

THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THEATRE AND POLITICS:
GAMBARO, PAVLOVSKY, AND CONTEMPORARY ARGENTINE SOCIETY

by

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Abstract

The proposal of this thesis will be threefold: firstly, to study the phenomenon and structure of power in relation to Argentine drama during the period of the 1960s to the 1980s as exemplified by various works from two leading Argentine dramatists of this period; secondly, elaborating and specifying from these works, to investigate certain determined manifestations of power, for example, discourse manipulation, hierarchies, violence, discipline, and torture, and the expression and presentation of these manifestations of power in dramatic form; thirdly, I will analyze the relation between political theatricality and power, and the reflections of this phenomenon in the chosen plays.

The four elements which will be the focus of this thesis, and in many ways, will help weave the chapters together are:

- 1) Internalization of the Master's Discourse
- 2) Process and Effects of Torture
- 3) Evolution of Space
- 4) Metatheatricality

These elements are found in all the chapters, even though, some with a more discernable presence than others. Through the discussion of the plays and these four elements I hope to construct an investigation which illuminates the process and relationship between theatre and politics.

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Introduction

The dictum “art for art's sake” was a luxury that Latin American dramatists, writing in the sixties and seventies, had rarely been able to afford. Most shared the ideology, asserted by Brecht, that art can never cease to be political; any attempt at a non-political art, by default, will result in supporting the ruling powers, i.e. the status quo.

The purpose of this thesis will be threefold: firstly, to study the phenomenon and structure of power in relation to Argentine drama from the 1960s to the 1980s as exemplified by various works by two leading Argentine dramatists of this period; secondly, by elaborating and specifying from these works, to investigate certain determined manifestations of power, for example, coded discourse, hierarchies, violence, discipline, and torture, and the expression and presentation of these manifestations of power in dramatic form; thirdly, I will analyze the relation between political theatricality and power, and the reflections of this phenomenon in the chosen plays.

I have chosen this particular period because of the crucial and symbolic transformations that took place then, both within society and culture, and, most importantly, within politics. In order to situate this investigation historically, Chapter One will offer a brief historical overview of the period with a concentrated study on the “Dirty war” of 1976-1983. In turn, to contextualize this historical period in dramatic terms the focus on the “Dirty war” will be manifested through the study of the deliberate strategic theatrical elements the Argentine Junta utilized during those seven years.

Chapter Two will consider the terminology used in this investigation, beginning with the word *power*, and will attempt to answer the questions: What is power? How does power function within society? What constitutes violence? I shall not presume to explain the essence of power (if such a

thing exists) since this constitutes a thesis by itself; rather I shall elaborate my own eclectic perspective of power, viz.: power as a socially constructed, pliant and malleable entity which adapts to any situation that arises in the passage of time (implying a changing of ideologies, morals, governments, etc.). My perspective on the meaning of the word *violence* will also be elaborated in similar terms as that of power, i.e. the different levels, functions, and types of violence and how it is depicted.

Then, having defined my terms (or more correctly, after having attempted to circumscribe my terms to a somewhat more focussed field) I shall proceed in the following manner: Chapter Three will be an analysis of Griselda Gambaro's play *Las paredes*^a (1966) in terms of the relations of power and repression, a delineation of how the power structures in the plays are set, and an explication of the dramatic techniques adopted to manifest these structures. Chapter Four, in similar fashion, will start with an analysis of Gambaro's play *El campo*^b (1967), Chapter Five with Pavlovsky's play *El señor Galindez*^c (1973), Chapter Six with Gambaro's play *Del sol naciente*^d (1983), and Chapter Seven will consist of the Conclusion.

Since my primary aim is to demonstrate how the various levels of power and repression function within the chosen plays, my stance is at once literary, sociological, and political; however, since the written text is only half the theatre, the other half--perhaps the more important half--being the actual dramatic theatrical representation, I shall also attempt to incorporate into my investigation

^aThe Walls

^bThe Camp

^cMr. Galindez

^dFrom the Rising Sun

some practical dramatic studies, for example, the space chosen for the representation, lighting, etc. My thesis will, of course, be two-dimensional since it is a mere text analyzing a multi-dimensional theatre; therefore I believe it to be vital for my study, and for my intent to approximate the proper context of the plays, to include a section, where possible, on the actual dramatic representations. If *El señor Galíndez* had been preformed in Vancouver in 1973, it would most probably have enjoyed a very different reception than it did in Buenos Aires in 1973. The plays belong to their own paradigm, which has its own construction of power (including time, events, etc.) and language (such as the code languages of artists in repressive countries).

The chosen plays of these two dramatists are of quite distinct styles and forms. For example, Pavlovsky is the father of *psychodrama* in Argentina, while Gambaro (especially in the 60s and 70s), has been called an absurdist dramatist by many critics. Nonetheless, the plays have several explicit common factors upon which I will focus: a preoccupation with society; repression; and the distribution of power.

The main core of the thesis--an analysis of the relationship between power and drama--is the focus of the first three plays, however, my analysis of the final play also serves as a concluding section since the main conflict in the play, *Del sol naciente* (performed in the year 1984), concerns both a different manifestation and focus of power; that is, it no longer refers to the Argentine military oppression *per se*, but to other factors of repression, i.e. the power hierarchy of gender. This shift made possible since in 1984 the blinding monolithic repression of the military junta had subsided somewhat, and the opportunity arose for Griselda Gambaro to shift her gaze onto other, albeit more subtle, forms of power and repression. With this last play, *Del sol naciente*, I will indicate how the variable historical construction of power represented within the first three plays (with an emphasis

on social military agenda), shifts to a new situation that subsequently requires a different construct.

In conclusion, I hope to render through a unique perspective a possibly new and greater understanding of the connection between power, politics, and theatre in Argentina, as epitomized in the works of two outstanding Argentine dramatists, Eduardo Pavlovsky and Griselda Gambaro. I will endeavour to make this thesis as holistic as possible, starting with a theoretical base which will provide me with a methodology for approaching the subject of power; shifting to the field of practise in order to relate the theory to the living reality of Argentina; and concluding with an attempt to illuminate the process of consolidation between these two camps.

Socio-Political Context of the Plays

The tyrant must reduce the world to an idolatrous cartoon of perfect heroes and irredeemable foes, of ironclad moral certainties.

David Bosworth

Fascism is Theatre.

Jean Genet

In order to be successful, a gesture must have social meaning. There are hundreds of thousands of us here, all living in absolute solitude. That is why we are subdued no matter what happens.

David Rousset

It is not adventitious that the four plays chosen have, as their central preoccupation, power, repression and society, and that all four plays were written in the period of the 1960s to the 1980s. This particular period of time was selected because of the crucial and symbolic transformations that took place both within society and culture; and, most importantly, within politics. The political points of reference in Argentina during this period are: the provisional government of José M. Guido (a military front)--1962-1964; the military coup d'état in June of 1966 and the installation of General Juan Carlos Onganía as president--1966-1970; the rule of various other Generals, including a brief interval from Perón and after his death, Isabel Perón, who then was promptly desposed by a new military Junta in 1976. Thus began the Junta's program of "El Proceso de La Reorganización

Nacional”^a. To the shame of the Argentine military this “Proceso” became infamously known to the world as the “Dirty war” (the most common soubriquet) between 1976-1983, in which conservative estimates of the number of *desaparecidos*^b range from 12000 to 15000, but with many more people estimating a more realistic 30,000. Argentina, during those twenty odd years, was a country ruled, rocked and crushed by various military leaders invariably under a restrictive social and political censorship.

Argentina is a country unfortunately too well conversant with military totalitarian rule, the first being that of José Uriburu and his coup d'état in 1930. As early as 1930 one can descry the historical inception of the military's new ideology: not only to secure the nation against external danger, but most importantly, to protect the nation internally against loss of moral values and dissolute and sinful proliferation. Under Uriburu, as Graziano observes, “the role of violent repression as such became more integral to governance, more tightly interwoven with the political program as a whole.”¹ Parallel to this puritan patronizing perspective of society was the public interiorization of this type of subtle violence which, perhaps combined with a certain passive, fatalistic resignation, years later facilitated a propensity for turning one's gaze in disbelief instead of questioning and doubting authorities, and for deferring to the side of the visible power, the military. The first two plays discussed in this work, by Griselda Gambaro, were written in 1966 and 1967; a time which corresponds with another military coup d'état and the repressive rule of General Onganía. As stated, the military had begun to show an interest in the “morality and values” of the citizens of its State. This doctrine was intensified by Onganía with the belief of “ideological borders”: the

^aThe Process of National Reorganization

^bThe disappeared ones

military's role of upholding "the moral and spiritual values of Western and Christian civilization."² In May 1969 violence erupted in several Argentine cities and the military responded efficaciously, systematically, and ruthlessly. The most serious clash occurred in the city of Córdoba and the tragedy that ensued became known as the *cordobazo*. The *cordobazo* became a turning point for the military treatment of the Left in which the military intensified, and to a certain degree, mythologized and reified its fight against a group which it viewed as a single consolidated entity: Marxist Left-wing Subversives.

The 1970s brought the emergence of extreme right-wing paramilitary groups, such as Mano, reputedly composed of off-duty policemen, and Triple-A (Alianza Anti-Comunista)^e, the unofficial extended hand of punishment and repression of the State. Violence was escalated and intensified with the frequent use of abductions, torture, and executions, although, in retrospect, we realize that this was a mere foreshadowing of what was to come. The founding member of Triple-A, José López Rega, was a former minister for Perón and a leading adviser (reputedly by means of astrology and the occult) for Isabel Perón. Between 1973 and 1977, Triple-A was responsible for over 2000 political assassinations.³

In 1973, Perón, at the age of 78, returned to Argentina, greeted with great hope and support from earlier Peronist supporters and reformed Peronist youth. However, those who supported Perón most ardently were the ones who became the most disillusioned as Perón rapidly shifted his policies to the Right. Nonetheless, before Perón's policies could cause another wave of violence he opportunely died in 1974 and his government was taken over by his wife Isabel Perón. Concomitant with the inauguration of Isabel Perón's rule was an increase in military repression against

^eAnti-Communist Alliance

“subversives”; and gradually, the Dirty war, even though not officially started yet, was commenced. Finally, as the situation escalated, the three armed forces united to establish a Junta headed by General Videla, deposed Isabel Perón, and came officially to power, immediately implementing the infamous “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional” which later became known to the world as the bloodiest seven years in Argentine history.

In this thesis I will be referring to the “subversive”; the military considered as subversive anyone who questioned or criticized the State. As General Videla stated, “a terrorist is not someone with a gun or a bomb but also someone who spreads ideas which are contrary to Western and Christian civilization.” I will also be referring to victims; but in the narrowest sense, that is, a person who was either tortured or murdered in the Dirty War, not including their families, friends, etc. The victims, of course, were seen as enemies of the State. The Governor of the province of Buenos Aires, General Ibérico Manuel Saint-Jean, summarizes as follows his ultimate objective regarding this enemy: “First we are going to kill all of the subversives, then their collaborators, then their sympathizers, then the indifferent, and finally, the timid.”

The strategy of the military to repress, silence, and ultimately annihilate the “subversives” was of a cruelty so harrowing that one would relegate it not to the realm of humanity, but to a reign of grotesque bestiality. Perhaps, as witnessed historically, this radical degree of cruelty, which ultimately functions against human nature's instinct for the survival of the species, was one of the reasons why the military fictionalized their oppression, as a form of psychological self-defence for the perpetrators. Hence, the military related their ideologies and actions not to a tangible reality but rather a mythologized theatricality. Argentina already had tasted the theatrical political ingredients of Perón's rule (1946-1955, 1973-1974) and the spectacle of Evita (the latter has been subject of two films in

1996 and 1997, one produced in Argentina, the other in Hollywood, starring Madonna--thus reiterating the premise of the theatricality and mythologization of power). Before starting on the actual analysis of power within the plays it is worthwhile to observe, from a certain distance, the military's deliberate use of theatrical elements in its war⁴ against thousands of its country's own citizens, in the manner of a *mis-en-scène*, within a dramatic text/performance.

In December 1983 Raúl Alfonsín was elected President of Argentina by the people of the Republic. Two weeks later the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (referred to as CONADEP henceforth), a thirteen-member body headed by Ernesto Sabato, was created to investigate and write about the crimes of the military Junta; the result was the book *Nunca más*, which consists of hundreds of personal testimonies of tortured victims. In the preface to *Nunca más* we read such words as "la más grande tragedia de nuestra historia"^d In the last paragraph of the preface we read phrases such as, "y sin duda el más terrible drama que en toda su historia sufrió la Nación"^e and in the last sentence, "que nunca más en nuestra patria se repetirán hechos que nos han hecho trágicamente famosos en el mundo civilizado."^f These allusions to the world of drama are neither coincidental nor gratuitous and, as history repeatedly has shown (analysis of the strategies of dictators like Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, and Franco would reveal similar patterns), mythology, tragedy, ritual, murder, violence, and torture often accompany each other in fiction and reality.

War is enacted against an external enemy which the State desires to defeat. However, when

^d "the biggest tragedy in our history"

^e "and without a doubt the most tragic drama that our nation has suffered in all its history"

^f "and never again will they repeat the acts in our land that have made us tragically famous in the civilized world"

the enemy is internal, the State cannot obliterate its own country and self-destruct. Hence, it uses the ideology of war but creates a microcosm of it, which consists of torturing a selected group who represent an ideology contrary to the State. Comparing war and torture, Elaine Scarry, states that "There must be more drama in torture: the destruction must be acted out symbolically within a handful of rooms."⁵

We may now extend the dramatic metaphor offered by *Nunca más* and analyze the different phases of the torturer's strategy to the end of the "play". Starting with *Nunca más* itself we read about the "primer acto del drama"⁸ which is the initial abduction. The first dramatic element in the abduction was the use of the mask to dissimulate. Often, especially in the provinces (to avoid recognition) the secret police would disguise themselves. In *Nunca más*⁶ we read, "Es así que se presentaban usando pasamontañas, capuchas, pelucas, bigotes postizos, anteojos, etc."^h

The theatricality is also evident from the beginning with the flagrant flaunting of power by the military in the sheer number of *patotas* (individuals that executed the abduction):⁷

Generalmente, en el domicilio irrumpía una "patota" o grupo integrado por cinco o seis individuos. A veces intervenían varios grupos, alcanzando hasta 50 personas en algunos casos especiales.ⁱ

and in weapons:⁸

Los integrantes de la "patota" iban siempre provistos de un voluminoso arsenal,

⁸First act of the drama

^hIt's like this, they presented themselves using helmets, hoods, wigs, fake moustaches, glasses, etc.

ⁱGenerally, the "patotas" would break into the house, a group consisting of five or six individuals. Sometimes, various groups intervened, reaching up to 50 people in some special cases.

absolutamente desproporcionado respecto de la supuesta peligrosidad de sus víctimas.^j
and in mobile equipment:⁹

La cantidad de vehículos que intervenían variaba, ya que en algunos casos empleaban varios autos particulares (generalmente sin chapa patente); en otros contaban con el apoyo de fuerzas regulares, las que podían estar uniformadas, en camiones o camionetas identificables como pertenecientes a alguna de las tres fuerzas y, en algunos casos, helicópteros que sobrevolaban la zona del domicilio de las víctimas.^k

An actual description of an abduction is given by Adolfo T. Ocampo in *Nunca más*¹⁰:

A las 2 de la madrugada del 11 de agosto de 1976, penetraron en el edificio y derribaron la puerta del departamento de mi hija y se introdujeron en éste. Otros hombres se quedaron vigilando el departamento . . . el Capitán Navío . . . logró que llegaran al lugar dos camiones del Ejército. Los dos grupos se trabaron en un intenso tiroteo . . . El tiroteo se detuvo cuando las fuerzas recién llegadas y a las órdenes del Capitán ya citado pudieron oír a los victimarios gritar: "Tenemos Zona Liberada", acorde a esto, se retiraron las fuerzas, dejando actuar a los victimarios, quienes después de destruir y robar, se llevaron a Selma y a una amiga, Inés Nocetti, ambas desaparecidas al día de la fecha¹

^jThe participants in the "patota" usually were provisioned with a voluminous arsenal, absolutely disproportionate with regard to the supposed "dangerousness" of the victims.

^kThe quantity of the vehicles that intervened varied, in some cases several private cars were used (without plates), in others they counted on the support of the regular army, those that could be in uniform, in full trucks, or lighter ones identifiable as belonging to the three armed forces and in other cases helicopters that flew over the zone of the victim's house.

¹At 2 in the morning of August 11, 1976, they penetrated the building, broke down the door of my daughter's apartment and entered it. Other men stayed guarding it, Captain Navío succeeded obtaining that two other army trucks arrive. The two groups started an intense firing. The firing stopped when the recently arrived forces, at the order of the already mentioned Captain Navío, could hear the victimizers scream, "We have a

Such descriptions provoke images that belong almost to the world of fiction, as if the Argentine military thought itself part of a Hollywood movie in which the heroic powers of the West, with their technological prowess, fight against the evil Easterners. Of course, on the more pragmatic level such behaviour boosted the morale of the men, triggering the innate predisposition for the machismo and violence displayed by the soldiers, and persuading or brain-washing them that they were the heroes, fighting against the evil and dangerous subversives (even though almost always the victims were defenceless and only surrounded by their spouses and children). The fact that there was a true absence of subversive militant uprising renders the aggressiveness of the military techniques even more ridiculous. The military had to deploy its own force to manifest resistance. Graziano states, "Pseudoterrorist acts were staged by the military and then duly neutralized as though they were real in order to perpetuate the illusion of revolutionary threat

"¹¹ The second act of this military play takes place in the "detention centres," as they were called, with the presence of various torturers, their instruments, and the action of torturing. The victims were physically and psychologically tortured, sometimes for several hours each day, sometimes in front of their spouses or children to the degree that many wished for death.¹² It is evident, as in the following testimony published in *Nunca más*, that the physical torture was combined with a psychological torture aimed at a total breakdown of the victim at every level:¹³

Cuando me venían a buscar para una nueva 'sesión' lo hacían gritando y entraban a la celda pateando la puerta y golpeando lo que encontraron. Violentemente. Por eso, antes de que se acercaran de mí, ya sabía que me tocaba. Por eso, también, vivía pendiente del momento

liberated zone" With this, the army left, leaving the victimizers to act, who after destroying and looting, abducted Selma and a friend Inés Nocetti, both disappeared on that date.

en que se iban a acercar para buscarme.^m

De todo ese tiempo, el recuerdo más vivido, más aterradorante, era ese de estar conviviendo con la muerte . . . Buscaba, desesperadamente, un pensamiento para poder darme cuenta de que estaba vivo . . . Y, al mismo tiempo, deseaba con todas mis fuerzas que me mataran cuanto antes.ⁿ

Verbal torture started from the beginning of the abduction¹⁴:

Sus expresiones: 'vos sos bosta'. Desde que te 'chupamos' no sos nada. 'Además ya nadie se acuerda de vos'. 'No existís'. 'Si alguien te buscara (que no te busca) ¿vos crees que te iban a buscar aquí? 'Nosotros somos todo para vos'. 'La justicia somos nosotros'. 'Somos Dios'.^o

In Argentina, the torture room was called the *quirófano* the operating theatre, in which, extending the metaphor, a surgeon would cut out the disease (subversive ideology) from the victim and thus heal (the nation), in the setting of a theatre represented for a select audience. Scarry relates:

It is not accidental that in the torturers' idiom the room in which the brutality occurs was called the "production room" in the Philippines, the "cinema room" in South Vietnam, and the "blue lit stage" in Chile: built on these repeated acts of display and having as its purpose the production of a fantastic illusion of power, torture is a grotesque piece of compensatory

^mWhen they would come to get me for a new "session" they would do it screaming, entering the cell kicking the door and hitting whatever they could find. Violently. Because of this, before they would come close to me, I would already know that it was my turn. Because of this, also, I lived expecting the moment in which they would come to get me.

