



Performing Torture in Argentina and Chile

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In a 1990 interview with Marguerite Feitlowitz, Griselda Gambaro discusses the risks of portraying torture on stage. In her plays, she uses what she calls “blatant artifice” in order to avoid what might be “too terrible to watch” (56). According to Feitlowitz, Gambaro uses this distancing technique to “avoid the-torturer-as-most-fascinating-character-syndrome through ridicule, buffoonery¹” (56). The removal of torture to off-stage or distancing it through “blatant artifice” also avoids the risk of eroticizing the torture for the audience, which is a concern mentioned by a number of playwrights in Latin America who were attempting to deal with the kidnappings, tortures, and disappearances of thousands of victims during the dictatorships. According to Amalia Gladhardt, “The difficulty lies in how to make theater *about* torture without recreating its dynamics, without parroting a regime’s deliberate use of torture as spectacle” (156). In an attempt to reduce the chance of torture as spectacle, many Latin American plays including those by Gambaro, Mario Benedetti, and Eduardo Pavlovsky pushed much of the torture offstage or redirected it in some way. Gambaro uses buffoonery; Roberto Cossa’s *El avión negro* uses a dummy as the torture victim; *Pedro y el Capitán* has no onstage torture, nor does *El señor Galíndez*^{2z} nor Mário Prata’s *Fábrica de chocolate*. On occasion there were instances of torture onstage, Severino João Albuquerque points out that “...playwrights of the period have resorted to the eloquence of the theatre in order to express their repugnance toward such practices” (174). As eloquent as it might be, there is a real danger in performing torture that Gambaro and others noted. Nevertheless, there are some performances in Latin America that have surfaced recently as the next generation of what may be called vicarious victims, people who were not direct victims of the dictatorship, attempt to understand and take ownership of what happened during the dictatorships in Chile and Argentina. These artists present a challenge to the concept of distancing those acts of torture from the viewer.³ There are two events or cultural products that I am going to

address here that are considerably more overt in their depiction of the torture that occurred during the Southern Cone dictatorships: “Cuerpo torturado/Cuerpo recuperado,” (“Tortured Body/Recuperated Body”) by Argentine performance artist Silvio De Gracia addresses the 1973 Chilean coup and its dictatorial aftermath, and the Pornoterrorismo performance of “Perfo Luddite” which, in part, deals with the Argentine Dirty War.

These two acts of spectacle and concomitant looking that we are discussing here problematize the way in which traumatic historical events are witnessed. While they offer a means through which the traumas of the past can be viewed and perhaps ameliorated, they cannot completely distance themselves from the problems arising from the fetishization, commercialization, and position as mere spectacle. Furthermore, even if they allow viewers the possibility of a shift in their position from passive object to active subject, they run the risk of distorting the events to the point of unknowability. The Argentine Dirty War and the Chilean coup are events that need to be remembered, one needs to look at the events, events that should never have been seen originally, and address them, but the act of looking can be an ethically risky proposition. Though it is difficult to make any ethical judgment on ways of addressing traumatic pasts, in some cases there seems to be a disconnect between intention and execution caused perhaps by a distorted sense of empathy, economic concerns, or perhaps some combination of those issues.

The idea of putting violence on stage is not necessarily new in Latin America. Violence in Argentine theater and its effects are noted in the 19th century Gaucho plays. Gaucho Theater, for example, included onstage fights that proved problematic for the actors. “The provincial audience recognized themselves in the language, attitudes, and actions of the characters. They joined them both in body and in spirit, as demonstrated by anecdotes about the peasant who jumped into the ring to fight alongside Moreira...” (Versényi 77). Though contemporary audiences have long been acculturated to the conventions of theater and there is not much chance of that level of participation seen in Gaucho Theater, perhaps the most important part of that quote is that audiences

recognized themselves in the plays. While the audiences today might not participate in quite the same way, they still very much see themselves reflected back at them from the stage. The fact that they still recognize themselves means that onstage violence can still have an overwhelming effect on the audience. An important comparison for the type of violence that we are dealing with here comes from a different part of the world and a different genre. In the 1960s, for example, the “Stalags” appeared in Israel and had record breaking sales.

