

ABSTRACT

This article analyses a corpus of so-called countercultural magazines from 1980s Argentina. These graphic publications constituted artifacts that constructed sensitivities by developing modes of dissent against the ruling power, forms of territoriality, and insertion into the public sphere that allowed for the possibility of building political-affective networks. The approach adopted in the analysis has allowed us to understand these periodicals as devices involving discourses and practices that reveal ways of conceiving the world that helped shape subjectivities. A varied body of textual, visual, and contextual elements has been considered for this study.

The study puts forward a few hypotheses about the selected period, which includes both the final years of the last Argentine civil-military dictatorship (1976-1983) and the early years of post-dictatorship, revisiting the main topics discussed in the literature on the period. The analysis thus implies a consideration of the transformations that took place in these practices during this transition period from dictatorship to democracy, in order to account for ruptures and continuities in their development.

keywords

CULTURAL JOURNALISM
ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION
UNDERGROUND PRESS
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ORCID: 0000-0001-5527-2554

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Argentine Countercultural Magazines in the 1980s: a Reading in Context

EVANGELINA MARGIOLAKIS

Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani
Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad
de Buenos Aires

Introduction

This paper proposes an analysis of Argentine countercultural¹ or underground magazines (*revistas subterráneas*) from the 1980s, a decade that includes the last years of the Argentine civil-military dictatorship and the first years of the post-dictatorship, a period of study that allows us to discover ruptures and continuities between authoritarianism and democracy. In order to understand the post-dictatorship years, it is necessary to examine with some detail the preceding period under dictatorship, analysing those traces, reverberations and also changes in the passage to the post-dictatorship.

Creating a specific articulation between aesthetics and politics, underground magazines strained the public space, presenting themselves as a confrontative alternative to the commercial press and official culture. They also challenged the limits imposed by power through their projects of political and cultural intervention in public life, their disruptive graphic proposals, and the recovery of traditions often opposed to those adopted by the mass or hegemonic press.

During the last Argentine dictatorship (1976–1983), the military regime deployed a series of strategies aimed at gaining popular support, implementing repressive measures and seeking to generate consensus and support among the population through a series of propaganda campaigns in public and private media (Risler 2018; Schenquer 2022). The military's cultural and communications policy was rationally planned around 'anti-subversive struggle' and the establishment of

¹ In Argentina, 'countercultural', 'underground', and 'alternative' were the terms used to characterise this type of dissident press by both those who participated in these practices and those who reflected on them. These terms began to be used during dictatorship and gained greater visibility and relevance during the post-dictatorship period.

a re-foundational process (Risler and Schenquer 2018). After the coup of 24 March 1976, the dictatorship immediately launched a systematic plan of repression and forced disappearances. On a symbolic level, a series of cultural policies emanating from the military regime promoted censorship, self-censorship, and ideological prohibitions, while propaganda mechanisms aimed at generating support were deployed at various levels.

Other practices developed alongside these disciplining policies, on the fringes or even openly challenging the limits imposed by military power regarding their mechanisms of censure, persecution and forced disappearances. Within this framework, a diverse and heterogeneous set of cultural magazines,² known as ‘underground magazines’, emerged with the aim of voicing ideas and views that were not allowed to circulate in the mainstream society of the period. Contrary to the belief that the dictatorship uniformly implemented processes of forced silence and confinement, these publications allow us to recognise a certain cultural effervescence despite the repressive policies of the regime. While these magazines maintained their initial fervour during the early years of the post-dictatorship period, developed distinctive aesthetic and political proposals, and fostered debates about the role of intellectuals in the public sphere and in the new democratic context, the initial enthusiasm gradually waned.

These dissident graphic experiences and editorial projects can be seen both as modes of dissent against the ruling power and as forms of territoriality and insertion into public space, representing the possibility of building affective networks of resistance. The perspective adopted here understands periodical publications as performative devices involving discourses and practices that shape subjectivities.

Drawn from Raymond Williams’s (2010) cultural materialism, the concepts of ‘cultural formations’ or ‘cultural groups’³ enable analysis of movements or tendencies that prove effective in a given society and time, allowing us to corroborate the dynamism of the cultural sphere and the capacity of these cultural groups for independent initiatives which challenge power both in dictatorship and in democracy. Due to the political context at the time, the magazines studied here emerged as a means of expression for private study groups working with texts of limited circulation at universities. These formations felt the need to express their concerns and make themselves known, even in a context of state terrorism and the drastic curtailment of possibilities for expression.

² The most important publications were *Mutantia*, *El Ornitotrinco*, *Nudos*, *Xul*, *Último Reino*, *Poddema*, *Signo Ascendente* and *Sitio*, among others.

³ From the perspective of cultural materialism, Raymond Williams (2010) characterises *cultural groups* or *formations* as more or less informal forms of organisation or self-organisation linked to cultural production that differ — in various degrees — from formal institutions, which possess more enduring and lasting life and organic regulations. He defines them as effective movements and trends in intellectual and artistic life that have a significant and sometimes decisive influence on the active development of a culture.

Argentine society during dictatorship and post-dictatorship

Argentina's last civil-military dictatorship implemented a project called 'corporate liberalism', which resulted in a shift in the profile of the ruling class and in a significant increase of poverty, marginalisation, and social exclusion. The 1976 military coup altered the productive structure of the economy, leading to the closure of many small and medium-sized businesses, a major decline in the living conditions and purchasing power of the working class, growing oligopolisation, changes in the pattern of foreign trade in manufactured goods, and the consolidation of prevailing economic groups amid increasing foreign debt (Aspiazu and Schorr 2010). The working classes and low-income population segments experienced regressive income redistribution and social discipline, with their rights to decent wages, healthcare, employment, and education severely impaired. The growth of the economic and institutional power of a group of large oligopolistic corporations meant it was profitable for this new and predominant fraction of the ruling class to support the military establishment in its pursuit of state terrorism and the repression of social protest.

At the political level, the situation was equally dire, with political opposition persecuted during the early years of the dictatorship. In the context of a subsequent governance crisis, the military pursued a civil-military solution, with the military junta retaining control over the activities of political parties and leaving no room for any form of opposition. Severely weakened, the traditional parties refused to lead the anti-dictatorship struggle as they lacked confidence in their own capacity to confront the dictatorship in times of crisis (Pucciarelli 2004).

