

## C Stands for Censorship: *Buscavidas* and the “Terror of the Uncertain Sign”

### I

Let us begin with a disappearance. Through the juxtaposition of two images, we will become witnesses of an erasure. The two images I have in mind (see Figure 1) are part of the same comic, *Buscavidas*, but were published within different contexts: the picture on the left is taken from the original Spanish version first published in Argentina between 1981 and 1982, while the image on the right is taken from the French translation as published in 2001.

What immediately catches the eye when comparing the two is the absence in the French version of the signature of the drawer, Alberto Breccia, and the absence of the rather out-of-place and apparently nonsensical typographical sequence “M.r.CHta. R.dio.UTO.” It is clearly visible that during the transition from the one version to the other something has happened, indeed, something has vanished, or – to use that most Latin-American of phrases now also ingrained in our lexicon – something *has been disappeared*.<sup>1</sup> Only by juxtaposing these two images are we able to notice that something has been blotted out. But why is it that during the transposition to the French, a signature and a few seemingly unintelligible words have been forgotten, or perhaps more sinister, have been erased? What is it about this word puzzle “M.r.CHta. R.dio.UTO,” that has provoked such glaring oversight?

Let’s hazard a guess or two. Perhaps the editor was just careless. Forgetting is only human, so let’s just be accommodating: the act was based on nothing more than absentmindedness. However, an erasure is always an erasure, no matter if it is intentional or not. So, alternatively, we could say that this act was quite deliberate, that something has been hidden on purpose from the reader and viewer. As a consequence, there must be something disturbing in these signs that warranted their disappearance. Carlos Trillo, who wrote the script of *Buscavidas*, subscribes to this thesis when he insists that the sequence of letters was just a bit of folly, a mere “typographical extravaganza,”<sup>2</sup> borne out of Alberto Breccia’s idiosyncratic iconography, an “intimate mischievousness (“picardia intima”) of the drawer” (Trillo 2005). However, it seems a rather strange coincidence that not only the idiosyncratic signs themselves have been disappeared but that also the very index of this idiosyncrasy – the signature – is cut out. However, let us suspend the issue of the signature – an issue exhaustively and often tiresomely circumscribed by deconstruction – and momentarily focus our attention on the “typographical extravaganza.”

What could “M.r.CHta. R.dio.UTO,” possibly mean, provided it refers to anything in the first place? Might it not be that the French edition has repulsed all possible *horror vacuum*? Perhaps the editor took pity on his poor reading audience and

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Figure 1. Left: Final frame of the episode entitled “Con Valdés Atras,” by Alberto Breccia and Carlos Trillo, p. [8]. *Buscavidas* was first published in the magazine *Superhumor* during 1981 and 1982. I am using the 1994 reprint of *Buscavidas*, published by Doedytores. (c) Doedytores, Buenos Aires. Right: Final frame of the French version translated as “Valdés au Trousses,” p. [8], from the French edition of *Buscavidas* published in 2001 by Rackham. (c) Rackham, Montreuil.

spared them the task of puzzling out this hermetic sign, this typographical anomaly? On the other hand, might this not be much ado about literally nothing? Whatever the case may be, it is now difficult to negate that the white space in the right-hand bottom corner of the frame is filled with potential meaning. It attests to the act of blotting out and forgetting, and, for me, it has become a reminder of the strange interrelation between amnesia and remembering. The white space has become the index of something else, and I associate this blank with the mechanisms of erasure and forced forgetting that were imposed by the Argentine military dictatorship which ruled from 1976 until 1983. One might even say that the blank is emblematic of the latter mechanisms. Paradoxically, the French version has, in a sense, erased that which the Argentine censors were too blind to see at the original time of publication. The disappearance of that strange and obstinate sign seems to imply that every anomaly, every apparently senseless or hermetic sign that a reader might (mis)interpret, should be evacuated from the text. Ambiguity is to be contained, so as not to produce confusion. However, it is evident that the French version does of course not follow this logic; it is merely a reminder of it. In fact, the French version contains all the other hermetic signs of the Spanish version which make *Buscavidas* such an uncanny reading experience even today.

## II

*Buscavidas* was first published in Argentina between 1981 and 1982. The comic is actually a collection of short graphic stories published separately in the magazine *Superhumor*.<sup>3</sup> “Buscavidas” refers to the main character who is also the narrator. In Argentina, “buscavidas” is a generic term and refers to street vendors and paupers, rummaging through garbage or buying cheap trinkets, like can openers, city maps, toys and other junk, in order to resell them.<sup>4</sup> The “Buscavidas” of the comic has nothing to sell, except perhaps the tales he picks up from the streets, but he regales us free of charge with his sickening horror stories. In fact, Buscavidas is obsessed with collecting the gloomiest and most horrific *tranches de vie* in order to file them in his ever-expanding archive of human misery. He is a receptacle, a black hole gobbling up narratives, recounting them for our entertainment. He is the pure narrator who never intervenes in the story action: he observes everything from a safe distance, devouring and transcribing every new tragedy he snatches from the streets of the poorest barrios of Buenos Aires.

If we take the term literally, we must point out that the word “buscavidas” is a conjunction of “buscar” – *to search for or to raid* – and “vida” – *life*, and seeking out lives is exactly what Buscavidas does. He is the vampire-narrator sucking the life out of the characters that are featured in his stories. He is the parasite infecting whoever crosses his path: the figures describing their life story always end up worse than they were before, as if this Buscavidas is a spider attracting little flies into the spider web of his library. He presents himself as an objective chronicler and witness, but he omits his own complicity in the downfall of his subjects. The ethical implications of the act of narrating are thus directly addressed through this comic, especially considering the context in which it was produced, as the witness-narrator somehow becomes an accomplice to the reality of what has been enunciated. However, the strength of the comic *Buscavidas* resides in its deferral of explicit references to the contemporaneous Argentine socio-political matrix, although it is saturated with *Zeitgeist*. And it is precisely because of this “fuzziness” that reading *Buscavidas* today can still provoke unease. Paradoxically, what I perceive to be the strength of the story was also for a large part the effect of the specific socio-political constraints on the artistic and cultural productions of those times, productions regulated by (self-)censorship.