The “Stalags” are pocket books that depict the highly eroticized torture of, and violent sex with Allied, particularly British and US, soldiers during WWII at the hands of busty SS dominatrices. At the end of each story the Allied soldier would escape his bonds then rape and kill his capturers. I will come back to the examples of the “Stalags” several times, but what makes them salient to this discussion is threefold. First, just as with “Perfo Luditte” and “Cuerpo torturado,” the “Stalags” were written and consumed by the generation once removed from the violent acts they are speaking to. Second, the highly sexualized nature of the violence gives us an important point of commonality. Lastly, there is some existing research on the “Stalags” that will provide us with some insights into the performance pieces.

More recently there have been an increasing number of films, performances, and even sites of torture in Latin America that have become sites or texts of remembrance blended with commercial amusement. One term that has surfaced in recent years is trauma tourism. Laurie Beth Clark in “Coming to terms with Trauma Tourism” lists a number of sites around the world that serve the role of a place of remembrance that have also been commodified by those who wish to further financial gain on the backs of those who have suffered. Some sites mentioned and described by Clark include The World Trade Center site in New York City where one could buy photos of the burning buildings; “Krakow, Poland, the former Jewish ghetto of Kazimierz [which] operates as a kind of ‘theme park’ for the disappeared;” Tours of “former slave forts in Ghana and Senegal;” and in Chile and Argentina Villa Grimaldi, ESMA, and Plaza de Mayo serve as tourist destinations (See Clark 2-6). This brings me to the texts themselves. What is

the responsibility of the creators when attempting to create culture that deals with trauma? Are some texts nothing more than traumatainment or is there an empathetic move on the part of the texts that adds value to the discussion of a given historical event?

The principle idea that these cultural products have in common is their willingness to address, directly, the pain and violence of the catastrophes that befell those countries whether they know it or not. The first text is a performance piece by Argentine performance artist Silvio De Gracias called “Cuerpo torturado/Cuerpo recuperado” (Tortured Body/Recovered Body). From the outset there is no mistaking the meaning of the performance as De Gracia solemnly arranges coins on a table, dons a black ski-mask, and contemplates the coins. After almost one minute into his twenty-four minute performance he places his left hand over the mound of coins, removes it and then his right. Starting slowly and building with intensity and frequency he pounds on the coins sitting on a table stopping once to rearrange the pile before pounding it violently with his fist.

Once he finishes hitting the coins with his hand, he lays his head on what is left and then proceeds to slam his head into the coins. These various ways of beating coins continues for almost five minutes before De Gracia removes the mask. This is, of course, the introduction to the conflict and offers the viewer an immediate connection between the Chilean economic situation leading to the destruction of *La moneda*, the word for coin in Spanish as well as the name of the presidential palace. There are various conflicts implied here including the suggestion of the United States commercial interests, Milton Friedman’s economic policies as implemented by the Chicago Boys and Friedman himself. The hidden hand behind the coup as well as the hidden nature of DINA (the Chilean Intelligence Agency). Lastly, there is the aerial attack on the presidential palace by the Chilean air force. Through costuming and props, the performance brilliantly alludes to all of these aspects of the coup. One of the more interesting counter-points is that the violent pounding is clearly more painful to the actor than to either the coins or the table, which turns out not to be the case for Pinochet,



Friedman, or the US. This opening beat, though, sets the tone and conflict for the brutal Pinochet dictatorship which was to come after the short violent military coup that began on September 11th 1973.