ⁿIn all that time, the clearest memory, the most terrifying, was that of living with death. I looked, desperately, for a thought in order to be able to realize that I was alive...and at the same time, I wished with all my strength that they would kill me as soon as possible.

^oYou are trash. Since we "sucked you in" you are nothing. Besides no one remembers you anymore. You do not exist. If someone looked for you, (and they don't) do you think they would look for you here? We are everything for you. We are Justice. We are God.

drama.¹⁵

The different kinds of torture were similar in all the detention centers (there were more than 300) and were used systematically. The most common torture instrument was the *picana eléctrica*; a metal rod, attached to electrical power, in which one could vary the degree of electricity emitted. The torture consisted of placing or, in many cases, thrusting the *picana* in the victim's mouth or genitals or placing it against various parts of the body. Sometimes a medical doctor was present in the *quirófano* to ensure that the victim did not die from an overzealous torturer and "to heal" the victim, or to use Scarry's terminology, to partake in the "making" of the victim after the torturers' "unmaking" in order for the victim to be tortured again. This carnivalesque inversion of the doctor's role (sometimes those abducted would be carried off in ambulances) is another dramatic factor that helped render irrational, and for many, unbelievable, the vision of a reality turned upside down.

The majority of the victims were not part of the *Montonero* guerrilla group and did not have information that would aid the military in matters of national defence. Almost half of the victims were under the age of 25, but the torturers persisted and often the victims, after serving their time in the *quirófano*, were perfunctorily executed.¹⁶ There were different types of executions; some victims were shot alongside massive graves, others were drugged into a semi-conscious state and thrown alive into the ocean.¹⁷

As stated, approximately eighty percent of the *desaparecidos*, were not part of an armed guerrilla movement and did not have information regarding armed subversive activity. Of course, this was not some ridiculous mistake (even though the State allowed its police a 25% margin of error), but rather another factor in this absurdist tragic play: a totalitarian State requires a steady supply of subversives and if authentic dangerous subversives do not exist, they must be invented. Hence,

teenagers were tortured so that they would name other subversives, or in this case, just other names, which therefore would provide a fresh supply of victims for the State's juggernaut-like machine.¹⁸ Scarry that "the sequence of arrests and torture may only mean that governments sometimes depend on their opponents to provide an arbitrary structure for their brutality."¹⁹ The military had convinced itself that these "subversives" had to be eliminated at all costs. As René Girard states in *Scapegoat*: "Ultimately, the persecutors always convince themselves that a small number of people, or even a single individual, despite his relative weakness, is extremely harmful to the whole of society."²⁰

The detention centres became the new homes of the *desaparecidos* as these victims ceased to exist any longer in the social reality. This absence of the victim (which created the discourse of the absent, as will be discussed later), in which not even the corpse was shown to the public, was presented as an act of magic; one's husband, wife, brother, sister, or child simply disappeared. The public torture of the body for punishment, in a setting of a spectacle, was inverted, and realized for a select group. Michel Foucault argues that historically, as the State gradually eradicated public execution at the end of the eighteenth century, punishment shifted from the body to the soul. In this Dirty War there was both a focus on the body and the being, corporeal torture not as a public spectacle, but rather an imagined spectacle for the victim's family and friends, which in many ways becomes more horrifying, disturbing and damaging. This supported the State strategy to keep the public in a state of perpetual confusion and psychological limbo. Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, states:

In totalitarian countries all places of detention ruled by the police are made to be veritable holes of oblivion into which people stumble by accident and without leaving behind them such ordinary traces of former existence as a body and a grave. Compared with this newest

invention for doing away with people, the old-fashioned method of murder, political or criminal, is inefficient indeed. The murderer leaves behind him a corpse, and although he tries to efface the traces of his own identity, he has no power to erase the identity of his victim from the memory of the surviving world. The operation of the secret police, on the contrary, miraculously sees to it that the victim never existed at all.²¹

Outside the detention centers the spectacles were closely controlled and sometimes made visible to the public. Graziano states:

The prisoners were prepared, like actors, for the parts scripted for them. The staged terrorism, choreographed before and marketed after the spectacle, was structured by considerations of public reception rather than by strategies of enemy elimination. The dead "terrorists" generated by mock battles mediated a discourse between the Junta and the public. Here the military's maneuvers were distanced from theatre proper only by the forced participation of some of the players and by the use of bullets in place of blanks. The illusion of power generated by the spectacle was dependent on an imaginary enemy whose pain was real. And it was precisely in this forced imposition of the repressers' fiction onto the victims' reality that the essence of the tragedy resided.²²

With the whispers of the neighbours, of friends, of colleagues and the overt show of force by the military, the public was subsequently terrified into a state of abeyance and of silence. However, they could not share their grief, as there was a general state of mistrust and justified paranoia. Foucault, writing about the Panopticon, which is analogous to the Argentine State, states:

In the Panopticon each person, depending on his place, is watched by all or certain of the others. You have an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust, because there is no absolute

point. The perfected form of surveillance consists in a summation of *malveillance*.²³

As the 1980s approached, the Argentine economy became increasingly precarious and fragile. Finally, by 1982 the economic situation was near crisis. At this time the military Junta, in a move to unite the destroyed Argentine spirit, decided to invade the Falkland Islands. However, this time the enemy was not the defenceless victims it had annihilated in the last six years but a veritable, tangible force: Margaret Thatcher and England; and the result was a complete debacle for Argentina. The Argentine military did not stand on their megalomaniac stage any longer but rather descended to the humble grounds of earth. The fiasco of the Falklands war, in addition to international pressure regarding the military's deplorable human rights records, contributed to the "breaking of the spell" for the country. Shortly afterwards, in 1983, the military Junta stepped down and the bloody and tragic play was over, leaving behind a torn and devastated nation. The audience of this heinous play, the public, reacted in different ways. There were some, of course, who went underground to battle against the State, others who went into exile, and others, family members, friends, who tried to access all the different legal routes (for example by filing a *habeas corpus*) in order to find the *desaparecido*, or who tried to attract international attention to the atrocities. However, like other countries which have suffered totalitarian rule, there was a number of people, unfortunately the majority, who watched passively. The State, without losing the opportunity, manipulated and exploited this group's non-committal behaviour.

This position of public limbo not only enervates the public itself and empowers the State, but becomes devastating for the victims. Hence, many of the public who were aware of what was indeed occurring, but remained passive, felt the psychological effects of guilt and denial since they also knew that the victims, without a struggle and outcry from the majority, were almost guaranteed an

imminent death. The State utilized this passivity to further manipulate an ever more perplexed and paralyzed society. It would be reductionist to state that it was a case of self-preservation or apathy that led to such passive behaviour; the responsible agents are multiple and complex. First, it is a psychological self-defence mechanism that will help one deny this reality; accordingly, the State strategically left a cloud of ambiguity over all its actions (for example most of the soldiers who abducted the victims were, as mentioned previously, disguised, or dressed in civilian clothes and usually drove un-marked cars: the famous Ford Falcons). Arendt writes:

This common-sense disinclination to believe the monstrous is constantly strengthened by the totalitarian ruler himself, who makes sure that no reliable statistics, no controllable facts and figures are ever published, so that there are only subjective, uncontrollable, and unreliable reports about the places of the living dead.²⁴

As a large group of Argentinians maintained their silence and were kept in a state of stupefaction by the State, the Dirty War became increasingly distant and seemingly fictitious.

Inasmuch as man depends for his knowledge upon the affirmation and comprehension of his fellow-men, this generally shared but individually guarded, this never-communicated information loses its quality of reality and assumes the nature of a mere nightmare.²⁵

The public, wanting to believe in a form of traditional patriarchal “good” government covertly reinforced the State's power by accepting the silent, logical, explanation that the victims actually had committed a crime against the State. The famous utterance, *Por algo será* and *Algo habrán hecho*^p sustained and maintained the status quo of the military State. Of course, the public wants to make sense of the horrendous disorder in front of them and, as Graziano, states there is an “identification

^pIt's for something. They must have done something.

with this aggressive elite” as the most “prominent mechanism by which the Argentine public feigned an escape from its eerie uncertainty and attempted to restore the quality of reality” Hence, the individuals allied themselves with the visible power, the traditional and historical power, the State.²⁶ Graziano states that expressions such as *Por algo será* and *Algo habrán hecho* were “an informal rite of obeisance; they deferred to the military; they conceded in bad faith that the military knew the ‘something’ that the public did not know, the ‘something’ that made atrocity just and necessary.”²⁷ Instead of questioning and doubting, the public gave the State the benefit of the doubt and to complement this further, chose denial instead of a more critical observance of the atrocities and cruelties committed by the military State.

As shown, this faith of the public in the State supported the State's claim that the subversives were guilty. As soon as the victims were abducted, whether they were innocent or not, they automatically became guilty, became subversive, and were forced to act out the role of the guilty subversive in the script written by the Junta.²⁸ Concomitantly, by “forcing” innocent citizens to become guilty, the torturers accounted for and justified the State's ideology and their own beastly actions.

As will be discussed in the subsequent chapters, the relationship between power, theatricality and the Dirty war is a complex and fascinating one which entails history, sociology, culture, icons, and literature. When the boundary between fiction and reality becomes blurred and the public (in reality and in theatre) become prone to slipping into pools of passivity and disbelief; then, the most lethal action can occur: violence can become internalized and naturalized.

Ultimately, the most sinister effect of the dramatic strategies used by the State is the possibility that in time, perhaps in a relatively brief time, their atrocities will gain a fictional air, thus

manipulating and playing on the seemingly incredible human capacity to relegate oppressive history to the space of oblivion. The publication of the tortured victim's testimonies, *Nunca más* (and its subsequent English translation, *Never again*) became an instant bestseller in Argentina, selling over one hundred thousand copies in the first month. *Nunca más* "became the favourite reading of hordes of Argentine tourists who converged on Mar del Plata during the summer, making copies of the *Informe [Nunca más]* as much a part of the beach scene as bottles of suntan lotion."³⁰ In 1983, President Alfonsín commenced the process of trying and committing the military leaders responsible for the Dirty War. Consequently, many were sent to prison. In 1989, President Carlos Saúl Menem granted pardon to over two hundred Dirty War criminals, leaving only seven incarcerated, including Videla, Viola, Massera, and former Police Chief Ramón Camps. The majority were freed in an attempt to pacify an angry military. On the other hand, keeping the most well-known perpetrators in prison created an appearance of justice served for the raging crowds of people, international powers, and their respective Human Rights agencies. However, In 1990, President Menem pardoned these last remaining seven.³¹ Recently a number of abusive cases of police behaviour have been reported in Argentina; these allegations have caused some public concern.

1. Franz Graziano, *Divine Violence* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992) 18.
2. Cited in Graziano. p.19. Alain Rouquie: *Poder militar y sociedad política en la Argentina*. Vol. 2 (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1982) 231.
3. Graziano 22.
4. Many scholars, including myself, use the word “war” when referring to this period in Argentine politics. However, I must point out that the word is not used in a conventional sense, since a war connotes two opposing groups and in this “war” a true dangerous enemy did not exist.
5. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985) 61.
6. *Nunca más*, ed. Ernesto Sabato (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1984) 18-19.
7. *Nunca más* 17.
8. *Nunca más* 17.
9. *Nunca más* 17-18.
10. *Nunca más* 19.
11. Graziano 65.
12. *Nunca más* 20.
13. *Nunca más* 30.
14. *Nunca más* 31.
15. Scarry 67.
16. *Nunca más* 294.
17. Graziano 40.
18. A documentary film concerning children and torture during the Dirty war is “La noche de los lápices”.
19. Scarry 329 (Note 7)
20. René Girard, *Scapegoat* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1986) 15.

21. Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1966) 435.

22. Graziano 65.

23. Michel Foucault, *Power and Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 158.

24. Arendt 437.

25. Arendt 435.

26. Graziano 77.

27. Graziano 77.

28. Graziano states: "The abduction itself...transformed a person into a "subversive" with the public-as-audience implicitly endorsing that transition through discourse crystallized in refrains such as *Por algo será* and *Algo habrán hecho*. (95).

29. The Jewish people, who are well acquainted with this particular characteristic of human nature have wisely and effectively kept the horrors of the Holocaust alive for future generations, not in a fictional form but rather a historical one, through museums, documentaries, Remembrance days, semantics, such as the capital H for Holocaust, professional Nazi criminal hunters, etc.

30. Tulio Halperin Donghi, "Argentina's Unmastered Past," *Latin American Research Review* 23, 2 (1988): 15, quoted in *Divine Violence*.

31. Graziano 225.

Theory(ies) and Definition(s)

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.

Michel Foucault

The word “power” contains many distinct connotations and functions at multiple levels. In this chapter, I shall endeavour to communicate to the reader my own eclectic perspective of power (including a combination of theories including Nietzsche, Foucault, Canetti, etc.) and the manner in which it operates, viz. power as a socially constructed matrix, and complex and pliant set of relations, which adapts to situations arising in the passage of time; implying the changing of ideologies, modifying set of morals, governments, etc.

Power is not a commodity belonging to an individual (for example a King) or a select group (Government) but rather something which is “exercised”. Power lies in social constructs, in groups of relations; and the people who function within that construct or matrix acquire the use of its power and are in the privileged position to wield it, but only as long as they are in its reign. For example, a professor has certain administrative powers over a student and simultaneously functions within a certain cluster of power relations: the power construct of the University. When she lectures, the professor has both the control of discourse and the control and power to decide the student's final grade, a decision which can affect the student and upon which the student is dependent. However, if this professor resigns, she no longer has any direct power over the student; the person who does

exert the power is the substitute professor who replaces her and who now stands at the podium. In this case the subject holding the power is not the woman who is playing the role of a professor, but rather it is the position (social construct) created by the university; whoever enters its space thus partakes of its privileges.

In general terms, all human beings are subject to and involved in, relations of power. Power relations, as Michel Foucault explains, “are imbued, through and through, with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives.”¹ However, since this work strives to cover a specific area, the construct of power to be discussed in this chapter will be more focussed and germane to this thesis: the strategic and deliberate use of power manifested through the different relations and facets of the Argentine State that are reflected or commented upon in certain theatrical works.

Argentina's situation under the military Junta is analogous to Foucault's description of the political consequences of dealing with and administering the city during a time of plague.

(a) political dream of the plague, which was exactly its reverse: not the collective festival, but strict divisions; not laws transgressed, but the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life through the mediation of the complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power . . . it called for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, an organization in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power.²

From the perspective of the military Junta, it could thus be said that Argentina was in a time of plague and the disease consisted of a “virus” known as the “Left Wing Marxist Subversives” and their

concurrent ideas. Of course, these entities had to be separated and annihilated and the “virus” extirpated before others would come into contact with the “infection”. Gambaro and Pavlovsky were well-acquainted with this ideology; torture and death are two recurring elements in all four plays discussed in this thesis.

As previously mentioned in the analogy of the university professor, power extends into space. More dramatically, the institutional construct of the military State contains a general surveillance power that extends beyond its own parts and immediate spaces. Canetti, in *Crowds and Power*, using the metaphor of the cat and the mouse, discusses the surveillance power of the State over its citizens.

The cat uses force to catch the mouse, to seize it, to hold it in its claws and ultimately to kill it. But while it is *playing* with it another factor is present. It lets it go, allows it to run about a little and even turn its back; and, during this time, the mouse is no longer subjected to force. But it is still within the power of the cat and can be caught again . . . The space which the cat dominates, the moments of hope it allows the mouse, while continuing however to watch it closely all the time and never relaxing its interest and intention to destroy it - all this together, space, hope, watchfulness and destructive intent, can be called the actual body of power, or, more simply, power itself. Inherent in power, therefore, as opposed to force, is a certain extension in space and in time³

The Argentine people found themselves within this extension of power in space and in time in which one believes that one’s every move is being scrutinized, either by a representative of the State or an informant.

Reflecting on the first two plays in this work, one should keep in mind the words of Hannah

Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: "It is in the very nature of totalitarian regimes to demand unlimited power. Such power can only be secured if literally all men, without a single exception, are reliably dominated in every aspect of their life."⁴ Foucault's use of the concept "Panopticon" will also be another term used in this thesis in terms of the power construct which it connotes. The repressive State created the perfect Panopticon, incarnated and structured as the new Argentine State. The Panopticon, an architectural figure developed by Jeremy Bentham in 1781, consisted of a building which contained at its center a tower.⁵ The tower had large wide windows which opened into the yard, the "inner side of the ring" as Foucault describes, and the building itself was divided into many "cells", each having two windows, one on the inside facing the tower and the other on the outside, which of course permitted the light to enter from one side of the cell to another, fully exposing the person inside. Thus, according to the Panopticon theory there would be a guard inside the tower, watching, and maybe sometimes not watching, but the person inside the cell (patient, convict, victim, etc) would never be able to ascertain whether they were, or were not, being observed. As Foucault states, "They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible."⁶ In the Argentine version of the Panopticon were found people such as generals, paramilitary members, death squad members, captains, soldiers, police, professors, blue-collar workers, housewives, and students, all together, but in different positions, some in the tower, some in the prison, but all within the machine of power.

One doesn't have here a power which is wholly in the hands of one person who can exercise it alone and totally over others. It's a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised . . . Power is no longer substantially identified with an individual who possesses or exercises it by right of birth; it

becomes a machinery that no one owns.⁷

During those oppressive decades Argentina existed within this machine, and the principal purpose of the Panopticon was achieved, "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."⁸ Hence, a form of "disciplinary panoptican society" was formed during that period, "making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements."⁹

The Argentine military, paramilitary, and death squads manifested their power in every level of society: ranging from the seemingly (more) innocuous and less obtrusive acts of State propaganda, to more direct actions such as the closing down of theatres, censorship of the text (journalism, novels, poetry, etc.), to the more extreme and most overt manifestation of power which is physical violence: *desaparecidos*, torture, and execution. The universality of this radical display of violent power is echoed in almost all totalitarian States. Appropriate to this extreme showing of power are Mao Tse-tung words, "Power grows out of the barrel of a gun."

The plays discussed in this investigation all address some form of obvious power constructs and elements of extreme violence. The first two Gambaro plays, *Las paredes* and *El campo* include imprisonment and physical and psychological torture. Pavlovsky's play *El señor Galíndez* takes the step across the invisible line to show the public the life and thoughts of two "ordinary" torturers. The last Gambaro play, *Del sol naciente*, also deals with torture and violence, but of a more personalized nature, no longer the State as victimizer, but an individual (even though the individual could be interpreted as representing the State). The specific manifestations of power demonstrated in the plays will be discussed individually in the succeeding chapters.

The four plays addressed in this investigation all display (or connote) extreme degrees of violence which consequently lead to some problematic territory for the dramatists: how does one depict violence? Problems can include moral predicaments such as the fictionalization and hence denigration of the "real" experience of the victims, desensitizing the public to violence (as many would argue television and cinema have done). At one extreme are critics like Theodor Adorno, who states in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle-butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it. The moral of this art, not to forget for a single instant, slithers into the abyss of its opposite. The aesthetic principle of stylization, and even the solemn prayer of the chorus, make an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed. This alone does an injustice to the victims; yet no art which tries to evade them could confront the claims of justice . . . When genocide becomes part of the cultural heritage in the themes of committed literature, it becomes easier to continue to play along with the culture which gave birth to murder.¹⁰

However, what Adorno does not provide are alternatives, except perhaps the abstraction of the human condition, as in the works of Beckett. As is well known, Adorno criticized and did not believe in *littérature engagée*. As a pure theorist, he thought that literature should resist codification, emerging and functioning from the "negative dialectic" and of course, Adorno's theories tended to remain embedded in the texts in which he wrote. Committed artists are interested in theory, but they are even more interested, as evident, in praxis.