This re-foundational plan implemented by the military regime in the economic, social, and political spheres was accompanied by repressive policies, but also by cultural measures aimed at generating consensus in the population. This cultural program was made possible by the media, which disseminated a series of values intended to generate support among the population. In this way, the military regime saw culture and communication as relevant for disseminating its objectives and interests.

Our analysis will focus on the cultural sphere as it appears from the perspective of its 'relative autonomy', which means, first, examining its relationship of reciprocal influence with other spheres, and, then, identifying its particular dynamics (Williams 2015). Following this approach, the symbolic sphere appears as a space of dispute over the meanings and values surrounding a given society, in which the media constitute relevant social actors for the dissemination of said meanings and values through ideas, images, and practices that, in turn, validate the specific economic and social order that those same values and meanings represent. In this

context of dispute over symbolic meaning and values, economic and social transformations and the military regime's project to dismantle popular organisations were accompanied by a set of measures aimed at defining a common enemy that the military identified as Marxism and subversion (Gociol and Invernizzi 2002). Implemented by both state agencies and civilian sectors, the regime enacted mechanisms of propaganda, psychological action and censorship, in the construction of this 'other', identified as a 'subversive' threat. These measures aimed to impose a cultural and ideological model that included certain values, behavioural patterns, and norms of conduct (Risler 2018). The regime developed a strict set of regulations aimed at controlling the media and the National Social Communication Plan of 1977 sought to disseminate the actions and achievements of the National Government, advocating the validity of Christian moral values and the dignity of being 'Argentine', alongside the importance of family values in protecting youth from the infiltration of 'foreign ideologies.'

In this repressive context, other initiatives and practices dared to challenge this hegemonic order. Underground cultural magazines reflected a compelling need for expression and openly confronted the dictatorship's modes of control through attitudes and aesthetic preferences, social networks and group formation, and writing styles.

Subsequently, the beginning of the post-dictatorship period — with Raúl Alfonsín coming to power on 10 December 1983 — was marked by a fragile democracy exposed to strong pressures mostly stemming from powerful economic groups and the military. Several authors have characterised this type of transition as 'transition by collapse' since, unlike what happened in other Southern Cone countries, such as Uruguay, Brazil, and Chile, in Argentina the conditions for a 'negotiated' transition had not been generated (Nun and Portantiero 1987). After years of repression, Alfonsín's constitutional government (1983–1989), threatened by military and economic power, sought to provide interpretative keys for understanding the dire events of the dictatorship period by focusing on two factors: on the one hand, the Malvinas War, understood as the prolongation of state terrorism and, on the other, the impunity of hegemonic corporate and military powers, which had not been dismantled in the post-dictatorship period (Pucciarelli 2006; Gómez 2024). In this context, countercultural magazines generated heated debates around the transition to democracy, the role of intellectuals in this period, and the importance of the public sphere as a relevant place for democracy where people can discuss issues of common interest.

On periodisation and transition: the cultural 1980s

We will develop some hypotheses about the 1980s, the selected period of study, comprising the final years of Argentina's last civil-military dictatorship and the early post-dictatorship period, examining topics related to the idea of transition, democratic opening and post-dictatorship. This will also entail an examination of the transformations these practices underwent during the transition from dictatorship to post-dictatorship, in order to identify patterns of continuity and rupture.

The 1980s in Argentina coincided with the last years of dictatorship and, in particular, with the period known as the transition to democracy, which spanned the final years of the military regime, when the crisis of authoritarian rule began to become all too evident. The term 'democratic transition' emerged within a professionalisation of political studies that sought to discuss possible directions for post-authoritarian governments in Latin America, including the recovery of civil rights and political freedoms (Garretón 1995). The idea of transition thus made it possible to envisage an alternative to military dictatorships. Cecilia Lesgart (2003) has studied the concept, characterising it as a spatiotemporal metaphor useful to describe the process of decomposition of the military regime, which, in the Argentine case, deepened after the Malvinas War.⁴ This process was accompanied by calls from various segments of society for the return of democratic institutions, and by human rights organisations redoubling their demands for justice and their denunciation of forced disappearances.

The transition was a gradual process that started the moment counterinsurgency ceased to be the unifying element of the military forces (Canelo 2008; 2016). Marina Franco's (2018) analysis characterises the transition as the period between 1979 and 1983, beginning with the process of delegitimisation of the military regime. The author points out that already in 1979 — even a few months before — there were clear signs of the Armed Forces' weakening and their shift to more defensive positions in the exercise of power. A turning point was the loss of the Malvinas War, after which the political and social context grew more tense and an anti-military resistance took hold amid a general rejection of the military regime's policies. (Águila 2023). In this context, a series of mass marches, neighbourhood protests, and cultural and political movements emerged that had an important bearing on the regime's downfall.

For countercultural or underground magazines, this transition period coincided with the creation of collective spaces and networks of alternative cultural publications that began to emerge in 1979, the year in which Asociación de Revistas Culturales Argentinas (ARCA)⁵ was created, and later, starting in 1980, Agrupación

⁴ The war in the South Atlantic between Argentina and the United Kingdom began on 2 April 1982 and ended on 14 June 1982. The conflict exposed the crisis of the Argentine military regime, which resorted to this strategy to remain in power (Canelo 2008; Franco 2018).

⁵ Association of Argentine Cultural Magazines.

de Revistas Alternativas (ARA)⁶, Grupo Alternativo de Trabajo Antimitomanía (GATA),⁷ and Asociación de Publicaciones Alternativas de Rosario (APAR),⁸ among other groups in different Argentine cities. This confluence of graphic experiences promoted the creation of networks linking magazines' projects with other cultural practices, a process that allowed for the emergence of wider resistance fronts that gradually began to publicly demand the end of the dictatorship.