In the most explicit section of the performance, and the scene on which I wish to focus, De Gracia slowly unbuttons and removes his shirt then lays it on the floor. He removes his black tee shirt, holds it up over his face momentarily and then places it on the floor as well. His movements during this segment are very deliberate and presentational. He reaches into one of the pockets in his pants, produces a marker, and tosses the cap on the floor. From another pocket De Gracia pulls a red strap and then holds a pose with the marker in his left hand and the red strap in his right as the performance reaches the ten minute mark. It is here that he makes his next clear indication of the coup and torturous Pinochet regime; he writes the year 73 in the middle of his torso in red marker. With a sudden and violent movement, De Gracia strikes himself in the back with the strap. He continues to self-flagellate with a red strap while writing the dates of the dictatorship on his body with the marker starting with 1973 and ending with 1990.

He would beat his back, arms, and stomach and before each strike of the strap, he would write on himself. Once he reaches the end of the dictatorship in terms of years he tosses the strap on the floor and folds his arms momentarily before opening them in a messianic pose. He contemplates his body for a moment from this pose before beginning to wipe the dates away with his hands, which he does with relative ease. Although the next beat, and for me the most powerful segment of the performance, in a way, rescues the facile manner in which De Gracia wipes from his body the dates of the dictatorship; I still have problems with the idea that dictatorship, on any level, can be wiped clean from the body in this manner. There are numerous studies that point to the long term physical and mental effects of the type of torture De Gracia openly demonstrates onstage. Many articles that study the long term effects of torture on victims are in agreement that both physical and psychological symptoms remain that are more than traces of the past. "After an observation period of about 10 years a follow-up

examination was made of 22 Greeks earlier exposed to torture. All had physical symptoms and about 90% of the examinees had chronic psychological symptoms which had appeared after the torture experience, the most notable of which were emotional instability, depression, passivity, fatigue and disturbed sleep. Eight of the victims had a chronic organic psychosyndrome as defined by us” (Peterson, Draminsky, et al 89). Other research found in *The Mental Health Consequences of Torture* and “The Controlled Study of Torture Victims: Epidemiological Considerations and Some Future Aspects” and others concur. The dictatorship is not ephemeral and those who were closer to the actual torture seemed to understand that even if they were not directly exposed, there was enough empathy on their parts that they considered it important to create distance between the actual acts of torture and the simulated action on stage.

The most powerful moment for De Gracia comes as he traces his body, again with his arms stretched out, onto the wall behind him. As he steps way to contemplate the line drawing, his shadow blends with this “shadow” that he has created. On the chest of the outline he writes the date 1973. He rubs his hand around his outline; this time only blurring it slightly and not erasing it completely. A much more apt metaphor for the memories of the dictatorship than the whipping scene.

As the research on torture victims above confirms, for those who suffered torture, the marks are considerably difficult to wipe away. Even if the physical marks were to heal, though this is often not the case, the psychological and emotional scars nevertheless remain. De Gracia tries to elaborate the point that traces of the damage can get passed on generationally. If we remember that De Gracia is of another generation as were, for the most part, the writers and consumers of the “Stalags”, his performance makes a bit more sense. His generation does not bear the marks of physical damage, yet many are still dealing with the traumatic traces. The act of self-flagellation, with this in mind, seems to be an attempt at empathy by a generation that did not feel the Dirty War in the same way as previous generations. The generations that followed the dictatorships in the Southern Cone can often be victims of what is called vicarious traumatization. Therapists, for example, who work with trauma victims can show symptoms of