## III

Censorship, repression and the prohibition of public debate marked the period of what the military termed the “Process of National Re-organization,” a process that took place between 1976 and 1983 intended to restore Argentina as a “Western, Christian civilization”<sup>5</sup> through a self-imposed epic battle with left-wing guerrilla forces, a struggle that the ruling military termed the “dirty war.” “Dirty” it would be indeed, but a war certainly not – the Process was a carefully planned program of genocide and state terror. In fact, the aim of this Process was not so much the military annihilation of armed left-wing resistance groups – which had been decimated prior to the 1976 coup anyhow<sup>6</sup> – but rather, as junta leader and de facto president General Videla pointed out, “the profound transformation of consciousness.”<sup>7</sup> One way of achieving this aim was through the actual physical elimination of so-called “subversives” – a very fuzzy category of “undesirables,” or “political agitators,” many of whom were doctors, students, professors, artists, journalists and union members who had been arbitrarily marked as “un-Argentine.” In spite of the possible associations a term like *disappearance* might conjure up, the act of “disappearing someone” was quite spectacular and largely depended on the complicit self-blinding of the general population. This effect of self-blinding has been given theoretical shape in Diana Taylor’s concept of *percepticide*, which refers to the self-imposed blinding of a society witnessing the open spectacle of abductions and other crimes, where

the “disappeared” were dragged away in full view of family, neighbors, and other observers, [where] people were subjected to overt violence in public avenues during broad daylight [and where] people had to deny what they saw and, by turning away, collude with the violence around them (...). [S]eeing without the possibility of admitting that one is seeing further turns the violence on oneself. Percepticide blinds, maims, kills through the senses. (Taylor 1997: 122-23; 124).

The *disappeared* ended up in a network of secret detention centers and it is estimated that approximately 30,000 persons were abducted to be executed. In the words of James Neilson (qtd. in Feitlowitz 1998:15), this represented a “secret Argentina,” “that other country [within], the country of the missing, of complicit silence, of demented militarism” [and torture]; that ‘other Argentina’ that acted with absolute freedom, torturing and killing anyone whose presence it found irritating,” a clandestine world covered up by the rhetorical smokescreen of the junta.

Censorship was harsh, at least during the first three years of the dictatorship, and public life was highly regulated. Anything that did not fall within the conceptual framework of the Process was suppressed. “Guidelines” – a euphemism for prohibitions – were issued precluding the use of ‘subversive’ words. Vocabulary had to be purified as Admiral Emilio Massera insisted (1979) that “the only safe words are our words” (98), words in accordance with “God, mother-country and home” (Marchak 1999:114). Parents were taught how to look for linguistic clues of subversion in their children’s expressions; words as “dialogue,” “bourgeoisie,” “exploitation” and “revolution” were not kosher, as was modern math and Einstein’s relativity theory.<sup>8</sup> Books were burnt, authors such as the ‘usual suspects’ Marx and Lenin, but also Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Pablo Neruda, Aldo Ferrer and even Antoine de Saint Exupery (his *Little Prince*), were black-listed. Preferably, stories had to have happy endings.<sup>9</sup> The population internalized this censorship in acts of self-censorship, as a means of self-preservation. Artists all had “a broken pencil and an enormous eraser encrusted in [their] brain,” as the Argentine author María Elena Walsh once put it.<sup>10</sup> The most serious crime was to divulge the “secret Argentina.” Junta legislation (quoted in Graziano 1993:255 n.68) unambiguously stipulated that

It is forbidden to inform, comment or make any reference to subjects which relate to subversive activity. This includes information relating to abductions and disappearances.

This entails that those artists who refused or were unable to go into exile, could not express their views directly when trying to speak about the situation in their own country. Opposition, in the form of the revelation of the ‘secret’, could only be formulated in a roundabout way. Cryptic references to the silenced reality of abduction, murder and disappearance had to be smuggled in. The Argentine sculptor Victor Grippo (quoted in Ramírez 1999) succinctly summarizes the situation: “The arrival of the military forced a change in language, the invention of new codes” (155). In this language – whether visual or verbal – the artist would increase “the opacity of the sign,” which would, at least according to Mario Rojas in his discussion of dramatic discourse during the Process, “attack the dictatorship’s monological, falsely transparent sign and at the same time clear the lattice-work of censorship.”<sup>11</sup> The “metaphorisation of reality” was one of the preferred techniques of playwrights in order to “recreate on stage the very reality that permeated their lives” (Graham-Jones 2000:26). The “new code” involved the sustained use of such rhetorical devices as “metaphor, allegory, and analogy, and the reappropriation of cultural codes already in place” as well the use of “parody, the orphaned quote, the double entendre (ibid.:21).

As such, politics could only be addressed indirectly. One example of this attitude can be found in the literary magazine *Punto de Vista* (“point of view”), published during the dictatorship. The contributors of the publications, with the cultural theorist Beatriz Sarlo as one of the founding members, initially wrote

articles under pseudonyms, and the journal had to subordinate politics to aesthetics, or rather to approach politics obliquely, through a rereading of the Argentine literary canon and cultural history (Beasley-Murray 2001: xv).

Furthermore,

*Punto de Vista* returned to the founding texts of Argentine literature and politics to (...) indirectly construct resources for thinking about the contemporary situation. One result of this detour through the nineteenth century forced on Sarlo by the exigencies of censorship was the reconceptualization of this anxiety as an advantage (ibid.: ix).

This shows that the Argentine artistic and cultural field can be described in terms of a “culture of camouflage,” which, according to Danné Ojeda (2003) is characteristic of Latin-American art and culture as a whole:

It is evident that a culture born out of and built around resistance to hegemonic domination would inevitably develop into a *culture of camouflage*. In repressing resistance, power only makes it stronger by forcing it to create more subtle and sophisticated strategies for survival (68, my emphasis).

Due to the opaqueness of signs in such a “culture of camouflage,” all texts<sup>12</sup> demanded a high interpretative effort from their readers and audience, as these texts positioned an (implied) audience capable of decoding these tokens, or, as Rojas puts it, “as a consequence of the “opaqueing” procedure, the reader must “de-opaque [desopacar] that multidirectional and cryptic language [by] contextualizing it” (quoted in Graham-Jones 2000: 60). The reader, as participant, is invited to decipher ‘hidden’ layers, and perform a potentially ‘subversive’ and empowering act through a reading intent on discovering meanings that disrupt the misleading unequivocal discourse of the regime.<sup>13</sup> By allowing painful glimpses of the “Secret Argentina” to slip in, glimpses that struggle with the “common-sense disinclination to believe the monstrous” (Arendt 1958:437), the reader becomes aware of the inconsistency between the Proceso’s vocabulary and (the rumors of) what was actually happening.

I believe that readers were well aware of the potential censorship or self-censorship within an artwork, necessitating an interpretation of ‘blanks’ and ‘silences’ as meaningful elements for an audience mentally reconstructing an uncensored version. The practice of camouflaging and its implied deciphering has been termed “counter-censorship” by Raúl Cánovas and Roberto Hozven. Cánovas (1980) defines the term as the “disarticulat[ion] [of] the repressive discursive system in order to generate a discourse censored by that very system” (171). In Graham Jones’s understanding of the concept,

counter-censorship, unlike self-censorship, is active and resisting. [It] allows for agency and thus functions as a positive alternative to the double bind of external censorship and internal self-censorship (21).

