentinean drama, and also expose the drifts and errors of the *Proceso*; they gathered over 150 actors to create *Teatro Abierto*, a festival of twenty-one half-an-hour long plays. By the end of a week of representations, the military that feared the success and the subversive power of the experiment, set the theatre-house on fire. That was to ignore that as many as seventeen other theatre-houses would come forward to produce the plays and that repression would be the best publicity stunt for the group among the inhabitants of Buenos Aires who soon rushed to the five *cuadras* to see the representations. Prompted by this success and in spite of internal divisions which, from 1983 – a year of democratic transition – imposed a new setting-up of the group and definition of its objectives, *Teatro Abierto* survived until 1986, its format changing every year. In 1982, the organizers launched a drama competition; in 1983, the main innovation was the notion of working-team: every team, made up of several producers et actors, were to stage a play in keeping with the general theme, an illustration of the seven years of the *Proceso*. In 1984, there was no event, but none of the members I interviewed could give me a similar reason for this cancellation. In 1985 and 1986, *Teatro Abierto* became an open-air theatre, responding to the slogan of Latin-America unity and the celebration of democracy. We will focus here on year 1981.

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<sup>1</sup> There were military dictatorship in 1930-32, 1943-1946, 1955-1958, 1962-1963, 1966-1973.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Soledad Catoggio, « La dernière dictature militaire argentine (1976-1983) : La conception du terrorisme d'État », *Encyclopédie en ligne des violences de masse*, pp. 1-20, [accessed on ligne 30 january 2011] URL : <http://www.massviolence.org/La-derniere-dictature-militaire-argentine-1976-1983-La>

<sup>3</sup> Means “disappeared” in Spanish. It refers particularly to the victims clandestinely kidnapped and killed during the last dictatorship.

<sup>4</sup> 30% of the missing persons were workers, 21% students, 5,7% professors, 1,6% actors and artists more than a hundred of journalists were disappeared. CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, Buenos Aires, 1984.

<sup>5</sup> During peronism there were 600 tango's orchestra, after the *Coup*, only 10 remained.

<sup>6</sup> There were between 20 and 40 000 political exiles, Marcos Novaro, Vincente Parlermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983. Del golpe de Estado a la restauración democrática*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2003, p. 76.

## **The mechanisms of Cultural Repression during the Argentinean last dictatorship: the case of Books and Writers**

How should we study cultural repression perpetrated by States? How can we apprehend and analyse cultural repression mechanisms used in Argentina? There is a scarcity of social science analysis focused on these events. Most documents that show that the systematic cultural repression was something planned and systematic were hidden or destroyed by militaries before they left the power. So, we have used several reports from human right's association and testimonies from writers, documentaries and movies to attempt to reconstruct the processes involved.

We will shed light onto the different types of repression used by the Argentinean *Junta* in the last dictatorship named *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*, we will then underline the justifications and methods used by the *Proceso* to carry out the cultural repression.

### **Different Types of Statal Cultural Repression**

«The history of reading is the history of readers' persecution»<sup>7</sup>.  
Mempo Giardinelli

The regime created legal justifications in order to ban, forbid and sometimes destroy thousands books, records and magazines. On the other hand, the military carried out undercover operations to persecute, threaten and “disappear” hundreds of writers and artists and many more citizens. The cultural repression, much like the rest of the repression, was organized, systematic, fierce and well financed. In this section we will analyse two types of cultural repressions: legal and clandestine.

### ***The Engineering of the System of Legal Cultural Repression***

In the sixties, vanguard artists created cultural expressions around their political compromises against power. It was the “cultural modernization”. Several of those artists were close to the Peronist ideology<sup>8</sup>. During Onganía's dictatorship (1966-73), several methods of cultural repression were engineered to coordinate the severe censorship of this type of art. Evidence shows that the military wanted their actions to be legal and therefore legitimized, so they enacted several laws to justify their actions. The first two were the National Defense law (16.970/66) and the Communist Actions Repression and Prevention law (17.401/66). Law 16.970's third article was so vague that it enabled large-scale repression: “The National Defense includes the set of means adopted by the State in order to achieve national security”<sup>9</sup>. The second law was justified by the “legal vacuum” with regards to the communist threat. In the first article of this law, we could read this tautological definition of communists: “Will be considered communist the physical persons [...] which realize activities proven as undeniably motivated by communist ideology”<sup>10</sup>.

These laws were followed by a third, which modified the Post Office Law (16.984/66). According to this legal measure, the National Post Office would not admit material (books, paintings, photographs, etc.) containing communist propaganda. The law also settled that this material could be burned. In 1971, a decree created a commission to

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<sup>7</sup> « La historia de la lectura es la historia de la persecución de los lectores ».

<sup>8</sup> Silvia Sigal, *Le rôle politique des intellectuels en Amérique latine*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Hernán Invernizzi, Judith Gociol, *Un golpe a los libros, represión a la cultura durante la última dictadura military*, Buenos Aires, Eudeba, 2002, p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> « Serán calificados como comunistas las personas físicas [...] que realicen actividades comprobadas de indudable motivación ideológicas comunistas ».

“qualify” the material entering in mail services in order to “implement common mean to protect public decency, peace, tranquility and the country’s sovereignty”<sup>11</sup>. At first, members of this commission had to have a university degree, but a year after, a modification allowed members of the Armed Forces to join the commission without the initial requirement. The military wanted to control every aspect of cultural repression.

During Perón’s second government (1973-74), an Anti-Subversive law (20840) was approved. It enacted that any person attempting to disturb the institutional order would be imprisoned from 3 to 8 years. Censorship and repression of left-wing Peronists became more severe when López Rega assumed power<sup>12</sup>, during Isabel Perón’s government.

In 1976, the *Proceso* arrived at the *Casa Rosada*<sup>13</sup>. The State’s cultural action was conceived in opposition to Perón’s: working class cultural practices [*culturas populares*] - theater, popular legend workshops, tango - were not privileged anymore, but considered “subversive”.

The legal cultural repression of art works - such as books, films or magazines - was implemented by national, regional and local decrees. Two days after the *Coup*, the Military toughened the 20.840 law and severely punished each attempt “to offend or threaten” a military. But they still considered their legal engineering incomplete: a “legal vacuum” concerning subversive texts needed to be filled. The Military used supraconstitutional means: the *Proceso*’s Acts. It became legal to censure or destroy any book containing values opposed to those the Military tried to transmit. Their censorship measures also relied on the Constitution’s 23<sup>rd</sup> article on the State of Emergency.

Several statal institutions applied cultural regulation, control and repression: the Home Office and the Education and Culture Ministry. Yet above all, censorship was centralized in the Home Office that hosted the National Publication Department. The General Direction of Legal Affairs ensured the legality of the *Juntas*’ actions. *Figure 1* illustrates the institutional organization of cultural repression.

The Military considered that culture was the best way to transmit “subversive ideologies”<sup>14</sup>. So they created several tools to teach citizens how to “recognize” a subversive student or professor<sup>15</sup>. In 1979, the Culture and Education Ministry created a commission that recommended textbooks without ideological content and oriented authors and editors. Some university courses such as cinema, music or painting were closed, so were arts schools. The Secretary of Culture, Francisco A. Carcavallo even advised museum directors to expose only artists who had past away at least thirty years before. A re-education process was underway, legitimized by the Dispensability law [*ley de Prescindibilidad*].

Despite of all those decrees, there was no “censorship law” and the regime denied the existence of any censorship in the art. It also recurrently denied kidnapping and threatening writers and artists.

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<sup>11</sup> In 1973, a new Mail Law was adopted (20.216). It allowed the National Post Office to intercept sendings with forbidden content. Those are some books that were censored: E. Fromm, *Marx y su Concepción del hombre* ; S. Liberovici, *Cantos de la nueva Resistencia Española* ; E. Martínez Estrada, *Mi experiencia cubana*.