Regarding this period of formation of resistance fronts, Ramiro Manduca (2022) highlights the role played by Teatro Abierto and the experiences of 'molecular'⁹ theatrical resistance that led to the creation of an opposition cultural movement that, initiated in 1981, later shifted toward an alternative perspective in democratic times. Another relevant phenomenon that developed in the transition to democracy was the emergence of feminist magazines such as *Todas* [All Women], *Alfonsina*, and *Brujas* [Witches] — part of the ATEM group.¹⁰ A weekly section entirely devoted to emerging gender issues was also published for the first time in a newspaper with the *La Mujer* [The Woman] supplement of the *Tiempo argentino* newspaper (1982–1986). The supplement — which gradually grew in importance — proposed feminism in action, addressing various topics related to women's everyday lives and problems. These undertakings played an important role during the period, when previously taboo issues began to be addressed publicly in these alternative media, with the vindication of women's and sexual minorities' rights reaching public attention.

The anti-dictatorial cultural fronts that emerged in the transition period began to raise the idea of 'resistance', and, in particular, the powerful idea of 'molecular resistance'. This idea of resistance as an operative category was widely used in Argentina in the 1980s, in a context of appropriation of Cultural Studies (Hall and Jefferson 2010; Williams 2015), allowing these burgeoning groups to construct a theoretical frame of reference for marginal practices that coordinated their efforts in their struggle to put an end to authoritarianism.

In the post-dictatorship period, Nicolás Cuello and Lucas Disalvo (2019) studied a group of independent publications, graphic artifacts, and experiences of countercultural organisation that appeared in Buenos Aires' underground scene under the Alfonsín government. The authors observe that these graphic devices contributed to processes of subjectivation through discourses, knowledge, and images that privileged a radical politics of the body and its pleasures, presenting the *Resistencia* zine [Resistance] (1984–2001) as a paradigmatic example. These practices helped shape alternative lifestyles and local forms of the punk aesthetic and contributed to the formation of anti-authoritarian sensibilities. Daniela Lucena and Gisela Laboureau (2016) also describe a series of cultural practices from the post-dictatorship period, a network of poetic-political experiences that renewed

⁶ Association of Alternative Magazines.

⁷ Alternative Anti-Mythomania Working Group.

⁸ Rosario Alternative Publications Association.

⁹ The idea of 'molecular' or 'molecular resistance' refers to the characteristics of certain practices during the dictatorship. Arising spontaneously and disjointedly, these practices attempted to repair some parts of the damaged social fabric.

¹⁰ Asociación de Trabajo y Estudio sobre la Mujer [Association for the Work and Study on Women].

the cultural and artistic scenes of the cities and sought to rebuild social bonds based on alternative and festive forms of sociability.

By the mid-1980s, in a context of democratic institutions, numerous cultural and communication practices underwent significant transformations in their initial objectives and projects. In those years, debates began — also appearing in various countercultural magazines — about the role of the intellectual, the utopian horizons that had played a key role in the transition from dictatorship to democracy, and retrospective readings about exile and the culture of resistance (Franco 2018; Cristiá 2021). In this context, countercultural or underground magazines and dissident print media took on new characteristics, and the countercultural scene shifted toward the punk universe, the hierarchisation of science fiction, the visibility of sexuality and sexual dissidence, and the body as a central focus of interest.

Finally, in the late 1980s, numerous cultural projects, including various alternative magazines, began a commercial drift that would eventually lead to their dissolution or transformation. Under a political and social climate of disenchantment, a series of events sparked off a governance crisis, revealing the fragility and instability of the democratic institutions.¹¹

While the transition to democracy had coalesced certain expectations linked to the refoundation of institutions, the promise of equal access to democratic guarantees, the recognition of human and sexual rights, among other claims, these hopes were shattered in the late 1980s by events such as the economic decline, the enforcement of impunity laws for the military, and subsequently, under the presidency of Carlos Menem, the crisis unleashed as a consequence of a neoliberal economic and social model and the pardons of convicted military figures. These events marked the decline of democratic promises.

Underground, countercultural, alternative press

The ‘underground’ category, as used in this study, refers to media outlets that emerged as a response to disciplinary mechanisms in repressive contexts. In Latin America, underground magazines emerged in the 1960s in the context of dictatorial processes, driven by the need for expression and to question the established order. However, ‘underground’ did not necessarily imply clandestinity, but rather alluded to the adoption of a dissenting stance against authoritarian power. While certain publications echoed the official canon and accepted the dominant discourse, these magazines revisited different resistance traditions, recovering modes of communication that challenged censorship and authoritarianism. The productivity and

¹¹ Previously, in 1986, as a result of pressure from the military, the Full Stop Law (*Ley de Punto Final*) was passed, which mandated an end to the investigation and prosecution of military and security officers accused of state repression. The Carapintada mutiny of 1987 led to the passage in that same year of the Due Obedience Law (*Ley de Obediencia Debida*), shielding military personnel involved in crimes against humanity from prosecution (De Diego 2025).

fervour of these practices contributed to generating public friction during the last civil-military dictatorship in Argentina. In some cases, their editorial programmes were related to human rights organisations or political parties, though this connection was indirect due to the prevailing repression.

The idea of a journalism independent of commercial interests, which privileged poetic freedom and collaborative work, was common to this type of publications, variously referred to as ‘underground’, ‘subterranean’, ‘alternative’, or ‘counter-cultural’. This idea of the ‘underground’, as restricted to specific experiences in Latin America, was employed to refer to those specific experiences that challenged the established order in dictatorial contexts, in this particular case, within the context of the last civil-military dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1983), although these practices continued in the post-dictatorship period.

Several authors have argued that the underground press in Argentina emerged as the result of the activities of some cultural groups of young people that gathered during the last dictatorship. These groups functioned as spaces for expression, socialisation, and the building of close collective ties, thus managing to survive the censorship imposed by state terrorism (Marcus 2017). Albeit of limited circulation, their value lay in operating as a cultural medium that helped create collective networks. Their choice of formal or rhetorical devices allowed them to allude to a social and political context marked by terror and the persecution of dissident voices. Their creators consisted of high school and university students, poets, writers, journalists, and activists, among others (Warley 1993).