In other words, the counter-censorial work reveals or anticipates its eligibility for censorship; it addresses the reader in such a way so as to suggest that what is there on the page has been muffled, which in turn compels the reader to decipher and return possible “subversive” signs. Incidentally, counter-censorship, understood as the fore grounding of possible censorial restraint by the use of equivocation, might even be the “deepest [form of] subversion,” or as Etienne Dagut (qtd. in Ellul 1985) asserts:

The deepest subversion (countercensorship) does not consist in saying something to shock opinion, morals, the law, or the police, but in inventing paradoxical speech.

Paradoxical or ambiguous speech was employed in literature in order to “propose itself as a space for reflection (...) coming to terms with repression, death, failure, and lost illusions” (Sarlo 1992: 240). In visual arts, this paradox had to be sought on the level of the pictorial or its interaction with the verbal in order to create opaque assemblages playing upon polysemy. In fact, this polysemy has been more closely associated with the pictorial rather than the verbal. For instance, in her discussion of Argentine plastic arts during repression, Andrea Giunta (1999) claims that, “[i]mages, visual representations could, in some way, say that which terror of an error in speech prevented” (155). Similarly, Argentine press photographer Guillermo Loíacono (quoted in Feitlowitz 1998) states that the military “never deciphered our language” (161), because

we did so much political photography for the simple reason that it never occurred to the military that we would use the medium to express opposition (ibidem).

In my opinion, this also holds for comics, as they were not a priori suspect as opposed to cartoons, for example, which are explicitly political in content, or are at least supposed to be.<sup>14</sup>

## IV

By 1981 – the time of publication of *Buscavidas* – the military regime was walking on its last legs, which might imply that censorship as well was slackening as the regime “began to deteriorate rapidly on all fronts: political, economic, social, international, cultural, and educational” (Mignone 1992: 254). Nationalist sentiment would flare up one last time with the preparations for the invasion of the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands, ensuing in a war with the British and ending in shameful defeat for the once so proud Argentine military caste. The outcome of the Falkland War further hastened the regime’s demise; general elections were called and took place in 1983. However, the waning of the *Proceso* did not entail that direct and unambiguous criticism of the regime had become possible. Although censorship itself might have eased, the overriding “culture of fear” (ibid.: 251) had by no means dissolved, as Alberto Breccia (qtd. in Imperato 2002: 21) recounts with respect to his adaptation of *Dracula*, which was roughly contemporaneous with *Buscavidas*:

I started on *Dracula* during full repression. The last episode that I drew was “Fui Leyenda” (“I am not a legend anymore”) and, at that time, the dictatorship was already greatly weakened. Even so, if they would have found at home a page where I had written “State Butchery,” for example, they would surely have executed me. They had done it for far less than that.

Bearing this in mind, let us now return to the images (Figure 1) and the letter sequence “M.r.CHta. R.dio.UTO.” Perhaps Breccia’s “typographical extravaganza” hides something else; perhaps it is not only a seemingly spontaneous montage of letters, reminiscent of dada practices and the de-automation and fragmentation of language – practices of an avant-garde poetics, which incidentally, only arrived late to the field of comics?<sup>15</sup> In order to de-opaque these signs, or to “unpack” possible meanings following the “camouflage imperative,” – rather than just interpreting the typography as a legacy of a specific poetics – we can come up with some combinations that momentarily dispel our *horror vacuum*. In order to do so, we could substitute the dots with other vowels or consonants and rearrange their order so that a number of more or less meaningful combinations might arise, as for instance, “Morochta,” or “Morochita,” a colloquialism for “little black-haired woman,” “Radio Auto,” for car stereo, or even “Puto,” for “fag.” However, there is one combination that activates a more politically charged subtext, namely “Marchita,” literally the “little march,” the popular name for the Peronist march with the catchy “Los Muchachos Peronistas” as the political party’s anthem, of which this is the second refrain:

With the social principles  
That Perón has established  
The entire people are united  
And cry from the heart:  
Long Live Perón! Long Live Perón  
For this great Argentine  
who works nonstop  
so that the people will reign  
in love and equality.  
Viva Perón! Viva Perón!<sup>16</sup>

And so on.

Quite the ‘blast from the past.’ In fact, the oblique reference to the “little march” might not only constitute an “irruption of memory” for a contemporaneous audience, it surely must have been even more the case for an Argentine audience at the time of *Buscavidas*’s publication.<sup>17</sup> “M(a)r(i)CHta/M(a)rCH(i)ta” might be a nostalgic cipher condensing the memory of the glory days of the Argentine republic, namely the period of the first two presidential terms (namely 1946-1955) of the so-called “Colonel of the People,” Juan Domingo Perón. Perón, “the most reviled and most loved” figure of Argentine history, who was ousted in 1955 following a military coup.<sup>18</sup> He went into exile for 18 years, and the truncated sign “M(a)r(i)CHta” might also be associated with the years of repression and censorship that followed Perón’s overthrow, a time in which it was forbidden by decree to even mention his name, the “marchita” or any other symbol related to Peronism (cf. Silletta 2005). The stance of the military towards Peronism during the Process of National Reorganization was roughly the same. Although Perón himself was dead a year after his disastrous return to power in 1973, “that man,” was held responsible for the chaos the country was in and which the junta was determined to set right.

All in all however, our nitpicking of “M(a)r(i)CHta/M(a)rCH(i)ta” has resulted in very little as we are still clueless as to its meaning in relation to the image. What is this strange string of words doing in this picture anyway? Our deciphering has yielded some rather obscure results, not only for an audience of Argentine readers, but especially for a French-speaking audience that happens to leaf through these pages. So what is the point? Perhaps the point is that there is no point, or rather, the point is exactly that we are led to believe that there might be a point; a point constantly eluding us by the associations we invoke in the hope that we will once find the solution to the enigma, which might not even be an enigma in the first place. Nonetheless, we keep trying to make sense of this sign, although it does not allow us to fill the gap that would comfort our interpretative anxiety. Thus, the importance of the sign does not lie in its specific reference, but in its ability to provoke a deciphering stance in the reader.

I am sure you would agree if I were to call this an irritating sign – perhaps it annoyed the French editor so much that, out of sheer exasperation, he just did away with it. Perhaps the term “obstinate sign” is more suitable, because it is trying to get our attention again and again while stubbornly refusing to provide us with clues as to why it is there. It even seems to exult in its persistence to disconnect itself from the *diegesis* thereby frustrating every attempt at close reading. I believe the ensuing uncanny effect can be ascribed to the sign’s rejection of what Roland Barthes calls “ancrage” or “anchoring.” In its original sense, the concept of anchorage is a function of the word in connection with a contiguous image in that the former guides the latter’s orientation and interpretation, forcing it to assume a definite place. In short, the word is there to territorialize the image. Or, to quote Barthes (1977):

All images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a “floating chain” of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others. Polysemy poses a question of meaning and this question always comes through as a dysfunction. (...) Thus, in every society various techniques are developed intended to *fix* the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs; the linguistic message is one of these techniques. [A]nchorage may be ideological and indeed this is its principal function; the text *directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle *dispatching*, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance. The text is indeed the creator’s (and hence society’s) right of inspection over the image; anchorage is a control, bearing a responsibility — in the face of the projective power of pictures — for the use of the message. With respect to the liberty of the signifieds of the image, the text has thus a *repressive* value (37, emphasis in original).

