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“Una imagen real de la Argentina”: Image-based Counter-narratives through the Walking Archive and the Project Hegemony.

Elena Rosauero¹

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid-España

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Abstract

After the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz —then Minister of Economy under the Military Dictatorship— promoted an initiative to publish an article in Time Magazine in which “a real image of Argentina would be given” —in the words of businessman Carlos Pedro Blaquier, strongly close to the military regime—. But who defines the extent of reality of an image? Who makes these “real images” and how do they articulate within the construction of national

¹ Licenciada en Historia y Teoría del Arte y Maestra en Estudios Latinoamericanos, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Doctoranda e investigadora en formación, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Secretaria General de la Red de Estudios Visuales Latinoamericanos. Integrante del Grupo de Investigación: Estudios cinematográficos y cultura audiovisual-ECCA, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Líneas de investigación: estudios latinoamericanos, estudios culturales y de cultura visual y antropología del arte. <http://revlat.blogspot.com/>; elena.rosauro@gmail.com.

history and identity? Along this article, and departing from the construction of the past in Argentina through the “real images” produced within the economic and artistic institutions, we will examine the image-based counternarratives propounded by Eduardo Molinari through his Walking Archive and the collaborative project Hegemony. These two contemporary artistic projects focus mainly on the last decades of the 20th century in order to give visibility to the existent relations among economic groups, the military, politicians and the cultural system in Argentina. These relations have provided legitimacy to certain processes of construction of “real” narratives and also to certain artistic practices, while rejecting others.

Keywords: Eduardo Molinari, image, politics, power, Argentina.

Una imagen real de la Argentina: contranarrativas artísticas a través del Archivo Caminante y el proyecto Hegemonía.

Resumen

Tras el Mundial de Fútbol de 1978 celebrado en Argentina, el entonces ministro de economía de la Junta militar José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz promovió la publicación de un artículo en la revista estadounidense *Time*, en el que “se daría una imagen real de la Argentina” —en palabras del empresario Carlos Pedro Blaquier, muy cercano al régimen—. Pero, ¿quién define el grado de realidad de una imagen?, ¿quién elabora esas “imágenes reales”?, ¿cómo se articulan éstas en el marco de la construcción de la historia y la identidad nacionales? En este artículo,

partiendo de la construcción del pasado llevada a cabo en Argentina a través de las “imágenes reales” producidas desde las instituciones económicas y artísticas, examinaremos las contra-narrativas que propugnan las imágenes de Eduardo Molinari y su Archivo Caminante y el proyecto colaborativo Hegemonía. Estos dos proyectos artísticos se centran fundamentalmente en las últimas décadas del siglo XX, y tienen el objetivo de dar visibilidad a las relaciones existentes entre los grupos económicos, el ejército, los políticos y el sistema cultural en Argentina. Estas relaciones han dado legitimidad a ciertos procesos de construcción de narrativas “reales” así como a ciertas prácticas artísticas, mientras que han rechazado otras.

Palabras clave: Eduardo Molinari, imagen, política, poder, Argentina.

Une image réelle de l'Argentine: les contre-récits artistiques à travers l'Archive Promeneur et le projet Hégémonie

Résumé

Après la coupe du monde de football de 1978 en Argentine, le ministre des Finances de la Junte militaire, José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz, a promu la publication d'un article dans la revue états-unienne *Time*, où l'on “présenterait une image réelle de l'Argentine” -selon les mots de l'entrepreneur Charles Pierre Blaquier, très proche du régime-. Mais, qui définit le degré de réalité d'une image? A qui correspond l'élaboration de ces “images réelles”? Comment s'articulent celles-ci dans le cadre de la construction de l'histoire et de l'identité? Dans cet article, qui s'ouvre sur la question de la construction

du passé réalisée en Argentine à travers des “images réelles” produites par les institutions économiques et artistiques, nous examinerons les contre-récits soutenus par les images d'Eduardo Molinari, son *Archive Promeneur* et le projet collaboratif *Hégémonie*. Ces deux projets artistiques se concentrent fondamentalement sur les dernières décennies du XX^e siècle, et ont pour but de mettre en lumière les relations existantes entre les groupes économiques, l'armée, les hommes politiques et le système culturel en Argentine. Ces relations ont servie légitimité à certains processus de construction de récits “réels” ainsi qu'à certaines pratiques artistiques, alors qu'ils ont repoussé d'autres.