Gambaro and Pavlovsky, who found themselves steeped in repression and injustice, have chosen to represent violence, an integral part of their reality, on stage, but not as a mere reflection, rather as an educational part of a larger intellectual movement centered around a Brechtian and Boalian dialogical process. Consequently, the public can contemplate the inner workings and functions of the relationships of power, repression, torture and violence. Furthermore, as Diana Taylor clearly notes, Gambaro's plays are not historical testimonies, as is the Theatre of the Holocaust; rather, "it looks ahead to where the escalating violence will lead Argentina."¹¹ However, as in all art there are always risks, and the dramatist that confronts such issues has to be exceptionally cautious, sensitive, and alert or one is in danger, as Susan Sontag states, of "making the audience passive, reinforcing witless stereotypes, confirming distance and creating fascination."¹²

Chapter One addressed the military's theatrical strategies in the repression of the two decades leading to the military coup d'état, and then, in more detail, the Dirty War itself. This phenomenon of political theatricality will be focussed upon concomitantly with specific situations in the plays. Both dramatists mentioned in this work are conversant with the strategic theatrical displays of the Military State (perhaps Perón and Evita and their famous theatrical techniques and productions set the platform, years later, for the military Junta), and are aware of the tools the State utilizes in its oppression. In the first two Gambaro plays there is an intentional internal meta-theatricality (victimizers within the play) that represents and demonstrates the dangers of the external political theatricality (victimizers within totalitarian States). Of course plays are quintessentially theatrical. The difference in this case is that Gambaro demonstrates the victimizer's excessive theatricality compared to the other characters and the process by which they theatricalize situations, thus, providing clear theories on the relationship of politics, repression, and drama. Diana Taylor, in

Theatre in Crisis states:

The theatrical aura of the victimizers should not suggest that they are fantastic, “absurd,” . . . These plays warn us that on the contrary the theatricality of the victimizers is *real*; victimization could not continue without it. Victimizers, however theatrical, do not represent something else, such as the “human condition”; they are not make-believe “bad guys” that delight audiences. They kill people. But it is precisely our inability to credit the reality behind their theatricality that allows extermination to continue.¹³

The plays reflect the Argentine reality in which the theatricality of the repressors further harmed the victims, pacifying them into submission and denial. This meta-theatricality will be discussed in more detail within the analyses of the plays themselves in the subsequent chapters; comparisons will also be made to the theatrical elements utilized by Nazi Germany.

1. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1970) 95.
2. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1995) 198.
3. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (Middlesex, England: Peregrine, 1983) 327.
4. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 456.
5. Ian Mitchell, in his book *Colonizing Egypt*, states that it was actually Bentham's brother who found a blueprint of the Panopticon in Egypt and brought it back to Europe.
6. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 200.
7. Foucault, *Power and Knowledge* 156.
8. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 201.
9. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 216.
10. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics*. "Adorno on Brecht" (London: NLB, 1977) 189.
11. Diana Taylor, *Theatre in Crisis* (Lexington, Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 1991) 124.
12. Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar, 1980) 138.
13. Taylor, *Theatre in Crisis* 100.

The Velvet Walls of Entrapment

La relación entre el escritor y la sociedad, entre la literatura y la sociedad es una relación recíproca y de profunda dependencia.^a

Griselda Gambaro

Whatever its political naiveté or its melodramatic intentions, Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" discovers in its final moments the single distilled form of torture that in many ways represents all forms of torture, the walls collapsing in on the human center to crush it alive.

Elaine Scarry

Griselda Gambaro's play *Las paredes*^b, written in 1963 and performed in 1966, marked the beginning of a brilliant and politically engaged writing career that inspired and influenced many dramatists, both in Argentina and abroad. In retrospect, we are able to observe the prescience of Gambaro in *Las paredes*, a dramatic work that foretold the direction in which her country was moving; elements that were thought extreme at the time of the performance of the play became a reality a decade later: detention centres, psychological and physical torture, and State officials who arbitrarily assassinated innocent people.

Gambaro's *oeuvre* has been subjected to many distinct theoretical approaches, and early plays such as *Las paredes* have been interpreted within the disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis

^aThe relationship between a writer and society, between literature and society is a reciprocal one and one of a profound dependence.

^bA brief synopsis of the play: The setting is a luxurious room in which the Young Man is sitting. As the play progresses we meet the Usher and the Functionary, and realize that the Young Man has been brought there against his will. The Young Man changes throughout the play--contradicting his original thoughts and believing what the Functionary tells him instead of obeying his own reason and senses. At the end the Usher tells him that the walls will crush him during the night. He exits, but leaves the door open. The Young Man, believing instead the words of the Functionary (who states that he will be freed soon) sits in the middle of the room, paralyzed and waiting.

(Diana Taylor, Enid Valerie), absurdist and Artaudian (Sandra Messinger Cypess, Tamara Holzapfel, George Woodyard), and even within the postmodern theory of deconstruction (Jill Scott). However, analyzing such a play without considering social elements such as power, violence, and oppression provides an inadequate and incomplete critique, since these elements are not only the main “themes” but rather integral parts of the form, structure, and essence of the play. Furthermore such analyses would entail removing the play from the socio-political paradigm in which it was created, and placing it in an apolitical academic atmosphere in which, frankly, it does not belong.

Gambaro’s plays do not simply reflect the violence of the State, but rather endeavour to demonstrate the functioning of power constructs: the processes of violence and repression, manifesting how power is utilized; and the techniques the victimizers use to debilitate and ultimately destroy a victim. The plays are not only critical of the victimizers but also, and more profoundly, of the public and its passivity in the face of authority, disbelief in one’s own perceptions, and, subsequent connivance with the actions of the Military.

Starting with the title of the play we can commence unconventionally with the analysis of the spaces in the play, since one can argue, on a metaphorical level, that the play is about spaces (an invasion of individual space by the State, space representing liberty, etc.). The first line of the play, in the stage directions, is a description of the space, “Un dormitorio estilo 1850, muy cómodo, casi lujoso.”^c Diana Taylor, in *Theatre of Crisis*, states that from the beginning, we, the spectators, are reassured as to the status quo: we are not confronted with a cell with bars or a torture chamber, but rather a comfortable almost luxurious room, with heavy lavish curtains, and a painting of a young man in a similar room.

^cA bedroom in the style of the 1850's, very comfortable, almost luxurious.

The apparent tranquillity of the young man in the lovely painting with the heavy ornate frame functions as a background for the young man in the luxurious room framed by the heavy curtains. Placing the two images together demonstrates how theatre, by shaping perception, can either obfuscate or clarify a dangerous situation. Combining the two images--the victim set against the backdrop of the painting--blinds us to the lethal situation. It seduces the spectators, as it does the victim itself, into accepting what is in fact a horrifying situation. It soothes the spectator: surely there is no danger here, it all looks so normal.¹

It is true that Gambaro utilizes the technique of combining the banal and the dangerous to demonstrate how lethal the technique can be, but I disagree with Taylor in her assertion (that perhaps fits too snugly into her theory of the theatrical doubling and splitting of victim/victimization) that the spectator is "soothed" into believing that there is no danger in the scene. Watching this play in Argentina in the repressive time of 1966 (the year of Onganía's coup d'état),² and upon learning that the Young Man was "invited," even the most obtuse member of the public would at least intuit a malfeasance. Even if one is taken to a luxurious room by two strangers, one is still *taken* to that room against one's will. Contrary to Taylor's argument, I would suggest that the spectator, suspecting that the protagonist is doomed, does not associate or empathize fully with the Young Man, thus causing a sense of distancing that aids the spectator in understanding and contemplating the process and function of power and repression, instead of merely commiserating on an emotional level. Another factor which contributes to this *Verfremdungseffekt* is that the protagonist, the Young Man, is portrayed not as a noble, rebellious, and formidable character, but rather as a common, resigned and naive person. Hence, again, perhaps as a form of psychological self-defence, the spectators guard their distance and emotions, and *Las paredes*, with all its reputed "absurdist"

characteristics and Kafkian air, becomes even more *real* and disturbing than a realist play; for in the place of what we cannot immediately observe we are compelled to make an imaginative assumption.

The Young Man's room is literally the only space of the play, but at the same time it is a variable dynamic space that acquires many different and significant meanings. Other spaces alluded to are the Young Man's own room that he rents in the city; and the countryside in which he spent the day before his abduction. The room, of course, is symbolic of many different elements in the play; one's room is normally one's home, a place in which one feels most comfortable and secure. Elaine Scarry observes:

In normal contexts, the room, the simplest form of shelter, expresses the most benign potential of human life. It is, on the one hand, the enlargement of the body: it keeps warm and safe

the individual it houses in the same way the body encloses and protects the individual within

.³

However the Young Man's room becomes the inversion of this sense of "safety," a reassuring, trusted space that itself converts into an agency of torture: the constricting and shrinking of the room concomitant with the depletion of the Young Man's life force. The room itself also can be taken as (and most probably is intended to be) a metaphorical microcosm of the Argentine society in which the repressive powers constantly act as vigilantes, manipulating, watching, ultimately and consequently suffocating.⁴

It is also important to note the information the State has obtained about the Young Man: his daily schedule, address, place of work, etc., which perhaps will not strike us as unusual (as we in turn have internalized it). Of course this again reminds us that what passes unnoticed, things that we have

taken to be natural, are sometimes elements of which we should be cautious; similar to the panoptic State and the start of the surveillance of the repressive State. Foucault writes:

People learned how to establish dossiers, systems of marking and classifying, the integrated accountancy of individual records. Certain of the procedures had of course already been utilized in the economy and taxation. But the permanent surveillance of a group of pupils or patients was a different matter. And, at a certain moment in time, these methods began to become generalised. The police apparatus served as one of the principal vectors of this process of extension⁵

Gambaro has repeatedly written and worked in parallel with a State "program" of censorship; consequently, as with the majority of authors writing under a repressive State, she has learned and developed a particular language of codes, and whether these codes be the form, the characters, or the language itself, they all serve to convey the essential and cryptic meanings of her plays to the public. In an interview in 1979, during exile in Miami, Gambaro stated:

(c)uando la censura es tan fuerte como es en Buenos Aires, el trabajo del escritor es un trabajo penoso y un trabajo difícil. Pienso también que un dramaturgo tiene que escribir siempre a dos niveles: uno inmediato, y otro de largo alcance, uno para su momento, y otro para tiempo posterior, de mayor proyección, de mayor alcance.^d

In *Las paredes*, Gambaro utilizes distinct techniques in order to show the diverse methods the victimizers use for psychologically degrading, confusing, and breaking down an individual; and one of the most conspicuous techniques is the language of disorientation, consisting of a form of hidden

^dWhen censorship is so strong as it is in Buenos Aires, the work of the writer is a painful and difficult one. I also think that a dramatist has to write at two levels: an immediate one, and another for long term, one for its moment, another for a later period, of greater projection, of greater reach.

codes functioning on two levels: first, to bypass the censorship board, and second, and most importantly, to show the theatricality and irrationality of the victimizer's discourse.

The language of the victimizers, the central source of information for the Young Man, is circular, contradictory and laden with non sequiturs. For example, when the Young Man tells the Usher that the room has become smaller, the Usher denies this fact and states that the only thing that has ever changed in the room is the colour of the walls: "Antes las paredes eran grises". Immediately afterwards the stage directions inform us that the walls are indeed grey. Other examples of circular language which offer no logical escape are when the Functionary steals the protagonist's watch, and then the Usher accuses the Young Man of filching a spoon; or when the Functionary locks the Young Man inside the room (the lock is on the outside only) and then violently pounds on the door while accusing him of not opening it and locking him out! This inversion, of the innocent (victim) given the role of the guilty (victimizer), is also a part of the psychological game of torture. Elaine Scarry writes that the slogans of the South Vietnamese torturers were, "If they are not guilty, beat them until they are," and similar logic is found in the phrase, "If you are not a Vietcong, we will beat you until you admit you are: and if you admit you are, we will beat you until you no longer dare to be one."⁶ Similar to this contradictory form of mental torture, in the Dirty War, family members who searched for the *desaparecidos* were made to think that "they could have prevented the disappearance if they would have done precisely the opposite of what they did."⁷

Even though the language is ambiguous and circular, it is not, as some critics believed, absurd⁸ (in the sense of belonging to the general movement of the "Theatre of the Absurd" as coined by Martin Esslin).⁹ The language of the Young Man forms the only rational discourse in the play. However, the irrationality of the victimizer's discourse does not deliver this play into the realm of the

Theatre of the Absurd, but rather is an integral part of the paradigm of repression. After reading the testimonies in *Nunca más* one becomes aware of the veracity of the dictum "truth is stranger than fiction". Similar to this play, in which the victimizers state that the Young Man is detained because of the resemblance of his name to another, years after the birth of this work the State detained and tortured a man who had the same name as another man they were looking for, and who had resided in the same apartment years before.¹⁰

Another method of psychological enervation is the technique of disorienting the victim by repeatedly imposing a discourse which directly contradicts one's temporal, visual, and audiological senses. It is significant that the Young Man's watch is stolen; the watch, in this sense representing time. The lights are switched on and off at different times of the day; the curtain does not cover a window (from which normally the protagonist would be able to orient himself in relation to the light of the day) but another wall. Hence the Young Man has to rely on his victimizers for all information, which consists, of course, of a medley of lies and contradictions. The only true discourse in the play is one that is absent: the screams of the invisible others.

The Young Man loses faith in his own sense of reason in order to believe the discourse of the victimizers. Even at the end, the Young Man, believing entirely in the words of the Functionary, refuses to accept what his own mind intuits, and patiently waits for the Functionary, which ultimately signifies his death. When the Usher informs him that the Functionary stole his watch, the Young Man obstinately states, "¡Me está mintiendo! ¡El Funcionario es un caballero! Es . . . un padre . . . Sí, un padre."^e Another example of the victim internalizing the discourse of Authority is the initial abduction: at the beginning, the Young Man insists that he was brought to the room and had no

^e You are lying to me! The Functionary is a gentleman! He is . . . a father . . . Yes, a father.

option: "Me obligaron."^f Yet after discussing the situation with the Usher, moments later he states, "No sé por qué me ha traído (rectifica), me he llegado hasta aquí . . . Yo vine, pero ellos me invitaron,"^g hence taking part in the victimizer's script.

The Young Man's faith in the Functionary forms a large part of Gambaro's critique of a public which stands by and closes its eyes as the victimizers assassinate thousands of people. Of course, the public, like the Young Man, cannot believe that high-ranking generals, professionals, men like the Functionary, authoritarian figures, could be capable of such actions. Hence they place the blame on the victims themselves, thinking that they were the ones that had done something "wrong" and were now being justly castigated.¹¹ Hannah Arendt writes: "Common sense reacted to the horrors of Buchenwald and Auschwitz with the plausible argument: 'What crime must these people have committed that such things were done to them!'"¹² This disbelief of truth, for the sake of not disturbing oneself or one's conscience, is one of the most common human traits that time and time again dictators and fascists have used in order to initiate and then maintain their repression. As Gambaro states in an interview about *Las paredes*:

Las palabras están constantemente desmintiendo la realidad. Pero el Joven en vez de ver la realidad, acepta la mentira de las palabras, o de lo que le han enseñado a respetar como cierto, es decir, al Funcionario que es la autoridad y la verdad. Pero la realidad demuestra que no, que el Funcionario está mintiendo, que le ha robado el reloj. Y ante esa evidencia, no la

^f They forced me.

^g "I do not know why they have brought me (corrects himself), I have arrived here . . . I came, but they invited me"

acepta porque está educado para negarla y él no se exige a sí mismo ver esa realidad^h.¹³

This phenomenon of blaming the victims themselves, not believing one's own reason and senses, and conceding to the State, the Authority, has multiple causes and effects. In another interview in Buenos Aires in 1982 with Griselda Gambaro, Miguel Angel Giella and Peter Roster state:

Es que yo veo siempre una relación de personajes sometidos, de personajes víctimas, de personajes sojuzgados. En tus obras ese personaje acepta su situación de víctima, como que amara o se encontrara cómodo con esa situación porque no tiene una mentalidad preparada para asumir su libertad.

Gambaro comments:

Claro, y ahí está. Porque, ¿qué es lo que pasa con el espectador? . . . Que el espectador empiece a preguntarse, a reflexionar, a imaginar sobre lo vistoⁱ.¹⁴

What Griselda Gambaro desires is for the spectator, through contemplating the process of victimization and victim paralysis, to develop this "mentalidad preparada para asumir su libertad."^j

Western society has been created upon paternalistic power constructs (the emphasis here is on the idea of the Foucauldian theory of power constructs and *not* essential human nature) that

^hWords are constantly denying reality. But the Young Man, instead of seeing reality, accepts the lie of the words, or what they have taught him to respect, of course, that is to say, the Functionary who is the authority and the truth. But the reality demonstrates that no, that the Functionary is lying, that he has robbed him of his watch. And before this evidence, he does not accept it because he has been educated to deny it and he does not force himself to see this reality.

ⁱQuestion: I always see a relation of conquered characters, of characters as victims, of subdued characters. In your plays the character accepts the situation of victim, as if they loved or found comfortable the situation because they do not have the mentality prepared to assume their liberty.

Answer: Of course, there it is. What is it that is happening to the spectator? . . . The spectator starts to question, to contemplate, to imagine about what one has seen.

^jmentality prepared to assume one's liberty.

inculcate in us “values” such as to respect, believe, and acquiesce to authority. Institutionalized religion, one of the greatest and most manipulative constructs of all, has also impelled us in this direction (hence we are not surprised by the invariable strong traditional ties between the Church and the State). This, combined with the repressive history of Argentina, in which people, after years of continuous repression, gradually and insidiously have become inured to high levels of violence, has caused an internalization of Authoritative discourse and repression: all of which accrue to the victimizer’s benefit: people become prime material for physical, psychological and spiritual manipulation.

Perhaps the most terrifying aspect of this play is not the allusion to the imminent death of the Young Man and the psychological torture that he experiences, but rather the faith and trust the Young Man has in appearances, language, and authority. As previously mentioned at the end of the play, the door of his room is left open. Nonetheless he sits in his chair waiting for the Functionary.

As Hannah Arendt writes in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, quoting David Rousset:

For to destroy individuality is to destroy spontaneity, man's power to begin something new out of his own resources, something that cannot be explained on the basis of reactions to environment and events . . . “The triumph of the SS demands that the tortured victim allow himself to be led to the noose without protesting, that he renounce and abandon himself to the point of ceasing to affirm his identity. And it is not for nothing. It is not gratuitously, nor out of sheer sadism, that the SS men desire his defeat. They know that the system which succeeds in destroying its victim before he mounts the scaffold . . . is incomparably the best for keeping a whole people in slavery.”¹⁵

Exactly a decade after this play was performed, thousands of people like the Young Man deceived

themselves and remained passive and ignorant towards the bloodiest seven years of Argentine history.

Gambaro states in an interview:

(e)l hombre . . . es un ser muy pasivo a quien le cuesta asumir su responsabilidad con respecto a los otros y con respecto a sí mismo. Y creo que eso está indicado en mis primeras piezas. Siempre me preocupó eso de encerrarse y no asumir la responsabilidad que tenemos, porque esa actitud nos lleva a la destrucción y a la muerte.^{k16}

One of the most interesting and provocative phenomena in Gambaro's plays, which also supports the recently discussed internalization of violence, is metatheatricality. Gambaro is cognizant of the techniques victimizers use to "fictionalize" and "theatricalize" brutality, first, to produce, in the victim a state of passive paralysis, not believing what reason and the senses dictate and to pacify and also paralyze the public, thus making it easier for them to condone or ignore the acts occurring in the time of repression. The combination of the banal with the dangerous is a lethal cocktail most repressive States have utilized including the military Juntas in Argentina.