The photograph for instance has a meaning, or rather multiple meanings, but it is difficult to find a definite ground for our interpretation without a verbal key, such as an *external* caption, capable of directing our interpretation. Things are similar in comics, where, by the way, images never function in isolation. Furthermore, comics contain words within the images, and it is often underscored that, in comics, the verbal either *anchors* (“anchrage”) the image, as in the use of captions for instance, or complements the image as *relay* (“relais”), where the word *supports* the visual, which is the case with dialogues in texts balloons.<sup>19</sup> The word, in its *anchoring* function at least, reduces the polysemy of the image; it *explains* the visual message, it endows it with a code.

The concept of *anchoring* is also interesting because it is *suggestive*. It evokes the logical possibility of a “de-anchoring,” or better, a “non-anchored” image. As I’ve tried to illustrate, it is precisely this non-anchoredness of the image vis-à-vis the text (and vice versa) that is the cause of our confusion. Contrary to what is mostly expected of comics, a host of images in *Buscavidas* is not “held down” by any text, and inversely, some words – such as the “M(a)r(i)CHta/M(a)rCH(i)ta” sequence – seem not to “anchor” the image at all, let alone function as relay. Furthermore, I believe that this un-anchoring or deterritorialization is counter-censorial. Whereas censorship prefers a transparent interplay between word and text while castigating any straightforward subversive anchorage as in the case of a caption saying “State Butchery” for instance, the mere absence of anchoring already bypasses any possible intervention. External censorship becomes simply impossible in this case: one cannot censor an absence. It might be interesting in this regard to repeat Breccia’s words:

I started on *Dracula* during full repression. The last episode that I drew was “Fui Leyenda” (“I am not a legend anymore”) and, at that time, the dictatorship was already greatly weakened. Even so, if they would have found at home a page where I had written “State Butchery,” for example, they would surely have executed me. They had done it for far less than that.

What is important in this statement is Breccia’s acknowledgment of the impossibility of clear critical anchoring in a context of repression. Breccia’s counter-censorial solution is twofold: he either obscures anchorage, by providing a somewhat ambiguous caption (“Fui Leyenda”), or he opts to create spaces of outright refusal of anchorage. Both solutions are added to what can be called “safe” or “harmless” anchoring connected to the story’s diegesis. Indeed, the image we are analyzing (figure 1) already contains some anchoring; the caption at the top of the image elucidates the drawing by explaining what Buscavidas is doing, namely writing down today’s story so he can file it in his library. It is then the “M(a)r(i)CHta” sequence that does not have any anchoring function with respect to what is shown, thus leaving open all interpretative possibilities and giving rise to speculations and associations. The latter tactic – the refusal of anchoring – can be seen as empowering in the sense that it subverts the dictatorship’s own manipulation of images and texts, notably in mass media. The regime itself precluded any direct reference to atrocities or cloaked the “dirtiness” of its operations in a teleological and monumentalizing discourse. Instead of manipu-





Figure 2. Alberto Breccia and Carlos Trillo. "La Abuela," 1994 [1981]: [3]. From *Buscavidas*. (c) Doedytores, Buenos Aires.

lating images through a naturalizing anchoring, Breccia's images and scraps of texts seem to allow a centrifugal instead of a clear-cut centripetal "remote-controlling."

Semiotic analyses of comics inspired by the findings of Barthes maintain that *anchoring* is a *function* of the word in comics. I believe it is not so much a *function* but rather the *stance* of the reader, a reader who is positioned as someone intent on extracting a homogenous interpretation out of fragments. Although counter-censorial techniques were employed by authors, they still largely depended for their decoding on a reader able to pick up cryptic pointers, a reader willing to follow a 'subversive' path of interpretation in order to unearth 'dirty' secrets. In a context of surveillance, the reading stance seems more attuned, even hypersensitive, to possible traces of opposition, regardless of the author's intention. Perhaps, due to the context, the reader will even construct additional "blanks," so as to fill them with a resistant reading, as a form of (over)compensation.

I now return to the concept of *percepticide* to clarify this point. What the concept basically highlights is that what people were *able* to witness every day – arrests with suspects kicking and screaming and dragged by their hair, roadblocks, checkpoints, the ransacking of houses – was not *allowed* to be seen, or at least it could not be spoken of in public, it could not be acknowledged. What is said has been radically *de-anchored* from what is seen. In comics, one can feel this same *percepticide* at work – images depicting state violence were simply forbidden. The paradox is that this *percepticide* is turned back on the reader, and this also holds for *Buscavidas*. It is as if the presence of oblique or obstinate signs is suggestive of the reader's blindness, or rather, these signs now call upon the responsibility of the reader in choosing a meaning, a possibility denied by the regime's monopoly on anchoring. The images have become the reader's – rather than the censor's – "right of inspection." Their sheer indeterminacy poses the reader with a choice, demanding him to actively participate in connecting words with images. Alternatively, the reader is also free to choose amongst the associations or mental images in confrontation with disconnected phrases or any other type of "typographic extravaganza," such as "M(a)r(i)CHta/M(a)rCH(i)ta." In effect, *Buscavidas* abounds in such hermetic and unanchored signals which seem to force us to make strange connections to ward off "the terror of the uncertain sign" (Barthes 1977: 37); it is as if this de-territorialization is a way of getting back at the censor.

## V

Allow me to shift my focus to another excerpt from *Buscavidas*, namely the episode entitled "La Abuela," or "The Grandmother." The story itself is straightforward enough: a woman wanders about in the poor district of Buenos Aires showing off her expensive fur coat thus arousing the curiosity of our character-narrator *Buscavidas*. He believes there's a juicy story here for his collection, and right he is. A withering old lady with a parrot on her shoulder confides that this posh character, *Laurita*, was once the poorest girl of the *barrio* but that she was able to gather her fortune by putting up her own grandmother as the main prize in a raffle, literally capitalizing on the belief that the old disabled grandmother possessed supernatural powers of healing. The old lady and the rest of the community are not so much shocked by the sale of the grandmother – they were all more than happy to buy tickets for the raffle with the little cash they had – but with the fact that *Luisa*, who had the winning ticket, refuses to share the blessings of this wondrous grandmother. Indeed, the old lady cackles, the least *Luisa* could have done is loan out her grandmother to cure her scoliosis; this would have been the charitable thing to do. But no, *Luisa* keeps her all to herself, greedy and selfish as she is. "People are evil," the old hag concludes.