While this type of press originated in Argentina with publications such as *Eco contemporáneo* [Contemporary Echo] and *Contracultura* [Counterculture] since the early 1960s and including Onganía’s military coup (1966–1970),¹² the last Argentine dictatorship was a period characterised by the proliferation of a large number of underground magazines that had a conflictive relationship with the military and somehow managed to circumvent the control of their repressive mechanisms. Cecily Marcus’ (2017) research in this area finds that these publications were responsible for highlighting the concerns of younger generations, not only in relation to literature and political definitions, but also in other disciplines. With little financial support, almost all of them included an editorial that constituted a brief manifesto introducing the magazine guidelines. The articles included criticism, political praxis, and aesthetic reviews, allowing for a wide variety of topics and approaches. While they may have included a variety of interests, they have been recovered by recent cultural studies mostly for their political and cultural programmes, for their vitality and, in particular, their confrontation with the corridors of power. José Luis De Diego (2025) described the experience of these underground magazines, examining them as a space of dispute over hegemony

¹² Both magazines were edited by Miguel Grinberg. *Eco contemporáneo* was published in the 1960s, and *Contracultura* in the early 1970s.

during the dictatorship and post-dictatorship into the literary field. Roxana Patiño's studies (2006) have described a set of publications named magazines of 'resistance' or 'dissidence' to the dictatorship, and characterised by a common stance in the context of cultural oppression. Silvia Guiard (2006) focused on the capacity of these practices to unite different views and create alternative spaces to hold meetings, coordinate events, organise sales of banned books, publish works by young poets and storytellers, discuss aesthetic movements such as surrealism, and create theatre, film or music cycles.¹³

The idea of 'counterculture' referred to those practices that, by their very nature, opposed official culture, either due to their non-commercial nature or in their discussion of certain issues. Challenging the values of mainstream culture, countercultural movements emerged between the 1950s and 1970s as a form of protest against the capitalist consumer society. In opposition to the bourgeois way of life, they questioned consumerism, wealth, selfishness, and inequality. Two important social phenomena of this general trend were the Beat movement, emerging in the United States in the 1950s, and, later, the hippie movement, appearing in San Francisco in the second half of the 1960s. Both movements questioned the social system and its conventions, and had important writers, musicians, film directors, and painters among their followers. One of the most notable figures in this context in the United States was Thomas Merton, who maintained an important correspondence with Miguel Grinberg, a figure of Argentine counterculture.

'Alternative communication' or 'alternativity', on the other hand, refer to a set of Latin American experiences that proliferated in the early 1970s, alluding to a type of journalism that proposed an agenda different from that of the hegemonic press, characterised as it was by its commercialism and the reproduction of the values of the official culture. The communication model differed completely from that of the commercial mass media, as representative of the dominant culture, championing values such as equal access, participation in the production of messages, and collective decision-making in order to give voice to marginalised groups in society. The rationale for alternativity was presented as a differentiating option as compared to the ownership structure, organisational form, and content adopted by the mass media. This characterisation cannot be fully grasped without considering its relationship with the social political context in which it took place.

During the last dictatorship and the post-dictatorship, the main axis of the world of underground magazines was dissent from the official discourse: they criticised authoritarianism and presented a different approach in terms of their editorial stance, the topics explored, the use of symbolic practices that opposed official culture, and their non-commercial nature. They established a particular relationship with the reader, who was challenged to play an active and critical role.

¹³ In 1979, the ARCA collective held a press conference expressing its opposition to the prevailing censorship.

At the same time, they emerged as a means of expression for critically engaged groups of young people, allowing them to experiment with 'other' modes of storytelling. During the period, the terms 'underground', 'countercultural', and 'alternative' were used interchangeably, further blurring the boundaries between these concepts. Despite their differences in relations to these terms, all these cultural endeavours shared a particular mode of criticism of official culture, a type of communication opposed to vertical organisation, and were characterised by experimentation with writing styles that challenged the established order.

Different publication categories

In order to more clearly characterise the different graphic experiences, we will map out different publications categories or groupings.¹⁴ It is important to point out that all the selected magazines belonged to the underground and were characterised as such both by their contemporary protagonists and by scholars subsequently. Beyond their differences in publishing style, subjects, formats, and aesthetics, they are all considered underground for presenting a clearly distinct programme that confronted ruling power.

A first publication group includes magazines such as *Mutantia* and *Antimitomanía* [Antimythomania], which drew heavily on the countercultural movement that emerged in the United States in the 1950s, linked to the Beat philosophy and later to the hippie culture in the following decade. They incorporated ideas of notable figures of the U.S. counterculture such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, which allowed them to connect with Argentine rock culture, engaging many of its followers in a fruitful dialogue. These magazines also drew attention to ecological concerns, promoted pacifist values, and featured writer, rock critic, essayist and poet Miguel Grinberg as an inspirational figure of Argentine counterculture.

Grinberg was also instrumental in the creation of *Antimitomanía* (1974–1981), having gifted its creator and director Daniel Serra complete collections of the two magazines he had produced: *Eco contemporáneo* (published in the 1960s) and *Contracultura* (published between 1970 and 1971). Inspired by these counterculture magazines, Serra decided to create his own publication in 1974. After a break, the magazine was relaunched in September 1979. The magazine's editorials promoted counterculture values, proposed a balance between the individual and the world, upheld environmental awareness and the defence of freedom, and presented a critique of the oppressive conditions of consumerist capitalist society.

In June 1980, Grinberg published *Mutantia* (1980–1985) in book form for the first time, running for 22 issues. In its first edition, he reproduced a statement by

¹⁴ As a result of this research, some of the magazines are digitised and available at: <https://www.archivosenuso.org/>.

Fig. 1 Cover of *El Ornitorrinco* [The Platypus] no. 10, October-November 1981. Source: <https://ahira.com.ar/>.



Thomas Merton in which he analysed the violence of the system. The statement, accompanied by images of acts of repression, criticised torture at a time when the regime in Argentina was implementing a systematic plan of disappearances, torture, and repression. *Mutantia* published transcripts of unpublished letters by Thomas Merton and by Ernesto Cardenal. Dating from 1963 and 1966, Merton's letters to Grinberg emphasise the importance of exchange, particularly to familiarise people in the United States with the cultural vitality of Latin American countries. Merton also acknowledged a close connection with his friends in Nicaragua, such as Ernesto Cardenal, a priest and poet.