<sup>12</sup> In 1974, a bomb destroyed twenty five thousand copies of Henri Lefevre’s book, *El marxismo*.

<sup>13</sup> *Casa rosada* is the name of the building that shelters the presidency.

<sup>14</sup> Francisco Ángel Carcavallo, *Revista de Educación*, 1, n° 1, La Plata, Ministerio de Educación, pp. 153-156 cited by Laura Graciela Rodríguez, « La educación artística y la política cultural durante la última dictadura militar en Argentina (1976-1983) », *Arte, Individuo y Sociedad*, 2010, 22 (1), 59-74, p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> Laura Graciela Rodríguez, « La educación artística... », *op. cit.*, p. 62.

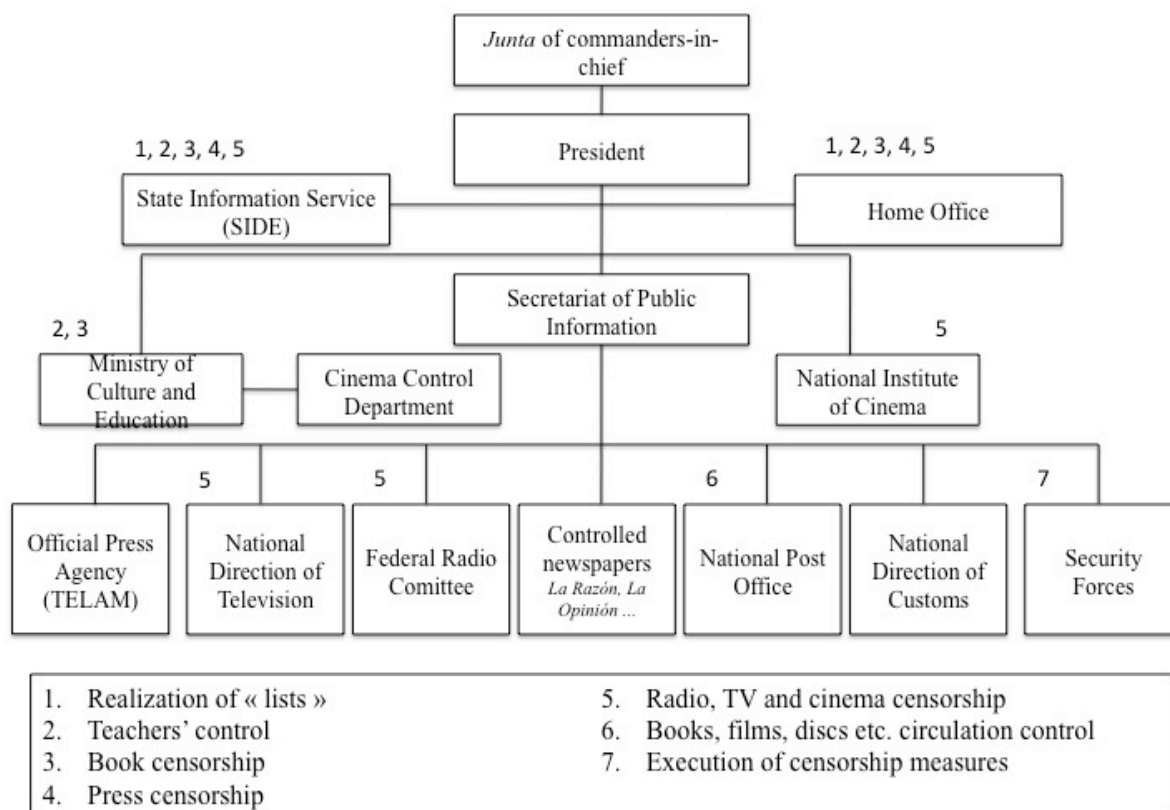


Figure 1. *The Organization of Cultural Repression* (source: AIDA, p.14)

### ***The Origins of Clandestine Repression***

Much like its legal counterpart, clandestine repression began during Onganía's government, during which dozens were disappeared<sup>16</sup>. During Isabela Perón's repression against the *Montoneros*<sup>17</sup>, many citizens also disappeared. However, the bureaucratization of the disappearance of people in statal installations all over the country started in 1976<sup>18</sup>. Then onwards, the disappearance became the repression technique, *par excellence*, what has later been labeled "State terrorism". As the *Junta* denied the existence of censorship, they denied the existence of political repression. General Videla and General Viola even declared to the Organization of American States' Inter American Human Rights Commission that there was not a single political prisoner in Argentina<sup>19</sup>. In fact, some political prisoners were presented like regular criminals and other were simply hidden in Clandestine Detention Centers (CDCs) and became *desaparecidos*. While the *Junta* denied the *desaparecidos*'s existence, they enacted the 22.068 law in September 1978, in order to shirk their responsibility. People missing could be convened by relatives or the Public Ministry, and declared dead if they had not appeared in the three following month<sup>20</sup>. In some cases, the CDCs were already detention centers, in others, they were civilian buildings or administration offices. Each center

<sup>16</sup> Eduardo Luis Duhalde, *El Estado Terrorista Argentino. Quince años después, una mirada crítica*, Buenos Aires, Eudeba, 1999, p 39-40, cited by M. S. Catoggio, « La dernière dictature militaire argentine (1976-1983) », *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Guerrilla* association close to left-wing Peronism, which led an armed conflict between 1970 and 1979.

<sup>18</sup> María Soledad Catoggio, « La dernière dictature militaire argentine (1976-1983) », *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, Buenos Aires, CONADEP, 1984, p. 46.

<sup>20</sup> AIDA, *Argentine, Une culture interdite. Pièces à conviction 1976-81*, Paris, François Maspero, 1981, p. 164.

depended of one of the three Forces (Air Force, Naval Force, Earth Force)<sup>21</sup>. In *Buenos Aires 1977*, a movie directed by Adrián Caetano (2007), we see prisoners detained in a civilian house.

The *Nunca Más* report<sup>22</sup> notably underlines that kidnapping, torture and death were political tools in the *Juntas*' hands, and that humans rights were systematically violated by the State and with the same methods across the country. One of the main goals of that report was to prove that the repression was not the result of individual excesses but rather the outcome of a systematic strategy organized by the State. Several movies<sup>23</sup> filmed during the first years of democracy describe the blindness of this repression: in *La noche de los lápices* (directed by Héctor Olivera, 1985) we can see the true story about the kidnapping and disappearance of ten students in La Plata who were asking for price reductions on bus tickets. In *La Historia Oficial* (directed by Luis Puenzo, 1985), a woman is kidnapped and tortured because she went to school with a presumed "subversive" man.

So an important part of State repression was illegitimate and hidden by the Forces. We will now analyse how the *Proceso* justified its repression.

### **The State's Justifications for the Cultural Repression**

It must be clear that the events of the 24<sup>th</sup> of March do not solely represent the fall of a Government. They represent, on the contrary, the end of an historical cycle and the opening of a new one, whose task will be characterized by reorganizing the Nation<sup>24</sup>.  
General Videla

The last dictatorship gained power thanks to the praetorian character of Argentinean society that accepted Military participation in politics. When constitutional order loses legitimacy and the democratic State enters in crisis, force becomes the best solution. In such a manner, the *Junta* led by General Videla came to power. Here, we will shed light on the two main arguments put forward by the regime in order to justify its recourse to cultural repression: countering the Marxist threat and fighting "subversion".

### ***The Fight Against the Marxist Threat***

The discursive strategy of the Armed Forces was to legitimize its intervention in the political sphere. So the regime created military strategies in order to find Marxism in all its forms, wherever it lay. As journalists, writers, artists and students were particularly dangerous according to the *Proceso*, it created a specific program in order to identify and spy on education, art and culture professionals: this was labeled the Clarity Operation [*Operación Claridad*]. There was a secret list with 231 names of artists and writers that was only discovered in 1996<sup>25</sup>. The Clarity Operation was in charge of detecting the Marxist literature and getting rid of it.