The relationship between fascism and theatricality has been extensively studied (especially after the reigns of Hitler and Stalin--two masters of propaganda). As early as 1930, when Fascism was still in its nascent period, Thomas Mann wrote the novella *Mario and the Magician*, which consisted of the story of a magician who deprives his audience of all ability to make judgements or think critically. Mann focusses on the tenuous and sometimes invisible line between reality and fiction and the faint distinction between political theatricality and theatrical politics.¹⁷ Thirty-six years

^kHumans . . . are very passive beings who find it difficult to assume responsibility in respect to others and with respect to themselves. I believe that this is indicated in my first plays. It has always preoccupied me this closing of oneself and not assuming the responsibility that we have, because this attitude takes us to destruction and to death.

later, after Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Franco, the element of metatheatricality was (and is) still germane to the political world. In *Las paredes* this phenomenon is easily discernible--from the space of the play (a room that changes size), the description of the characters (the theatricality of the victimizers), and the circular language itself. In fact, the *paredes* or walls may serve as a metonymy for the frame of the room (one's house) and subsequently the stage (theatre-world). Furthermore, the word "theatrical" itself is used many times within the stage directions of the play. For example in Act One, when the Functionary enters, the stage directions describe him as having, "gestos teatrales y enfáticos".¹⁷ Diana Taylor observes the relationship between the metatheatricality, disappearance of objects in the play, and the political reality of Argentina:

We spectators, seemingly protected by the proscenium arch, are neither separate nor safe.

The fact that the victims are themselves spectators watching the unthinkable happen as well as actors experiencing it should lead us to suspect that the audience too plays a greater role than it suspects in the process of erasure. *The Walls* illustrates that the things that disappear from consciousness (the painting, the shrinking social space, logic, coherent language) must be understood in relation to the disappearance of humans, of consciousness, from the world.¹⁸

The reason given for the Young Man's abduction also plays into the metatheatrical and intertextual paradigm since he was abducted on the pretext that the State wanted to ascertain whether his name is Ruperto de Hentzau or Hanttau, who is a villain in the novel *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Hence, we enter the world of fiction: the question concerns the connection between a man in the world of reality and a character in the world of fiction, all within a theatrical work. Upon watching this, one immediately thinks of Borges, Gambaro's compatriot; however, this is not a Borgian

¹⁷theatrical and emphatic gestures

influence; it reflects the process of the military to fictionalize and theatricalize repression. The fiction not only encompasses the characters in the novel, but also the situation of the Young Man, who lives in the fiction that he will soon be free.

As is evident, *Las paredes* is a play that deals directly with the situation and consequences of a repressive State: the power of the State over individuals; psychological and physical torture terminating in death; theatrical elements utilized by victimizers and their relation to the passivity and disbelief of the victim; and the internalization of the victimizer's discourse. As will be shown in Chapter Four with the play *El Campo*; when the situation in Argentina escalates to a more alarming and calamitous level, Gambaro's plays concomitantly manifest the heinous destructive ramifications of a repressive regime. Moreover, as stated previously, her work is not a mere reflection of the abuse of power and repression, but rather an engagement of a constant confrontational discourse. As Havel states in *Summer Meditations*:

A moral and intellectual state cannot be established through a constitution, or through law, or through directives, but only through complex, long-term, and never-ending work, it is a way of going about things, and it demands the courage to breathe moral and spiritual motivation into everything, to seek the human dimension in all things. Science, technology, expertise, and so-called professionalism are not enough, something more is necessary. For the sake of simplicity it might be called spirit. Or feeling. Or conscience.¹⁹

Her struggle against political injustice, which still continues, is such a dialectic that embodies what Havel aptly has called "spirit" or "conscience".

1. Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis* 103.
2. See Chapter One for the socio-political context of Onganía's brutal regime
3. Scarry, 38.
4. All form carries an implicit ideological position: *Las paredes* was quite experimental for its time in Argentina. Gambaro realized that in order to criticize the status quo, the Military, and in many ways the bourgeoisie, she had to choose another form, and many critics have erroneously labelled this as absurdist or Artaudian influence. The play is divided into three scenes, the first two in Act I and scene three in Act II. It is a very simple structure which tends to lend it an air of passive acceptance of fatalism.

Objects in the play acquire special importance because first, there are few, hence obtaining a symbolic status, and second, the few objects that appear, tend to disappear. The objects consist of the painting, curtains, the doll, the Young Man's watch, and of course the room. The Functionary steals the Young Man's watch in Act I and the paintings and curtains disappear in Act II, leaving the Young Man alone, in a shrunken room, with a large detested doll.
5. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 71.
6. Scarry, 42.
7. Cited in Graziano. Diana Kordon and Lucila Edelman's *Efectos psicológicos de la represión política* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana-Planeta, 1986) 44.
8. Gambaro has repeatedly denied any affiliations with the Theatre of the Absurd and states that the "absurdity" that is found in her plays emerges from the tradition of the native Argentine theme of "lo grotesco". For further details see *Cien años de teatro argentino: del Moreira a teatro abierto* by Osvaldo Pellettieri.
9. Gambaro states in an interview: "cuando yo escucho que hacen análisis de mis obras, y como parámetro usan el teatro del absurdo, siento una especie de retorcimiento. Porque pienso que no influye en mi obra. Pero sí hay ciertos elementos en mi teatro que vienen del grotesco" (*Sucede lo que pasa*) 13.
10. *Nunca más*, 64.
11. Please refer to my discussion of phrases such as "Por algo será" in Chapter One.
12. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 446.
13. Gambaro, *Sucede lo que pasa* (Ottawa: Girol, 1991) 29
14. Gambaro, *Sucede lo que pasa* 29
15. Arendt, 12.

16. Gambaro, *Sucede lo que pasa* 28.

17. Linda Schulte-Sasse, "National Socialism in Theory and Fiction: A Sampling of German Perspectives, 1923-1980," in *Fascismo y experiencia literaria: reflexiones para una recanonización*, Hernán Vidal. (Minneapolis: Society for the Study of Contemporary Hispanic and Lusophone Revolutionary Literatures, 1985) 70.

18. Taylor 38

19. Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations* (London: Faber, 1992) 20.

Camp Games

The only rule of which everybody in a totalitarian state may be sure is that the more visible government agencies are, the less power they carry, and the less is known of the existence of an institution, the more powerful it will ultimately turn out to be.

This atmosphere of madness and unreality, created by an apparent lack of purpose, is the real iron curtain which hides all forms of concentration camps from the eyes of the world. Seen from outside, they and the things that happen in them can be described only in images drawn from a life after death, that is, a life removed from earthly purposes.

Hannah Arendt

Written in 1967 and performed in 1968, *El campo* appeared in Argentina at a time of escalating violence and repression.¹ In the most cursory synoptic fashion one could state that the play concerns a person who arrives at an unidentified institution, perhaps a children's camp, to take up the function of administrator/book-keeper, comes to care about one of the victims; and, realizing the nature of the institution, ultimately falls prey to the power of the victimizers. The play's title has been translated in two distinct manners, playing on the ambivalence in Spanish of the word "campo": *The camp* and *In the countryside*; hence the meaning could be taken as camp/concentration camp or camp/disguised as countryside. As we will observe later, the ambiguity of the title is representative of one of the main themes of the play -- double discourse, text and subtext.

This dramatic work, similar to *Las paredes*, unfortunately foreshadowed an imminent future; one of detention centres/concentration camps closely connected with Nazism/fascism. Also, the play is similar to *Las paredes* in its use of political theatricality, a constant in Gambaro's works of this period, in order to show the distinct methods of manipulation the victimizers utilize.

El campo alludes directly to an historical phenomenon in Argentina: the presence and fascination of fascism and Nazism in the Argentine military. Argentina is one of the few countries in Latin America in which the indigenous race is rarely seen: as a result of the massacres of the overwhelming majority of the indigenous peoples in previous centuries. Argentina, obsessed with the dichotomy of “civilization” and “barbarism” as elucidated by Sarmiento, is almost homogeneously white (even though included within this “whiteness” is an interesting mix of Europeans). Furthermore, during World War II, though theoretically neutral, Argentina was obviously in support of the Axis, terminating its relation with Germany near the end of the war. Donald Hodges states:

Because of the pronounced Axis sympathies of the new military regime, its indefinite prolongation of the state of siege decreed in 1941, its dissolution of congress, and its legal ban on all political parties, it evoked extensive civilian opposition. The deposed Conservative Party joined the majoritarian Radical Party and the Socialist and Communist parties to denounce the “totalitarian” blight which had descended upon the country. In January 1944, the government finally broke off diplomatic relations with Germany and Japan. Nonetheless, Argentina was the only nation in the Western Hemisphere that did not declare war against the Axis powers until the outcome of World War II was already decided, and then only to avoid becoming isolated and the subject of recriminations by the United States.²

Following the demise of the Axis powers of World War II, many former Nazi leaders fled to a welcoming Argentina, including the infamous Adolf Eichmann, whose last words, before his imminent execution in 1961 were “Long live Germany, long live Argentina, long live Austria. I shall not forget them.”³ During the Dirty War (1976-1983), Simon Weisenthal, a professional hunter of

Nazi war criminals, discovered sufficient evidence of the existence of a Nazi war criminal in Argentina to persuade Germany to request the man's extradition. Jacobo Timerman, incarcerated in a detention centre at that time (1979), writes:

The Argentine government, ever eager to demonstrate publicly that it was not anti-Semitic -- despite its failure to ban anti-semitic violence among its security forces -- consented to the extradition of the German subject, allowing him, however, to escape first to Paraguay. Those who attended the Academy in the clandestine prison where I was held felt that a true betrayal had taken place against their National Revolution.⁴

The allusions in *El campo* to a fascist State abound; Martín is asked twice -- once at the beginning of the play, and second at the end -- immediately before he is assimilated, if he is a Jew or a communist. The victimizer, Franco, wears an SS uniform; the action takes place in a concentration camp where bodies are burnt in incinerators, dogs hunt humans, and people are branded. However, these allusions refer not only to a nightmarish Nazi state, but also foreshadow the Dirty War with its detention centers, dogs hunting humans⁵, bodies being burnt⁶, and of course, the ubiquitous *desaparecidos*.

In the play the antagonist's name, Franco, refers not only to the Spanish fascist leader, but also contains a second reference directly related to the time in which the play was performed: general Onganía earned the particular soubriquet "Franco", for his faithful allegiance and admiration of Franco's dictatorship in Spain. General Onganía's coup d'état of June, 1966, physically and psychologically established the military structure for the subsequent Dirty War period, and initiated one of the most repressive military States that Argentina had ever known: hence, of course, this situation would be painfully fresh in the minds of the public of 1968.

The play commences with the entrance of Martín, wearing an overcoat, gloves, and scarf, and then Franco, immaculately dressed in an SS Gestapo uniform, complete with shiny boots and a whip tied to his wrist, stunning Martín, who is shocked at Franco's choice of "costumes". Martín, physically reacts, and asks,

Martín: "Pero ¿por qué ese uniforme?"

Franco: "¿Y cuál me iba a poner?"

Martín: "¿Para qué?"

Franco: "Me gusta. Los gustos hay que dárselos en vida. No hago mal a nadie. Estoy desarmado. (Bruscamente) ¿Judío?"^a

Franco's uniform, because it is constantly referred to, acquires importance in the play; significant because of allusions to the Nazi regime, and the connotations the SS uniform itself carries. Susan Sontag, in *Under the Sign of Saturn*, writes:

There is a general fantasy about uniforms. They suggest . . . legitimate authority, the legitimate exercise of violence . . . the SS was the ideal incarnation of fascism's overt assertion of the righteousness of violence, the right to have total power over others and to treat them as absolutely inferior. It was in the SS that this assertion seemed most complete, because they acted it out in a singularly brutal and efficient manner; and because they dramatized it by linking themselves to certain aesthetic standards. The SS was designed as an elite military

^a Martín: But why this uniform?

Franco: And which one would I put on?

Martín: For what?

Franco: I like it. One must give oneself pleasures in life. I don't do anyone any harm. I am unarmed. (Brusquely) Jewish?

community that would be not only supremely violent but also supremely beautiful.⁷

An analysis of Sontag's paragraph reveals a connection between the mythology of the uniform and Franco's character. In the beginning of the play Franco insinuates that the uniform is only a play object for him, and, as quoted, a pleasure; hence this affirmation adheres to the level of a general fantasy about uniforms. However, as is evident in the development of the play, this fantasy is only one of several levels of the symbolic interplay of the uniform in the dramatic work. The uniform then becomes transformed into exactly what it represented in Nazi Germany - supreme violence, supreme authority, and a license for absolute and total power. Franco's uniform also represents for him "certain aesthetic standards"; he plays the role of a cultured and refined man of high society, with "concerts" for the elite of the community; and, as Franco states when the prisoners and the SS guards walk in, "La sala está llena. La flor y nata de nuestra sociedad."^b Another element belonging both to the general mythology of uniforms and to this play, is the sexualization and fetishization of the uniform, whips, boots, and other paraphernalia; and it is neither a coincidence nor mere persiflage that Martín asks Franco if he is going to strip, after Franco removes his jacket, shoes, and finally his socks, while putting his feet in front of Martín. Rather it is a direct reference to this element of what Sontag calls the "solemn eroticizing of fascism."

There are two parallel discourses: the first to which we can relate: a surprised and unsuspecting Martín who is shocked to see a Gestapo uniform; and the second, the metatheatrical discourse of Franco, a role which an audience in 1968 Argentina would readily recognize. As already mentioned, in Gambaro's plays of this period there is a manifestation of this double metatheatrical discourse. As in *Las paredes*, Franco blatantly lies, and his appearance "*de rostro casi*

^bThe salon is full. The *crème de la crème* of our society.

bondadoso”^c persuades Martín to bow to disbelief, not being warned enough by the Gestapo uniform and by Franco’s obviously rude and abnormal behaviour.

Franco’s abuse of Martín is evident from the beginning of the play: within minutes of meeting Martín, Franco orders him to stop chewing gum -- a “repugnant habit” he states, and to take his jacket off, to which Martín also acquiesces. Franco then proceeds to throw Martín’s jacket on the floor and to step on it, showing utter disrespect; however, Martín barely reacts and permits Franco to abuse him in such a manner. Consequently, Franco realizes that he can take certain liberties with Martín and that it will not be difficult to subjugate him. In one of the most important books on power of this century, *Power: the Natural History of its Growth* Bertrand de Jouvenal writes that, “In every condition of life and social position a man feels himself more of a man when he is imposing himself and making others the instruments of his will, the means to the great ends of which he has an intoxicating vision.”⁸ This characteristic of viciously forcing one’s will upon another, and the more extreme megalomania, is found in this play and countless dramas of history the centuries have given us; the South Americans, like Batista, Papa Doc, and Somoza, and the more infamous ones history has not forgotten; Darius of Persia, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Stalin, and of course Hitler.

With the entrance of Emma, the play intensifies to a more terrifying level -- not only has Emma obviously been tortured but also conquered, internalizing the Discourse of Authority and playing the role assigned to her by the Director, (State) Franco. As Schafer’s classic definition of internalization states: “Internalization refers to all those processes by which the subject transforms real or imagined regulatory interactions with his environment, and real or imagined characteristics of his environment, into inner regulations and characteristics.”⁹ Parallel to this definition we can

^cAn almost kind face.

observe that Emma (subject) interprets the theatrical and imaginary regulations and characteristics of Franco's discourse into her own inner discourse. Furthermore, Emma suffers a double victimization, firstly that of repression, and secondly that of herself as a woman who has been disfigured into a type of "frivolous Venus", reified and objectified by Franco, and sent to Martín as a gift.

In 1984, the year after the end of the Dirty War, with the approval of Griselda Gambaro and under the direction of Alberto Ure, a new production of *El campo* was staged in Buenos Aires at the Teatro Nacional Cervantes. This production, although relatively faithful to the original text, focussed more intensely on Emma's character and consequent feminist issues, such as having Emma dress in a maid's uniform. The last play discussed in this study, written in 1984, also shares this feminist preoccupation, and will be analyzed from this point of view. Thus the focus will be on the discourse of gender repression with secondary emphasis on the discourse of general State terror.

When Emma enters, the stage directions state: *Hace un visible esfuerzo, como si empezara a actuar . . . Sus gestos no concuerdan para nada con su aspecto. Son los gestos, actitudes, de una mujer que luciera un vestido de fiesta.*^d Again we encounter this obfuscating combination of a contradictory duality. When Franco re-enters he calls her "Señora" and proceeds to kiss her hand. Emma no longer is Emma; she has become a puppet who is manipulated and controlled by the State. She has experienced a terror that has led her into a world of oblivion, as Arendt states:

The real horror of the concentration and extermination camps lies in the fact that the inmates, even if they happen to keep alive, are more effectively cut off from the world of the living that

^dShe makes a visible effort, as if she were starting to act . . . Her gestures do not correspond at all with her aspect. They are the gestures, attitudes of a woman who would don a party dress.

if they had died, because terror enforces oblivion.¹⁰

Emma has adopted her victimizer's discourse and become part of the symbol of power; she wears on her tortured body (text) the political insignia of the State: her shaved head, itching torso, and on her hand, a livid wound. The pain, suffering, and torture that the State has inflicted upon her and her world is their own discourse; they have assimilated her; they have forced her to conform, quite simply, they have made her their own.

Diana Taylor astutely points out that the dramatist refers, *mutatis mutandi*, to the form of torture popular in repressive regimes called family torture: the woman is beaten, raped, and sometimes murdered in front of her husband and children in order to psychologically destroy the man and his will. Thus the invariably misogynist victimizers use the woman as a medium for obtaining their ends; and the women become doubly damned: some, involved with "subversive activity", are tortured for the information they carry; in addition to being tortured for the information the man carries.¹¹

Emma's internalization of the regime's discourse and script is evident from the beginning of the play. When Emma meets Martín and tries to be attractive to him, Franco, as the director, even gives her cues on how to act: Emma is playing her role, caressing Martín. Franco interrupts her, the stage directions tell us, *like a theatre director*: "¡Pero no así! ¡Es muy burdo!" Emma states, "Lo haré mejor. (*Recomienza*)" This scene demonstrates both the theatricality of torture and repression, and Franco's -- perhaps sadistically sexual -- fantasy of controlling and directing objects (victims) of and in reality. Susan Sontag states, "Between sadomasochism and fascism there is a natural link . . . As is sadomasochistic sexuality: to be involved in sadomasochism is to take part in a sexual theatre, a staging

¹⁰Franco: But not like that! You're very clumsy!
Emma: I will do it better. (Starts again)

of sexuality.”¹² Even though initially one may not descry sexual-gender innuendos in this particular scene, it is enough to imagine theoretical inversion to understand the sexual subtext: if Emma were a man victimized by Franco, sent to a woman as a “gift”, and directed in a fantasy by another woman, this scene would have not functioned as well, or at all.