A second set of publications might be taken as encompassing literary magazines such as *El ornitorrinco* [The Platypus] (1977–1986) [Fig. 1]. Directed by writer Abelardo Castillo, this publication recovered the figure of the committed

intellectual. This literary endeavour was carried out by a group of young people that took part in a literary workshop and was coordinated by its director. Its critique of the prevailing context of censorship is easily recognisable in its pages, as is the debate of controversial issues, the most prominent being an exchange with writer Julio Cortázar regarding his forced exile during the military regime. For its director, the magazine embodied the explicit decision to ‘do something’ against the dictatorship, a decision that prompted the use of oblique ways of saying things to bypass censorship. In its first editorial, the magazine described the art of writing as an act in favour of life. During the post-dictatorship period — and even earlier — the magazine covered topics such as the meaning of democracy, changes in cultural journalism regarding the possibility (or impossibility) of discussing controversial topics, and the politicisation of certain issues. In 1986, it reproduced and supported the demands of human rights organisations against laws granting impunity to the military. Its editorial, signed by the magazine’s staff, also bore the signature of Abelardo Castillo, a member of the Board of Directors of the *Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos* (APDH).¹⁵

A third set of publications is linked to the cultural tradition of left-wing political parties. While this connection was not explicit or organic, the party tradition was clearly noticeable in the topics dealt with, the discussions held, and especially through the works and authors it drew on.

Contexto [Context] (1977–1984), a publication linked to the Communist Party, reclaimed figures and aesthetic movements representative of the Argentine communist tradition, such as Brecht’s theatre, César Vallejo’s literature, and Antonio Berni’s muralism.¹⁶ This project was conceived at a time when the party’s official cultural magazine, *Cuadernos de cultura* [Culture Notebooks], was banned. It was directed by the intellectual Ariel Bignami, member of the Argentine Communist Party. The magazine included articles on Russian cinema and Karl Marx’s aesthetic legacy, and also addressed Latin American topics such as adult literacy in the revolutionary process in Nicaragua. Although more professionally designed, *Contexto* was still recognised as part of the underground press for its solidarity with publications sharing the same cultural world, its participation in resistance networks such as ARCA, and its recovery of traditionally left-wing topics and cultural concerns linked to the avant-garde or national and popular culture.

On the other hand, the magazines *Posta* (1977–1978) and *Nudos* [Knots] (1978–1992)¹⁷ [Fig. 2] had close links with the Partido Comunista Revolucionario (PCR),¹⁸ especially among some of their editors, and their editorial line held national, popular, and anti-imperialist views linked to Maoism. A relevant feature of these publications was their metaphorical and elliptical mention of the forced disappearance of people, repression, and censorship, as well as their strong focus on the

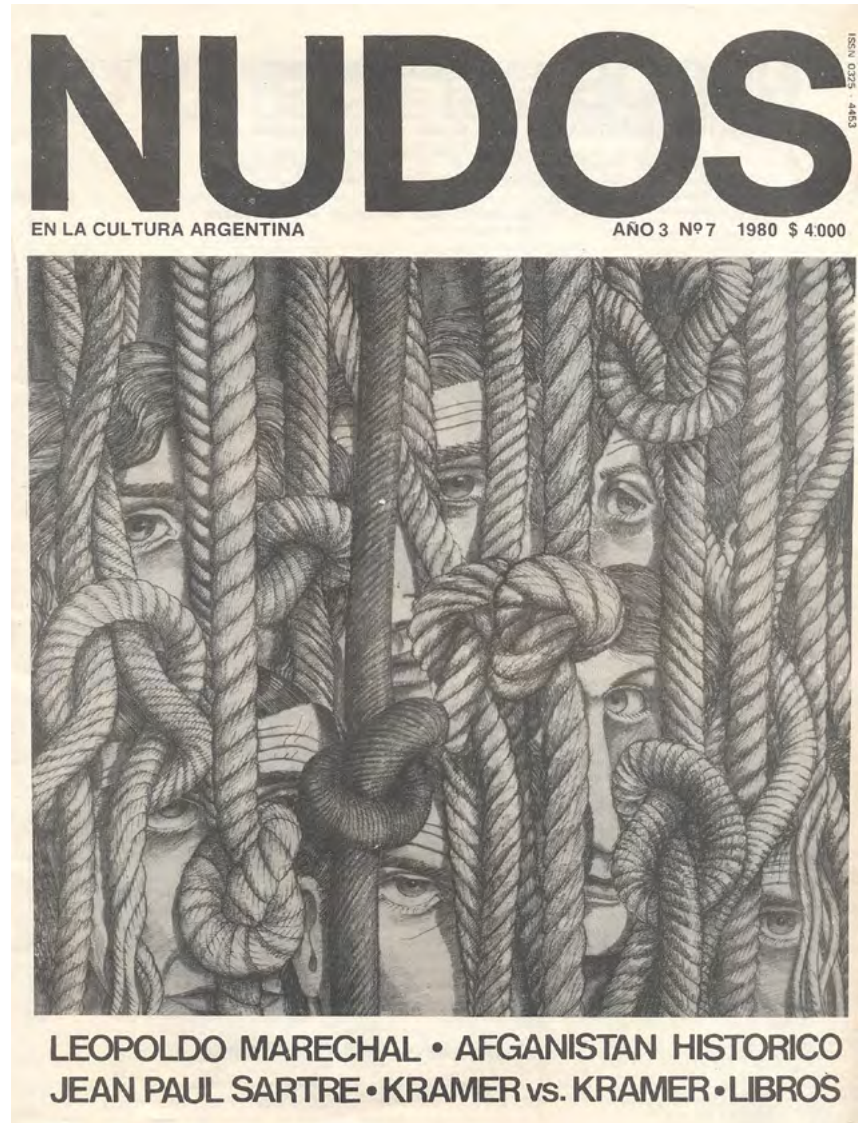
¹⁵ Permanent Assembly for Human Rights.