Mots clés: Eduardo Molinari, image, politique, pouvoir, Argentine.

1. Images

After the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz –then Minister of Economy under the Military Dictatorship and recently deceased– promoted an initiative to publish an article in *Time Magazine* in which “a real image of Argentina would be given” in order to counteract the “malicious rumors about our country that have been spread”² –these were the words of businessman Carlos Pedro Blaquier, strongly close to the Military Regime at that time, in a letter he sent to Martínez de Hoz, praising the Minister's initiative. This

² An example of these informations that displeased the Regime: “Under the guise of rooting out supporters of left-wing urban guerrillas, elements of Argentina's armed forces appear to be accelerating a campaign of murder, torture, arbitrary arrests and drastic purges. Recent arrivals in the United States present a picture of Buenos Aires, Cordoba and other major Argentine cities dismayingly reminiscent of the brutal repression imposed on Chile after the overthrow of President Salvador Allende in 1973” (“Repression in Argentina” in *The New York Times*, May 26, 1976).

“real image” of Argentina would be given to American journalists through their visiting various Argentine companies that Martínez de Hoz had suggested. The sugar company Ledesma (property of Blaquier)³ was, of course, one of them. The article in Time Magazine was never to be written, but it allows us to question the role of images within the construction of national narratives.

To start with, we need to define what an image is. John Berger states that it is “(...) a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or a set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved –for a few moments or a few centuries. Every image embodies a way of seeing”.⁴

On his behalf, Didi-Huberman notes that

[...] cada imagen es el resultado de movimientos que provisionalmente han sedimentado o cristalizado en ella. Tales movimientos nos obligan a pensar la imagen como un momento energético o dinámico, por más específica que sea su estructura. (...) La imagen, en suma, no se podría disociar del actuar global de los miembros de una sociedad. Ni del saber propio de una época. Ni, desde luego, del creer.⁵

³ Blaquier was summoned last year to court to testify in the Ledesma case about the so-called “Noche del apagón”, when prolonged power cuts during July 1976 in two towns of the province of Jujuy, in Northern Argentina, enabled the kidnapping of four hundred people (and thirty of them are still disappeared). The case directly involved authorities of the company, whose vehicles were used for transporting victims and which received direct economic benefits from the disappearances.

⁴ John Berger, *Ways of seeing* (London: reimpr., BBC and Penguin, 1988), 9-10.

⁵ Georges Didi-Huberman, *La imagen superviviente* (Madrid: Abada, 2009), 34-35, 43. Italics as in the original quote. The original text is written in French.

Azade Seyhan in *Languages of visuality*, argues that an “image not only represents but also imparts information. Therefore, the production of images furnishes a power base for the producers, who, in the course of history, have been the ruling classes.”⁶ Hence, along this article we will deal with images as sights that have been reproduced and embody a way of seeing, images as moments in which different movements take place –movements that have to do first with the ruling classes that produced these images, as Seyhan pointed out, but also movements that finally have much to do with their societies as a whole, as Didi-Huberman stated. We consider images, then, as politically useful instruments for the representation of the truth or, at least, of someone’s truth.

As Susan Sontag, among others, has indicated, images are never merely a trace of events: “It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph [or widely, to create an image] is to frame, and to frame is to exclude.”⁷ Thus, as Patrizia Dander reminds us

[...] there is competition to control the interpretation of images produced and disseminated (...) in connection with particular events. Whoever does gain control of their interpretation is also able to influence the spread of visibility, the generation of truth effects, and the positioning of certain individuals.⁸

⁶ Azade Seyhan, “Visual Citations: Walter Benjamin’s Dialect of Text and Image” in *Languages of visuality* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996): 236.

⁷ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2003), 41.

⁸ Patrizia Dander, “Image counter Image”, in *Bild gegen Bild* (Cologne: Walther König, 2012): 13.

Images are, therefore, not only politically useful instruments for the representation of the truth, but also elements of exclusion whose production and distribution control gives power to the groups holding them. Consequently, we can easily understand how extremely important it was to Martínez de Hoz and Blaquier to promote a report on their vision of Argentina.