The connection between power and sex permeates and affects our literature, cinema, governments, professions, politics; in other words, our reality. In times of repression when the military has absolute power, women are systematically raped -- Latin America has been no exception: in Argentina (Timerman states that Jewish women were twice as likely to be raped); in Chile, Paraguay, Salvador, Brasil, Uruguay, and Guatemala. Raping women during times of war has almost been accepted as a natural phenomenon; this statement appears terrifying and horrendous, but actually it is quite appropriate within the complex psychological brainwashing system that soldiers pass through: in order to convince a soldier that he must kill another human being, an act that fundamentally contradicts human nature, the State has to mythologize the enemy and itself, and connect this mythology to the remote, atavistic bestiality inherent in human beings. Raping women, touches upon, awakens, and most importantly perpetuates the animalistic and instinctive propensity of men to dominate, rule over, and conquer one another. A motive for rape in war mentioned previously as a torture technique, is to reach and destroy the man (subject) through the woman (object). Analogous and appropriate to our study is a quote from an essay by bell hooks, in *Yearning: race, gender, and culture politics*, in which she writes about the psychology and motivation of rape within the context of white men raping black women:

... rape -- the terrorist act re-enacting the drama of conquest, as men of the dominating group sexually violate the bodies of women who are among the dominated. The intent of this act was

to continually remind the dominated men of their loss of power; rape was a gesture of symbolic castration. Dominated men are made powerless (i.e., impotent) over and over again as the women they would have had the right to possess, to control, to assert power over, to dominate, to fuck, are fucked and fucked over by the dominating victorious male group.¹³

Thus, within this phallogentric paradigm, the partners of so-called subversives (dominated) were raped by the soldiers (dominating) to destroy and make “impotent” the enemy. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Gambaro suggests a sexual relationship but does not eroticize the scene, which would make the audience participate more as *voyeurs* and not contemplate the process with the intended Brechtian distance. This play could readily have slipped into the genre of “erotic theatre”, becoming “scintillating pornographic”, but only in a limited way, in the terms of an one-sided sadomasochism, since it is Franco’s fetish and fantasy and not Emma’s, who is forced to play along as a victim, and not because she elicits any pleasure from the act.

One of the pivotal scenes in the play is that of the piano “concert”, in which we witness the ultimate display of State power: the spectacle of the wilful, mandated destruction of another. The “public” at the “concert” is implied by Franco to represent a real concert, complete with the “elite” segment of society. However, instead of a beautiful piano recital, what we have is an execution, a metaphorical one, showing us the process of the psychological destruction of an human being; the degradation becoming an assassination of a spirit and a soul, placed before us as a spectacle. Foucault has been invoked, thus let us quote him:

The public execution is to be understood not only as a judicial, but also as a political ritual. It

belongs, even in minor cases, to the ceremonies by which power is manifested.¹⁴

Not only must people know, they must see with their own eyes. Because they must be made to be afraid; but also because they must be the witnesses, the guarantors, of the punishment, and because they must to a certain extent take part in it.¹⁵

Jacobo Timerman, a journalist/editor/publisher, tortured in Argentina during the Dirty war, writes about the torture/spectacle relationship:

The soldiers who tortured me were so proud of finally having laid hands on me that they strove to spread the details of the great event, and even embellished it, I believe, with nonexistent details. They spoke of the mirrored rooms where the electric shocks were applied and of the numerous observers who witnessed the episode from the other side.¹⁶

Franco, the director of the theatre, the camp, and in charge of the concert, rules absolutely; all actions revolving around him. The SS officers also have complete power over the prisoners, the latter playing the role of an audience/puppets. A revealing line is when one of the officers stands up and *ferociously screams*: “¡Silencio! (*Silencio absoluto y fugaz. Luego, los presos golpean el piso con los pies. SS*) ¿Cómo no obedecen? (*Con una aviesa sonrisa que se transforma en una risita irreprimible*) ¿Cómo se atreven a desobedecer?”^f Immediately one realizes that the odious dark laughter of the SS officer will transform into more tortures and punishment for the prisoners. The officers, feeling an intoxicating sense of power, play the role of an omnipotent god.

During the concert Emma scratches herself in an agonized manner and Franco stands up to

^fSilence! (Absolute and brief silence. Then, the prisoners hit the floor with their feet.) How can you not obey? (With a sinister smile that transforms into an irrepressible laugh) How do you dare to disobey?

apply some "medicine" to Emma's skin, passes Martín, and states, "¡No la cuido! ¡Dice que no la cuido! ¡Desgraciado!"⁸ Of course, this "medicine" is a liquid which exacerbates her condition and invites a renewed wave of agony. The torture is always in disguise; they torture, but with soft smiles. This scene itself could be taken as a study of the different methods of torture (direct torture of Emma and indirect torture of Martín), control (over body of prisoners), and of course elements of metatheatricality (spectacle within play). Several groups of audiences view the spectacle; the SS soldiers, the prisoners, Martín, and Franco, and we, the real public; with the performer being another prisoner (similar to the film scene of Carlos Saura's *Ay Carmela*). The piano has been tampered with so that it sounds like a broken toy piano barely emitting any audible sounds; hence, when Franco orders Emma to sing out the notes and orchestrates and orders the prisoners to sing along, the voices of the prisoners consequently overpower the sole woman's broken and frail voice .

Naturally, we the public, feel disappointed by the lack of solidarity shown by the prisoners for Emma. However, this sentiment is simplisitic and romantic; we want the prisoners to stand up, attack the guards, and to support Emma. Nevertheless, as many tortured victims have testified, when a human being is thrown into and maintained in such a heinous environment, generally the human genetic need for self-preservation will prevail at the expense of humanity. The process of being tortured, destroyed, and broken, will take a person back to the primal, pre-language, instinctual mode. Victims state that when one is being tortured, contrary to popular belief, one does not think of one's husband, wife, or child but rather oneself, one's own pain, and one's own existence. Perhaps this is the most humilliating consequence of it all -- to feel so utterly alone, helpless, and primordially human in a solipsistic world.

The concert, with its characteristics of psychological torture, spectacle, megalomania

⁸I don't care for her! She says that I don't care for her! Ingrate!

leader/director, false aesthetics, etc., can also be analyzed as a form of microcosm of Fascism: As Susan Sontag writes of fascist aesthetics:

(t)hey flow from (and justify) a preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behavior, extravagant effort, and the endurance of pain; they endorse two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude. The relations of domination and enslavement take the form of a characteristic pageantry: the massing of groups of people; the turning of people into things; the multiplication or replication of things, and the grouping of people/things around an all-powerful, hypnotic leader-figure or force. The fascist dramaturgy centers on the orgiastic transactions between mighty forces and their puppets, uniformly garbed and shown in ever swelling numbers

.....¹⁷

The last lines of the concert scene reveal that the whole concert took place while bodies were being burnt. Upon realizing this Martín, collapses into a mode of aphasia; this action parallels and foreshadows the last scene in which he is branded. Elaine Scarry writes: "Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject."¹⁸

El campo is a dramatic work which places much emphasis on the theatricality of repression. The concert is the quintessential example of this political theatricality but others also abound; the double representation with the Gestapo uniform, as already mentioned, or the theatricality of the false sounds coming from Franco's office intercom: peasants are heard singing but we see no one; children are heard laughing, but again, we see no one. Double discourse occurs as a human hunt is called a fox hunt, and burning dead dogs equates burning human bodies.

Another element emphasized in this play, similar to *Las paredes*, is a specific technique of torture: the gentle-aggression / kind-violence, which simultaneously bemuses and pacifies us; The SS guards scratch Martín gently, as the stage directions inform us: *Martín tiene el rostro ensangrentado. Todo esto se ha ejecutado casi tiernamente, sin violencia*^h, and in the end when Martín is going to be branded (*Le sonríe amigablemente. La sonrisa es común, completamente distanciada de lo que está sucediendo . . . Los otros dos lo sostienen con una especie de bondad, uno de ellos saca un pañuelo del bolsillo y le seca el sudor de la cara.*ⁱ The effect of this combination is that it disconcerts and disturbs us profoundly. As will be discussed in finer detail in the subsequent chapter dealing with *El señor Galíndez*, the victimizers are not the demonic figures we would imagine (or maybe hope) them to be, but fellow human beings, and it is this, perhaps, which is the most devastating of all. Appropriate here is a description from the writer who perhaps understood human nature more profoundly than any other western artist in our history, Dostoyevsky, in *Brothers Karamazov*, writes, “a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel.”

At the end of the play, there is an ironic inversion: it is the supposedly deluded Emma who truly understands the nature of the victimizers and the reality of State repression. When Martín's family is missing, she asks, terrified, “¿Desaparecieron?”, and Martín laughs and states, “¡No! Habrán salido por un momento.”^j Then, when the Functionary enters the house, Emma immediately realizes that Franco

^hMartín's face is bloody. All this has been executed almost tenderly, without violence.

ⁱ He smiles at him in a friendly manner. The smile is common, completely distanced from what is happening . . . The other two sustain him with a manner of kindness, one of them takes out a handkerchief from his pocket and wipes the sweat off Martín's face.

^jEmma: (Terrified) Did they disappear?

Martín: (Laughs) No! They probably stepped out for a minute.

sent him; thus, even though Emma had internalized the script we can descry glimpses of a lucid mind grappling through the darkness, while Martín still remains in a mode of denial.

After watching Emma and her interaction towards Martín one naturally questions her motivations when she is unsupportive of her only potential liberator. As paradoxical as it may seem, after severe and prolonged torture, many victims come to know it as a way of life. This human survival technique is a means of naturalizing an otherwise abhorrent manner of life in order not to succumb to insanity. As Havel states, in totalitarian systems, part of the essence is:

that it draws everyone into its sphere of power, not so they may realize themselves as human beings, but so they may surrender their human identity in favour of the identity of the system, that is, so they may become agents of the system's general automatism and servants of its self-determined goals¹⁹

As Havel states, victims are made to participate and play their role in totalitarian societies, hence they are "both victims of the system and its instruments,"²⁰ since the system could not function without obeying objects and subjects. An example which demonstrates this psychological phenomenon took place in 1942, at Auschwitz. Camp prisoners were waiting for a perfunctory inspection tour headed by Heinrich Himmler. One of the prisoners, Yankel Meisel, was found without the required number of tunic buttons. Immediately three of the Nazi soldiers took him aside, savagely beating him until he died. However, much less than compassion, the prisoners felt resentment for Yankel Meisel: "At that moment, I think, we all hated Yankel Meisel, the little old Jew who was spoiling everything, who was causing trouble for us all with his long, lone, futile protest."²¹ Phillip Hallie, in his analysis of this episode, states:

The sin that appalled them was the sin of inefficiency, the sin of breaking the smooth pace of the

machine that was maiming and destroying them all. What they wanted above all -- at least during that episode -- was to be inspected and approved by the man whose task it was to exterminate them all and who had already exterminated many of their co-prisoners.²²

Repression and torture turn the world upside down; the rational world is relegated to the margins, and the Law of the State, however irrational and absurd, is reified and standardized. One example of this is role reversal; throughout the play Franco inverts the roles of victim/victimizer; he confesses his servitude for Emma, and calls her ungrateful for not appreciating his "care": Hannah Arendt analyzes this reversal of roles in her study *Eichmann in Jerusalem*:

The trick used by Himmler -- who apparently was rather strongly afflicted with these instinctive reactions himself -- was very simple and probably very effective; it consisted in turning these instincts around, as it were, in directing them toward the self. So that instead of saying: What horrible things I did to people!, the murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders!²³

The ending of *El campo* is not pessimistic, but unfortunately prophetically realistic; in *Las paredes* the victim will fall within the social space of the victimizer, yet in *El campo* the victimizers have extended the oppressive space and Martín is branded in his own home, power has extended into the private sphere. Branding a person is the ultimate symbol of the loss of individuality and identity, of total assimilation and internalization. I cite a personal testimony which will demonstrate this better than any theoretical words:

They placed us in a line to tattoo the number. Some fainted, others screamed. Now it was my turn. I knew that these pains were nothing in comparison with what awaited us. A female

prisoner from the Political Department, with a very low number, wearing a red triangle without a "P" (ethnic German), grabbed my hand and began to tattoo the next number: 55 908. It seemed she wasn't actually pricking my arm, she was jabbing me in the heart. From that moment on, I ceased to be a human being. I stopped feeling, thinking. I no longer had a name, an address. I was prisoner no. 55 908. And that same moment, with every jab of the needle, a piece of my life dropped away.²⁴

The similarities between the descriptions of Franco's office and Martín's home (two doors, one on the left and one of the right, and one window) are not coincidences but symbolic of the blending of private and public space. When a totalitarian regime's direct power reaches inside the citizens' house then one can be assured that we have reached the maximum state of violence; when the State has reached inside the home there is no escape except death, assimilation, or exile.

The date of reference given in the play was contemporaneous with the time of performance, and with the Vietnam war. Franco mentions Vietnam and states he cannot distinguish between the various countries North/South, that he does not understand them, and hence, does not care; this, of course parallels the ignorance and apathy of the world to Argentine's situation (with the exception of the United States, which was not ignorant nor apathetic, in fact, Reagan had become friends with and initially supported the Junta.) In the language of modern postcolonial theory we can discern in Franco's discourse the construction and consequent relegation of the Other. Gambaro, in her prescience, knew that years later this Other would become Argentina itself. As we are well aware, history inevitably repeats itself -- we have witnessed the indifference of the rest of the world towards the crises in countries such as Chile, Nicaragua, Bosnia, and countless others.

This play has been appreciated and acclaimed in many countries, especially ones that have suffered similar experiences (most of Latin America), because of Gambaro's masterful artistic direction and profound understanding of elements such as domination, manipulation, suppression, fear, empathy, and submission, which seem to be part of the stock, as Manuel Castells calls them, of human qualities found in all of us, waiting to be ignited.

1. Please refer to Chapter One for the socio-political contexts of Onganía's 1966 Junta.
2. Donald Hodges, *Argentina, 1943 -1987* (Albuquerque: New Mexico UP, 1988) 18.
3. Cited in Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1986) 47
4. Jacobo Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* (New York: Knopf, 1981) 103.
5. See *Nunca más*, 183.
6. See *Nunca más*, 175.
7. Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar, 1980) 99.
8. Bertrand de Jouvenal, *Power: the Natural History of its Growth*, 4th ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1948) 110.
9. Roy Schafer, *Aspects of Internalization* (New York: International UP, 1968) 9.
10. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 443.
11. Taylor, 128-129.
12. Sontag, 103.
13. bell hooks. *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics* (Boston: South End, 1990) 57
14. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 47.
15. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 58.
16. Timerman, *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number* 39.
17. Sontag 91.
18. Scarry 35.
19. Havel, *The Power of the Powerless* (London: Hutchinson, 1985) 36.
20. Havel 36.
21. Cited in Evelyn Picón Garfield's article, "Una dulce bondad que atempera las crueldades: *El Campo de Griselda Gambaro*" from the book *The Paradox of Cruelty*. Phillip Hallie. (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1969) 93
22. Ibid. 99.

23. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Viking, 1975) 106

24. Cited on p.82 of *The Order Of Terror: The Concentration Camp* by Wolfgang Sofsky, translated by William Templer, Princeton UP, 1997.

On the Other Side of the Curtain

All politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence.

C. Wright Mills

The second dramatist to be discussed in this thesis is Eduardo Pavlovsky, a playwright, actor, and psychoanalyst. His play *El señor Galíndez*^a is one of the most profound works on the phenomena of institutionalized political torture in Latin America. This play, created and performed, like the previous two, in a time of repression, consists of a critique of oppressive powers, and is a perceptive study of the psychological world of torturers. By shifting the point of reference from the victims to the victimizers, the play acquires a unique additional dimension, and consequently endows us with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the world of torturers, and the less frequently discussed victimization, not of the "subversives", but of the torturers themselves within the machine of repression.

Before commencing the analysis of the play I must acknowledge that the critique of this play will be limited because of the intense technical, in contrast with the more discursive Gambarian,

^aThe play takes place in one room -- the characters are Eduardo, Pepe, Beto, Sara and two women who work as prostitutes. When the play starts we meet Eduardo and find out that he has come to "apprentice" with Pepe and Beto. When the latter two arrive they abuse Eduardo emotionally and physically. The most important scene of the play is when the two women enter -- at this time we do not know the real profession of the three men and assume that they will use the two women for sex. However the three men tie up the women, convert the room into a torture chamber and commence the preparations for the torture. The scene is interrupted with a phone call from Mr. Galíndez (a constant motif in the play). The men send the women away and Beto and Pepe become very nervous in regards to the phone calls of Mr. Galíndez and their jobs. The play ends with a last phone call from Mr. Galíndez which Eduardo, now fully assimilated, answers.

theatricality functioning within this play: the use of the lights, of set (the room -- torture chamber), and sounds (torture scene in voice-off), convert *El señor Galíndez* into a play that resists analytical reification; it is the quintessential *performance*. Hence, cognizant of the theatrical-analytical limitations of this study, yet desiring to offer an enlightening analysis, I will focus more on the theory of the ideas and concepts of the "text", while, at the same time, discussing the non-textual elements of the play. Michel Foucault, in the introduction of *Discipline and Punish* states that one of his focusses will be to study "the disappearance of torture as a public spectacle."¹ Indeed, with the exception of a handful of Eastern countries, explicit physical torture as a public spectacle has nearly vanished. However, another occurrence, more insidious and sinister, has replaced it; torture has not disappeared, it has merely shifted to the non-public realm, a secret State sphere in which torture is a State spectacle. According to Amnesty International, at least 96 countries practice torture, and in Latin America, it is no less than a political epidemic.² Foucault observes that the public, playing an active part in the spectacles, were the moral guarantors and judges. Often, if they felt that the judgement was too harsh, they would intervene;

Preventing an execution that was regarded as unjust, snatching a condemned man from the hands of the executioner, obtaining his pardon by force, possible pursuing and assaulting the executioners, in any case abusing the judges and causing an uproar against the sentence - all this formed part of the popular practices that invested, traversed and often overturned the ritual of public execution.³

By relegating physical punishment to the private realm, totalitarian countries create what is in fact a double victorious political situation: first, the public does not condemn the State as barbaric or cruel, since they do not explicitly and physically witness the crime, and thus are given the

opportunity to feign ignorance and embrace negation. Second, concomitant with the absence of the public is the denial of justice since there are no moral guarantors in private sessions of torture; both situations thus work to grant the State greater power and control.

Foucault's theory of the disappearance of explicit barbarity and the Panopticon can be analyzed as an analogy of the twentieth century as a whole -- a decrease in the spectacular manifestation of power, an increase in the actual control of power over the people, while simultaneously persuading us of the existence of our freedom; is this not the illusion we embrace in the West, laden with terms such as democracy, civilization, freedom, equality? Overt injustice may have become more subtle, but by becoming hidden, it acquires a more sinister character. Many would argue that in the modern age, we live in a more civilized epoch, that we have abolished slavery, that we have equality. But is this true? Others would argue that we live in the modern Gulag, in the Panopticon, and the most insidious part is that we have fooled ourselves into thinking that we have more freedom than ever before.

Perhaps nowhere in the Western Hemisphere, in the two decades of 70s and 80s, has there existed such theatricality, such surrealistic reality, as in the southern cone of Latin America. Pavlovsky, in *El señor Galíndez*, written in 1973, studies, exposes, and critiques this reality. The play enjoyed critical success, but brought political persecution for the playwright. The reasons for the critical triumph of this dramatic work are many; as already mentioned *El señor Galíndez* is an astute psychoanalytic and social analysis of a certain ideological reality. Furthermore, Pavlovsky refuses to emotionalize or vilify his characters; which consequently leads us to the most striking and disturbing feature of this play, one discussed briefly in previous chapters, what Hannah Arendt has coined as the "banality of evil".