¹⁶ It should be noted that the Argentine Communist Party’s (PCA) cultural programme included a Latin American and anti-imperialist perspective, in addition to the international recognition of works and authors linked to the tradition of Soviet communism. However, on the political level, the PCA contrasted the Argentine dictatorship with Pinochetism, considering the latter more ‘harsh’ and violent. In the post-dictatorship period, within the framework of the 16th Congress of the Argentine Communist Party in 1986, its youth promoted a self-criticism regarding this characterisation of the Argentine military regime by the party during the dictatorship.

¹⁷ The magazine was renamed *Nudos* since its previous name, *Posta*, was already registered.

¹⁸ Communist Revolutionary Party.

Fig. 2 Cover of *Nudos* [Knots] no. 7, 1980.
Source: <https://archivosenuso.org/>.



anti-fascist struggle. In the democratic period, *Nudos*, directed by the artist Manuel Amigo and the writer Jorge Brega, did much to bring into the public's eye the experiences of cultural resistance that were then developing, incorporating reflections on poetry under the dictatorship, the role of the media, the new international order, and other artistic endeavours based on popular and politically committed works. The anti-fascist struggle also employed other symbolic practices during the dictatorship, eventually resulting in the creation of an anti-dictatorial front in which the magazine *Nudos* played an active role.

Also within the set of magazines devoted to the recovery of left-wing party traditions we find *Propuesta para la juventud* [Proposal for Youth] (1977-1980), closely linked to the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (PST).¹⁹ This graphic endeavour focused on promoting self-expression among the young through poetry and music, and called for active youth participation. Born as the initiative of young people from the suburbs (Quilmes), the magazine gradually increased in size and circulation. Unlike other underground publications, its central focus was on music, particularly rock, with Miguel Grinberg making regular and important contributions. The publication also included sections on poetry, theatre and records, discussions about literary genres, sexuality, national cinema, and a section designed by and for women. Under editor-in-chief Roberto Catania and director Silvio Winderbaum, the magazine invited its readers to participate through poems and the proposal of new ideas, based on the concept that it did not belong to an editorial team but to its readers.

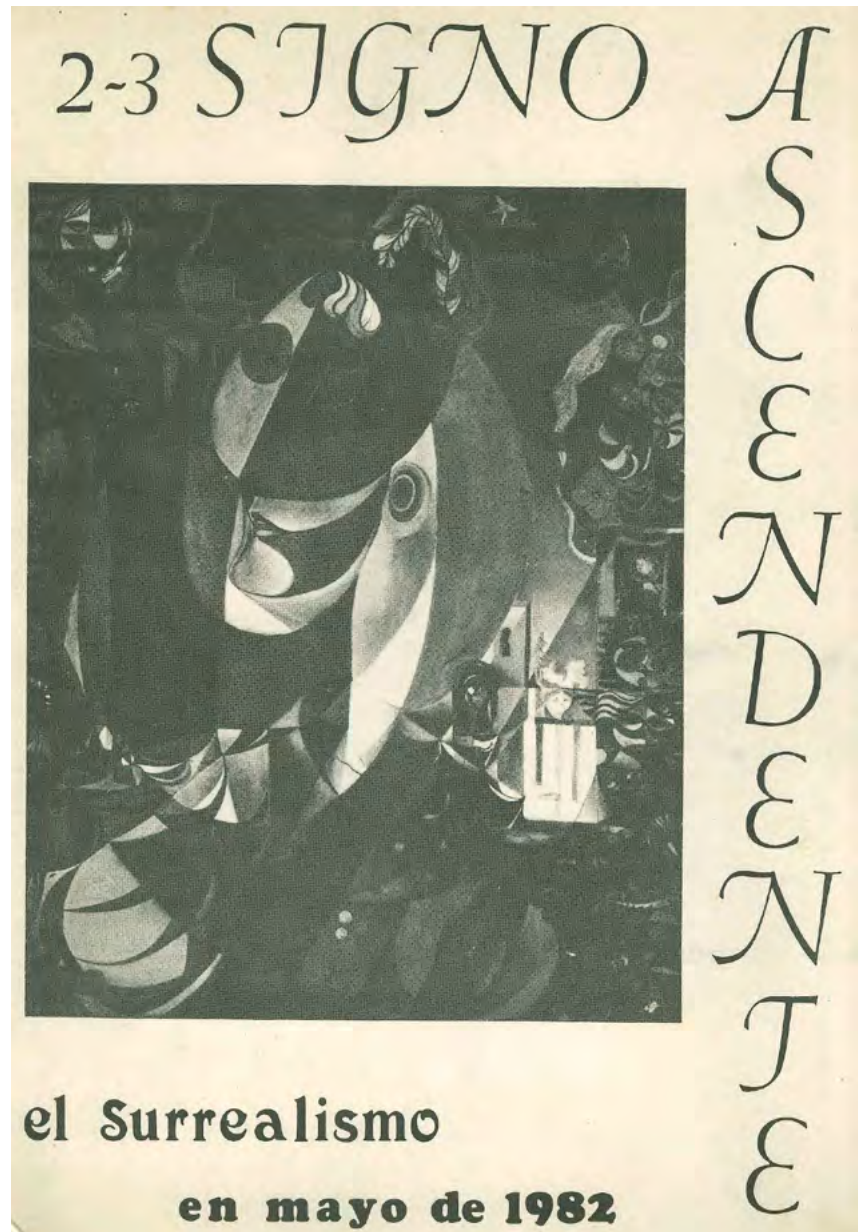
On the other hand, *Cuadernos del camino* [Journey Notebooks] (1978-1980), linked through some of its publishers to the PST, viewed artistic expression and collaboration in the media as a form of collective work. Directed by Mónica Giustina and, after its third issue, by Alicia Padula, the magazine was devoted to experimental cultural productions critical of what was regarded as 'bourgeois' art. Within this framework, the experience of the Taller de Investigación Teatral (TIT), a project conceived by some PST members (although this relationship only became explicitly known several years later) played an important role in the magazine.

A fourth set includes publications such as *Poddema* (1979-1980), and its later version *Signo ascendente* [Rising Sign] (1980-1982) [Fig. 3], which offered an idiosyncratic appropriation of the surrealist movement during the dictatorship. The use of this avant-garde movement as a form of activism reflects the importance of surrealist groups in the articulation between art and politics. This appropriation of surrealism proved critical for the recovery of the unconscious with its emphasis on desire, even in a context of censorship, forced silence and repression. The production of these magazines required enormous efforts under adverse conditions. Artisanally printed and hand-sewn, they were produced on a small scale (between 100 and 200 copies). Self-sustained projects, neither *Poddema* nor *Signo ascendente* received any external funding.