2. A real image

Jean and John Comaroff have highlighted the ideological shift that has taken place throughout the last decades from an ‘old-style’ nationalism to our contemporary identity politics; it is a shift, they argue, from the ‘old-style’ understanding of the nation state as a single, coherent, construct, to a labile historical formation, a polythetic class of politics-in-motion.⁹ What is remarkable for our current case study is that through both stages (nationalism and identity politics) the same power groups have maintained their hegemony in Argentina; first, they claimed for some kind of collective essence and innate substance that went beyond politics but now, more or less since the end of the last military dictatorship, they bet on the presumably multicultural and depoliticized discourse of neoliberal globalization. It is not our aim here to analyze the strategies related to culture and image of these power groups, since we will focus on the study of some projects in which the Argentine artist Eduardo Molinari develops counter-images, facing the “real images” that the power groups advocate for. However, as the Comaroff explain, we will note that “la cultura, antes esencializada (...) se convierte [especialmente durante los últimos dos o tres decenios] en otra posesión, un bien susceptible de ser

⁹ Jean and John Comaroff, “Naturalizando la nación: aliens, apocalipsis y el estado postcolonial” in *Revista de Antropología Social*, vol. 11 (Madrid: Complutense, 2002): 94-95.

patentado, transformado en una propiedad intelectual, mercantilizado, consumido,”¹⁰ and also depoliticized. Argentine power groups have understood this very well and they have acted consequently promoting cultural and artistic expressions that did not deal (at least profoundly) with sensitive political matters but were, on the contrary, easily assumed by the neoliberal machine.

Images are an appropriate way to conduct these strategies of the power groups, as they, due to their strong content of “reality”, enter our brain without too much elaboration at a first level, as many *Bildwissenschaftler* have argued. Thus, images have more power of persuasion than words. As Dander has noted, “the ‘real’ equals credibility via its sense of unfiltered immediacy. The reality of representation is substituted for the representation of reality. (...) Truth effects (can) replace the truth.”¹¹ Hence, the power groups have profited from the promotion of artistic products, and have portrayed themselves as benefactors and even connoisseurs, standing up for certain artists, museums and curatorial or editorial projects.¹²

¹⁰ Jean and John Comaroff, “Naturalizando la nación...”, 99.

¹¹ Patrizia Dander, “Image counter Image”..., 27. Italics as in the original quote.

¹² For instance: 1) Nelly Arrieta de Blaquier (Carlos Pedro Blaquier’s wife) was President of the Association of Friends of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires for thirty-four years, from 1977 to 2011. 2) From 1992 to 2003, businesswoman Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat was President of the Fondo Nacional de las Artes; her cement manufacturer company Loma Negra was extremely active during the Military Junta years (when she became the richest woman in Argentina) and also afterwards, especially as she engaged herself in President Menem’s political project. 3) In November 2007 Alejandro Reynal, former Vice-President of the Banco Central de la República Argentina during the Military Dictatorship, had to renounce his candidacy to the Presidency of Fundación ArteBA, after being denounced for harassment, extortion and even torture during 1980-1981; Reynal defended himself publicly through a statement he published in *Ramona. Revista de artes visuales*, available here: <http://www.ramona.org.ar/node/18255>.

Having all these in mind, which would be the aim of the “real images”? From our point of view, it is the hegemony of the power groups and the covering of all aspects of life, so that there is no room for alternatives (to neoliberalism, to their ideology, to their growing power).¹³ We will now go back to the definition of hegemony that Raymond Williams proposes in *Marxism and Literature*, following Gramsci. Hegemony

[...] is a whole body of practices and expectations, (...) a lived system of meanings and values – constitutive and constituting–. (...) Hegemony is always a process [not an abstract totalization]. (...) It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own [he calls these pressures counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony]. (...) The reality of cultural process must then always include the efforts and contributions of those who are in one way or another outside or at the edge of the terms of the specific hegemony.¹⁴

The hegemony of the Argentine power groups, as Williams would say, covers a whole body of practices and expectations and it is particularly present within the art world; but as Williams would also argue, this hegemony must face alternative and counter-pressures and deal with them, either to swallow or to reject them.

¹³ In this same line, it is worth recapturing philosopher Marina Garcés’ words: “[...] el verdadero problema: que el capitalismo se ha hecho uno con la realidad y ha tejido así la red infinita de una realidad que no deja nada fuera ni se tiene a sí misma como límite” (“Posibilidad y subversión” in *Archipiélago* No. 53 (Barcelona: *Espai en blanc*, 2002), n.p.).

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 110, 112-113.