In the bottom panel of one of the pages (Figure 2) we can see a poor *Laurita* carting around her paralytic grandmother in a wheelbarrow. What I find striking in this particular image are the words "YUKON Canadian Liquors," and the typographical prominence of "Yukon" in particular. At first sight, it seems simple. Is this not just an advert or a bar sign referring to one of Canada's finest liquors, namely "Yukon Jack" – which, as the corporate website announces, is "the black sheep of Canadian liquors – a 100 proof Canadian whiskey and honey based liqueur: boldly flavorful, yet surprisingly smooth"?<sup>20</sup> In that case, the words "Yukon Canadian Liquors" would merely function as an element creating a setting, in this case recreating the atmo-

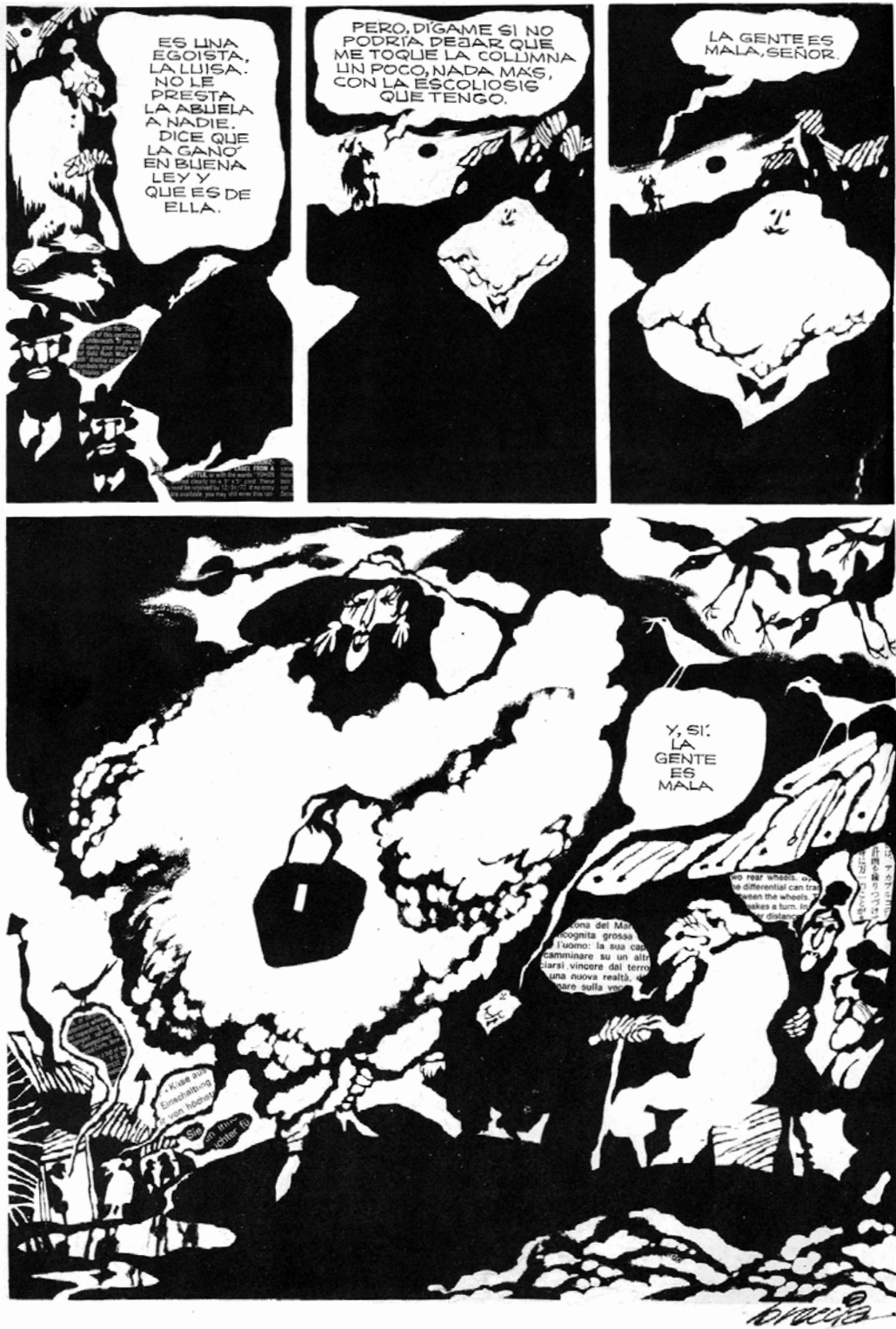


Figure 3. Alberto Breccia and Carlos Trillo. "La Abuela," 1994 [1981]: [8]. From *Buscavidas*. (c) Doedytores, Buenos Aires.

sphere of a rundown working-class district of Buenos Aires. In other words, it is just there to generate an ‘effect of the real’.

However, I believe there is more to it. It is one of those obstinate signs again, not fulfilling its role of anchor, and getting on your nerves. It professes to be a seemingly innocent piece of décor, but at the same time it suggests that some more sinister meaning might be lurking underneath, precisely because there is no image corresponding to the possible range of associations which “Yukon.” The Yukon: that mountainous region of North-western Canada, where gold-diggers and fortune seekers got together at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, all digging for riches, most of them ending up without even a nail to scratch. “Yukon” then stands out as some sort of condensed sign, recalling the mythical frontier days of the Wild West, with all the possible prototypical connotations and images this might conjure up, such as cowboys and Indians, bloodshed, buffaloes, saloons and brothels, Smith and Weston, Clint Eastwood, gunfights, fistfuls of dollars and the Gold Rush – just to name a few things coming to mind. But what point is there in this little exercise of associations? Once again, this stubborn sign does not indicate why it is there and how it can be grounded in the image. This is not to say that there is no possible way of anchoring “Yukon” and its associations within the image, or within the story as a whole. Indeed, I believe this stubborn sign enhances a subtext running through the episode, namely that of exploitation. Even a *barrio* has its own bonanza: on your way from rags to riches, you can always find something to sell, and if it’s not your own body, your own grandmother will do just fine.