posttraumatic stress disorder simply by the act of bearing witness to the stories of victims (McCann and Pearlman). By now the stories of what happened in Chile and Argentina are well known to the children of victims and clearly there is an effort, on the part of some of them, to attempt to address those tragedies. De Gracia is endeavoring to tell the story and at the same time, in some way, feel what they felt. There are three drawbacks to the performance, however. The first problem is that with onstage torture, though it is clearly simulated, it runs the risk of “recreating the numbing or terrifying effects of the spectacle the producers of actual torture seek from their audience” (Gladhart 163). While most people, especially those of De Gracia’s generation will not experience terror at the sight of the simulated whipping, it is still a risk. Actual sufferers of PTSD often actively avoid anything that can remind them of their experience, because they may trigger an overwhelming emotional response. The second problem conversely has to do with the simulacrum itself. Though he is striking his body with occasionally hard blows, he is in control of the whipping. During torture, the physical pain is only a part of the terror. There is anticipation of pain and, more importantly, there is lack of control. For example to go back to *El señor Galíndez*, it was enough to show the preparation of the torture, the anticipation of pain and clear loss of control. One becomes an object in the most abject sense of the word. The loss of control, the loss of subjectivity, the loss of humanity is one of the hardest aspects of torture to address in any concrete way. One of the better examples of an artist of any medium is the Peninsular war work of Francisco Goya including, of course, *El tres de mayo de 1808*, *Las pinturas negras*, and *Los desastres de la Guerra*.



“El tres de mayo, 1808.” Francisco de Goya - Museo del Prado, Dominio público,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=18777858>

These paintings address in no uncertain terms, not just the horrors of war in their physical manifestations, but also the loss of control, the dehumanization, the objectification that is the very foundation of torture. For example, in “El tres de mayo, 1808” the vast majority of victims and perpetrators are faceless, and the faces that are depicted are not what is generally expected

from romanticism or later realism. Furthermore, the helplessness depicted in this painting is palpable as victims bury their faces in their hands, trying not to see the traumatic events unfolding in front of them.



“Los desastres de guerra, Plate 3 Aquí Tampoco.”
 Francisco de Goya - Museo del Prado, Dominio público,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25076261>

Again, these are not exactly realistic paintings, they go beyond the mere recording of events and delve into the psychological aspects of their subjects. About one hundred years ahead of their time, these paintings by Goya are the nightmarish depictions of war that will resurface with a vengeance in Picasso’s “Guernica.” This distancing from realism allows for an intellectualization of the traumas without as much

concern for the triggering of psychological distress on the part of the viewer.

Lastly, there is the risk of eroticizing the action. In fact, there is an abundance of porn that is dedicated to just this aspect of eroticism through simulated torture where both men and women serve as sadists and masochists and where the act of sex is secondary to the pleasure of giving and receiving pain. Again, this differs from actual torture in that the participants consent to the treatment and the masochists set limits to their pain. Although the risk of eroticizing the torture of prisoners of the Dirty War is not a factor for every audience member it is enough of a risk that many playwrights, as mentioned above, refused to attempt direct scenes of torture. Pornoterrorismo, as we will see later, tries to upend this risk, however, De Gracia does not really address the issue.

The risks of De Gracia’s performance are great, however, there is something more to this performance. Just as Pinchevski and Brand point out in “Holocaust Perversion: The Stalags, Pulp Fiction, and the Eichmann Trial,” the Stalags gave young

Israelis a sense of power, there is a measure of control, or the reversal of being dehumanized by torture, in the making and viewing of a sadomasochism. “We argue that the Stalags constituted a text upon which Israeli youth negotiated issues of power and identity vis-à-vis both their parents’ generation and Zionist ideology” (400). The power in the Stalags, “Cuerpo torturado/cuerpo recuperado,” and Pornoterrorismo is undeniable. This younger generation seems to have found other ways by which they seek to take control of their subjectivity, and even their bodies, something that was in short supply during the dictatorship. One of the ways in which the Stalags, “Cuerpo torturado/cuerpo recuperado,” and Pornoterrorismo take control is through depictions of what is best described as BDSM.