As we have already noted, these power groups took a significant part in the military dictatorship, and they also found allies in the field of culture and within the system of the arts with the aim of both doing business and trying to manage the popular imaginary. The neoliberal model was installed by force during the dictatorship and continued its expansion afterwards, especially strongly during the nineties,¹⁵ and it meant to a large extent the looting of the nation-state and its natural resources, more exclusion, unemployment and labor flexibility, a great freedom for speculators and, finally, repression of social struggles and impunity for the genocides as well.¹⁶ In this same line, Molinari argues that,

[...] en el sistema del arte (...) muchos de los actores que se beneficiaron con estas políticas privatizadoras, generadoras de deuda externa y de

¹⁵ It is important here to distinguish these two moments of the neoliberal installation in Argentina: from 1976, the economic plan of the Military Dictatorship promoted economic liberalism, together with the dismantling of regional industrial circuits (especially due to the threat they saw in the different working class organizations); these economic processes contributed to the construction of a totalitarian State backed on terror. On the other hand, during the nineties the followed globalized neoliberal model was that of privatizations and foreign investments.

¹⁶ Regarding impunity, we should note that in 1985, during the Government of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989), a judicial trial of the members of the last Military Dictatorship (Juicio a las Juntas) was carried out. Nevertheless, in 1986 the Full Stop Law (Ley de Punto Final) was passed by the National Congress, mandating the end of investigation and prosecution of people accused of political violence during the Dictatorship; in 1987, the Law of Due Obedience (Ley de Obediencia Debida) was also passed by the Congress, dictating that all officers and their subordinates (from the Army, police or penitentiary service) cannot be legally punished as they were obeying orders from their superiors. Moreover, President Menem (1989-1999), pardoned in 1989 and 1990 those convicted in the trials and also the leftist guerrilla commanders accused of terrorism. However, under Néstor Kirchner's Presidency (2003-2007) the Congress revoked these "Pardon Laws" in 2003, and the Government reopened prosecution of crimes against humanity that has been continued since.

más y más indignidad, encontraron un territorio fértil para autolegitimarse socialmente, pero también para legitimar prácticas culturales y artísticas silentes ante este proceso excluyente, prácticas artísticas descontextualizantes y des-historizantes. Artistas silentes e historiadores-archivistas ciegos, una dupla muy funcional para esta construcción.¹⁷

3. Counter-images

Hitherto, we have argued that many objects of visual and material culture have the primary goal of setting up and maintaining a picture of the world that is both constitutive and affirmative of hegemonic cultural and historical values. Now we will discuss some works by Eduardo Molinari that we have labeled as counter-images. We will borrow this concept from Ellen Sapega who, in turn, borrows it from John Fiske's notion of counterknowledge,¹⁸ a mode of oppositional knowledge that recovers that which has been repressed by dominant discourses. Our use of the concept of counter-image will focus on the premise that

[...] all works [and images] contain within themselves the possibility of being reread or recontextualized in a way that may challenge the ideology according to which they were produced. (...) A counter-image (...) is to be found in relation to or within a given work, acting as a supplement to or negation of that work's preferred reading

¹⁷ Eduardo Molinari, “Los grupos económicos también fueron parte (2)” (blog of the Archivo Caminante).

¹⁸ Of particular importance on this issue would be the book by media scholar John Fiske titled *Media matters. Race and Gender in U.S. Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

or interpretation. (...) [T]he viewer or reader who moves to uncover the possible counter-images contained in a visual or material artifact must engage in a rearticulation of facts, events, and bits of knowledge that the dominant order has repressed or dismissed as insignificant.¹⁹

Thus, artistic works as counter-images may provide a basis for reflection or may even turn our interaction with the world –through images– into a more multilayered, more differentiated critical process. The Argentine artist Eduardo Molinari founded in 2001 the Walking Archive (Archivo Caminante), the root of his artistic practice since, which feeds itself from three sources: black and white photos fruit of the research he has been carrying out since 1999 in the public archives and in the media; his own photos taken during his walks, and “junk” documentation, which consists of all kinds of graphic material he can collect.

The Walking Archive, which currently consists of about fifty boxes, is a work in progress that Molinari defines as a visual archive developed around the existing and imaginary relationships between art, history and politics. It is also a conglomeration of critical questions and observations on the official historical narration and on the process of mummification that social memory has been undergoing.