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<sup>21</sup> The most infamous centers were: the Army's Mechanic school in Buenos Aires (ESMA) which is now a museum, *Campo de Mayo* and the *Perla* in Córdoba.

<sup>22</sup> The National Commission of Disappeared Persons (CONADEP) led by writer Ernesto Sabato, published in 1984 the first report that investigated the repression during the last dictatorship: *Nunca Más* [never again]. It demonstrated and illustrated, with more than a thousand testimonies, all the exactions perpetrated by the military regime.

<sup>23</sup> We can also mention *Un muro de silencio* (Litsa Stantic, 1993) about the *desaparecidos*, *Sur* (Fernando Solanas, 1988) which tells the story of a prisoner and his family.

<sup>24</sup> « Pero debe quedar claro que los hechos acaecidos el 24 de marzo no materializaran solamente la caída de un gobierno. Significan, por el contrario, el cierre definitivo de un ciclo histórico y la apertura de uno nuevo, cuya característica estará dada por la tarea de reorganizar la Nación... ». *La Prensa*, 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1976.

<sup>25</sup> Valeria Zurano, *Operación Claridad*, Buenos Aires, Ramos Conspira, 2009.

For example, all the books that came from the Argentinean Society of Cultural Relationships with the USSR were automatically censored because such books used “Leninist-Marxist” ideologies. Books with references to “class struggle”, “historic materialism” or authors like Engels, Gramsci, Lenin, or Amin meant Marxist content and had to be destroyed. In the decree banning Paulo Freire’s books<sup>26</sup> from schools and libraries we can read: “its works are used to insert the Marxist ideology into schools, [...] this pedagogical doctrine undermines the fundamental values of our occidental and Christian society”<sup>27</sup>.

*Proceso*’s second enemy was the highly subjective notion of “subversion”, which, as we will see, was subject to all sorts of interpretations.

### ***The Fight Against Subversion***

“They [the terrorists] have used and keep using all possible and imaginable means to achieve their objectives: press, engaged songs, comic books, folklore, literature, cinema, university chairs, religion, and they have tried, without success, to create a climate of panic”.

Admiral Armando Lambruschini<sup>28</sup>.

As the movie *La Historia Oficial* shows, most people ignored the extent of the repression, and believed that those arrested were guilty [*por algo sera*] or “subversive”. Subversion was understood as “the process of loosing the sense of tradition” or “the attack to the most genuine sources of ‘national culture’”<sup>29</sup>.

The Military found “subversive content” where they could find concepts such as “questioning of family order”, “unionization”, “abortion” and “sexual liberty”<sup>30</sup>. Two children books written by Elsa I. Bornemann and Agnes Rosenstiehl were banned because “those books lead to an attitude which affected family, morality, the human being and society, [...] these [were] tales for children with indoctrination objectives which facilitated work for later subversive ideological action”<sup>31</sup>. In some occasions, fighting against subversion meant fighting for western and Christian values<sup>32</sup>. Mario Vargas Llosa was censored because he “made several offenses against family, religious and military institutions”<sup>33</sup>. Similarly, in Alvaro Yunque’s banning decree, his book *Niños de hoy* is said to affect “domestic institutions and the values they transmit, and this attitude leads to social disintegration as destructive as violent actions”<sup>34</sup>. So ideas can be as dangerous as bombs. Even in children’s books.

As subversion could be hidden behind everything, the regime looked for it everywhere: posters, novels, textbooks, encyclopedias, poetry, catechism, literature contests, writer symposiums, television news headlines, radio programs, theater schedules, non translated works, atlases...<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> *La educación como práctica de la libertad*, Buenos Aires Siglo XXI and *La acción cultural para la libertad*, Buenos Aires Editorial Busqueda.

<sup>27</sup> *La prensa*, 20-10-1978, cited by AIDA, *Argentine, Une culture interdite*, op. cit. p. 67.

<sup>28</sup> *La Razón*, 03-12-1976, *Argentine, Une culture interdite*, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Inés González Bombal, « La figura de la desaparición en la re-fundación del Estado de Derecho », in Marcos Novaro, Vicente Palermo, *La historia reciente. Argentina en democracia*, Buenos Aires Edhasa, 2005, pp. 115-132, p. 118.

<sup>30</sup> Hernán Invernizzi, Judith Gociol, *Un golpe a los libros*, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>31</sup> *La Nación*, 15-10-1977, cited by AIDA, *Argentine, Une culture interdite*, op. cit. p. 65.

<sup>32</sup> Hernán Invernizzi, Judith Gociol, *Un golpe a los libros*, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>33</sup> *La prensa*, 02-11-1978, AIDA *Argentine, Une culture interdite*, op. cit. p. 65. Mario Vargas Llosa mocked Argentineans in his novel *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, Lima, 1977.

<sup>34</sup> *La Razón*, 28-08-1978, cited by AIDA, *Argentine, Une culture interdite*, op. cit. p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> Hernán Invernizzi, Judith Gociol, *Un golpe a los libros*, op. cit., p. 51.

## **Methods and Mechanisms of Cultural Repression**

Cultural censorship and the writers' repression were based on both systematic procedures and on arbitrary practices that lead to anxiety and fear for writers and readers.

### ***The Procedure of Book Censorship and Destruction***

“Reading is among the *desaparecidos*”<sup>36</sup>  
Mempo Giardinelli

The Argentinean book industry was the most important on the continent in terms of production and exportation. Censorship profoundly affected this industry. Reading habits were shattered. In 1974, 50 millions books were printed, in 1976 41 millions were printed and only 17 millions en 1979<sup>37</sup>. During the dictatorship, books were considered subversive, therefore, so was knowledge. Even free thought and speech were dangerous.

The Home Office and the Education and Culture Ministry followed an entire procedure of censorship. However, due to the federal nature of the country, every province and city government settled libraries' censorship on their own. This explains why certain books and writers were banned in some states and not others.

The first step in the censorship process could be triggered by a particular or institutional denunciation, a journalistic campaign against a piece or by the Publication Direction.

#### *Examination of books and press by academics and intellectuals*

Once the censorship commission obtained a book, it was “politically and ideologically” analysed. Humanities professors, sociologists and anthropologists made the reports. Groups of intellectuals also collaborated from unknown places or universities. Books censored were either critical against the *Proceso*, Marxist, or subversive. After evaluation, reports were transmitted to the Publication National Department to evaluate their degree of dangerousness. Special attention was paid to youth literature and textbooks. Also, every week, Intelligence services compiled reports were made about the media: radio, television, theater and cinema (see *Figure 1*). This meant that they could count on important human resources to do their work. An investigation was also made regarding authors and publishers of analysed books.

#### *Evaluation of their degree of dangerousness*

A difference was made between knowledge and political use of knowledge, and there were different levels of dangerousness and enmity with the *Proceso* objectives. According to this classification, books could have:

- No ideological references against the regime (formula 1),
- Ideological references that opposed constitutional values (formula 2),
- Or transmit ideologies, doctrines or political systems that tried to topple constitutional creeds (formula 3).

The Direction of Publications compiled a list of books that posed a threat to *Proceso*'s objectives. In this list (392 books) none belonged to formula 1. 123 belonged to formula 2, for

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<sup>36</sup> « *La lectura es uno de los desaparecidos* ». Mempo Giardinelli, « Literatura, Lectura, Ciudadanía y Educación en la Argentina del Siglo XXI ». Speech pronounced at the Argentinean Embassy in Washington DC, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Octavio Getino, *Las industrias culturales en la Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Colihué, 1995, p. 53.



example “*De Sarmiento a Cortázar*” by David Viñas and the Latin-American Bible<sup>38</sup>. The rest belonged to formula 3, among which were books by Trotsky<sup>39</sup>.