There have been numerous studies regarding the nature of BDSM activities and I want to start with some basic principles. BDSM often is used as an umbrella acronym for activities including Bondage, Discipline, Dominance and Submission, and Sadism and Masochism. According to an article in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, “People with sexual interests in bondage and discipline (B&D), sexual ‘sadism,’ and/or ‘masochism’ (S&M or SM), or dominance and submission (D/s) have long been seen by medicine, the law, and the caring professions as at best damaged (in need of therapy) and at worst dangerous (in need of legal or social regulation)” (Richters et al 1660). However, Richters et al. go on to conclude that this is not the case. “Our findings support the idea that BDSM is simply a sexual interest or subculture attractive to a minority, and that for most participants, BDSM activities are not a pathological symptom of past abuse or of difficulty with “normal” sex. This confirms the conclusions of other empirical studies based on purposive samples” (1667). That said, there is a way in which both dominant and submissive or sadist and masochist exercise control over their bodies and sexual desires. In fact, there are two other acronyms involved in the BDSM lifestyle that are important to note here. The first is SSC or “Safe, Sane, and Consensual. Sane, Safe, and Consensual which is practically a mantra in the community has three aims: it attempts to prevent risks to health; asks that activities be done while in a functional frame of mind, or rather, not impaired by drugs, alcohol, or emotional

concerns; lastly that all activities have consent of all involved parties. The other acronym is RACK or Risk-Aware Consensual Kink. People who advocate RACK understand that nothing is completely safe and that all parties need to be aware of the risks and consent to those activities while being sound of mind. I will return to these distinctions when discussing “Pornoterrorismo.”

The rising BDSM subculture in both Chile and Argentina is interesting considering their recent pasts and previous unwillingness to discuss the violence that took place in those countries. It is nearly impossible to get accurate numerical statistics on participants as it is a fairly closed and careful subculture. Yet, scanning the websites, one finds BDSM activities held on a regular basis and the active community seems to be growing exponentially. To get a little more concrete about the demographics of participants who are willing to share this information in private chat rooms and other online organizations, as of 2016, in Chile approximately one percent of participants are over the age of 45. Even a 45 year old would have been less than 10 years old at the time of the coup. In Argentina the number of active participants over the age of 45 rises to approximately 10 percent. That said, in casual conversations with members of the community, the similarities between the violence perpetrated during the dictatorships and the simulated violence in BDSM was something that had not even occurred to them. For the most part, these were the children, literally and metaphorically, of the victims of violence and similar to the youth in Israel, this generation is searching for its own identity and sense of power.

Another important aspect of BDSM that needs to be noted comes from Pinchevski and Brand who note that, “S/M is not properly an act of violence, sexual or otherwise. Rather, it is an act of staging violence, performance of a game that draws on social stereotypes for the sake of sexual pleasure” (400). This staging of violence seems to be prevalent, not just among the practitioners of BDSM but also in the texts covered here. Both De Gracia and Torres stage the violence as opposed to commit acts of actual violence. Although these “games” may not be for the sake of sexual pleasure, they are

drawing on actual acts of violence as a way of commenting on that violence. However, both follow the consensual aspect of both the SCC and RISK protocols.

Another aspect of BDSM that is in play with both of these performances is the concept of “power-exchange,” the fantasy of power and powerlessness are just fantasies and there are agreements made in advance as to the limits of those powers and often safety protocols in place that supersede the exchange of power. That is to say, the relationship between the dominant and submissive or the sadist and the masochist is surprisingly egalitarian and, I want to add, not dependent on gender whereas the torture in both Chile and Argentina played to a very specific set of government determined gender roles. As Diana Taylor points out, “Gender, then, was not simply the regulatory social system through which each sex assumed and incorporated the attributes assigned to it; it was also performative in that gender roles could be assumed or imposed, either unconsciously and apparently “naturally,” or through open or coercive acts of violence” (34). The dictatorships described themselves in familial terms with the leaders being the male “father-figures” while the opposition was often described in the worst feminine stereotypes. The fact is that the rest of the country was to see itself in a subservient role as either children who need to heed the father or as wives who were in a position to serve. In contrast to the dictatorships, in the BDSM community all aspects of the relationships are up for negotiation including gender. Again, according to Pinchevski and Brand, “S/M [is] an arena for negotiating questions of power, gender, and identity through the pleasurable performance of sexual fantasies” (400). The negotiation is the biggest difference between the torture of the dictatorships and the torture that is performed with the confines of a BDSM relationship. Though the acts may seem eerily similar, for example, as did the torture in Chile and Argentina, BDSM may include verbal abuse, bondage, imprisonment, beatings, electrocution, cutting, and the like. The difference is that the participants in BDSM are to enter into the contract willingly and always have the option to end the activities following either the SSC or the RISK protocols. This choice was not available to the victims of dictatorships.