The documents of this Walking Archive are collages, intervened photographs, photo-composites and drawings. These documents are displayed, in Molinari’s artistic production, in different spatial ways (pictures, installations, intervention of the public space, etc). The

¹⁹ Ellen Sapega, “Image and Counter-Image: The Place of Salazarist Images of National Identity in Contemporary Portuguese Visual Culture” in *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 39:N.2 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002): 48.

artist defines them as “expanded documents”, following Rosalind Krauss.

We consider the documents of the Walking Archive counter-images, for they engage in a re-articulation of facts, events, and bits of knowledge that the dominant order has repressed. Molinari’s counter-images, through collage, installation and montage, boost an alternative “nationness”, that is, they confront the “real images” with social justice, following the motto “ni olvido ni perdón”. They try to build an alternative to the official historical narration and to bring about counter-knowledge, asking the spectators to look for certain details, relations and meanings within the “real images” he intervenes.

We will focus here, on the one hand, on the installation entitled *Las banderas*, a work conceived as site specific for a collective exhibit²⁰ that took place from June 2nd to August 5th, 2012 in one of the buildings of the ex ESMA (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada, a military school used as a clandestine detention center during the dictatorship, that has recently been reused as a site of memory), and on the other hand, we will discuss a collective project in progress, coordinated by Molinari and artist Azul Blaseotto, with the title *Hegemony*,

²⁰ The collective exhibition *Espejos: El camino incierto al País de las Maravillas* was curated by the artists Federico Zuckerfeld and Loreto Garín Guzmán, both members of the artistic collective Grupo Etcétera. Their aim was, too, to create counter-images: “Espejos es la metáfora que permite asumirnos como refractores-proyectores de imágenes. (...) La investigación propone una hipótesis sobre el propio contexto en tensión de la ex-ESMA mediante una narración compuesta por archivos, objetos e instalaciones que intervienen como hipertextos, citas o didascalías en la puesta en escena de la exposición. La exposición (...), ha sido concebida para reactivar el espacio en su función simbólico-testimonial, reflexionando sobre su histórica conflictividad: primero como Escuela Militar, luego como Centro Clandestino de Detención y, tras su recuperación a partir de 2004, transformada en Espacio para la Memoria, la Justicia y los Derechos Humanos, como reflejo invertido de su antigua función represiva” (excerpt from the curatorial text, available at: <http://grupoetcetera.wordpress.com/2012/06/17/espejos-el-camino-incierto-al-pais-de-las-maravillas/>).

which consists of a series of exhibitions, performances, public debates and book presentations exploring cultural, political, and economic machines with artistic methods. In the text he wrote for *Las banderas* (2012), Molinari asks himself and us:

[...] ¿Qué hilos invisibles unen el terrorismo de Estado y el genocidio de la última dictadura militar con el modelo neoliberal de la década del '90?
¿Qué grupos e intereses económicos utilizan la maquinaria lavadora del sistema de arte contemporáneo como herramienta de autolegitimación social?
¿Qué imágenes y prácticas artísticas disfrutan del raro privilegio de mostrarse y funcionar como siempre disponibles a la pretensión de dichas élites de administrar y gestionar el imaginario social?
[...]²¹

In this photographic installation the artist intervened two walls and sixteen wooden drawers he found in one of the garages of the ex ESMA (Image 1). The drawers were laid along the walls, on the floor. Molinari placed three pictures inside each drawer, in which we can see details of some of the people who have been active gears of the hegemonic machine throughout the last decades (Image 2). As we already noted, the power groups have been using the visuality of the contemporary arts' system to hide or camouflage their ideology within the multicultural and depoliticized discourse of neoliberal globalization. This way, they have tried to legitimize themselves socially and politically, through sponsorship in the field of culture and arts. On the walls of the installation, we can see images of different social struggles in Argentina, and especially their signs and flags (*banderas*), with which social movements place themselves in the public space and create alternative modes of visibility (Image 3).

²¹ Eduardo Molinari, "Las banderas" (blog of the Archivo Caminante).



Image 1. Eduardo Molinari, *Las banderas*, within the exhibition Espejos, Centro Cultural Haroldo Conti (ex ESMA), Buenos Aires, 2012, general view. Source: blog of the Archivo Caminante.



Image 2. Eduardo Molinari, *Las banderas*, within the exhibition Espejos, Centro Cultural Haroldo Conti (ex ESMA), Buenos Aires, 2012, detail of the drawers. Source: blog of the Archivo Caminante.