As much as we would like to imagine for our own psychological and spiritual comfort, that torturers are demons incarnate, we are confronted with the opposite; two men, who could easily be our neighbours, practise a profession which happens to be torture. This normality is the most terrifying element in the play, making us realize that torturers, as Arendt states, are “neither Macbeth nor Iago”. Of course, as mentioned, we want to imagine torturers as psychotic, inhuman beasts, like Hitler, but what we tend to overlook (or are persuaded to overlook) is that Hitler was one person, seven million people (Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, communists, etc.) were not maimed and killed by one man but by thousands and thousands of soldiers; gas chambers were not built by one man but by thousands of workers (one recalls Alfonso Sastre’s play *William Tell* in which a beggar attacks the apathy of the workers building a prison); thousands of people communicated to the State the whereabouts of hidden Jews; similarly Stalin murdered 13 million people, again, Stalin was one man. Hence, this leads us to the questions, how and why? Are we all capable of becoming murderers?

A famous experiment by Stanley Milgram, conducted at Yale University shortly after the Eichmann trial, and very apropos to this play, demonstrated how the majority of people could be brought into a psychologist’s laboratory, and under the appropriate circumstances, become a torturer or a murderer⁴ (coincidentally the Germans did score substantially higher in this experiment than their American counterparts, higher signifying applying more electricity which ultimately would have caused the death of the subject). The experiment consisted of “teachers” who were made to believe that they were participating in an educational experiment; with another person who was wired to an electrical apparatus; the “student”, who would be tested on word-associations; and a director who conducted the experiment, encouraging the “teachers” to continue. The “teachers” were told to apply

an electric shock every time the “student” answered incorrectly; the “student” actually being an actor who did not feel any pain but reacted with screams and shouts to the electric shocks. Milgram found that over 65% of the people experimented obeyed the director’s instructions and applied electricity of up to 450 volts. The results were a shock for the psychological community. However, the surprise perhaps emerged less from the ability of one human to impose such suffering on another, but rather, as will be discussed in greater detail further on in this work, from the extremely high level of obedience shown by the experimenters toward the director. Interestingly enough, this experiment is demonstrated in Gambaro’s play *Información para extranjeros*^b. This level of ultimate obedience is also visible this play; primarily in the men’s behaviours concerning Mr. Galíndez. Thus, could the three torturers simply be similar to the majority of the experimenters? If the appropriate context arose, would fellow Canadians also become torturers? Questions such as these surface from this provocative play.

Sociologists and psychologists, referring to the Milgram experiment, often endeavour to explain torture as a crime of obedience. That is, the soldiers, or people in the lower level of hierarchy, simply obey their superiors, and deal with the justification of their actions through the propaganda given to them by the State ideology (many are mentioned in Chapter One, ie. eliminating enemy, saving the Nation, etc.)⁵ It is also interesting to note that obedience is one of the highest valued “virtues” of our society; the religious vow of obedience, the vows of institutions, military vows, marriage vows, and general vows of obedience that our civilization demands. Pavlovsky, as a psychoanalyst, most probably was conscious of such theories. Eduardo, even though maltreated, treats Beto and Pepe with the utmost respect and obedience; and in turn, the obedience of the three

^b*Information for Foreigners*

towards Mr. Galíndez is unequivocal and absolute. The attitude of the three men towards their superior is very typical of people in the armed forces and in rigid hierarchies.⁶

As mentioned, one of the most disturbing characteristics of this play is the “normalness” of the characters. Pavlovsky deliberately emphasizes the “normality” in the play; for example, Beto verbalizes his doubts regarding the security of his current profession and is studying to be an accountant. Later we also see him speak to his wife and daughter:

Beto: (*Pausa.*) Hola, negra. El Beto habla, corazón. ¿Cómo te va? (*Pausa*) ¿Cómo está la nena? ¿La abrigaste? (*Pausa.*) Mirá que está fresco esta noche. (*Pausa.*) Hacele repasar la tabla de 7, que andaba floja en el cuaderno....Hola, Rosi, el papi habla. ¿Cómo le va a la muñequita? ¿Me querés mucho?⁷

This particular torturer, like most caring fathers, is concerned whether his daughter is dressed warmly or if she is doing her homework. Pavlovsky does not attempt to make this scene appear out of the ordinary, but rather, on the contrary, portrays it as a very normal conversation between a man and his family.

Another element in “normalizing” the atmosphere is through the medium of language. In contrast to the neutral language of Gambaro’s plays the dialogue in *El Señor Galíndez* borders on the scatological and the trite; it is not in the text that the profoundness of the work discerns itself but rather in the subtext. The conversations are about work, bathroom hygiene, soccer, sex, colleagues, etc. For example, we read, “¿Pero cómo ponés que Colón le gana a Boca? ¿No sabés que hace

⁶Beto: (*Pausa*) Hello, black one. This is Beto, honey. How are you? (*Pausa*) How’s the little girl? Did you dress her warmly? (*Pausa*) It’s cold out tonight. (*Pausa*) Make her review the times table for seven, she was a little weak in that . . . Hi, Rosi, this is your daddy. How’s my little doll? Do you love me very much?

quince años que no le gana en la Bombonera?"⁸ d In this sense Pavlovsky's play is more *Argentinian* than Gambaro's in that it has an undeniable Argentinian stamp. Gambaro's plays could emerge from any Latin American country which has suffered similar repressions, but even though the theme of *El Señor Galíndez* transcends Argentina, the language and local references make it recognizably Argentinian. Another consequence of the presence of scatological language in the play is that it conveys a general sense of human dehumanization, reflecting a society which is concerned with defecation (the focus of conversation during the first part of play between Eduardo and Sara,⁹ and between Eduardo and the rest of the characters), fornication and job security (the focus of conversations between Beto and Pepe). Furthermore, by choosing this level of language Pavlovsky immediately makes a political statement by indicating a certain social class in Argentina, an element absent in Gambaro's plays.

The representation of the space of the State and its imposition on the private sphere is a symbolic and important one; in *Las paredes* the State is in government space, at the end of *El campo* the State has extended its power into the private sphere, and finally in *El señor Galíndez*, the State now operates, from the beginning, in the private sphere. The actual physical, dramatic space of the play is also one of importance and interest, since common objects, such as a bed and a lamp, and the space of a room, become transformed into agents of torture: the lamp changes into an interrogation tool, the bed moves into vertical position and has clamps, and the small damp room becomes a private torture chamber, just as, on the symbolic level, in Gambaro's *Las paredes* all objects in the room acquire a double significance. The opening stage directions of the play inform

⁸But how do you suppose that Colon will win over Boca? Don't you know that it has been fifteen years that it hasn't won in the Bombonera?

us that, “Escenográficamente la primera imagen que el espectador recibe es ‘extraña’ . . . Deliberadamente no se grafica ‘qué es’ ese ambiente,” and later on “buscando dar la sensación de que ‘estamos’ en un ‘lugar’ que en realidad podría ser ‘otro’.”^{10e} The set is also used to make the spectators and actors feel caged in; once again as in *Las paredes*, the whole play takes place in one room. The consequence of such a space supplies the psychological effect of entrapment, a place of no escape, which of course sets the appropriate atmosphere, symbolic of society as a whole in Argentina of the 70s.

The pivotal scene in the play takes place with the entrance of the prostitutes; the public, still not cognizant of the true nature of the three men’s work, surmises that the three men will have sex with the prostitutes as they were sent over as a “gift”. However, we are wrong and our expectations are constantly inverted; we see a room and then realize it is a torture chamber; we meet three nondescript men and then learn that they are torturers; we witness the entrance of two prostitutes, expect the men to have sex with them, then realize that instead, the three men want to practise their torture techniques on the prostitutes -- the most dehumanized people in the eyes of modern society: Pepe states, “Vos tenés suerte, pibe. Es bueno adiestrarse con una puta.”^{11f}

Pavlovsky’s dramatic and technical lucidity is evident in his selection of the victims. By choosing prostitutes, the dramatist immediately establishes a link between the torture of the innocent, and torture and sexual gratification. I disagree with Charles Driskell who writes that the “two innocent prostitutes . . . are going to be tortured simply because the men are frustrated and impatient

^eScenographically the first image that the specatator receives is ‘strange’ . . . attempting to give the sensation that ‘we are’ in a ‘place’ that could be ‘another’.

^fYou are lucky, kid. It’s good to train on a whore.

to get to work.”¹² I believe that the reasons are much more complex than Driskell implies; the men are going to torture the prostitutes not because they are “frustrated,” but for pleasure (*ganas de laburar*)^g and for business (training Eduardo), all of which is indicative of a much more disturbing state of affairs than Driskell’s wishful thinking.

Other allusions to this torture/sex/power relationship abound in the conversations between Beto and Pepe. The relationship between torture and sex, within the domain of the military, is a well-known and accepted one. In Benedetti’s *Pedro y el Capitán*, the torturer states: “una noche en que estábamos picaneando a una muchacha, no demasiado linda, picaneándola . . . de pronto me di cuenta que yo tenía una erección . . .” Later on that day, alone with his wife, the Captain states that “Sólo logré funcionar con mi mujer cuando me acordé de la muchacha que se retorció porque la picaneábamos.”^{13h}

It is at this time that the audience also fully realizes the nature of the work of the two men and their young apprentice. The sexual connection is further established when Eduardo, asked which body part he would like to torture first, answers the nipples. Nevertheless, the scene involving torturing naked prostitutes is not laden with Sadian eroticization, since Pavlovsky, like Gambaro, does not sensualize or pornographize the scene. Both dramatists are aware of the rampant violations of women but neither explicitly mentions them or demonstrates them, precisely because they know that the public is attracted to exactly that -- sexual spectacle, similar to the unwarranted and gratuitous rape scenes in modern cinema. Another allusion to the sex-violence relationship occurs in

^gDesire for working

^hOne night, when we were using the electric goad with a girl, not too pretty, torturing her [with the picana] . . . suddenly I realized that I had an erection . . . I could only function with my wife when I remembered the girl that twisted up because we were torturing her (with the goad).

one of the conversations between Beto and Pepe concerning violence and women; Pepe informs us of his sexual relationship with his girlfriend in which they beat each other in order to achieve orgasm.

Ronald Crelinsten argues that there are three types of torturers: the zealots, who truly believe in what they are doing; the professionals, who want to advance their careers; and the sadists, who receive gratification from the pain that they cause the victim. All three torturers in *El Señor Galíndez* combine the characteristics of those three types; but also all three, especially Pepe, fall closest to the torturers as sadists classification. Outside theatre, in the sphere of the State, in the majority of countries in the world, examples abound of this sadistic kind of torture. In Uruguay, Miguel Angel Estrella, the renowned Argentine pianist, wrote that the torturers often focussed on his hands and fingers and would bring in chainsaws and threaten to cut them off.¹⁴

The relationship between torture and power is also explored in this play on two levels: one, the already-mentioned obedience to authority; and two, exerting power over another to feel intoxicated with one's own personal power. For example, Eduardo, who has constantly been humiliated by Beto and Pepe, employs his position over the prostitutes to feel like a "man" again: as Eduardo beats the prostitute he states, "Vamos, negra de mierda, ponete los zapatos. (*la zamarrea, agrandado*)"¹⁵. Hence, by abusing a helpless woman Eduardo feels superior. The "trickle-down effect" of violence is also evident when Mr. Galíndez instills fear into Beto and Pepe, who in turn beat Eduardo, who consequently imposes his will on the prostitutes.

Herbert Kelman, Professor of Social Ethics at Harvard University, speaks about the policy of torture at the micro level and the processes of authorization, routinization, and dehumanization, all of which can be discerned in *El señor Galíndez*:

¹⁵Let's go, you black shit, put on your shoes. (He knocks her around, feeling bigger)

The justification of torture as a means of protecting the state against threats to its security helps to *authorize* the practice; the development of a profession of torturers as part of the state's security apparatus helps to *routinize* the administration of torture; and the designation of the targets of torture as enemies of the state who are excluded from the state's protection helps to *dehumanize* the victims.¹⁵

Pavlovsky understands that torturers, in order to maintain their sanity and be reliable workers, have to be able to justify their livelihood, often through the brainwashing propaganda of the State's ideology on torture as a "transcendental mission," and through their work, labelled a "profession", or "un oficio científico," as in the play. This is exemplified by the mention (and memorization) of Galíndez's books by Eduardo and the courses the torturers attend. Authorization is also rendered through Galíndez's phone calls, which are the focus and core of the structure of the torturer's lives. As Linda Zee has written, "Galíndez, á la Orwell, manipulates through fear, praise and absence."¹⁶

Related to authorization is the second part of the process, routinization: to make torture a profession it must be normalized. It is important to study the methods in which Eduardo is inculcated into the world of torture. First, psychological tests, which in a way bestows the legitimacy of science upon the torturer's work: we read about Eduardo's recruitment, theory, classes, books, etc.:

Pepe: ¿Y cómo te metiste en esto?

Eduardo: Por unos tests que me sacaron.

Pepe y Beto - (*A la vez*) ¿Por unos qué?

Eduardo: Por unos tests, unos cuestionarios. Me dijeron que mi personalidad se adaptaba a este tipo de trabajo, y como yo me mostré interesado me dijeron que viniera a hacer la

práctica con ustedes. Me hablaron de cursos teóricos primero, pero me dijeron que por mis características personales yo tengo que hacer la práctica; después, si me adapto, viene la teoría.^{17j}

As is evident in the conversation just quoted, torture has become institutionalized as a career, a profession. Kelman speaks about the different steps in routinization, one of them being through language. The different torture techniques, as well as the different torture chambers, are typically designated by special names, often with an euphemistic or ironic quality. These names are not so much designed to hide the reality of what is actually taking place as to give expression to a professional culture with its own rituals and jargon.¹⁸ Ritualization through language is evident in this play by constant use of musical metaphors to describe torture; playing one's own tune; making people sing; and, as Beto states to Eduardo, "¡Vas a aprender a tocar a tu propio ritmo!"^k

Pertinent to the discussion of the jargon regarding confession (cantar) is Elaine Scarry's analysis of torture, in which she separates the process of torture into two parts; first, the physical act of the infliction of pain; and second the verbal act, which is the interrogation. The verbal act consists of "question" and "answer". Scarry continues, the "question" is deceptively presented as the motive for the torture, and the "answer" falsified as the betrayal.

The first mistake credits the torturer, providing him with a justification, his cruelty with an

Pepe: And how did you get into this?

Eduardo: Because of some tests I took.

Pepe and Beto: (together) By some what?

Eduardo: Some tests, questionnaires. They told me that my personality was suited to this kind of work, and as I showed interest they told me to come here to practise with the two of you. They spoke of theoretical courses first, but they told me that because of my personal characteristics I have to do the practicum first, and if I adapt, then comes the theory.

^kYou're going to learn to play your own rhythm!

explanation. The second discredits the prisoner, making him rather than the torturer, his voice rather than his pain, the cause of his loss of self and world. These two misinterpretations are obviously neither accidental nor unrelated. The one is an absolving of responsibility; the other is a conferring of responsibility; the two together turn the moral reality of torture upside down.¹⁹

The ritualization and conceptualization of torture is also evident in the play, albeit in a more indirect, perhaps theatrical, manner: one of the most theatrically brilliant and pregnant scenes in Latin American theatre was born when Pavlovsky decided to play the quasi-torture scene in voice-off; thus the image is accorded an automatic air of ritual and solemnity. The stage directions inform us that loud music masks the voices on stage, and that we see only "mimics":

(En ese momento una música muy fuerte tapa las voces de la escena. Sólo se ve la mimica. Los actores hablan pero no se escucha lo que dicen . . . La tensión dramática llega a su climax. De pronto se ve que suena el teléfono. Digo se ve, porque Beto, Pepe y Eduardo quedan como petrificados. Cesa la música y sólo se escucha el teléfono y el llanto y quejido de las mujeres . . .)^{20 1}

Hence, the element that breaks this trance-like scene is the ringing of the omnipresent telephone, which is symbolic of the unknown and feared power of the State incarnated in the enigmatic voice(s) of Mr. Galíndez. It is interesting to note that no actual torture is represented in the play; as Eduardo grasps the *picana* and is about to start his initiatory "session," the scene is interrupted. Mario

¹In this moment a very loud music covers the sounds on stage. Only the mimicry can be seen. The actors speak but their voices are not heard . . . The dramatic tension reaches its climax. Suddenly, we see that the phone is ringing. I say, we see, because Beto, Pepe and Eduardo become petrified. The music stops and only the phone and the cries of the women can be heard.

Benedetti²¹ another dramatist from the Southern Cone who has also written about torture, states in the prologue of *Pedro y el Capitán*, regarding the performance, or representation, of torture on the stage:

Siempre he creído que como tema artístico, la tortura puede tener cabida en la literatura o el cine, pero en el teatro se convierte en una agresión demasiado directa al espectador y, en consecuencia, pierde mucho de su posibilidad removedora. En cambio, cuando la tortura es una presencia infamante, pero indirecta, el espectador mantiene una mayor objetividad esencial para juzgar cualquier proceso de degradación del ser humano.^{22m}

The third element, dehumanization, also appears in this play. The victim is not perceived as a citizen of the State but one that does not belong to society, a subversive, a dangerous agent. It is psychologically less damaging for a torturer to inflict pain on someone whom he can consider a threat to society than a person who might have had coffee beside him in the local cafe the day before. In times of war, at least, the enemy is from another country, another culture, and the construction of the evil "Other" is relatively easy; but when there is internal war, there has to be more intensified propaganda in order to convince the soldiers of the victim's inherent "evil" and danger: "Afuera se hacen machos, ¿sabés? Ponen bombas. Matan inocentes compañeros..."²³ Similar to Franco in *El campo*, by reversing the role of victim/victimizer, the torturers justify their own lives to themselves. Of course, the overwhelming majority of the people they torture have never seen a bomb or taken part in guerrilla warfare. This point is exemplified by the dramatist's act of choosing two prostitutes,

^mI have always thought that, as an artistic theme, torture can be fit into literature or cinema, but in theatre it converts to an aggression too direct for the spectator, and, in consequence, loses much of its disturbing possibilities. But on the contrary, when torture has an odious but indirect, presence, the spectator maintains a greater objectivity, essential for judging any process of human degradation.

and not guerrilla fighters, as potential victims.

The central element in this play is not torture but rather torturers, even though neither word is ever uttered by any of the characters. We observe the development of the dynamic character of Eduardo, who at the beginning plays the role of a timid and submissive character. Subsequently, the play ends with Eduardo's initial entry into the organization with the words, "Sí, señor Galíndez". Such blind allegiance to such an ambiguous source could be analyzed through the paradigm of religion. Similarly, many critics (playing on the God-Godot connection) have interpreted this same factor in *Waiting for Godot* in theological terms.²⁴

Fear of the unknown pervades every scene and affects every character in the drama; the prostitutes are made to wear hood over their eyes when they are tied up; the torturers have never met Mr. Galíndez, are cognizant of the death of a colleague under suspicious circumstances, and encounter different voices on the telephone claiming to be Mr. Galíndez. Hence, this terror of ignorance not only affects the direct victims, but also the victimizers: everyone is coerced to operate in fear. Mr. Galíndez, like Godot, never appears on stage, and the rest of the characters' preoccupations revolve around him.²⁵

The word "fear" will take us yet again to another word which has frequently appeared in this thesis: Panopticon. An analogy can be made between the Panopticon and this play; within the central tower stand guards on duty (Beto, Pepe, and Eduardo) who nonetheless are entrapped within the Panopticon: and following this analogy, Mr. Galíndez would represent the whole panoptic apparatus. The guards, however, are not free: they are part of the system; they cannot escape (as evident in the predicament and consequent suicide[?] of El flaco Ahumado). These men remain in the tower, occasionally watching the others; and always expecting the phone call, an abstract, not visible power

that originates from a place not known to the torturers. They, like the prisoners, do not know when, or by whom, they are being watched.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the central focus of Pavlovsky is not the evil of torturers, but rather something much larger and sinister: the system itself. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Panopticon is a machine that entraps everyone, both victims and victimizers. There is no concrete geographical origin of power that one can point to and thus destroy; power is omnipresent and its shield of invisibility prevails. What we are left with is only the visible presence of its effects.