In the end, the reports were sent to Home Office for approval. Once approved, they were sent to the General Direction of Legal Affairs<sup>40</sup>.

#### *Publication of a decree banning them*

Once the Legal report and approval were made, the decree was drafted by the Home Office, analyzed by the Minister and finally signed. Afterwards, the National Post Office received the order not to circulate the banned books. A similar process enabled to censor foreign books.

#### *Withdrawal of copies in libraries, bookshops and feria*

Every year in Buenos Aires, the National Book Feria is held. Three month after the *Coup*, the feria was maintained, inaugurated by the head of Marine Forces. Just before the feria opened, civilians accompanied by the feria’s director were checking every stand to point out books that should be withdrawn. This included books like *The Little Prince* by Saint-Exupéry, or the Universal History Encyclopedia. In bookstores, some books were totally forbidden whereas others could not be displayed and had to be hidden in bookstores’ backrooms.

#### *Outright book burning*

In most cases, books bonfires were made in front of guests, press and television; in other cases they were clandestine.

In April 1976, the regiment of *Infantería Aerotransportada* from La Calera (Córdoba) burned a mountain of books. The official press release claimed: “this pernicious documentation that affects intellects and our way to be Christian is burned, this way it cannot keep cheating the youth about our most traditional spiritual heritage: ‘God, Motherland and Home’”<sup>41</sup>.

In 1977 in Rosario, thousands of books from the Constancio Vigil People’s Library [*Biblioteca Popular*] were burned and all users investigated.

In 1979, a people’s library in Buenos Aires was attacked by masked men who burnt 8 000 books. No official information was given about this event.

The most notorious book burning occurred at the *Centro Editor*’s. The *Centro Editor* was created after the *Noche de los Bastones Largos*<sup>42</sup>, when some editors left UBA’s publishers, Eudeba<sup>43</sup> during Onganía’s dictatorship. Both publishers were censured and theirs employees persecuted. *Centro Editor* has several collections: encyclopedias, political essays, etc. Several books from their stocks were analyzed during an entire year. Boris Spivacow, the director, and his employees declared that the Marxists books in theirs stock were supposed to be for paper selling. So the *Junta* decided to burn those books. During three days, one and a half million books were burned.

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<sup>38</sup> Indeed this Bible mentions that the “freedom of oppressed people was at the beginnings of the Bible”. *Somos*, 27-04-1979, cited by AIDA, *Argentina. Une culture interdite*, op. cit. p. 71.

<sup>39</sup> Hernán Invernizzi, Judith Gociol, *Un golpe a los libros*, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>40</sup> The majority of those reports were destroyed upon democracy’s return.

<sup>41</sup> Cited by Marcelo Massarino, revista *Sudestada*, 46, 18<sup>th</sup> of March, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> In 1966, the regime made a strong attack against the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), known as “the night of the long sticks” [*la noche de los bastones largos*]. A 2004 movie directed by Tristán Bauer shows the cruelty of a repression of students fighting against the intervention of the military government in the university. After this attack, hundreds of professors were layed off from the university and had to flee the country.

<sup>43</sup> Eudeba was the biggest scholarly publishers in the continent. En 1976, a military became its director.

These were not the only book bonfires. Terror and fear led thousands of citizens to burn their “suspicious” books, frightened that the police may find them during routine searches. So they burned Freud, Neruda and García Márquez. This destruction also applied to records, magazines and cassettes. In the same way, publishers censured themselves and destroyed books that could be dangerous for them.

This procedure was sometimes followed. However, often, acts of cultural repression and censorship were simply arbitrary, in order to reinforce fear and uncertainty.

### ***The persecution process: the Case of Writers and Professors***

« All hope abandon ye who enter here »<sup>44</sup>.  
Dante

Since the Latin-American boom in the 1960s<sup>45</sup>, writers began to be famous and influent in Argentina. Some of them became public figures that participated in television debates. Thus, it was important for the regime to control the content of their books and public declarations. But censorship did not start with the dictatorship. As Carlos Gorostiza told us, censorship is an old practice in the country: “*I was censured from 1930 to 1983*”<sup>46</sup>.

Writers and artists were monitored and listed. There were three different kinds of lists. The authors on the black list were forbidden of any professional activity. On the grey list, they could not work in public industries (like financed theaters, TV and radios). To be on the white list, artists had to make a radical change and pledge allegiance to the government. But they could only work in private industries. Those lists, arbitrary in nature, changed according to places, persons involved and civil servants’ mood<sup>47</sup>.

Writers and artists were not usually arrested as the *Junta* claims there was no censorship. So they disappeared. Since the moment he was considered suspicious, each prisoner was registered on a list, investigated, evaluated and the final decision on the case was always taken at the highest Military authority<sup>48</sup>.

The kidnapping *modus operandi* was similar the same in all cases. Before someone was kidnapped, there was a blackout in the neighborhood, a group of at least five persons irrputed in the house, broke and stole things, beat the family and finally took someone in their infamous *Falcón Verdes* cars. Once they were kidnapped, they lost all their rights of communication with the outside world, their sight<sup>49</sup> and their identity until they became no more than numbers. In the end, they were just bodies. Bodies that could be thrown alive into the sea<sup>50</sup>. According to the documentary *Esma Memoria de Resistencia*, by Grupo Boedo Films (2010), this procedure was used because the Church somehow considered it to be an “acceptable” way to fight against subversion. The decision to kill someone was taken after the analysis of the possible “rehabilitation”<sup>51</sup> of the prisoners.

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<sup>44</sup> “Abandonad toda esperanza, los que entraís”. Dante read those words on the gates of hell. Cited by CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, op. cit. p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> It was a literary movement when authors like Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez y Julio Cortazár started becoming became world-famous.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with the author, Buenos Aires, 19-05-10.

<sup>47</sup> *La Redacción*, November 1979, cited by AIDA, *Argentina. Une culture interdite*, op. cit. p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, *Breve Historia contemporánea de la Argentina 1916-1999*, Buenos Aires, Fondo de Culture Economica, 2008, p. 208.

<sup>49</sup> They were *tabiqueado*, blindfolded.

<sup>50</sup> The movie *Garage Olimpo* (1999) from Marco Bechis shows the daily lives of the prisoners of a CDC and how prisoners were thrown into the sea.

<sup>51</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, *Breve Historia contemporánea de la Argentina*, op. cit., p. 208.

No one ever knew about the people arrested in their homes, workplaces or even in the streets. Entering one of those centers<sup>52</sup> was like “stopping being” [*dejar de ser*], the torturers tried to deconstruct or undo [*deseestructurar*] the identity of the captives. This system wanted to isolate individuals and to disconnect them from public and private life. There were no reports from the police, no knowledge of places where they kept them. They became phantoms. Even if there was death penalty, it was never used by the *Junta*. All the executions were clandestine.

The scale of *Operación Claridad* shows the importance of culture for the regime, a domain particularly prone to “subversion”. The victims were not chosen randomly, the *Proceso* tried to eliminate every form of social protest. Several politically engaged journalists and writers were arrested and some were disappeared. Haroldo Condi was a writer in the magazine *Crisis*<sup>53</sup> directed by Eduardo Galeano, he disappeared in 1976. He had publicly expressed his political views and was an active member of several left-wing political movements (ERP, FAP)<sup>54</sup>. He chose to stay in Argentina despite of the threats he received<sup>55</sup>. He hung a sign in his desk which said: « *Este es mi lugar de combate, y de aquí no me voy* »<sup>56</sup>. G. García Márquez spread the notice of his death, after General Videla left power in 1981.