Something similar occurs in the speech balloons. On this and also the final page of the same episode (Figure 3), the texts in some of the speech balloons do clearly not function in support of the images. In fact, the words in the speech balloons that are disconnected from the narrative are scraps from publications in different languages, like Arabic, Chinese or Japanese, English, French, German and something resembling cuneiform. This is suggestive of the conditioning of discourse in a context of state repression, in which dialogue becomes ready-made monologue, in which discourse is produced according to the strict guidelines imposed by censors. The words in the speech balloons, if legible, are printed ready-mades reiterating such glamorous and posh words as “St.-Tropez” and “Costa Brava,” words seemingly cut from a tourist brochure promising an “unforgettable” (“unvergesslich”) trip (cf. figure 2). These are prefabricated scraps of discourse that have no supportive function with regards to the images, to the narrative or the characters uttering them. The figures just blab and spit out unintelligible or respectable *printed* words; the kind of speech that has been approved by the censors. Snippets of interviews, adverts and articles in foreign languages are crammed into the speech balloons of the passers-by. Deprived of their own vocabulary, these figures are being spoken as they copy the written and published words that have presumably been sanctified by the censor’s gaze. These scraps can be seen as counter-censorial jibes, displaced from the original context of publication – one assumes they belong in glossy magazines – to be reinserted into the squalid slums of Buenos Aires, effecting a parodic cosmopolitanism for the pauper. Once again braving all possible accusation of nitpicking, we can make out, in the top left panel of the last page of this episode (cf. Figure 3) – and I admit you have to look very closely, or better still, use a magnifying glass – the word “Yukon” and even “Gold Rush,” as printed in one of the speech balloons of one of the two almost-identical characters. The reappearance of “Yukon” further strengthens the subtext of capitalist exploitation, and even enables an (admittedly rather farfetched) allegorical interpretation tying the economic policies adopted by the Process of National Reorganization to its practices of state terror.

It is true that the neo-liberal *laissez-faire* economic policy of junta minister José Martínez de Hoz favored foreign capital while trying and failing to reduce the Peronist legacy of ‘interventionism’ or a state directed economy. It can be asserted that “the atrocity that occurred in Argentina during the Dirty War was tied into Argentina’s entry into the neoliberal world economic ‘order’” (Taylor: 1999:24). Or, quoting Neil Larsen (1983):

Many, if not most, of the policies of military rule in the Southern Cone can in fact be explained as requirements of the imperialist 'solution' to global capital disequilibrium, whereby the latter's most damaging effects are transferred to the dependent economies of the periphery (113).

The economic experiment failed miserably and by 1980 Argentina was going through an economic collapse that would transform it into a third rather than a first world nation, the latter being a goal the junta had been so obsessed with. Now, stating that this little Laurita in furs is an emblematic representation of the neo-liberal's wet dream of an affluent Argentina might be stretching the point a bit. Similarly, the allegorization of this image as illustrating the defeat of this economic policy in which Laurita-Argentina in furs can only put herself on display for foreign investors by the suffocation and repression of the poor scum living in the barrios might also be a rather heavy-handed overinterpretation. However, the importance of these reading exercises lies in the fact that they illustrate the endless flow of meaning emanating from unanchored signs. Here, the terror of (false) transparency of junta discourse is countered by the "terror of the uncertain sign," giving rise to some rather ingenious or simply outlandish readings.

## VI

Let us conclude with a final image, an image I would like to call Breccia's counter-censorial monument to censorship. I am referring to the final frame of the second page of "La Abuela" (cf. Figure 4). This panel refers to censorship in its crudest form, and can be considered the most blatant *counter-censorial* picture of the entire comic. In anticipation of the censor, the C already covers up that which must not be shown, in this case the genitals. Instead of using a fig leaf, which is a rather discreet solution to cover what is forbidden for the eyes to see, we are confronted with a capital C which does not require much explication. As such, the C carries with it a whole history of censorship, the one pertaining to the body, fear of arousal and the pornographic. In fact, this C reverberates throughout the entire comic: it clearly signals cultural surveillance and is a mocking index of the principle of self-censorship. It can be seen as a cautionary sign, calling upon the reader to actively search out the subversive, to imagine what lies beneath the sign C so to speak.

The figure itself seems to be a representation of a statue or monument. Birds land on his or her body, while its feet seem to have merged with the pedestal. In the right hand corner we can see a tiny old man – complete with the bourgeois apparel of pipe, hat, suit, tie and cane. On his daily walk through Buenos Aires, the aged *petit bourgeois* stops at one of his favorite monuments and takes a minute to admire it. Perhaps the settled little old man is blind and a bit foolish – dare we invoke the name of Jorge Luis Borges? – because it is one thing to admire a repulsive fat giant on a plinth who has not much in common with the imperious equestrian statue of kings or generals or the refinement of a Michelangelo nude. It is of course a totally different and more problematic matter when one admires the back of such a statue, indeed, when one decides to admire the arse of a statue to censorship. Disregarding the undoubtedly deeply philosophical implications of this observation, it is important to note that in this frame we are dealing with a counter-memorial, or anti-monument, precisely because it gives shape to a counter-memory.<sup>21</sup> The concept of counter-memory, as put forward by Michel Foucault (1986:76-100), indicates the "apocryphal" versions of "Official History," those versions in which forgotten and rebellious voices contradict a state-sanctioned historiography. In Mari Carmen Ramírez's words (1999), counter-memory gives form to a "misfit version of history," where

the heroes of this retentive counter-history are the antiheroes of "monumental history," and their antiheroism humbly stipulates that that particular "monument" does not deserve to be remembered (30-31).





Figure 4. Alberto Breccia and Carlos Trillo. "La Abuela," 1994 [1981]: [2]. From *Buscavidas*. (c) Doedytores, Buenos Aires.

We can clearly see Breccia's stipulation on memory. What is worth remembering are not any grand or heroic acts in the fight against terrorism, a "fight" that was rigged by a paranoid military elite anyhow. No, what deserves to be remembered by posterity is repression, silencing and the big C.

## Afterthoughts

Allow me to immediately point to some of the shortcomings of my thought-processes as encapsulated in this text. First and foremost, it has to be stressed that comics such as *Buscavidas* were a minority. Although my lengthy analysis of *Buscavidas* might retrospectively suggest a considerable impact and importance, I cannot stress enough that such comics were the exception rather than the rule.

Secondly, the impression of a deterministic approach to textual production might arise, suggesting that cultural systems, of which the comics field is but a part, do not have their own internal dynamics. If this were the case, one could develop full-proof techniques for producing or either detecting oblique signs of subversion. As I see it, there will never be a *Subversion for Dummies* listing "Ten Easy Steps to Criticize Majority Rule and Get Away with It in Times of Repression," because subversion is more tied to the situation of reception rather than that of production.

Although I have my reservations about the unconditionality of her assertion, one has to agree on some level with Beatriz Sarlo (1992: 241) when she writes that

[T]he point of using coded messages was not to get around censorship. This aesthetic option is more than a simply tactical one in my opinion; whether the writer is able to speak clearly is important but only circumstantial. Basically, these authors are expressing an opinion on the limits of realism, one that seems to me to be relatively independent of the circumstances in which those stories were written, published, and read. They are coded stories, and although this aspect meant that they were able to circulate under the military dictatorship, I believe that they would have been encoded in any case, under other circumstances. They treat Argentine history from an oblique, diagonal perspective; they glance over their shoulder at it, as it were. Each is encoded differently, and the variation reveals the aesthetic potential of the Argentine literature produced during that time.