The first *Poddema* issue, published in July 1979, conceived its editorial as a manifesto or programmatic declaration, advancing the revival of the surrealist movement of the early 20th century. It argued that true art should express the real needs of humanity, encouraged the exploration of unrestricted imagination, and sought to promote the artistic avant-garde. In October 1980, the publishing team decided to rename the magazine *Signo ascendente* and expanded its editorial staff. Alberto Valdivia was the editor of both endeavours.

¹⁹ Workers Socialist Party.

Fig. 3 Cover of *Signo ascendente*
[Rising Sign] nos. 2-3, May 1980.
Source: <https://archivosenuso.org/>.



The first *Signo ascendente* editorial made explicit reference to the dictatorial regime and the crisis unleashed by its policies. ‘Life being annihilated by a germ’ and ‘the internalisation of terror’ were some of the expressions used by the editorial group to characterise the weariness and fear that permeated the everyday life of the population. It also criticised censorship and the curtailment of free expression, reduced to the limits of the bearable. In 1982, the Malvinas War accelerated the loss of the

military regime's legitimacy and *Signo ascendente* questioned the conflict and openly expressed its rejection of the *de facto* government. Its last issue in 1982 included an untitled statement on its back cover characterising the war as a threat of barbarism and violence. During this period of regime exhaustion and crisis, members of the surrealist group participated in a counter-protest against the Malvinas War celebrations, distributing the statement about the war they had published in the magazine. However, this was one of the group's last activities. The end of the dictatorship led to the disappearance of the magazine, although the group continued publishing poems and organising surrealist events under the same name for a few more years.

A fifth set of magazines was dedicated to poetry, including publications such as *Último reino* [Last Kingdom] (1979–1987), which understood poetry, particularly that linked to Romanticism, as a privileged form of expression, and *Xul* (1980–1994) [Fig. 4], which conceived writing as a ludic form of creation and experimentation that allowed the exercise of freedom under imposed terror. *Último reino* was directed by Gustavo Margulies and Víctor Redondo, while *Xul*'s editorial board included writers such as Jorge Perednik, Laura Klein, and Leonardo Scolnick, among others. While both publications stressed the role of poets in society and shared common traits, such as the presence of young writers committedly involved in the development of these editorial projects and the importance attached to poetry as a privileged form of expression, they represented different ways of approaching the poetic phenomenon: the romantic spirit of the poetry published in *Último reino* sharply contrasted with *Xul*, which revered the Argentine artist Xul Solar and favoured a poetics of estrangement in the use of language more in tune with avant-garde experimentation.

A sixth set of publications is ideologically and thematically linked to the New Left, including magazines such as *Ulises* (1978–1979), *Nova arte* (1978–1980), and *Sitio* [Place] (1981–1987). *Ulises* focused on the relationship between literature and 'social being', and between aesthetics and politics. Under the direction of Horacio García, Horacio Tarcus and Gabriel Rot, the magazine's first editorial stated an intention to address an urgent cultural need. By denouncing the obsolescence of inherited aesthetic norms, it sought to contribute to the construction of new forms of expression that would allow new generations of writers to manifest their views more freely.

For mostly budgetary reasons, after its third issue *Ulises* merged with *Nova arte*, which had already run six issues. Directed by Enrique Záttara, *Nova arte* was also characterised by its interest in topics such as avant-garde theatre, the linguistic basis of structuralism, the connection between art, avant-garde, and love, and other subjects that represented a break with the tradition of left-wing parties. *Sitio*, on the other hand, focused on discourse analysis and psychoanalysis, as well as on



Fig. 4 Cover of *Xul* no. 1, October 1980.

Source: <https://ahira.com.ar/>.

Fig. 5 Cover of *Kosmos* no. 14, August-September 1983. Source: Editor Daniel Schapces' personal archive.



the importance of words for the art of writing between the lines. Its editors were the writers and intellectuals Ramón Alcalde, Héctor Grisafi, Luis Guzmán, Jorge Jinkis, and Eduardo Grüner. The publication envisaged the act of reading as a meeting place where it is possible to engage in a close dialogue with those texts that helped disrupt the inertia imposed by dominant discourses. Subsequently, the issues published under democracy focused on the decline of the critical essay, developing an acute critique of what they dubbed 'Alfonsinist culture'. In these publications we find some clear examples of the influence exerted by the New Left, such as the attempt to leave behind the debate between aestheticism and realism, the recovery of discourse analysis, psychoanalysis, and the avant-garde.

Kosmos (1979–1986), directed by Daniel Schapces, found its own niche in the area of alternative journalism, as reflected in its motto [Fig. 5]. It was a type of

cultural press that privileged the sociological perspective and testimonial journalism, focused on human rights, the Malvinas War, and criticism of the establishment media, including discussions on unionism, universities, and articles dedicated to rock music. The support for human rights organisations played a prominent role in the magazine, expressed through articles that demanded trial and punishment for those responsible for genocide.

A final set of publications comprises magazines that included discussions about the transition to democracy, such as *Pie de p gina* [Footnote] (1982-1985) and *Praxis* (1983-1986). Appearing at the end of the dictatorship, these projects developed during the years of the post-dictatorship period to examine the relationship between culture and politics, including debates about the role of intellectuals in a context of democratic transition. These two publications mentioned clearly show that the utopian horizons envisaged during the transition were far from being univocal. While the former promoted the ideals of democracy, the latter supported the creation of a socialist state. *Pie de p gina*, directed by Alberto Castro, followed a tradition devoted to the recovery of a national and popular culture. While denouncing the crisis of the authoritarian project, it explored the possibility of building a cultural identity closely linked to the democratisation movement of Argentine society that would promote popular access to cultural production and consumption.