Image 3. Eduardo Molinari, *Las banderas*, within the exhibition *Especjos*, Centro Cultural Haroldo Conti (ex ESMA), Buenos Aires, 2012, detail of the walls. Source: blog of the Archivo Caminante.

Both the photographs of the flags used by the social movements (Image 3) and the pictures of businessmen, politicians and the military kept inside the drawers (Image 2) are cropped and thus reframed, strategy that does not allow the spectators to easily recognize the people and the mottos. Nonetheless, the pictures on the walls tell us about the ongoing social discontent in Argentina, which had its peak after the crash of December 19th and 20th, 2001. In fact, we are able to read the famous frase “que se vayan todos” in one of the photographs of the left wall (Image 1).

The flags contrast the pictures inside the drawers, where powerful and extremely rich people appear relating and supporting one another, be it during the dictatorship years or already in democracy. They have been ruling the country for over forty years, Molinari asserts, from

economics to politics, and of course culture as well. We will now analyze some of these images.

In drawer number 3 (Image 4), we see on top the face of José María Dagnino Pastore, businessman, economist, and Minister of Economy from 1969 to 1970, with Army General Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970) and again in 1982 with General Reynaldo Bignone (1982-1983), among other political, public, and private positions. He was a member of the Directorio del Fondo Nacional de las Artes in the years in which Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat (see footnote 11) was its President (1992-2003). Dagnino Pastore was also involved in a judicial investigation suspect of having given false information to the clients of Banco Sudameris, where he worked, during the 2001 crisis. These sorts of relationships between power groups and artistic institutions are the ones Molinari tries to point out in *Las banderas*. In the middle picture inside drawer number 3, we see the face of Army Captain Luis Emilio Sosa, responsible of the Trelew executions in 1972.²² Finally, at the bottom of the drawer, a medium-shot-image without head of Domingo Cavallo's take over as President of the Banco Central de la República Argentina in 1982, with Dagnino Pastore as Minister of Economy, at the end of the military dictatorship. After that, Cavallo was designated Minister of Economy with President Menem (1991-1996) –time when the Argentine currency board pegged the Peso to the U.S. Dollar– and again with President Fernando de la Rúa (2001) –implementing infamous measures as the “corralito”–.²³

²² On August 22, 1972, sixteen members of different leftist and peronist armed organisations were captured and executed by firearm after having escaped from Rawson prison, in Southern Patagonia. Army Captain Luis Emilio Sosa directed this operation. On October 15, 2012 Sosa and two other officials were condemned to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity.

²³ The economic measures taken by Cavallo at the end of 2001 in order to stop a bank run were known as “corralito”: they almost completely froze bank accounts and forbade withdrawals.

In drawer number 8 (Image 5), we have on top another medium-shot-image without heads of Bartolomé Mitre (director of *Diario La Nación*, and great-great-grandson of the historical Mitre, President of Argentina from 1862 to 1868) and Ernestina Herrera de Noble (director of *Diario Clarín* and one of the richest women in the country, together with Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat); both media business people appear in the original picture with Commander (and President de facto) Jorge Videla –though in Molinari’s reframing we cannot see him– during the opening of a factory property of the company *Papel Prensa*, in 1978.²⁴ As Molinari suggests through the counter-narrative of these photographs, the media and economic groups have long been closely linked to the political power in Argentina. In the middle, a picture of Army General Domingo Bussi –Governor of the province of Tucumán during the dictator ship–²⁵ and Monseñor Adolfo Tortolo –father confessor and spiritual adviser of Videla– in Tucumán, in 1970. And at the bottom, we see President Carlos Menem smiling to José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz in 1990, when Menem was already President of the nation. Again and again, the relationships between power groups are made visible, and they all have a link –however small– with the culture and arts system, either through promotion and sponsorship, through media and education, or through direct ruling of institutions.

²⁴ *Papel Prensa* was the larger manufacturer of newsprint. It was founded in 1971 by some businessmen and sold in 1976 to *Diario Clarín*, *Diario La Nación* and *Diario La Razón*. This sale was promoted by the Military Junta in order to monopolize the media production and control the news flow. From 2010, there have been several reports about crimes against humanity committed by the Military to pressure the former owners during the sale of the company.

²⁵ And sentenced in 2008 to life imprisonment for several crimes against humanity during those years as Governor.