What is important is Sarlo's insistence on a continuity of poetics between the literature produced during and the literature produced prior to and after the military junta. This continuity consisted in the progressive debunking of realism through various formal, narratological and representational experiments. This insight has the virtue of dislodging the myth that the Process of National Reorganization constitutes an absolute irruption in the development of the arts. As Sarlo points out, literature, and by extension also the other cultural spheres, did have "relative autonomy" to develop their own poetics, a poetics in which metaphor, allegory, the "diagonal perspective," and a general indirectness of style had already been established. This was also the case with comics, which were also fervently crossing the boundaries of a traditional realist style, both narratively and graphically. Alberto Breccia's oeuvre was no exception. In fact, he can be seen as a forerunner in his early experimentation with collage, drawings styles, fragmentation, and experimental points of view – innovations that predate the Process of National Reorganization. In a sense then, what we find in *Buscavidas* is but the continuation of a pictorial language progressively turning away from realist limitations. This graphic renewal would be taken up in full force after the restoration of democracy (cf. Reggiani 2005).

Whereas I can partially follow Sarlo's insistence on the relative independence of encoding, I do not believe this autonomy is as absolute as she maintains. Of course, context alone does not condition the form and content of cultural production, but to maintain that it merely has "circumstantial" or negligible influence projects an image of an unconditionally autarchic literature. Even more disturbing than this reduction is her silence when it comes to decoding. Although it might not be the function of fiction to expose repressive regimes – in this case to reveal a "secret Argentina" – it can be an effect of decoding, an after-effect of reading, what the novelist Ricardo Piglia (quoted in Balderston 1994:1-2) seems to have in mind when discussing his novel *Artificial Respiration*, which was also published during the period of state terror:

[C]oding is the work of fiction in any context. I don't believe that the ellipsis of political material performed by fiction depends on authoritarian situations. Perhaps the type of coding is different in the latter cases, and that would be interesting to research: whether there are different types of coding according to the different contexts within which the novelist works. I believe that fiction always codes and constructs hieroglyphs out of social reality. Literature is never direct... What I do believe is that political contexts define ways of reading.

The same could be said about comics produced during the "dirty war." Furthermore, another factor coming into play is that of audience expectation. *Buscavidas* was originally published in *Superhumor* by the publishing house La Urraca, which, in its turn, activated a very specific reading stance. In this respect, Judith Gociol (qtd. in Torres 2005) observes that "buying magazines published by La Urraca was an act of defiance, readers searched for critical contents." Surely, this must have had an influence on the decoding and (re-)signification of these comics. Regardless of authorial intentions, it seems that the reading audience constructed a more 'heroic' author as a way of compensating for their own complicity, helplessness or feelings of guilt. Counter-censorial readings are indifferent to authorial intention, and it is perhaps this indifference that seems to cause unease with Carlos Trillo when he states that

readers sometimes 'saw' hidden meanings – I have to be honest – we as authors never intended or imagined; such was the need of the times. (Trillo: 2003).

Even authors themselves can feel somewhat uncomfortable by the "terror of the uncertain signs" of their own work, as evinced by a reader's instinctive ascription of a rebellious intentionality, or by a reader who is simply seeing things.<sup>22</sup>

## Notes

- 1 According to Patricia Marchak (1999:16-17), the word "disappeared" (*desaparecido*) "is a word that belongs to Latin America as no other word does." One important legacy of the Argentine junta and similar regimes in the southern cone therefore pertains to language: "the word 'disappeared' has become a noun and a transitive verb in Latin-American Spanish as a consequence of the terrorist regimes in Argentina and neighboring societies" (ibidem.). Tina Rosenberg (1992) does not confine the notion of *desaparecido* to Latin-American Spanish arguing that "over the years, the word 'disappeared' metaphorized into a transitive word in the global vocabulary, and 'to be disappeared' and 'to disappear someone' entered the world's consciousness" (79).
- 2 I am of course first and foremost referring to the work of Jacques Derrida and his questioning of authenticity and its trace, the signature, ranging from "Signature Evenement Contexte," (in his *Marges de la Philosophie*. Paris: Minuit, 1972. 367-93) to *Mémoires d'Aveugle* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1990), just to name two examples.
- 3 The different episodes were published in the following issues of *Superhumor*, namely n°11 - (November 1981), 12 (December 1981), 13 (January 1982), 14 (February 1982), 15 (March 1982), 16 (April 1982), 17 (May 1982), 18 (June 1982), 19 (July and August 1982), 20 (September 1982), 21 (October 1982) and 22 (November 1982). I would like to thank Federico Reggiani for providing me with this information.
- 4 This is what Carlos Trillo (2005) explained to me with regard to the possible meanings of the word *buscavidas*.
- 5 I am quoting some of General Videla's terms used during a press conference, reported in the daily *La Nación* of 18 December 1977, p.1 and p.18. General Luciano Méndez (quoted in Arceneaux 2001) left little doubt concerning the actual theatre of war, i.e. the mental (ideological) battlefield: "Armed subversion is totally annihilated in the country; but, with respect to the other, the ideological, I do not venture to say that it has been eradicated in the university staffs, nor in civic life, in associations, in neighborhoods, in the working environment. The ideologues are hidden and delinquent subversion can rise up again." (ibid.: 119).