Perhaps the most direct attempt at using BDSM as performance in order to contest history is Diana Torres's "Pornoterrorismo" of which "Perfo Luddite" is a part. In her manifesto, Torres claims that "Pornoterrorismo" is political direct action aimed at a mostly unnamed enemy, but includes heteronormative sex, the Vatican, dictatorship, and capitalism.

Pornoterrorismo, la caja de herramientas de activismo multidisciplinario que creó Diana en 2006, aúna prácticas artísticas y géneros políticos: poesía, ensayo, acción directa, talleres, video, activismo a través de internet, aunque el concepto en sí está firmemente arraigado en la performance y el spoken-word. Desde hace más de 8 años, PORNOTERRORISMO ha estado en constante diálogo con el público y Diana ha estado combinando sus ideas feministas con un curioso sentido del humor para asaltar sin piedad la cerrazón de mente y la hipocresía en todas sus formas mediante los golpes de hacha que sólo una afilada lengua poética puede entregar. (<http://pornoterrorismo.com/about/>)

What is clear from the description of Pornoterrorismo is that it has a far more radical agenda than that of De Gracia. Though the goals are amorphous, there is the clear sense that Torres is attempting to affect change in a more direct manner and as such she has written several manifestos that include a number of very general goals. "El Pornoterrorismo puede (o no) tratarse de una forma de representación artística, un arma política, una carrera personal, una terapia -de choque-, una herramienta de difusión de ideas, una forma de follar, un fetiche, una tocadura de pelotas, una venganza, un juguete para locxs y mil cosas más" (N.P.). The manifesto itself is ambivalent when it comes to effectiveness of the goals stated, which are wide ranging. One of the primary questions when it comes to these performances is what sort of effect do they have, or are they as the manifesto states mere fetish. I asked Torres directly if she has seen any results or consequences to "Pornoterrorismo." In an email exchange with Torres, she claims that "Pornoterrorismo" has an effect on a micro-political level. "Es decir de a poquito y a poquitas personas," she continues, "creo que se ha promovido la idea de recuperar el cuerpo como estrategia de lucha, romper la cárcel interior, combatir al enemigo al otro lado del espejo" (Torres email). In an attempt to achieve the goals of attacking

patriarchy, creating a form of therapy, a shock, and retaking control of the body from government, Torres staged “Perfo luddite en Valencia” with Argentine artist Leonor Silvestri in Valencia, Spain. Using the combination of live sex-acts, sadomasochism, and poetry onstage the two performers attempted to address a number of social issues including sexual violence, torture, dictatorship, and the holocaust. Unlike De Gracia, there is no through line to the performance. It is a series of vignettes that are connected only by acts of BDSM, sex, and the vague goals espoused by Torres in the *Pornoterrorismo* manifesto.