Another famous case of writer repression is the one suffered by Rodolfo Walsh. He was also a militant in the ERP movement and the *Montoneros*. He investigated massacres and created in 1976 a Clandestine News Agency (ANCLA)<sup>57</sup>. He said: “Terror is based on lack of communication. Break isolation. Feel again the moral satisfaction of an act of freedom. Defeat terror. Circulate this information”<sup>58</sup>. He is also famous for his open letter to the *Junta* in which he declared: “Triple A<sup>59</sup> are today the Three Armies. The very source of terror which has lost its head and can only stammer the speech of death”<sup>60</sup>. After this open letter, he was injured to death when police tried to arrest him.

Both writers are symbolic of the State’s cultural repression and illustrate the tension between the writers’ craft and their political engagement. Thousands of writers and artists fled the country<sup>61</sup>. The exiled participated to several discussions on the consequences of censorship on literature organized by NGOs like Amnesty International or Freedom to Write Committee. Some authors, such as the Russian writer Joseph Brodsky, claims that censorship functioned like an incentive to creation that forced authors to explore new metaphors and periphrasis. But according to Luisa Valenzuela – also a *Crisis* writer – this was not the case in Argentina, because it was impossible to anticipate what would be censured next. The *Proceso*

<sup>52</sup> During the *Proceso*, there were approximately 340 Clandestine Detention Centers.

<sup>53</sup> *Crisis* was edited between 1973 and 1976 at 40 000 copies. It covered economical, social and political issues.

<sup>54</sup> ERP (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo), FAP (Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas).

<sup>55</sup> A documentary directed by Andrés Cuervo, « El retrato postergado », recounts Haroldi Condi’s life until his death.

<sup>56</sup> « This is the place from which I fight, and I will not leave it ». Gabriel García Márquez, « La última y mala noticia sobre Haroldo Condi », *El País*, 21-04-1981, [accessed online, 18-07-11], URL : <http://www.rodolfowalsh.org/spip.php?article1879>

<sup>57</sup> R. Walsh’s life was also narrated in a documentary directed by the Universidad de las Lomas de Zamora, « P4R+, Operación Walsh » (2000).

<sup>58</sup> « El terror se basa en la incomunicación. Rompa el aislamiento. Vuelva a sentir la satisfacción moral de un acto de libertad. Derrote el terror. Haga circular esta información ». Rodolfo Walsh, "Crónica del Terror". Informe número 1, diciembre de 1976, de Cadena Informativa. Compilado por Horacio Verbitsky (1985), [accessed online, 18-07-11], URL : [http://www.elortiba.org/ancla.html#Las\\_cartas\\_y\\_la\\_cadena\\_informativa](http://www.elortiba.org/ancla.html#Las_cartas_y_la_cadena_informativa)

<sup>59</sup> Alianza Anticomunista Argentina, right-wing armed movement which murdered hundreds of left-wing guerrilleros, intellectuals and artists in the 1970s. This movement was headed by José López Rega who gained power after Perón’s death.

<sup>60</sup> AIDA, *Argentine, Une culture interdite*, op. cit. p. 61.

<sup>61</sup> There were between 20 000 and 40 000 political exiles. Marcos Novaro, Vincente Parlermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983. Del golpe de Estado a la restauración democrática*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2003, p. 76.

consciously hid “the rules of the game”. “It [was] an intimidation where no parameters could be found, where every value scale became diffuse”<sup>62</sup>. Writers censured themselves and avoided discussing their works, thereby facilitating the task of censorship bodies.

Famous authors made several public declarations to denounce this situation. Ernesto Sábato claimed “[...] our own government does the upmost to give a worthy image of itself. What can we think about a civilized country where *The Little Prince* is censured? Not to mention worst things...”<sup>63</sup>. Jorge Luis Borges declared: “I cannot ignore the severe moral problem raised here by terrorism and repression. I cannot remain silent in front of dead, in front of disappeared”<sup>64</sup>.

The consequences of the State’s repression concerning literature and artists were dramatic. The *Proceso* did not just destroy Argentinean and foreign books, it also produced books in order to fill the cultural vacuum it had created. Those books were oriented to acclaim the *Proceso*’s societal project celebrating the State, religion and the family. So a type of culture substituted another. As theater is not an art expression that reaches the masses, the censorship system was quite different and less organized. Consequently, some artists and cultural expressions managed to grow in the cracks of this repressive system: *Teatro Abierto*.

### ***Teatro Abierto: An Artistic Mobilization under an Authoritarian Regime***

In spite of the repressive system whose main features we have already outlined, a form of artistic protest became possible, thanks in particular to an anti-establishment heritage (that of an independent theatre born in the 1930s), forms of political activism developed before the advent of dictatorship, and also the relative openness and weakening of the regime after 1980. To study this artistic mobilization under an authoritarian regime, political science has to adapt its tools; reasoning in terms of rational choice, mobilization of resources or identities cannot suffice. We will keep the concept of “action repertory” conceived by Charles Tilly, but to analyse it further on, proper tools adapted to aesthetic analysis will be needed. It is this multidisciplinary method, combining dramatic art and political science, which we will develop now.

#### ***Analysing production, analysing repertoire***

First, we will start with a semiological and aesthetic analysis of the plays produced by *Teatro Abierto*, which can, in a sense, be paralleled with a study of the processes of awareness<sup>65</sup> created by the mobilization movement. Our analysis of the staging of the plays will link contextual elements and a dramaturgic and aesthetic approach. This type of analysis makes it possible to point out, on the one hand, what theatrical signs are used by stage-directors to denounce a political regime – and thus invites us to think in terms of action repertory – and, on the other hand, to understand how an apparently apolitical theatrical sign can become anti-authority. We will focus here on two characteristics of the dictatorship denounced by *Teatro Abierto*: the state of siege imposed by the regime, and its puritanism.

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<sup>62</sup> “Se trata de una intimidación en la que no se pueden reconocer parámetros, toda escala de valores se torna difusa”, Luisa Valenzuela, Fernando Burgos, M. J. Fenwick, “Literatura y repression: perspectivas de Luisa Valenzuela”, *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, volume 5, 2001, pp. 203-222, p. 209.

<sup>63</sup> *La prensa*, 27-09-1980, cited by AIDA, *Argentine. Une culture interdite, op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>64</sup> *La prensa*, 06-05-1980, cited by AIDA, *Argentine. Une culture interdite, op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>65</sup> Christophe Traïni, *Émotions... Mobilisations !*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2009.

The military, at their ascent to power on 24 March 1976, declared a state of siege, which meant restricted the right of assembly of Argentinean citizens in public places to three people only. Moreover, identity checks were regularly made at random on the public highway depending on the physical appearance of the people controlled. Thus the urban scenery of Buenos Aires, a city of the night par excellence, changed between 1976 and 1983. Socializing places like cafés, that play an important part in theatre life, were disrupted. It became difficult to meet there and when actors did so, intelligence agents would spy on them. In that context, one of the dissenting devices of *Teatro Abierto* was to gather a maximum number of comedians on stage, a characteristic that would be its essence in the following years: “*In 1981, there was no slogan, but it is true that some plays had numerous casts, even disproportionate ones. Yes, there was a determination to show groups and show that the group was visible. It then became the trademark of Teatro Abierto, so to say. This was not explicitly said, but we were prompted to write plays with many characters.*” What became a common practice in the editions from 1982 to 1986 had been invented and promoted in 1981 by some stage-directors that chose to work more particularly on the notion of group. They were Rubens Correa (*Lobo estas?*), Francisco Javier (*Chau Rubia*) and Villanueva Cosse (*Cositas mias*). In *Lobo estas?* there are forty-five actors on stage. This play, which is about the adventures of a young boy – who utters at school the following fatal sentence: “*I’m fed up with being told what to do, what to say, and what to think* –, has a dramatic structure which enabled Rubens Correa to introduce many group scenes. In fact, Mario, the main character, is first seen in class, then in front of a firing squad, in a forest, in a circus, and the play eventually ends with a group dance: all situations that lent themselves not to limit the cast to the characters who had lines to say, but to enlarge it by adding many extras. But one should note that Rubens Correa did not merely enlist a number of extras (a dozen would have been enough), but more than forty, a relatively huge number, even for a dramatic production which does not have to comply with the restraints imposed by a mobilization under an authoritarian regime<sup>66</sup>. Francisco Javier, the stage-director of *Chau Rubia*, also introduced an important group scene at the end of the play. This work is a nostalgic variation on the character of Marilyn Monroe, who symbolizes the first years of Peronism, bygone but still enchanted times for some Argentineans. At the end of the play, the three male characters start quarrelling about who is Marilyn’s true lover. The scene turns into a violent battle and then ends with tango dance:

So there was this big battle and I remember that it had a stirring effect among the audience. They did not expect such an irruption. There was a mass effect. And, moreover, the people would fight; in fact, at the *Teatro del Picadero*, the actors and the spectators were on the same level, and the effect was all the more powerful as there was no raised stage. The spectators would shrink back; they were frightened because what we showed them was sheer violence. [He laughed]. And then, everything would calm down and end with tango dance; that was very beautiful... Truly, if one thing in *Chau Rubia* must be remembered, it’s its very end<sup>67</sup>.