Image 4. Eduardo Molinari, *Las banderas*, within the exhibition *Espejos*, Centro Cultural Haroldo Conti (ex ESMA), Buenos Aires, 2012, detail of drawer no. 3. Source: blog of the Archivo Caminante.



Image 5. Eduardo Molinari, *Las banderas*, within the exhibition *Espejos*, Centro Cultural Haroldo Conti (ex ESMA), Buenos Aires, 2012, detail of drawer no. 8. Source: blog of the Archivo Caminante.

The images Molinari uses are taken or appropriated from the media: television, internet, and newspapers.

The artist either intervenes them or, as in *Las banderas*, he just reframes, crops, and puts them together in order to allow the spectators see how the power groups relate and function.

In our second example, the project *Hegemony*, the participant artists²⁶ focus on the development that the nation state has undergone towards the global phase of capitalism, in which transnational flows and the end of history play a capital role. Within the frame of *Hegemony*, the artists have illustrated this situation through micro-narratives dealing with power and economy, emphasizing agro-business, bio-technology, or political deals, for these are a very visible part of the economic and social repertoire that nourishes the speculations of transnational banking and financial groups. Therefore, through local and micro research, and artistic practices, these artists try to follow the direction of social movements and alternative resistance experiences in order to continue to open cracks in the apparently impregnable body of capitalism, and to make visible and disrupt the hegemonic agendas (Image 6).²⁷

²⁶ They are: Azul Blaseotto (Buenos Aires, Argentina), Santiago Fredes (Tigre, Argentina), Paola Tafur (Cali, Colombia), Gabriel Serulnicoff (Buenos Aires, Argentina), Valeria Serué (Buenos Aires, Argentina) and Eduardo Molinari (Buenos Aires, Argentina).

²⁷ For more information about the ideas behind this project, read the artists' statement here: <http://archivocaminante.blogspot.de/2011/05/el-archivo-caminante-y-la-darsena-te.html>.



Image 6. *Poster of the project Hegemony.*
Source: Eduardo Molinari.

Among the different artistic actions forming Hegemony, we will focus on El Hotel, an installation by Molinari and artist Azul Blaseotto, consisting of documentary images covering different periods of the life of the imposing hotel Carrasco in Montevideo, Uruguay (from its construction to its neglect, and finally its restoration –as hotel and casino– from 2008 on by the international tourism companies Sofitel and Codere). The two artists focus here on the relationship between architecture and ideology, and they mark a very significant political and military deal, as it is an essential milestone for Latin American history the fact that in 1975, the 11th Conferencia de Jefes de Ejércitos Americanos had taken place at the Hotel Carrasco. In that meeting (four months before the coup d'état in

Argentina), the first agreements of the Plan Cóndor²⁸ were made, and Videla stated eloquently in the press: “Morirá quien sea necesario” (Image 7 and 8).



Image 7. Eduardo Molinari and Azul Blaseotto, Invitation to the opening of El Hotel, European Center of Constitutional and Human Rights, Berlin, 2012. Source: Eduardo Molinari.

²⁸ As Tito Tricot explains, “Operation Condor was the name given to a secret union of intelligence services of six US-supported, South American military governments- Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, which operated during the 1970s into the early 1980s. Under Operation Condor the intelligence agencies were to use their joint resources to round up thousands of people who were suspected of involvement with leftist groups and imprison them in camps or secret detention centres. Many were tortured, interrogated, then executed and secretly buried, becoming known as the disappeared. Those that escaped their own dictatorship’s security services were often captured and tortured in other Condor countries and eventually returned from where they fled to be executed. Condor agents also located and killed dissidents in operations outside Latin America, in several European nations and the USA” (“CIA’s ‘Operation Condor’: Dirty War, Death Squads, and the Disappeared” in Global Research News, March 15, 2003, available at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-cias-operation-condor-dirty-war-death-squads-and-the-disappeared/5327003>).



Image 8. Eduardo Molinari and Azul Blaseotto, *El Hotel*, within the exhibition *Memoria fotográfica*, SUBTE, Montevideo, 2011, detail of the installation. Source: blog of the Archivo Caminante.