The scene, on which I want to focus, deals directly with the torture endured by many during the dirty war in Argentina and its relationship to gender and performativity. Torres seems to understand this relationship:

Just as gender is a performative act, what Judith Butler describes as an ‘identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts,’ nation-ness is also performative. Both gender and nation-ness (which, I will argue, are the product of each other’s performance and therefore difficult to imagine separately) are oppositional and exclusionary –just as one is male opposed to female, one is Argentinean as opposed to something else. Both are inscribed on physical bodies. (Taylor 92)

In this scene which opens with the Argentine, Silvestri, sitting on a couch and Torres bent over her lap, the performance attempts to re-inscribe the body in new and shocking ways. Silvestri is holding a microphone in one hand and a large dildo in the other. Into the microphone she says, “Father, from you...” She pauses at this moment to hit Torres with the dildo reinforcing the concept of the father and the phallogentric nature of the torture. She continues, “I learned fear, terror, and panic”. Silvestri drops the phallus and strikes Torres furiously with her hand. There is almost an uncontrolled anger in her as she hits Torres. One can see and sense the rage she seems to feel over the dictatorship, nation, and gender. While De Gracia is silent, controlled, detached; Silvestri and Torres are loud, visceral, and connected. Into the microphone, she continues to list what she learned from the dictatorship, including how to rape, murder,

and water board. On occasion she screams her line, the distortion of the screaming sometimes makes the words difficult to understand. She continues to punctuate the list by hitting Torres. The scene invokes the familial relationship between father and child as Silvestri spans Torres, which, in turn, implicates the patriarchal position adopted by the Argentine junta and the imposed gender roles. Overall, the segment lasts little more than a minute in the 18 minute performance that I was able to see, however, there is an emotional connection to the torture that is rarely seen onstage. At the end, she screams “Horrible girl, dirty girl, why were you ever born?” With this she shoves Torres to the floor. The audience in Valencia bursts into applause.

According to Taylor, “Doing one’s nation-ness/gender ‘correctly’ promises privilege and a sense of belonging, yet involves coercive mechanisms of identification. National/gender identity is not so much a question of being as doing, of being seen doing, of identifying with the appropriate performative model” (92). The one thing that “Perfo luddite” does is challenge the “appropriate” performative model both in terms of gender and national identity. Just as De Gracia inscribes and reinscribes his body, albeit in temporary, and perhaps superficial ways, Torres and Silvestri offer performative models that radically and permanently reinscribe the body.

“Perfo luddite” is an extreme version of “Tortured Body/Recovered Body” and both performances ultimately run the same risks; “Perfo,” of course, to a much greater extent. Although the political messages in both the “Pornoterrorismo” performances and the manifesto are made explicit, Torres claims that her performances are a tool in the war against the hetero-normative social constructs, dictatorship, torture, and the like and during her performances, for example, she makes reference to Hitler and the Dirty Wars of the Southern Cone, there is still the problem of pleasure. It is problematic precisely because the performance makes a link between pleasure and these acts of actual violence, actual terror, and actual trauma. The claim that “Pornoterrorismo” is “a new way to construct the use of pleasure and reprogram our desires” (N.P.) does not change the fact that the acts are, to some, in particular to the audience and the performers, purely pleasurable and creates a level of confusion that Gambaro and others consciously

avoided. In fact, the only place I could find the clip as of November 29, 2015 is on a site called “Cliphunter” that is a porn aggregating site that features ads for porn sites, and sites that promise free anonymous sex. Regardless of the intentions of Torres and Silvestri, the political message, or even the use of pleasure as a political message is, if not lost, at least diluted by its inclusion here. The performance is being read as fetish; it becomes the “*objet a*” but in the way that “the *objet a* bears a structural similarity to the ‘commodity’: it is not a concrete object but also a ghostly value, a false essence carried by the concrete object and constituted through the process of exchange” (Kripps 21). The false essence, however, may be implicit in the object itself. Regardless of the intention of the artists, the object carries with it a multiplicity of meanings. While this is often the case, the objects in this particular event point, primarily to something that they are trying to contest. One way to look at this clip is, perhaps, through no fault of its own, it becomes stripped of its “aura” in a Benjaminian sense. “Looking at someone carries the implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze” (Benjamin 188). A live performance has an “aura” and the gaze is instantaneously returned and interrogated. On the other hand, just as a daguerreotype, the appropriated video cannot, in any sense of the phrase, return the gaze. Had Torres been able to retain control of the video, there is a way in which she could digitally “return the gaze,” however, since the performance’s video has been appropriated by a porn aggregator site, we are looking at someone who cannot return the look and meaning is assigned by the voyeur leaving Torres, or rather her object, the original performance at risk as the change in medium and its reception can alter the reception of the original performance. The risk, in the end, is that these types of performances will distort the original traumas they are trying to address by adding a level of pleasure to these acts of violence by using sexual pleasure or the pleasure of looking as they attempt to come to terms with horrific acts of violence.

