THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NATIONAL MEMORY THROUGH THE POPULAR CULTURE.
THE CASE OF THE ARGENTINIAN TV SHOW, PETER CAPUSOTTO Y SUS VIDEOS AND THE APOCRYPHAL MUSICIAN, BOMBITA RODRÍGUEZ, EL PALITO ORTEGA MONTONERO

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**Abstract** | This article addresses the borders of the complex television sign through the analysis of the Argentinian TV show *Peter Capusotto y sus videos*. Here we find that humor is used as a mechanism to dismantle binary hierarchic political and social oppositions. The program is presented as a musical and comedy TV show where concepts such as popular culture and mass culture are questioned through different false musicians. We focus our attention in the character of *Bombita Rodríguez*, *el Palito Ortega montonero* due to the controversy generated in the cultural scene by the fact of bringing up recent aspects of Argentinian history.

**Key-words** | Television | parody | popular culture | Linda Hutcheon | Stuart Hall | *Peter Capusotto y sus videos.* 

The operation of naturalized codes reveals not the transparency and 'naturalness' of language but the depth, the habituation and the <near-universality> of the codes in use. They produce apparently 'natural' recognitions. This has the (ideological) effects of concealing the practices of coding which are present. But we must not be fooled by appearances. Actually, what naturalized codes demonstrate is the degree of habituation produced when there is a fundamental alignment and reciprocity an achieved equivalence – between the encoding and decoding sides of an exchange of meanings. (Hall, 1973:131)

The severity or level of the habit is, according to Hall, the producer of the «naturalization» of language. For which reason, the analysis of the praxis forming the habit is essential to demonstrate the encoding of the binary signs.

The massive character of television is one of the reasons for the media indoctrination. That is, in favor of the interest of a hegemonic speech, the *goggle-box* is the perfect spoke person to be the pamphlet of the dominant ideologies. However, in more than one occasion television itself has parodied<sup>1</sup> and has parodied itself giving clear proof of the manipulation of which it is a participant.

### 0. Todo por dos pesos, the esthetic politics or the politics esthetic of a critical television

During the last decade, in Argentina several artists have come up with an esthetic proposal that reveals the crisis the country is going through. Via humor, television is used as a passable mechanism for questioning the political and cultural establishment.

Shows like *Cha Cha Cha* by Alfredo Casero (1992), *Todo por dos pesos* (1999-2002)<sup>2</sup>, run by Fabio Alberti and Diego Capusotto and produced by Marcelo Tinelli and *Peter Capustto y sus videos. Un programa de rock* (2006-2008), show up humor as a tool to demonstrate the binary

### **NOTES**

- 1 | We do understand parody as an opposition or contrast between two texts from the addition of a base text in a new text teasingly imitating its characteristics. It is intended to cause a comic, ridiculous or degrading effect; to make a difference or contrast between both texts, diverting the meaning of the parodied text towards a new one (Hutcheon, 1992).
- 2 | The title refers, in a tone of parody, to the stores with imported objects, mainly from China, with ornaments and cheap products of doubtful good taste, which proliferated in Argentina during the period of convertibility between the dollar and the national currency, associated with the kitsch.

hierarchic oppositions. That is, through specific discursive strategies, humor favors and results in a demystifying effect deploying a process of deconstruction. We understand that as an operation about the speech which aim is to, as Derrida says (1997), «undo» the grouped senses, to dismantle the net of meanings adhered to the sign or the principle like a core constituting it.

In different contexts (*Cha Cha*, during the peak of the first government of Carlos Menen; *Todo por dos pesos*, during Menen's second government and, lastly, *Peter Capusotto y sus videos*, during the government of Nestor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner), the shows began a wave of critical and intelligent humor in the Argentinian media scene. With a low budget but a lot of creativity, they achieved their own place in television.

The Argentinian TV show *Peter Capusotto y sus videos. Un programa de rock*, is an example of how television humor can dismantle the trap. The current essay is the analysis of the character created by Diego Capusotto, *Bombita Rodríguez, el Palito Ortega montonero.* Under the auspices of Channel 7, the national one, the actor and comedian plays, in just one hour, different characters that parody the national and international musical scene. The counterpoint among videos of rock and humorous sketches is part of the dynamic of the show.

Beto Quantron, Roberto Quenedi, Ricky Balboa, Bobby McFerrum, Micky Vainilla, Fabián Crema, Pomelo, Juan Carlos Pelotudo, Bob Nervio, Beverly Di Tomasso, Luis Almirante Brown and Bombita Rodríguez, among others, are part of the pantheon of characters accompanying Peter Capusotto every Monday at 11 p.m. As the title *Un programa de rock* itself explains, the proposal consist of one hour of original and apocryphal music videos.