Similar to Brecht, and the philosophies of Theodor Adorno and Max Weber, Pavlovsky shows us the process, that is, the causes, content, and consequences of a situation, and does not point to a blatant answer or direction. There are no easy solutions and the dramatist does nothing more (and nothing less) than place before us the great contradictory complexities of human nature.

1. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 7.
2. Ronald D. Crelinsten, and Alex P. Schmid, eds. *The Politics of Pain: Torturers and Their Master* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995) 1.
3. Foucault 60.
4. Herbert Kelman, "The Social Context of Torture," in *The Politics of Pain* 24.
5. For an excellent account of why millions of people would sacrifice their lives for their "nation" see Benedict Anderson's seminal book, *Imagined Communities*. (London: Verso, 1991)
6. In 1987, in Argentina, the Law of Due Obedience exonerated lower-ranking officials on the premise that they had been merely following orders. For other similar historical situations, see Nuremberg trials.
7. Eduardo Pavlovsky, *El Señor Galíndez y Pablo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Búsqueda, 1986) 36.
8. Pavlovsky 22.
9. Sara, the woman who passively condones their work, of course, is part of one of the main critiques of the playwright, representing the majority who close their eyes to the brutality of the State.
10. Pavlovsky 9.
11. Pavlovsky 44.
12. Charles Driskell, "Power, Myths and Aggression in Eduardo Pavlovsky's Theatre," *Hispania* 65 (1982): 574.
13. Benedetti 65.
14. Crelinsten 55.
15. Herbert Kelman, "The Social Context of Torture," in *The Politics of Pain* 28.
16. Linda Zee, "El campo, Los siameses, El señor Galíndez: A Theatrical Manual for Torture," in *Romance Language Annual* 2 (1990): 607.
17. Pavlovsky 23.
18. Zee 607.

19. Scarry 35.

20. Pavlovksy 45.

21. In Benedetti's short story, "La otra orilla," we are also confronted with the topic of torture indirectly; through irony and allusion.

22. Benedetti, *Pedro y el Capitán* (Madrid: Alianza, 1986) 10.

23. Pavlovsky 47.

24. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* was first represented in Argentina in 1958 by Jorge Petraglia.

25. It is also interesting to note that Pavlovsky views *Waiting for Godot* (Samuel Beckett) as the most important play of the century.

Reemerging Voices, Forgotten Whispers

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies -- for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text -- as into the world and into history -- by her own movement.

Hélène Cixous

Aún hoy, no sé exactamente cuál es mi público; diría que es el inquieto, el que no va al teatro para ser servido en la mesa del espectáculo, el que está dispuesto a perder su control de voyeur.^a

Griselda Gambaro

...since it is necessary to write, at least do not smudge the space between the lines with words.

Clarice Lispector

Having analyzed plays from the repressive decades of the 60s and 70s, we proceed now to the 80s, a time of renewed hope and of a possible rebirth of Argentine society. We return once again to Griselda Gambaro, not to demonstrate another dramatic work that adheres to a certain pattern or model already established in this study, but rather, on the contrary, to reveal and then to study the paradigmatic shift in the work; thus the importance of *Del sol Naciente* play, both within Gambaro's *oeuvre* and to this investigation, is pivotal. *Del sol naciente*^b was written contemporaneously with

^aEven today, I do not know exactly who is my public, I would say that it is the anxious person, the person who does not go to the theatre in order to be served at the table of spectacle, the person who is disposed to lose his/her control as voyeur.

^bFrom the Rising Sun. A brief synopsis of the play: The setting is ambiguous, except that we are somewhere in Japan and the time is in the past, maybe in the medieval period, though, the historical setting is of the least importance for Gambaro. The protagonist, Suki, is a courtesan who lives with her maid. The scenes commence with her sitting on the ground playing the biwa. The action starts with the entrance of Obán, a great warrior, with whom the maid is instantly infatuated. However, Suki understands Obán for who he is, an authoritarian brute, and treats him accordingly. Obán attempts to acquire Suki's affections but fails. Other characters enter the play, such as the Tísico, the beggar, and Oscar, the soldier. Both are treated kindly by Suki, but are subsequently killed by Obán. However, neither refuses to die and both come to life over and over again. The last

the demise of the Junta in 1983, and preformed at the Lorange theatre in Buenos Aires in 1984. If we analyze the play as a reflection and an integral part of the socio-political situation of the time (as all the previous plays have accurately demonstrated, perhaps better than any history book) then we can argue that *Del sol naciente* marks a change in the discourse of power and acceptance, and establishes the premises for a new, more just, society.

The methodology that will be used in this chapter will differ slightly from that of the other chapters: the protagonist of *Del sol naciente* is a woman, and many issues arise that call for a feminist analysis of the play. Hence, my methodology will also consist of feminist theory situated within the socio-historical context of Argentina, while attempting not to lose sight of the perennial questions of power and victimization. I repeat, in contrast to the other plays discussed, the protagonist of this play is a woman; and upon stating this I am aware of that some readers will ask, why gender is specifically so important? It is not, in fact, just a question of difference in gender, but by creating a protagonist who emerges from a marginalized section of society (first as a woman and second as a courtesan), the dramatist both invokes and provokes many distinct ideas, acquiring a different point of reference, which consequently requires a feminist analysis.

All the plays discussed in previous chapters of this study were written at a time of blatant repression, from Onganía in the 60s to the Military Junta in the 70s and early 80s. However, with *Del sol naciente* a certain shift in the dramatist's focus can be discerned. Argentine repression of the 1960s, leading to, and including, the Dirty War, consisted not only of an historic time but also of a dramatic repertoire (referring also to my constant reference to the theatrical nature of repression) that made possible paradigmatic displacements; from the discourse of military repression to the discourse

scene entails Suki leaving the house for the first time, following Oscar.

of gender repression. In 1983, concomitant with the fall of the Junta a reprieve finally arrived for politically engaged artists, in which they could address other problems, such as the relationship of repression, power, and gender. Gambaro states:

Si en mis primeras piezas teatrales yo contaba la historia como una mujer que observa el mundo de los hombres y lo descodifica para llegar a un efecto determinado, mi mira estaba más comprometida con el mundo en general que con mi propia condición de mujer.¹⁶

However, it is important to note that even though there exists more material for a feminist analysis in this play than the other plays discussed, the tragedy of the Dirty War and the Falklands War is still extremely pertinent and integral to the work; the study of general State repression and gender repression do not preclude each other; on the contrary, they are complementary since one cannot be resolved without the other.

One of the most salient elements of Gambaro's dramatic discourse discussed in this study is the technique of irony. We are constantly forced to read between the lines, to question, to contemplate, to search for the absent, and to locate the gaps. Similarly, Suki, the "simple" courtesan who sits quietly playing her *biwa* for much of the play, is not as ingenuous as she appears; in fact, she is one of Gambaro's most lucid characters. Nor is Suki a typical Gambarian character who is pacified and led by the victimizer; it is the seemingly fragile and petite Suki who controls Obán, since she is the one thing that he can neither truly possess nor destroy. Suki's gaze transcends and undermines the light and glitter of Obán's character; and the more the maid reminds us of classically deceived Gambarian characters, the more apparent becomes the contrast with Suki's penetrating

¹⁶If in my first theatrical pieces I related the story as a woman who observed the world of men and decoded it in order to achieve a determined effect, my gaze was more committed to the world in general than to my own condition as a woman.

mind. In Gambaro's play, as in Brecht's² *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1940), there is an explicit antithesis between the characteristics and integrity of the protagonists (both honourable and noble women) and what society normally considers them to be since, as prostitutes, they are placed on the lowest, most scorned and degraded rung of the hierarchical societal ladder (see *El señor Galíndez*); this in itself plays a part in the subversive dramatic discourse. On the other hand, Obán's character brings us closer to the characteristics of previous Gambarian victimizers with one exception; he is neither as subtle nor as smart as his predecessors. He embodies, on several levels, the spirit of the military Junta: his histrionic antics (reiterating the metatheatrical element that has been constantly discussed within this investigation), his desire to be the cynosure, his sense of megalomania and jingoism, and reliance on a totalitarian power which in turn depends on brute strength, power, and intimidation. Obán, like Eduardo in *El Señor Galíndez*, feeds on the power that is accorded him through the submissiveness of others.

One of the most poignant scenes of the play consists of an indirect violation of Suki's body by Obán, through the medium of another victim, el Tísico^d. This is a metaspectacle: the actors, Suki and el Tísico; the audience: Obán, the maid, and ourselves, the general public. This description is, of course, reminiscent of another scene of attempted indirect rape: Franco forcing Emma to seduce Martín in *El campo*. When Obán observes the kindness Suki displays for el Tísico, he orders her, under threat of killing the Tísico, to kiss the sick man, to take off her clothes, and to make love to the beggar while he watches. The scene is interrupted when Obán, who had hoped that Suki would prefer the death of the Tísico rather than his touch, realizes that Suki has every intention to continue with the act, and observes that there is a certain love and warmth in her touch to the Tísico, which

^d (meaning "the Consumptive")

has always been denied to him, Obán the great warrior. Thus, not being able to acquire what he wants through sheer physical power, Obán's role is inverted, and he is emasculated, enervated, and silenced. Thus, the method of imposing his will upon her in order to fuel his insatiable need for power fails because Suki will not descend to the base level on which Obán functions, and because of her profound understanding of human suffering and compassion, an understanding Obán lacks.

For a man to manifest his physical power over a woman by forcing her to have sex with a stranger (in this case a beggar who happened to be nearby) is no less cruel than raping her himself. Feminists view rape as the ultimate patriarchal violent tool with which man attempts to impose a certain will and order on women. Radical feminists (or cultural feminists), state that rape is "the foundation for patriarchy". Sue Ellen Case, in her seminal book *Feminism and Theatre* (1988) states that one of the most important theories of radical feminists was the connection between oppression and sex, that is, "erotic oppression".

Rape began to be perceived as the patriarchal weapon that directly wounded or violated women and indirectly, as a threat, kept women off the streets and alienated them from the expression of their own sexual desires. This new consciousness of rape as a social, patriarchal weapon rather than the perverse action of individual men produced a widespread influence on the theatre.³

Examples of feminist plays influenced by the theory of the relationship between rape and oppression are: feminist theatre in Minnesota called At the Foot of the Mountain and their play *Raped* (1976), an adaptation of Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule*; Nell Dunn's *Steaming* (1981), Ntozake Shange's *Three Pieces*, and many others.

Obán's power is manifested through his sword, the ultimate symbol of the patriarchal,

phallic destroyer which maims, violates, and kills. It is important to note that Obán is described as a great warrior, handsome and aesthetically pleasing. Similarly, the members of the Argentine Navy, who were considered the most aristocratic and cultured group, in supposedly the most superior European-like country in Latin America, also happened to be responsible for ESMA (Escuela de la Mecánica de la Armada), one of the largest, most heinous death camps in Argentina functioning during the Dirty War. All repressive governments attempt, usually successfully, to weave a myth around their power. The military junta in Argentina was no exception: "We are God" uttered the torturers; "I am light," states Obán.

The maid is also a character (who can readily be exchanged for the landlady in *El Señor Galindez*) who represents a large part of Gambaro's critique. Her fulsome praise and adoration for Obán, her blindness to his cruelty, her ingratiating behaviour towards, and betrayal of her friend to the authorities, all make her the perfectly constructed citizen for most military and democratic governments. The maid represents a large number of people who, perhaps not inherently adverse and base, under times of crisis (read different Juntas, especially most recent Dirty War) are paralyzed into a passivity which automatically converts them to the allies of the victimizers.

The maid's priorities are prominently material and economic: good food, furniture, and beautiful clothing. Again, this reflects many people who are satisfied with economic comfort, even if they have to make a Faustian exchange for this level of luxury. After his coup d'état, Pinochet had great popularity with large portions of Chile's population because of the apparent economic prosperity that entered with his rule; only when the economy crashed was there a substantial popular demonstration against Pinochet.

The Tísico is the character who represents the most marginalized class in modern society, the

sick, homeless, and poor. Obán punishes the beggar with indiscriminate arbitrariness: the sick man's innocence, *nihil ad rem*. The character of the Tísico is secondary to that of Suki and Obán, but it is through him and Oscar that Suki's solidarity with the poor and weak is manifested.

The characterization of Oscar is very important in its contrast with other Gambarian characters. Oscar, unlike previous victims, does not fade away. Gambaro, in 1983, referring to the victims of the Dirty War and the hundreds of soldiers who died in the Falklands War⁴, posits optimistically that their voices will not be forgotten, that they will carry on, through voices such as hers and through voices such as those of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo⁵. However, as recent history has demonstrated to us, Gambaro, whose previous prescience in front of disaster was uncannily accurate, was in 1983, perhaps too optimistic.

Oscar represents a victim of the system, a foot soldier who was exploited by authority, and when he challenged it, was castigated. Michel Foucault spent a significant part of his life studying, analyzing, deconstructing, and then reconstructing the dialectic relationship of knowledge and power. His conclusion was quite complex, stating that there was no absolute truth (much to the postmodernists' glee) and that a minority of people impose their subjective "truth" on the majority. If one does not partake in the rituals of this "truth," then one is duly marginalized. Oscar, like Suki, questions the constructed truth that Obán imposes and is consequently castigated and anathematized. Oscar's death, like that of the Tísico, is arbitrary, like the death of the people Hitler had labelled superfluous, such people were deemed as expendable.

Even though it is evident that this play marks a shifting point in Gambaro's dramatic work, there are several important elements that have remained constant, one of these being language. As

⁵Mothers of the Plaza of May

already mentioned, the Gambarian irony pervades the performance, however, it is no longer the double-speak of the victimizers, but that of the supposed victim, the protagonist, Suki, who constantly ridicules Obán, and in her speech uses words that belie her true intent. Another interesting element concerning the language used in this play is the variety of the language utilized, in contrast to the more neutral language of other plays. There is a significant contrast between the pretentious language of Obán, the simple concise speech of Suki, and the maid's bromides. Gambaro states:

En *Del sol naciente* (estampa japonesa como la puede imaginar una argentina) usé un lenguaje comprimido de frases cortas, roto por estallidos verbales de mayor longitud, y usé el 'voseo' argentino tanto para la segunda persona singular como para una ambigua distancia ceremoniosa, lejanamente emparentada con el modo arcaico del español.^{5f}

As has been mentioned, irony is constant in the Gambarian language: this signifying the conceptual tension between appearances and reality concomitant with the verbal strain between the significance of what is said and how it is understood (of course leading us back again to why many critics labelled Gambaro Absurdist, for this type of deconstructive language).

All form ineluctably represents and partakes in a certain ideology. What Brecht revealed to the world (actually he was not the first, but certainly a popularizer) was the ideology of realism (mimesis) and its adherence to an ahistorical bourgeois referent that the public had naturalized. What Brecht achieved through theatrical brilliance and maneuvering was to expose the illusionistic apparatuses behind theatre, which to him also applied to life, especially politics. As mentioned in

^fIn *From the Rising Sun* (with a Japanese sense that an Argentinian is able to imagine) I used a compressed language with short sentences, broken by verbal outbreaks of greater length, and I used the Argentinian "voseo" as much for the second person singular as for an ambiguous ceremonial distance, remotely connected with the archaic Spanish mode.

previous chapters, Gambaro also exposes the theatrical nature of politics through the medium of her plays. However, she does not accomplish this through physical aids like projectors, radios, loudspeakers, posters, etc., which Brecht employs, but through double-coded discourse.

Returning to the initiating sentence of this premise, all forms imply different world views. For example, it would be difficult to imagine this play divided into three acts, with smaller scenes which all have small climaxes and conclusions. (what also has been referred to as a form which mimics male sexuality -- excitement leading to ejaculation-climax). What we are confronted with is a seemingly simple play: six scenes that all start in a similar fashion, with each minor change to the scene significant in the evolution of the dramatic process (for example Suki stops playing the *biwa* and the sounds of the scraping of spoons against empty tin cans become more emphasized) The last scene, the seventh, is considerably different, because of the absence of Obán and presence of Oscar. There is a certain repetitive rhythm to the seven scenes; all scenes commence with Suki sitting in a certain position playing, or later just holding, her *biwa* (which coincidentally *do* give the play a Japanese Zen buddhist air and quality!) Then a conversation with the maid ensues with the consequent entrance of Obán, an encounter with either el Tísico or Oscar, and a certain action which leads Obán to storm out of the house. This circular motion is only broken in the last scene which can be perceived as a certain ideological shift into a more dialectic and historical perspective.

This play is similar to the other Gambarian works discussed in this thesis in several ways, especially in the sense of the conflict between institutionalized powers and an individual (Young man and Functionary in *Las paredes*, Martín and Franco in *El campo*). However, the difference lies in the emphasis and focus of Gambaro. We are introduced to feminist issues, and the invariable passive Gambarian protagonist exists no longer; there is rebellion instead of acquiescence, empowerment

through agency instead of being subject to power, and most importantly, refusing to participate in the drama of the State, rejecting the script written by the powerful, and being aware of the destructive situation.

One of the principal characterizations of many of the characters in all of the plays discussed in this thesis is obedience (as discussed in Chapter Five regarding *El señor Galindez*). Suki is the first character in the four plays analyzed who does not obey and acquiesce to the established power. The importance of this theme is fundamental in understanding one of the main preoccupations of many artists and scholars regarding the factors that lead to the incredible “success” repressive regimes have enjoyed in our history. Obedience is a highly valued virtue in our society: if we are quiet, and obey, we will be safe. In contrast, resistance has always been a marginal element. For the first time we can hear the popular dissent in this play, the beggars scratching their spoons on their tin cans, and speaking out.

In the previous plays the relationship of power and destruction between victim and victimizer was quite clear and established. However, in this play, the victimization, although not less, is even more subtle, and much more accepted in our patriarchal society: that of a woman as an object of the man, which of course subsequently leads us to feminist theory.

Sue Ellen Case, echoing the arguments of Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett (among others) writes in *Feminism and Theatre* that the trilogy *Oresteia* was the “mythical rendering of a patriarchal takeover”.⁶ At the end of *Eumenides*, the last play in the trilogy, Orestes, the murderer of his mother and avenger of his father, is put under trial, in a symbolic gesture towards democracy, and subsequently set free; thus the crystallization of norms for gender roles, and a firm misogyny based on a hegemonic, patriarchal, cultural, and political paradigm, was established in western

Theatre that were to last (and of course still exists in a very healthy fashion) for over two thousand years. Only in relatively recent years has a new type of theatre emerged, one that read and rebelled against such a text, one that broke with this rigid type of categorization and marginalization (some examples of seminal works of feminist theatre are *The Portrait of Dora* [1976] by Hélène Cixous; *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* [1976] by Pam Gems; *La Vie singulière d'Albert Nobbs* [1977]; and *Cloud Nine* [1979] by Caryl Churchill). The “new poetics” of feminist theatre is based on several different techniques from distinct schools; materialist feminist theatre which focusses on the “social significance of male-female relationships to the audience” by combining the acting guidelines of Stanislavski’s Method and Brecht’s Epic Theatre, aiming for mixed audiences; radical feminist theatre which is “directed exclusively at women and their interrelationships”, and furthermore desiring an all-female audience.⁷ Consequently, in the realm of theatre, many feminists have found a manner in which to combine theory (semiotics is the leading contender) with praxis, the personal with political action.