- 6 Maria Estela “Isabelita” Martínez de Perón, Juan Perón’s third wife, assumed the presidency after her husband, by that time reduced to a “doddering right-winger,” (Rosenberg 1992:121) died in 1974. During Isabelita’s short term as president, it was already her secretary Lopez Rega who, behind the scenes, really led the government. Rega set up right-wing death squads that would have free reign during the military repression. The two major guerilla groups, the *Montoneros*, named after irregular parties of gauchos fighting for Argentine independence, and the ERP, or the People’s Revolutionary Army (*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*), “had been wiped out” or at least seriously damaged by the time the junta took power (ibidem.). Emilio Fermin Mignone, who had lost his daughter during the repression and was co-founder of CELS (*Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales*, Centre for legal and Social Studies), calculated that “no more than 5 percent of the disappeared people could be called combatants [i.e. armed resistance]. The number of combatants could not have been more than four hundred or five hundred at the time of the military coup – no more” (qtd. in Carlson 1996:11). One need only cite a few figures in order to illustrate the disproportionate violence of the military engaged in their ‘Dirty War’. “From 1971 to 1979, government forces killed or disappeared at least 10.483 people. In the single month of November 1976, fewer than 20 people were killed by the left while 600 were killed or disappeared by the right. In the entire period of the Dirty War the navy lost 11 men: 6 officers and 5 enlisted men. In the ESMA, where about 4.500 prisoners died, Task Force 3.3.2. [i.e. the navy’s elite ‘intelligence’ unit] lost 1 sailor (Rosenberg 1992:122-23). The junta’s own figures greatly exaggerated the number of armed resistance in an effort to manipulate public opinion into believing the ‘justness’ of its ‘Dirty War’.
- 7 Videla made this statement on 24 May 1976, on the two-month anniversary of the coup (quoted in Troncoso 1992 vol.1:29).
- 8 Modern math and Einstein’s relativity theory were forbidden and could not be taught at any educational institution. The examples of ‘subversive’ words are taken from the ministry of education’s manual “How to Recognize Marxist Infiltration in the Schools” (quoted in Feitlowitz 1998:37).
- 9 The following junta decree (quoted in Taylor 1997:268 n.12-13) is very explicit on the subject in stating that it was not allowed to “diminish the image of the guardian of order” or taint “the image of parents, or justify the rebellion of their children. In all cases, the resolution of the issues must lead to a positive ending.”
- 10 This is how the Argentine author María Elena Walsh (quoted in Graham-Jones 2000:20) in 1979 described the impact of self-censorship on artists trying to work during the Process of National Reorganization.
- 11 Quoted in Graham-Jones’s (2000) *Exorcising History* (p. xx), a study of theatre during the junta.
- 12 Needless to say, I use the term text in its widest possible sense as described by Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*: “The impossibility of living outside the infinite text – whether this be Proust or the daily newspaper or the television screen.” (Barthes 1975:36)
- 13 With ‘hidden layers’ I do not refer to authorial intention, namely that an author would have put ‘secrets’ in a text in order for a ‘clever’ audience to decipher them. It is the text, in dialogue with the censorial context, that enables the reader to decipher according to the reading ‘imperative’ of a ‘culture of camouflage’, which one could characterize as “the message is hidden between the lines.” The camouflaged texts position the reader as a decipherer, and whether or not his reading coincides with the intention of the author is only important in that this divergence points to new perspectives on the text in question.
- 14 Quino and Cilencio (Eugenio Cilencio), to name only two well-known cartoonists, made some daring cartoons of the junta, so this would not constitute encryption.
- 15 Thierry Groensteen (2004) argues convincingly that comics never really had an ‘avant-garde,’ because comics “lack (...) an authority susceptible to rejecting or stigmatizing heretics (...). Furthermore, one should ask oneself the question whether (...) the possibility to subvert exists in the same manner within “noble” culture and popular culture.” Accordingly, the history of comics is not marked by the succession of avant-gardes, but rather by “a list of curiosities” (63, my translation).
- 16 These are the actual original Spanish lyrics of the popular song (source: <http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Documentos/marcha.htm>) “Los muchachos Peronistas”

Los muchachos Peronistas  
 todos unidos triunfaremos,  
 y como siempre daremos  
 un grito de corazón:  
 ¡Viva Perón! ¡Viva Perón!  
 Por ese gran argentino  
 que se supo conquistar  
 a la gran masa del pueblo  
 combatiendo al capital.

¡Perón, Perón, qué grande sos!  
 ¡Mi general, cuanto valés!  
 ¡Perón, Perón, gran conductor,  
 sos el primer trabajador!

Por los principios sociales  
 que Perón ha establecido,  
 el pueblo entero esta unido  
 y grita de corazón:  
 ¡Viva Perón! ¡Viva Perón!  
 Por ese gran argentino  
 que trabajó sin cesar,  
 para que reine en el pueblo  
 el amor y la igualdad.

¡Perón, Perón, qué grande sos!  
 ¡Mi general cuanto valés!  
 ¡Perón, Perón, gran conductor,  
 sos el primer trabajador!

Imitemos el ejemplo  
 de este varón argentino,  
 y siguiendo su camino  
 gritemos de corazón:  
 ¡Viva Perón! ¡Viva Perón!  
 Por esa Argentina grande  
 con que San Martín soñó,

es la real y la efectiva  
que debemos a Perón.

¡Perón, Perón, qué grande sos!  
¡Mi general cuanto valés!  
¡Perón, Perón, gran conductor,  
sos el primer trabajador!

An English translation by T.M. Edsall is available on [http://web.archive.org/web/20040624205236/edsall-historypage.org/html/marcha\\_Peronista.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20040624205236/edsall-historypage.org/html/marcha_Peronista.html)

- 17 The phrase “irruption of memory,” as it is used by Alexander Wilde (2002), shows clear affinities with Walter Benjamin’s utopian interpretation of the possibility of memory to effect change. In his analysis of the recent public debates in Chile centering on the commemoration of the Pinochet years, Wilde refers with “irruption of memory” to “public events that break in upon Chile’s national consciousness, unbidden and often suddenly, to evoke associations with symbols, figures, causes, ways of life which to an unusual degree are associated with a political past that is still present in the lived experience of a major part of the population” (4). Such irruptions in their turn arose public discourse with possible political effects, or influence the way this past is to be represented. In her discussion of Walter Benjamin’s essay “Excavation and Memory,” Esther Leslie refers to Benjamin’s understanding of memory’s utopian potential on each new generation in that its traces are “ready to burst out and scatter the fragile consensus of the present” (Leslie 2003:178). It is the latter understanding of the utopian potentialities of memory that my own essays focus on, whereby I do not restrict the use of “irruption of memory” to public events in the re-working of a past experience alone; comics and by extension any other text can effectuate “irruptions of memory.”
- 18 In his hagiographic and uncritical account of Juan Domingo Perón’s life, Alfredo Silleta (2005) repeats the oft-heard characterization of the “colonel of the people” as “the most loved and hated [man] of his time” (“el más amado y el más odiado de su tiempo”). It is perhaps superfluous to add that to this day, Perón is still both revered and reviled in equal amounts.
- 19 Roland Barthes (1977: 30) refers to this relaying function of the word in comics as follows: “Here language (generally a fragment of dialogue) and image are in complementary relation; the words are then fragments of a general syntagm, as are the images, and the message’s unity occurs on a higher level: that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis.” Or, in the words of Stéphanie Dansereau (2002), “La fonction relais du verbe a pour rôle de faire des sauts spatio-temporels par souci d’économie d’espace et de temps pour raconter une histoire tels les espaces diégétiques (récitatifs) dans les B.D. ou les fondus au cinéma.”
- 20 Incidentally, the brewer *Yukon Liquors* is also known for its “Perma Frost,” some sort of, believe it or not, “peppermint schnapps.” Cf. <http://www.webtender.com/db/ingred/62>
- 21 Although of course we are dealing with a drawing and not an actual monument, I still believe it is insightful to repeat James E. Young’s (1992) characterization of the counter-monument as “brazen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being” (267).
- 22 I am paraphrasing Judith Gociol’s succinct formulation (qtd. in Torres 2005) of the divergence between authorial intention and reception, and the possibly disquieting effect the latter might have on an author confronted with meanings he or she had “never intended.”

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