The last production to use the resources offered by a large number of actors and the visual effect of a mass of people is Villanueva Cosse’s for *Cositas mias* (José García Alonso). This play counts only three characters, a man, a woman, and the salesman who talks them into buying the armchair and the chair with which they will eventually deceive each other. But

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<sup>66</sup> As a comparison, let’s note that the entire troupe of the Comédie-Française counts about 70 comedians and that all of them never play in the same representation.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with actor Roberto Saiz, Thursday, February 11, 2010.

Villanueva Cosse, who was trained at the school of Jacques Lecoq in Paris<sup>68</sup>, added to these characters a chorus that accompanied the couple in their peregrinations:

It's a very physical play and I chose to stress that dimension by resorting to a chorus, and there, I think that one can see Lecoq's influence on my work. Thus I wanted to stress the bodily excessiveness already present in the play, somehow to underline it. I wanted to show that the whole is always more than the sum of its parts, which is the golden rule of drama in a way; don't you think so<sup>69</sup>?

In these three successive examples, *Lobo estas?*, *Chau Rubia*, and *Cositas mias*, we can see that one of the subversive dramatic signs used by *Teatro Abierto* is the group in a limited space so as to make a powerful impression on the audience. Indeed, the visual effect expected is not the same depending on the size of the theatre-house and of the stage. The *Teatro del Picadero* could host 300 spectators and its stage was about 20 meters long. The first effect among the audience is one of surprise, as actor Roberto Saiz said. But the mass also induces an infectious energy. Moreover, it allows to underscore other subversive elements and to bring them to light, as it is the case with the chorus in *Cositas mias*, which accompanies the physical performances of the actors. The human body is indeed the other element *Teatro Abierto* insists on so as to denounce dictatorship.

*Teatro Abierto* also exposes the puritanism of the authoritarian regime. In effect, the military dictatorship established very close links with the Church as early as 1976. The censorship imposed by the regime from that date on became tinged with puritanism and expressed the will to rebuild Argentinean society on two main "Western" values: family and religion. Censorship of nude photographs, recurrent in the press, was backed up by censorship of all sensuality in films or shows from 1976 to 1983<sup>70</sup>. It was the whole human body that was forbidden in the society of the *Proceso*, and it did not need to be stripped off in an extreme way to make its representation problematic. Contemporary dance, for example, was practically nonexistent in this period in Argentina. In this context of refusal and repression of the human body, we may assume that a particularly subversive theatrical device was to reintroduce its representation at the centre of the performances. And it is really significant that the first project of dramatic resistance that preceded *Teatro Abierto* intended to create an event only made up of erotic plays. Thus *Teatro Abierto* kept some characteristics of this initial project, though in a less open way: only a few plays among the twenty-one performed worked on the theme of sensuality. But some others, without being erotic, focused their attention on physicality, either theatrical or choreographic. At least nine plays out of twenty reintroduced the body at the very centre of dramatic creation. Now, we will examine the plays that consider the body as an essential dynamic element of dramatic art and then those which contain explicit erotic signs.

<b>The body as dynamics</b>	<b>The body as sensual and erotic</b>
<i>Lejana Tierra prometida</i> , Ricardo Halac	<i>El 16 de octubre</i> , Elio Gallipoli
<i>Lobo estas?</i> , Pacho O'Donnell	<i>Cositas mias</i> , José García Alonso
<i>Tercero incluido</i> , Eduardo Pavlovsky	<i>La Cortina de Abalorios</i> , Ricardo Monti
<i>Desconcierto</i> , Diana Raznovich	<i>Chau Rubia</i> , Víctor Pronzato

<sup>68</sup> Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999) is an actor and acting instructor who based his research work on movement and the body of the comedian. He is famed for creating the neutral mask. His work focused on masks, mime and the chorus of ancient tragedies. It is this last element that Villanueva Cosse wanted to emphasize.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with stage-director Villanueva Cosse, Friday, March 19, 2010.

<sup>70</sup> Andrés Avellaneda, *Censura, autoritarismo y cultura: Argentina, 1960-1983*, Buenos Aires, Centro Editor de América Latina, 1986, p. 206.

Ricardo Halac's play, *Lejana Tierra prometida*, shows us three characters: Ana, Osvaldo and Gerardo, who live a free love story. As actress Virginia Lago, who played the part of Ana, said in an interview, this is a play where love acts as a force that flows between the characters with none of the barriers usually imposed by society. The best illustration of this phenomenon is that Ana is pregnant by one of the two men without knowing which is the father. On top of that, Osvaldo and Gerardo share an ambiguous relation: the two men not only love the same woman, but they love each other. This play proposes a vision of the couple that is radically opposed to the one advocated by the dictatorship, a vision of free love which, moreover, imposed some physical acrobatics on the actors. Some other *Teatro Abierto* stage-directors worked on the freedom of the body and inserted choreographic elements in their productions. That was the case with Rubens Correa who produced *Lobo estas?*, and with Pacho O'Donnell who engaged Silvia Vladimivsky to direct the dancing scenes. The final scene was a piece of stylized rock-and-roll that challenged the state of siege imposed by the *Proceso* since there were more than 50 actors on stage, which created a particularly striking mass effect for the audience. Finally, the human body could become a central theme in a play, as it is the case in *Tercero incluido* by Eduardo Pavlovsky. A man obsessed by war refuses to have sex with his wife because he prefers to watch out for the enemy that might, at any moment, enter the married couple's bedroom. We have identified several cases in which the human body is reintroduced at the centre of the play in various ways: this could be through a particular conception of the body (free love and its representation); through the production itself (choreography); or through the general set of themes. But the provocative power of the body is all the more important as the body is eroticized.