Praxis, edited by Emilio Cafassi after its second issue, sought to recover, as explicitly indicated by its name, the Marxist praxis and discuss the role of the intellectual in society. From a theoretical perspective and a Marxist programme, it aimed to contribute to the creation of a select group of revolutionary intellectuals, exploring the relationship between different disciplines and the class struggle within the framework of an ideological confrontation. The journal also examined the meaning of democracy for Marxism. The last issue is relevant because it explored the relationship between activism and everyday life, including an analysis of certain categories of traditional activism.

To conclude this classification, two points are worth noting. First, although this classification of areas of interest is meant to be as comprehensive as possible, it is far from being exhaustive. Second and more importantly, despite the wide variety of areas covered by these editorial proposals, all were united by the same spirit of confrontation with power.

Resistance fronts in the transition and subsequent developments

The cultural groups organised around the publishing projects of underground or countercultural magazines played an important role as a space for the exchange of ideas, allowing for the creation of a network of caring support. For all those who participated in these projects, the need to form a cohesive group was fundamental from the start. This need can be interpreted as a form of resistance to the fragmentation and prohibition of developing collective projects imposed by the rule of terror.

From the beginning, most groups, pushed by the need to exchange and articulate experiences, began to spontaneously establish links with other collectives. By 1979, a number of private study groups started to interact and create publishing networks. This represented a turning point, as the formation of networks allowed for a wider critical perspective on the military regime, thanks to the perception that each publishing endeavour was no longer an isolated phenomenon, but rather part of a broader network that provided support and helped generate a shared common identity. Contrary to the belief that the dictatorship exercised a monolithic power silencing all dissident voices, these experiences prove that a significant segment of society played an active role in creating a dynamic space for cultural exchange.

The Malvinas War and the period that immediately followed represented a watershed for countercultural magazines as they began to more openly question the established order, denouncing censorship and the foreign debt resulting from the military crisis. Timidly at first, they also began to suggest the idea of a return to democracy. It was also after the Malvinas War that they began to give more visibility to the struggle of human rights organisations.

During the transition to democracy, the main concern of these editorial projects was to give voice to a growing demand of society: the return to the democratic institutions in the context of a debate about its scope and programmes. Various resistance fronts that emerged in this period daringly embodied this programme of direct confrontation with the dictatorship for the reestablishment of democratic institutions. The analysis of one of these fronts in particular, the Movement for the Reconstruction and Development of National Culture,²⁰ reveals the changes that took place in this period. This anti-dictatorial movement appeared in 1981, held its first event in 1982, and dissolved in 1984, with a final major event, the Resistance Culture Week,²¹ held at the San Martín Cultural Centre. From its creation in the final years of the dictatorship, the collective sought to disseminate

²⁰ Movimiento por la reconstrucción y el desarrollo de la cultura nacional. This movement included musicians, painters, and intellectuals such as Ana Candiotti, Aída Carballo, Diana Dowek, León Gieco, Aimé Painé, Suma Paz, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, and Leda Valladares, among others. Representatives of cultural journalism included Andrés Cascioli (*Humor* magazine), Gabriel Levinas (*El Porteño* magazine), Manuel Amigo, and Jorge Brega (*Nudos* magazine).

²¹ Semana de la cultura de la resistencia.

symbolic productions, defend the rights of cultural producers, oppose commodification, preserve cultural heritage, promote debate, and strengthen experiences of Latin American integration. But its main objective was to build an anti-dictatorial front, encompassing various disciplines, such as painting, theatre, cultural magazines, popular music, etc. Once democracy was reestablished, the collective lost momentum and soon after disbanded.

The transition to the post-dictatorship period represented the establishment of a fragile democracy that was exposed to strong pressures from corporations and the military. This led to shifts in the way the symbolic and political spheres were articulated, and later, to a crisis in democratic expectations. Initially, with the return of democracy, several practices persisted. Heated debates took place, revealing the existence of political differences that had been dormant or postponed under dictatorship. However, these debates gradually lost vigour and their initial impulse faded. In this post-dictatorial context, after a few years, underground cultural life moved to other spaces, such as the punk universe, fanzines and performative experiences.

The return to democracy thus entailed changes in underground magazines and realignments among the cultural agents that produced them. As some publishing projects dissolved, some of their members chose to participate in new publications that sought to reach wider audiences. In other cases, their participants turned to other cultural and political projects. In the last years of 1980, this indicated that the space for dissident publications had lost its power to transform and challenge hegemony, as now, under new circumstances, the reorganisation and transformation of the public sphere had passed into the hands of new agents.

Conclusions

During the last Argentine dictatorship, countercultural magazines played a fundamental role in the country's cultural life. In a context of oppression and persecution, they coalesced society's capacity for expression and managed to rebuild in part the social bonds damaged by state terrorism. Their language, resources, and modes of communication took on a political dimension that enabled these projects to develop group-based approaches, tactics of care, containment, and creative strategies for producing texts and images that defied the limits of censorship and challenged authoritarian power.

In this period, various dissident practices merged to form resistance fronts, turning cultural opposition into one of the main features of the transition period.

Postponing controversies and debates, they concentrated all their efforts on forging bonds of solidarity. These initiatives allowed these resistance fronts to construct collective projects for intervention in the public sphere. These experiences of active cultural resistance aligned themselves with the demands of human rights organisations that denounced state terror and demanded the end of the dictatorship from a utopian perspective based mainly on the recovery of civil rights, and the return of democratic institutions. These cultural spaces for the exchange of ideas and political debate also played an important tactical role as they allowed for the development of common strategies in the final years of the dictatorship. In short, the vital role played by underground magazines spanned the three periods: dictatorship, transition, and first years of democracy.

However, in the post-dictatorship period, a few years after the return to democratic institutions, this cultural movement began to lose momentum as a result of the emergence of other initiatives in the public sphere, and several of these projects withered away, amid a period of disenchantment with the utopian horizon built around the idea of democracy. Some of the causes for this decline were the lack of serious discussions and the superficiality of the ongoing debates in the context of economic and political crisis. While at the beginning of Alfonsín's administration cultural initiatives regained momentum for a short time and political discussions multiplied, by the end of the decade the exhaustion of certain cultural projects, including underground magazines, was evident, in a context marked by a series of events that manifested the weakening and disillusionment of democratic expectations.

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