The photographic installation has been showed twice. First, as part of a collective exhibition titled *Memoria fotográfica*, curated by Santiago Tavella at SUBTE / Centro Municipal de Exposiciones de Montevideo, Uruguay, in 2011. Here, each participant created a piece after having researched on the documentary patrimony of the Centro Municipal de Fotografía in Montevideo. Second, *El Hotel* travelled to Berlin in 2012, where it became a “solo show” at the European Center of Constitutional and Human Rights. Molinari has explained how they came to create this project:

Dos procesos alojados en la historia del Hotel Carrasco llamaron y concentraron nuestra atención. Por un lado, el hotel como ícono, emblema de un modelo social. El Hotel Carrasco como

portador de un imaginario y un universo simbólico propios de un modelo social. La arquitectura y el urbanismo como manifestaciones de un proyecto político y económico determinado. Por otro, el hotel como territorio de la memoria vinculado a sucesos de la historia reciente, a las raíces semiocultas del terrorismo de Estado en nuestra región.²⁹

Thus, we found in this installation the issues we have been dealing with in this article, that is, how the power groups relate in order to build and spread certain (real) images constitutive and constituting their worlds. Here, the building of hotel Carrasco acts both as a symbol and as a site where these relationships and image constructions take place. Molinari and Blaseotto display numerous images of the history and present of the building but also of other archive materials related somehow to the hotel, such as newspaper headlines and reports, fotonovelas,³⁰ advertisements, and illustrations. The installation in Montevideo consisted of a space delimited with used corrugated metal sheets (such as the present perimeter of the hotel). Inside this space, the visitors found different construction tools as well as the photographic display (Image 9 and 10).

²⁹ Eduardo Molinari, “Hotel Carrasco: memoria, urbanismo(s) y dictadura(s)” (blog of the Archivo Caminante).

³⁰ A fotonovela is a publication similar to a comic-book but with photographs instead of illustrations, always combined with dialogue bubbles.



Image 9. Eduardo Molinari and Azul Blaseotto, *El Hotel*, within the exhibition *Memoria fotográfica*, SUBTE, Montevideo, 2011, general view of the installation. Source: Eduardo Molinari.



Image 10. Eduardo Molinari and Azul Blaseotto, *El Hotel*, within the exhibition *Memoria fotográfica*, SUBTE, Montevideo, 2011, detail of the installation. Source: Eduardo Molinari.

In Image 11, it is possible to observe the variety of photographic material we have just brought to attention: to the left, on top, a big size picture of the beach in front of the hotel, during its golden age; just below it, three small photographs of 1975 newspapers’ headlines reporting on the military Conference and the issues the Commanders dealt with during that meeting. The fourth small photograph below the big size picture is an illustration of the three military Corps (Marine, Army, and Air Force) of the Uruguayan Army, saluting their coat of arms. On the right, the artists have displayed two sets of four photographs each: above, we see again more 1975 newspapers’ headlines and reports, dealing with the celebration of the military Conference; below, the first picture shows a graffiti that reads “fuera Yankis”, probably in the outskirts of Montevideo; on the contrary, the next three photographs depict the (official) warm welcome given to the United States Military due to the Conference.



Image 11. Eduardo Molinari and Azul Blaseotto, *El Hotel*, European Center of Constitutional and Human Rights, Berlín, 2012, detail of a wall.
Source: blog of the Archivo Caminante.

4. Epilogue

I would like to close this article with a quote by Raymond Williams, regarding the results or effects that these counter-images can actually have on the spectators and on the system:

It can be persuasively argued that all or nearly all initiatives and contributions even when they take on manifestly alternative or oppositional forms, are in practice tied to the hegemonic: that the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture. [But] It would be wrong to overlook the importance of works and ideas which, while clearly affected by hegemonic limits and pressures, are at least in part significant breaks beyond them, which may again in part be neutralized, reduced, or incorporated, but which in their most active elements nevertheless come through as independent and original. (...) The finite but significant openness of many works of art, as signifying forms making possible but also requiring persistent and variable signifying responses, is then especially relevant.³¹

It is then significant and valuable to create and spread counter-images through artistic artifacts and practices, for they allow the spectators to engage in the re-articulation of facts, events, and bits of knowledge that the dominant order has repressed. Molinari's counter-images confront the "real images" produced by the power groups with social justice, and try to build an alternative to the official historical narration and to bring about counter-knowledge, asking us, the emancipated spectators, to look for certain details, relations and

³¹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*..., 114.

meanings that would result in a wider and more profound understanding of our contemporary world.

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