Five of the plays of *Teatro Abierto* are openly erotic, though they deal with this theme in different ways. The first of these plays is *El 16 de octubre* by Elio Gallipoli. The literal content of the play was not at all erotic, but the production was entrusted to Alberto Ure, one of the most famous and subversive stage-directors of Argentina, who had made his name when working on *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (*Le Locataire*), Joe Orton's play on homosexuality, in 1968. One can easily imagine what power the representation of such a play could acquire right under Onganía's dictatorship<sup>71</sup>... Roberto Cossa told us about a very precise and particularly subversive element of the production of *El 16 de octubre*: "Yes, Ure was a stage-director, you know, who would project many of his fantasies on stage. [...] Everything was a pretext for eroticization. *El 16 de octubre* was like... Well, for example, you could see an actress masturbating on stage. That had no real relation with the subject of the play, but well..." Women, under the *Proceso*, were reduced to the mother figure: their sexuality could only be aimed at breeding and female sensual pleasure was inconceivable. So, the scenes proposed by *Teatro Abierto* were doubly subversive: they were not only erotic, they also dealt with another taboo, female orgasm. One should however note that sex was always used as a means to deal with another set of themes. Then, we cannot speak of pornography, or of erotic plays, but of plays that used eroticism as an anti-establishment instrument. This instrument, by provoking a shock among the audience, highlighted the political content evoked and could entail the form of awareness expected. Moreover, eroticism was not devoid of a certain comical dimension, in particular in two plays, *La Cortina de Abolarios* and *El Nuevo Mundo*, which were extremely outraging. In *La Cortina de Abolarios*, the main female character is a former prostitute of French origins who has

<sup>71</sup> Onganía's dictatorship lasted from 1966 to 1970.

become a brothel madam; she is now associated with Pezuela, her regular lover, who comes to visit her in the brothel she runs. Both of them psychologically and physically manhandle their servant, Mozo. Mama is particularly aggressive and her violence falls within the codes of sadomasochism. Let's quote some stage directions here: "she slaps him in the face"; "with slow fury, she presses one of her stiletto heels on Mozo's face. After a brief pause, she drives it with a thwack into his face"; "she sits astride Mozo's body"... But in what sense is sex political here? It is used as a subversive instrument to illustrate and denounce two things. First, it is symbolical and in fact suggests, in a more general way, the corruption that was rife in Argentina. But it also permits to deal with the violence of the regime in an oblique way. In effect, the evocation of sex in this play is particularly graphic and disturbing. Mama asserts her power on other people that way, a power that will eventually turn against her when Popham tries to rape her. Here sex is only seen in its dimension of domination, master/slave domination, then man/woman domination, and it thus exemplifies the alienation of a people represented by Mozo. Symbolically, Mozo keeps on being killed and brought back to life throughout the play, much in the same way as the Argentinean people who lived according to the rhythm of military coups.

### ***Emotional contestation at the centre of collective action under an authoritarian regime***

This type of analysis leads us to examine the emotions aroused by these plays. We are brought here to join the writers who reintroduced in the early 1990s the emotional variable or factor in the study of collective action. But we will try here to slightly displace the perspective of those earlier writers who considered emotion above all as a mobilizing factor<sup>72</sup>, or as a means to rally new supporters and to heighten public awareness of the cause<sup>73</sup>. We will try to consider emotion as contestation *per se*; that is to say that emotion then is neither a means nor an instrument, but its mere expression in an authoritarian regime is subversive in itself. At the very sources of dramatic expression, we find the emotional dimension; *catharsis*, the aim the ancient Greek dramaturges tried to achieve, was meant to release the passions of the spectators by making them experiment fear and pity<sup>74</sup>. Thus dramatic art was truly political and socially aware since it was to regulate public life through emotions. French sociologist Jean Duvignaud tried in the 1960s to analyse what the Greeks had sensed. In *L'Acteur, esquisse d'une sociologie du comédien*<sup>75</sup>, he studies the social role of the artist who, by creating imaginary behaviours in the lapse of time of a representation, creates collective participation. If we simplify his reasoning to the extreme, we may say that the comedian, as an atypical and heretic figure, is the symbol of freedom in society. Thus, the figure of the comedian, by offering to the spectator's desire an imaginary involvement, unites the audience. In a monarchic society, as Duvignaud analyses it, the comedian contributes to the fusion of individual states of awareness by abolishing class barriers. He/she transcends the notion of class, first literally since very often it is young people from the middle class that choose that career, but also in a figurative way on stage: "*To mimic the kings of tragedy, in the eyes of Molière, is to assert the participation of all non-aristocratic groups and of society at large in the adventure of the mythological heroes*"<sup>76</sup>. One of the functions of the actor is to undermine social reality thanks to the dream and the imaginative world he offers. The corollary of this

<sup>72</sup> Cf. the concept of moral shock developed by James M. Jasper.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. the concept of consciousness-raising mechanism developed by Christophe Traïni.

<sup>74</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapter xiv.

<sup>75</sup> Jean Duvignaud, *L'Acteur, esquisse d'une sociologie du comédien*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1965.

<sup>76</sup> Jean Duvignaud, op. cit., p. 60.



function is union. But Jean Duvignaud leaves apart the precise mechanisms that bring about the process of identification of the audience and this ephemeral union. We may wonder whether the appeal to emotions, both enacted by the comedians and felt by the audience, would not be what allows collective participation, i.e. the cohesion of the group in a shared imaginary desire. Then it would be necessary here to reintroduce a crucial variable, the emotional factor that political science and sociology too often ignore, but which has somehow been restored to favour since the 1990s<sup>77</sup>.

Like the comedian of the XVII<sup>e</sup> century analysed by Duvignaud, *Teatro Abierto* challenged military order while reuniting a society formerly divided. And it achieved its aim by showing on stage what people could no longer do under the dictatorship. *Teatro Abierto* fulfilled some expectations: “Teatro Abierto really was something incredible. I had never seen such audiences. People would queue up, up and up... On Avenida Corrientes, I guess the queue was at least five hundred metres long... But, if they did queue up, they had a good reason for it. They could not do what we did on stage. And seeing that we could do it was a tremendous relief to them.”<sup>78</sup>

Let’s now study more precisely what emotions *Teatro Abierto* aroused among the audience. We have chosen, as a synthetic approach, to classify the types of production in the following way: realistic, oneiric, experimental and light comedy.

Play	Political Content	Aesthetics of the production	Emotion provoked in the audience
<i>Papa Querido</i>	Wait-and-see Attitude of the Argentineans	Realistic	Shame and Sadness
<i>Gris de Ausencia</i>	Exile	Realistic	Sadness
<i>El que me toca es un chanco</i>	Disparitions and Division of the Nation	Realistic	Anger and Sadness
<i>Mi Obelisco y yo</i>	Servitude and History of Argentina	Oneiric	Laughter
<i>For export</i>	Violence and Conflicts between Peoples	Light Comedy	Laughter
<i>El 16 de octubre</i>	Role of the Nation	Experimental erotic	Discomfort
<i>Decir si</i>	Repression and Torture	Realistic	Anguish
<i>Cositas mías</i>	Consumer Society	Experimental	Laughter
<i>El Acompañamiento</i>	Wait-and-see Attitude of the Argentineans	Realistic	Shame and Sadness
<i>Criatura</i>	Repression and Torture	Oneiric	Anguish
<i>Lejana Tierra prometida</i>	Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo	Oneiric	Anguish
<i>La Cortina de abalorios</i>	Servitude and History of Argentina	Light Comedy	Laughter
<i>Lobos estas?</i>	Repression	Oneiric	Laughter
<i>La Oca</i>	Repression and Torture	Oneiric	Laughter and Anguish
<i>Tercero incluido</i>	War	Light Comedy	Laughter
<i>Coronacion</i>	Fascism	Realistic	Feeling of revolt

<sup>77</sup> To examine this question further, we may refer to the works of James M. Jasper in the United-States and those of Christophe Traïni in France.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with actor Juan Carlos Puppo, Tuesday, February 16, 2010.

<i>Chau Rubia</i>	Nostalgia of Peronism	Experimental	Melancholy
<i>Desconcierto</i>	Censorship	Realistic	Pity
<i>El Nuevo mundo</i>	Corruption	Light Comedy	Laughter
<i>Trabajo pesado</i>	Repression and Torture	Oneiric	Anguish

My reading

Some themes generally arouse the same emotion and are moreover sustained by the same aesthetics of the production, as if content and form were really inseparable: the political theme would have somehow dictated the decision of the stage-director who would have chosen the most appropriate aesthetic approach to arouse the emotion expected by the author. Thus, the wait-and-see attitude of Argentinean people is a theme sustained by realistic aesthetics that aims at arousing shame and pity among the spectators. Similarly, the evocation of repression and torture very often inspires the audience with a feeling of anguish. We can say that, in general, a play evoking repression, torture or violence, will resort to theatrical devices of distancing: realism would be too unbearable and the emotion aroused would then be mere repulsion in front of a moral shock. A relation may also be established between the theme of the Argentinean people's servitude, still sustained by an oblique production, be it oneiric or comical, which will make the spectator laugh. If this theme arouses laughter, it is because it promotes, even if it is in ridiculous situations, a sense of communitarianism: the Argentineans laugh *together* because they can see the funny side of a *shared history*.