Hence, within the guidelines established, *Del sol naciente* is the first feminist play discussed in this thesis; this play, and others such as *Real envido*^g [1983], *La malasangre*^h [1982], *Antígona furiosa*ⁱ [1986] represent a new type of theatre for Gambaro; plays which all carry female protagonists and deal with issues of gender and oppression. The dramatist speaks about her female protagonists and the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo:

El hecho de que tuviera una protagonista femenina no sé si fue un reconocimiento inconsciente a la entereza de aquellas mujeres que, reclamando por sus hijos desaparecidos,

^gRoyal Gambit

^hBitter Blood

ⁱFurious Antigone

fueron por un tiempo la única voz alzada en el silencio de esos años. De cualquier manera, la Dolores de *Malasangre*, como la Suki de *Del Sol Naciente* o la *Antígona furiosa*, no es cualquier mujer, es una mujer con una voz que nadie le presta sino su propia condición de mujer, su propia fuerza y la conciencia de su fuerza.^{8j}

In the previous plays discussed the victim internalized the role and discourse of the victimizer, not being aware of the sinister methods used to lure him/her into a trap. Nevertheless, the public, more distant and objective, was very aware of this destructive ensnaring process. However, in a more subtle manner it can be argued that this same plot has been woven for women. Nevertheless, the real audience is much less aware of it because, in this patriarchal society, it has been accepted; we have become inured to gender violence, not in times of overt repression but in everyday life.

The difference of the protagonist of this play from other characters in previous plays discussed in this thesis is the victim's awareness of her unique position; we are not confronted with denial, or credulity, and the would-be victim does not succumb to the theatrical strategies of the oppressors; in sum, the victim ceases to be an accomplice in his/her own annihilation. The protagonist is aware of her exact situation and context, in contrast to the maid, who would fall into the previous category of blind victims. Suki might physically be destroyed by the oppressor but her spirit, this time, cannot be conquered. Furthermore, instead of becoming reified into a sexual object for the male gaze, Suki resists social and sexual construction. Obán, attempting to mold her into an

^jThe fact that I had a female protagonist, I don't know if it was an unconscious acknowledgement of the integrity of those women, who, demanding for their disappeared children, were for a time the only voice raised in the silence of those years. But in any case, the Dolores of *Bitter Blood*, like Suki of *The Rising Sun* or *Furious Antigone*, is not any woman, she is a woman with a voice that nobody lent her except her own condition as a woman, her own power, and the awareness of this power.

object that he desires, constantly tells her what to do and tries to domesticize her, but Suki subverts his attempts by disobeying or only mockingly obeying.

It can be argued that on one level Suki represents the archetypal oppressed woman; however in her discourse she subverts the patriarchal order by the use of her irony and her will against the "Master", who wants her to be silent, beautiful, attentive, and submissive. Instead of remaining silent, as the traditional gender codes prescribe, Suki speaks through a negative dialect, that is, she speaks with gaps, with ironic utterances, between the lines of the convention, rebelling within her silence and in the silence that hangs between her words. As Debra Castillo writes regarding the traditional silencing of women and resistance: "In the counter hegemonic response to this official silencing, she executes a dizzying dance of negativity, appropriating silence as a tactic neither for saying nor for unsaying but for concealing a coded speech between the lines of the said and the unsaid."⁹

As mentioned in previous pages the space in which the characters appear in the play is symbolic. The fact that women are relegated to a more private space than men has been extensively studied, acknowledged, but unfortunately accepted by most of society, except of course, by feminists, and other enlightened individuals. It is important to note that for almost the entirety of the play Suki does not leave the domestic space of her home, and when she does, at the end of the play, it symbolizes the first step into liberation. The maid does leave the house, (more accepted because of her social position and function) but even so, less than the men, who constantly wander between the public and private space. Jean Franco, writing about gender oppression and norms which are imposed upon women in Latin America, states that: "The public woman is a prostitute, the public man a prominent citizen."¹⁰ The reference to the appropriation of public space (when Suki leaves the house

and enters the public space in an act of solidarity for the victims at the end of the play) for an audience of the year 1984 would certainly invoke the image of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo.

Franco writes:

In Argentina, the mothers of the disappeared began to hold demonstrations in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, inaugurating a symbolic action . . . These women took over public space, their only weapons being white headscarves and photographs of disappeared children. They refused to stay in the privatized space of the home, nursing their grief behind four walls and were not afraid to display their sorrow, to show the mutilation of loss."¹¹

At the end of the play Suki, to the dismay and shock of the maid, sheds off her clothes, leaving behind the parts of her identity that were constructed and that belonged to the patriarchal and oppressive system. Suki's choice is to stand naked, to open the door and walk, outward, direction unknown, subverting the established phallogentric order (we have come a long way from a similar scene with Nora at the end of Ibsen's *The Doll's House*). In the late 70s, and early 80s, a significant amount of feminist theatre (especially Performance Art, which some feminists called the alternative to patriarchal theatre) was acted in the nude. Some examples are Carolee Schneeman's *Interior Scroll* (1975), Leslie Labowitz's *Sproutime* (1980), Rachel Rosenthal's *Bonsoir, Dr. Schön!* (1980)¹²; performing in the nude was symbolic of what these feminists saw as a transformation, as a choice to be taken, similar to Suki's, as a personal appropriation of their bodies.

Perhaps, because of a certain thematic displacement, the most salient focal point to bear in mind while analyzing this play, is not Gambaro's dramatic history, nor her influences, nor her biography, but, simply history, illustrated on two different levels. On the one hand, there are direct

allusions to the historical period (the Dirty War serving as a general thematic background, and direct allusions to the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, and the Falklands War in the foreground). On the other hand, we can perceive a new discourse of hope which emerges from the fall of the Junta in 1983.

Allusions to the Dirty War abound; one obvious example (in which the referent has everything to do with contemporary Argentina and very little to do with Japan) is the manner in which Obán attempts to murder Oscar: the method of *el submarino* (also referred to in Gambaro's play *Información para extranjeros* [1973]), consisting of a common torture technique used in Argentina and most repressive regimes in Latin America: almost drowning a person in a bathtub -- the victim's head would be held under the water until she/he was near asphyxiation, then lifted out, and then thrust in again. The word *submarino* would also immediately evoke, to an Argentine audience of 1984, the famous ill-fated submarine that was destroyed by the British in the Falklands war and the hundreds of sailors who consequently perished. As mentioned, within all the plays analyzed, there is a constant tension between what we initially perceive something or someone to be, and what she/he or it really is (similar to the room in *El señor Galindez* which converts into a torture chamber). Obán uses the bathtub several times in the play for his ritualistic purifying ablutions, Obán also uses the bathtub to take a human life.

One of Gambaro's constant preoccupations regarding the repressive regimes of Argentina and society has been "memory", "forgetting", or as more eloquently stated in Spanish, "el olvido,"^k which now brings us to a central issue in the play: the voices of the *muertos*, or the "dead ones"; the State wanted them to be forgotten, their families and friends wanted their voices heard, and their lives remembered. Obán, similar to the repressive State, attempts to silence and suppress these voices;

^koblivion, or to forget

speaking about the soldiers of the war, he states, “Y después cercaremos un cementerio --bonito-- y la tierra les caerá encima, con honor y olvido. Amén.”^{13l} Suki, attempting to communicate with Oscar, states that Obán “Dice que no fueron tantos los que murieron, que era necesario. Es lo que ocurre en las guerras. Algunos . . . mueren. Quiere . . . que se queden tranquilos!”^{14m} However, in this play and after the thousands of *desaparecidos*, and hundreds of soldiers who died in the Falklands war, the *muertos* reappear, and their voices speak out, contrary to the wishes of the authorities; as discussed in my first chapter, the State wanted every trace of the victims obliterated.

After drowning Oscar, Obán realizes that the soldier is still breathing. Furious, Obán screams, “Y ahora, de muertos, quieren tener voz.”¹⁵ⁿ What the mothers of Plaza de Mayo wanted was to find their children’s voices, not to allow society to forget so readily, or simply stated, a desire for a sense of justice. Suki states at the end of the play: “Compartiré y entonces podrán morir en paz. La memoria es esto: un gran compartir.”^{16o} Suki, like the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, becomes a living echo for the silenced voices.

Related to the theme of the silenced voices of the victims of the Dirty War is the fate of the hundreds of soldiers who died a futile death in the debacle of the Falklands war. Obán states, “los muertos quedaron allá, helados, mal sepultos . . .”^{17p}, similar to the Falklands wars in which occurred

^lAnd after we will enclose them in a cemetery, a nice one, and the earth will fall on top of them, with honour and oblivion. Amen.

^mHe says that they weren’t that many that died, that it was necessary. It’s what happens in wars. Some...died. He wants...them to stay quiet!

ⁿAnd now, dead, they want to have a voice.

^oI will share and then they can die in peace. The memory is this: a great sharing.

^pThe dead stayed there, frozen, badly buried.

scenes that would easily be accepted in the Theatre of the Absurd ; for example, soldiers literally froze outside (many had to have limbs amputated) while General Menéndez was safely ensconced in an office covered with furs.¹⁸ There are also allusions to the Falklands war as being a futile war; a plot, many would argue, to divert the attention of an increasingly hostile public attention; a political ploy in which many soldiers died a barren death.

Similar to the Dirty War, the battle that is referred to in the play is one in which there is no defined enemy; the enemy is constructed according to the need of the State.¹⁹ This ideology is reflected in Obán's statements:

Obán: Ganaremos la guerra. Te lo prometo.

Suki: ¿Quién te pidió esa promesa? ¿Qué guerra? ¿Contra quién?

Ama: ¡Y en el botín habrá sillones!

Obán: Señora, ¿qué importa contra quién? Siempre hay alguno que nos ofende, que nos quita lo nuestro.^{20q}

I have discussed several elements in *Del sol naciente* that are distinguishably Gambarian, and I have made cross-references to other plays analyzed in this investigation. Several elements that make this play quite distinct from the style of the first two have also been discussed, such as what I have called a new discourse of hope. Another element that differentiates this play is directly related to the socio-political context, and the discourse of hope: that of the absence of a fatalistic force. In *Las paredes* and *El campo*, one could sense a certain pull towards disaster as the characters

^qOban: We will win this war. I promise you.

Suki: Who asked you for this promise? What war? Against whom?

Maid: And in the booty there will be couches!

Oban: Madam, what does it matter against whom? There is always someone who offends us, who takes what is ours.

participated in the making of their own destruction; the conclusions of the plays revealed a closed, repressive, future. However, in *Del sol naciente* the destructive use of power is now resisted by the weak, and agency has been acquired (a very un-Foucauldian thought). The play ends with the words of the oppressed, a faint light of hope and show of solidarity. In contrast to the lack of solidarity shown by the victims in Gambaro's previous works (and well reflected by the Argentine nation during the repression), there is a new compassion and solidarity shown, incarnated by Suki's dignified treatment of Oscar and El Tísico (unlike the treatment of Emma by the prisoners in *El campo*).

In 1983, Argentina stumbling on with a devitalized spirit and a floundering economy, was slowly lifting its heavy head from the sand. The last word of the play is 'madre', 'mother', symbolic of a new birth, perhaps a rebirth of a nation, and, as the title suggests, a rising sun. As mentioned previously *Del sol naciente* contains seven scenes and only in the last scene is Obán and his brutality absent, and a certain positive light present. In contrast, the final scenes of the previous plays discussed (a young man waiting for his death in *Las paredes*; a man being branded in his own home while another victim watches in *El campo*; the assimilation of yet another person in the ideological propaganda machine of the state in *El señor Galíndez*) demonstrated the victory of the repressive powers, in which the victims were completely confused, emasculated, and destroyed.

Symbolic of the thousands of Argentines who denied the brutality and crimes of the State, with a passive gaze and disbelief, the maid states "No hay nadie. Algún perro arañando la puerta. Rumores. Del viento. Y esos, esos que hedían, ni yo creo que hayan existido. Nunca los vi."^{21r} However, the scene leaves us with someone who did see them, and care for them, and for the first

²¹No one's here. Some dog scratching the door. Murmurs. Wind. And those, those who stank, I don't even think they have existed. I never saw them.

time, the play, this chapter, and to a certain extent this thesis, ends with hope. However, not being one to conclude with a false sense of security, I must acknowledge that we, who, in 1997, have acquired and inherited fourteen years more historical knowledge, and have participated in fourteen more years of reality, perhaps would leave the theatre now with a dark touch of cynicism, and much less optimism for this new discourse of hope.

1. Griselda Gambaro in *Dramaturgas Latinoamericanas Contemporáneas*, eds. Elba Andrade and Hilde Cramsie (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 1991) 149.
2. In terms of theatrical influences and overtones, *Del sol naciente*, more than any other play studied in this investigation, contains Brechtian touches; in its didacticism, and in choosing a story set in an ambiguous historical past that has contemporary relevance. As also mentioned earlier, there are similarities with Brecht's play *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. At the end of the play, as Suki is leaving the house she states that she will not be a courtesan anymore; the maid asks what they will live off and Suki answers, "De otra inocencia."
3. Sue Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1988) 67.
4. Please refer to Chapter One regarding the Falklands war and its consequences for the military Junta.
5. Gambaro, in *Dramaturgas Latinoamericanas Contemporáneas* 156.
6. Case, 12.
7. Case, 93.
8. Gambaro, *Dramaturgas Latinoamericanas Contemporáneas* 158.
9. Debra Castillo, *Talking Back*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992) 41
10. Jean Franco, "Self-Destructing Heroines," in *The Minnesota Review*, (Spring, 1984) 105.
11. Franco 107.
12. Case, 57-60.
13. Gambaro, *Del sol naciente* 149.
14. Gambaro, *Del sol naciente* 144.
15. Gambaro, *Del sol naciente* 150.
16. Gambaro, *Del sol naciente* 162.
17. Gambaro, *Del sol naciente* 135.
18. Graziano, 48.
19. Please refer to previous chapters, especially Ch. 1 and the writings of Hannah Arendt, for a more detailed analysis of this phenomenon.
20. Gambaro, *Del sol naciente* 119.

21. Gambaro, *Del sol naciente* 161.

The Empty Stage

Shaheed and I saw many things which were not true, which were not possible, because our boys would not, could not have behaved so badly; we saw men in spectacles with heads like eggs being shot in side streets, we saw the intelligentsia of the city being massacred by the hundred, but it was not true because it could not have been true . . .

Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*.

In Latin America . . . we still have great difficulty in differentiating between fiction and reality. We are traditionally accustomed to mix them in such a way that this is, probably, one of the reasons why we are so impractical and inept in political matters for instance . . .

Mario Vargas Llosa

No revolution, no heresy is comfortable or easy. For it is a leap, it is a break in the smooth evolutionary curve, and a break is a wound, a pain. But the wound is necessary; most of mankind suffers from hereditary sleeping sickness, and victims of this sickness (entropy) must not be allowed to sleep, or it will be their final sleep, death.

Yevgeny Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic*.

What I endeavour to accomplish in this conclusion is not to further my argument or present new points, but rather to bring some cohesion to this investigation by listing some of the factors which appear consistently in all of the plays, such as the similarities of forms, techniques, discourses, and themes; and to show their respective connection with the socio-political reality of Argentina during the repressive period of the 1960s through to the 1980s.

Repression, power, and violence are not discrete factors; they complement and fuel each other, and are ultimately interdependent. In all the four plays discussed these three elements play critical roles in molding, creating, and concluding the plays; repressive victimizers, the question of the origin and functioning of power, and immanent violence. Some of the more concrete similarities

of the plays are: all include forms of torture (physical, emotional, or psychological); various degrees of violence (direct and indirect); the theatrical space of the plays, with few exceptions, occupies only one room (even though this one room is a polysemous signified); subtle and blatant allusions to the connection between sex and power (Emma and Franco, Señor Galíndez, Oban and Suki); all these factors weave the plays together in a motley, but cohesive, fashion.

However, it is not only the thematic and technical similarities in the plays that I want to emphasize but also the dialectic between the works and the socio-historic situation of the time; and thus the inevitable evolution of the plays. The first play (*Las paredes* [1966]) emphasizes the process of victimization within the space of the oppressors; the second (*El campo* [1967]) focuses in finer detail on the internalization of the "Master's discourse" and concludes with the entrance of the victimizer into the private space; the third (*El señor Galíndez* [1973]) presents us with the psychological machinations of the torturers themselves, and the victimization process that they also endure, ending with the assimilation of one more young man into the engine of oppression; the fourth and last play (*Del sol naciente* [1983]), different from the others in regard to the historical context in which it was written (immediately after the fall of the Junta and amid a new discourse of hope), presents us also with victimization, political and gender related, but for the first time, there is rebellion instead of acquiescence, and an opening to life instead of the previous closing within the dark spaces of an imminent entrapment.

A main argument in this thesis has been to establish a direct link between the relationship and reflection of the inherent theatricality of politics and the theatrical performance; examples abound: the double discourse of the government officials/characters in the plays, meta-theatrical events in the reality/theatre (staged rebellions/piano concerts in concentration camps), and fictionalization and

denial of events that happened both in society and on the stage (detention centers, number of victims, intentions, etc.) These all lead me to wonder whether it is a coincidence that the Spanish title of Kafka's *The Trial* is *El Proceso*, which was also the Junta's title for their ideology of the reorganization of society (*El Proceso de Reorganización Social*).

Both Gambaro and Pavlovsky were forced to leave Argentina as a consequence of their work and ultimate objectives, which were to raise a certain kind of consciousness and to break the cycle of the public's acculturation and internalization of violence. Gambaro states:

nosotros leemos ahora la guerra que hay en Líbano, y no nos pasa nada por la cabeza. Pero si eso lo vemos en un teatro, y somos capaces de "ver" lo que significa la muerte, la guerra, los chicos, los llantos, el dolor infinito, entonces nos moviliza de una manera muy distinta. El hecho estético nos tiene que despertar, nos tiene que desanestesiarse de todo eso que es la falsa información, la deformación de los sentimientos y las ideas que es base de nuestra sociedad.^{a1}

However, even within the more pessimistic plays, the playwrights never sink into the luxury of acquiring an attitude of *Weltschmerz*, but rather incessantly engage in a continued dialogical challenging of the society in which they live in and from which they later flee.

As I write the concluding paragraphs of my thesis I read in our national newspaper how the Argentine monster has "reared its ugly head" again in the killing of José Luis Cabezas, a journalist/photographer for the magazine *Noticias*, assassinated on 25 January 1997, for his work on

^{a1}we read now that there is a war in Lebanon, and nothing happens in our heads. But if we see it in theatre, and we are capable of "seeing" what the significance is of death, of war, of children, of cries, of infinite pain, then we can be mobilized in a distinct manner. The aesthetic fact has to wake us up, it has to deanaesthetize us of all this false information, of the deformation of sentiments and of ideas that is the foundation of our society.

issues that certain right-wing groups found unappealing. Perhaps it is too naive to think that a society which has suffered such an acute crisis, will learn, change, and somehow become more enlightened, simply by remembering the past. As mentioned in the previous chapter Gambaro, concluded her play in 1983 with a message that Argentina will not forget, that the voices of the victims will resound. Nevertheless, I ended the chapter with a tone which carried a dark touch of reality; many sectors of society have forgotten, and many who do remember it, desire to, sweep it, like memories materialized into dust, under the Welcome Rug that lies, forsaken and forlorn, in front of the great Nation's gates. The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, perhaps walking now with a slower, more ritualistic gait, have not forgotten. However, the question is, how does modern Argentina view these aging mothers and grandmothers? Are they a stark reminder of a grisly past? Or are they seen as simply belonging to another realm, as crystallized into a moment of shame, of a stagnant stillness in a capitalistic society (in Deleuzian terms) which constantly invents, reinvents, creates, and recreates itself? Has the collective Argentine memory chosen to recognize and remember the reason for their presence or to manipulate it into another form of discourse? The mothers continue circumambulating the plaza, speaking, holding up their signs; but the people pass, staring at them with the curiosity and the gaze of the ignorant.

1. Griselda Gambaro, *Sucede lo que pasa* 31.

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