A generation removed from the state sponsored acts of terrorism in Chile and Argentina; people are still trying to understand those heinous acts. There is residual trauma that gets passed on through the generations: disrupted families, interrupted lives,



secrets not revealed to spare the children the pain of the Dirty War. These younger generations, however, are attempting to approach these residual traumas from a distinctive and decidedly more direct approach. They are struggling to create empathetic connections to past generations and in that effort there are both rewards and risks. The rewards are control of the body never seen before at this level of intensity, they use forms of BDSM as a tool to retake power. “In such instances the cultural practice of S/M serves as a response to and a way to deal with socially coded power relations” (Pinchevski and Brand 401). Pain, pleasure, and fear are all accepted and completely controlled by the participants. In powerful ways, they take ownership of the traumatic events. Conversely, the unmediated use of pain, pleasure, and fear has a distorting effect on the very traumatic acts the performances are attempting to address. There are reasons why posttraumatic culture creates distance, without this distance the ability to intellectualize the traumas and discuss them on a less than emotional level. Posttraumatic culture is always a triggering event. It is not meant as a corrective but instead start conversations regarding one’s trauma. One, though, ought to be careful with the triggers as they can overwhelm the viewer. The question regarding whether or not these cultural products, produced by the next generation can serve a therapeutic experience for the viewers, as well as for the participants has yet to be determined and it is this exploration and negotiation of the traumatic past is something that should propel the second wave of trauma studies for the foreseeable future.

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Notes

1 This interview is also available online at <http://bombmagazine.org/article/1345/griselda-gambaro>.

2 *El señor Galíndez* pushes the envelope of onstage torture more so than the others as the would-be torturers prepare to torture two prostitutes. This act, in my mind, falls within the realm of torture as the two bodies are being acted upon. However, there are some interesting aspects built into the scene. The first is the fact that the torture never begins in earnest as it is interrupted by a telephone call. Second, is that there is purposeful ambiguity in it for exactly the reason so many were concerned about torture on stage. Though the scene breaks off just before the physical torture begins, there is clearly a risk of eroticizing the torture. The fact that the play specifically uses the word prostitutes, creates enough ambiguity to cause confusion. David Foster Williams discusses this ambiguity in “Ambigüedad verbal y dramática en *El señor Galíndez* de Eduardo Pavlovsky,” “A través de este bosquejo general de la pieza, se puede ver cómo el impacto dramático depende de una mbigüedad crucial referente a las actividades de Beto, Pepe y Eduardo. Aunque al principio entendamos que se trata de algo extraordinario, no podemos determinar cuál es, exactamente, el oficio de estos hombres, por qué se han reunido, y cuál es la función del cuarto donde están y de los temas de conversación” (106).

3 Distanciantion, which is a concept that is often used by Bertolt Brecht, creates a distance between the action onstage and the audience. For Brecht this was often done so that the audience had the opportunity to develop an understanding of the message on an intellectual level as opposed to getting wrapped up emotionally in the story or the characters. For posttraumatic theater, distanciantion operates on multiple levels. Often it prevents over-identification with characters as well as gives the audience the space to think about the action on an intellectual level. Lastly, and perhaps more importantly for the discussion here, it also protects members of the audience from being overwhelmed emotionally by the intense subject matter. Notes

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