According to the table above, one single emotion can be aroused by different aesthetic approaches. Thus, anguish can be inspired by a realistic production (like in *Decir sí*), or by a dreamlike one (in *Criatura*, *Lejana Tierra prometida* or *La Oca*). But this possibility remains rare and this typology attempt rather tends to show us some characteristics proper to certain emotions. For example, anguish is more often aroused by an oneiric production, while a realistic one arouses sadness or shame. An oneiric production will indeed produce an effect of disquieting weirdness (*unheimliche*)<sup>79</sup>: it will create an agonizing distance by twisting everyday life scenes or objects and also traditional theatrical signs. Thus, *La Oca* by Carlos Pais undermines the ritual of the "dinner with friends" in which the final reward is no longer the dessert, but death. An oneiric production may also create a complete change for the spectator who, having lost all his usual daily or theatrical reference points, experiments a feeling of anxiety. It is the case, for instance, with *Lejana Tierra prometida* that proposes a deserted set peopled only with Mother figures looking for their dead sons at the battle of Pavón. The humans have replaced the scenery and their reification is a prelude to the final feeling of anguish that rises from the confrontation of two times, the time of these Mothers and the time of a group of young intellectuals fleeing from their native country.

These aesthetic emotions are completed by the festive emotion that seizes both the spectators and the activists, and contributes to the diffusion of the message advocated by *Teatro Abierto*. "Teatro Abierto was not theatre, it was a soccer stadium." This is one of the statements that recurred most often in the interviews... All the actors that were interviewed spontaneously mentioned the role of the audience in *Teatro Abierto* and insisted on the fact that the spectators had a more important place than the actors in the mobilization movement:

<sup>79</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Das Unheimliche*, 1919; the German text is available online at the following address: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34222-h/34222-h.htm>.

Sigmund Freud, *Une inquiétante étrangeté*, 1919; the French text is available online at the following address: [http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/freud\\_sigmund/essais\\_psychanalyse\\_appliquée/10\\_inquietante\\_etrangete/inquietante\\_etrangete.html](http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/freud_sigmund/essais_psychanalyse_appliquée/10_inquietante_etrangete/inquietante_etrangete.html); May 14, 2010.

To me, it was the people that were the great show in *Teatro Abierto*, and a greater one than the representations themselves. What was a real phenomenon, for example, was those people who were queuing up to get in and those who remained outside, those who would hustle to enter and those who would come back to see *Teatro Abierto* because it was a phenomenon; all those people who, day in day out, would come and see the plays. It was like political meetings because, in fact, anything could happen. There were people who, all of sudden... Something in the play would make them react and they would say something. It's something rare at the theatre, isn't it? It makes me think of... It makes me think of the film with Depardieu, *Cyrano*. There's a scene where you see a play being performed and the audience talk with the actor... Well, *Teatro Abierto* was just like that. [...] Everything brought about a reaction from the audience. There was always something happening that would cause either applause or exclamations. Let's say that the audience were very responsive and I suppose that it had something to do with the desire people had to be free to express themselves<sup>80</sup>.

The audience of *Teatro Abierto* was what could be called a participating audience. They were completely integrated in the representation that they would comment on throughout with applause, shouts and peals of laughter. The first cycle of *Teatro Abierto* ended with a representation on 21 September 1981, which was the climax of the experiment. A huge feast was organized at the Tabaris when all the members of *Teatro Abierto* climbed up on stage and then mixed with the audience: there were more than 1,000 people in a house that could only host 700:

The audience was very fervent and supported us with great enthusiasm. [...] The last representation, at the Tabaris, was a real apotheosis with a huge number of people. I think, without being sure, well I think that the doors of the theatre house were kept wide open for the last representation. There were so many people...<sup>81</sup>

*Teatro Abierto* was a great feast, a truly new event, both for the theatre people and for the spectators. This festive element really proves that the emotions the actors wanted to arouse during this collective mobilization found an echo among the audience that expressed those emotions by adopting a participative position during the representations. If *Teatro Abierto* was welcomed in such a way, it was partly due to the fact the spectators expected that a space of free expression would at last be proposed to them.

## Conclusion

During the last dictatorship, the State split in two: some of its actions were clandestine and terrorist in nature, whereas others were public, relied on a judicial order established by itself which shut down any alternative voices<sup>82</sup>. Argentinean culture was transformed; each space in which people could gather or identify themselves with the community was shut down. The regime created a petrified community in the face of a threatening State. It considered its intromission into the cultural domain entirely legitimate. For the *Junta*, it was "logical and necessary for the State to practice its police power on cultural products"<sup>83</sup>. It

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Roberto Saiz, actor, drama professor, February, Thursday 11, 2010

<sup>81</sup> Interview with stage-director Francisco Javier, March, Wednesday 10, 2010.

<sup>82</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, *Breve Historia Contemporánea de la Argentina*, op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>83</sup> German Bidart Campos, *Poder de policía de moralidad en materia de espectáculos y de publicaciones en la capital federal*, Buenos Aires, 1980. Cited by Hernán Invernizzi, Judith Gociol, *Un golpe a los libros*, op. cit., p. 87.

imposed, in one of the most culturally vanguardist countries, the conservation of a “‘national essence’ identified with its very own rhetoric”<sup>84</sup>.

Cultural repression was as systematic as it was arbitrary. No one knew the exact rules of the game to avoid cultural repression. “The State knew everything about the other, but the other ignored everything about the State”<sup>85</sup>. As we have mentioned, there are countless political analyses of the dictatorship, but there is a scarcity of analyses of the cultural repression. Nevertheless, thanks to Human rights reports and artistic testimonies, we can reconstruct the cultural repression system and understand its mechanisms.

As we had mentioned, the repression of theatre was quite different. Nevertheless there are two cases of post-representation censorship (*Telerañas* from Eduardo Pavlovski and *Juegos de la hora de la siesta* by Roma Mahieu). They were banned with decrees, but it was an exceptional decision. Theatrical repression consisted in attacking theatres with bombs, which provoked auto-censorship in the theatrical field. *Teatro Abierto* fought against this particular form of censorship.

The *Teatro Abierto* case study draws on the analyses of texts and productions in order to demonstrate how an apolitical theatrical sign can become anti-authority and what signs the directors choose in order to protest. Thanks to this kind of analysis, we can better understand what an artistic repertoire is and points out, and what drifts of the authoritarian regime are denounced, like state of siege or Puritanism. We are quite conscious that this methodological approach is not exclusively ours, and that it tends to be increasingly used by young researchers who are interested both in arts and in political science. However, we notice that it is still scarce in spite of all the efforts undertaken since 2000 in France and in Europe. These analyses led us to focus on an essential variable in collective action: emotions, the emotions felt by artists but also the emotions felt by spectators. As a consequence, this type of analysis helps us to question the mainstream of our discipline’s literature, which considers that emotions are a factor of mobilisation. We consider that emotions are a variable we must explain. In our case study, it is the power of emotions and their diversity that are anti-authority. Expressing one’s joy, one’s positive feeling, laughing or entertaining oneself are different ways of protest in a society paralysed by anxiety.

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<sup>84</sup> Alain Rouquié, « Argentine : le départ des militaires, fin d’un cycle politique ou péripétie ? », *Problème d’Amérique Latine*, n°68, 2° trimestre, 1983, pp. 4-10, p. 6.

<sup>85</sup> Eduardo Duhalde, *El Estado Terrorista Argentino*, op. cit. 1999.

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