The script is written by Diego Capusotto and Pedro Saborido, who, in turn, is the artistic producer of the show. Little by little, the show has become the product with the best popularity rating and one of the most successful shows of the Argentinian television. In contrast to big productions like *Dancing for a dream* and *Big brother, Peter Capusotto y sus videos* emerges as a fresh and original proposal. The show has become a cult stage for all music and Capusotto's humor lovers. The character's echo has reached the Web: Bombita Rodríguez has its own Web page and its own page in the social network Facebook, where there is an application called *Capusottitos*, which consists in giving rock stars' portraits created by the artist<sup>3</sup>.

### **NOTES**

3 | http://www.facebook.com/ home.php#/pages/Bombita Rodriguez/20402468418?re f=ts. Véase también la web de Bombita Rodríguez, http:// bombitarodriguez.com.ar. In our opinion, the most emblematic character is Bombita Rodríguez, el Palito Ortega montonero. It has generated a lot of controversy due to the contents of its songs and the parallel to our nation's recent history. For that, we take the figure as a cultural object, which reveals, through parody, the Manichean game of representations. «Postmodernist parody is a value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through

### According to Linda Hutcheon, postmodernist parody has a subversive character as it deconstructs the intrigue that hatches the history of representations. Through the epithet of el Palito Ortega montonero, Capusotto provides us with the context of the convulsed Argentinian 1960s and 1970s<sup>4</sup>. The singer he mentions is a musician from Tucumán, a North Argentinian province, famous for his popular songs and disaffected films that take up again hegemonic values.

irony, the politics) of representations» (Hutcheon, 1993: 188).

Before continuing with our analysis, we consider it is appropriate to define the concept «hegemony». We start from Antonio Gramsci's definition (apud Soto Reyes, 2000), maintaining that there is a dominant class controlling and directing a whole society through moral and social leadership, that is, he recognizes the existence of a group of controllers and a group of controlled, one of rulers and another of ruled. It is important to highlight that the exercise of this power is done or obtained through repressions, negotiations, concessions, etc. Gramsci also affirms that the hegemony cannot always be reached through repression, but also through the control of institutions. For example, the media participate in the education/ training of the subdued classes. We must take into account that when we talk about hegemonic values, we are referring to concepts like «nation», «country», «family», etc., which approve the middleclass ideology.

We think it is appropriate to explore the figure of the musician from Tucumán to observe the intertextuality he maintains with the character created by Capusotto, el Palito Ortega montonero, since, as Hutcheon affirms (1993), parody puts politics in the foreground of representation. Ramón Bautista Ortega, known as *Palito*, for his thin and languid figure, becomes a landmark of the popular Argentinian culture. His humble origins, his trip to the big city, Buenos Aires, looking for opportunities and his sudden success crown the artist's career. This construction of the teenage idol was conveyed by whichever government happened to be in power.

### **NOTES**

4 | Also see Hoggart (1970), Jordan (1986), Williams (2000) and Johnson (2004)

Palito personifies the supposed values of the youth of the time. For that reason, Bombita Rodríguez's epithet is absolutely justified. The musician emerges from the people, and becomes a popular artist. Stuart Hall (1984) makes a triple distinction of the adjective «popular». In the first place, it can be understood as an object of mass consumption. Thus, it gives clear proof of the market politics associated with manipulation and, according to Hall, with the degradation of the people's culture. Obviously, «people» is not a monolithic concept, but a construct allowing politics of the power to exert certain conservative trends when forming subjectivities. Second distinction is about understanding popular culture as that emerging from the «people». It is worth noting that both «youth» and «people» are used in hegemonic speeches as «universal hiders» (Rolón et al., 1998), that is, stylistic generalizations absolutely out of context. This latter concept of the adjective «popular» is the most common one among social sciences, having a mobile character as it depends, precisely, on what each time understands for «people». Popular culture is not exempt from the power struggle, quite the reverse; it is absolutely intrinsic to the tension among classes. This last observation is the third definition of the adjective 'popular' recognized by Stuart Hall<sup>5</sup>.

During the presidency of Juan Domingo Perón, the word «people» was one of the government's valid slogans to gain popular support. The General's paternalistic politics and Eva Duarte's emblematic figure tinged their time with populist tendencies against the oligarchy of Buenos Aires. The Argentinian president emphasized the working class as the key of the country's economy. His protectionist politics was very criticized by the more conservative sectors, while the upper classes saw their life standards threatened by the arrival of «cabecitas negras», contemptuous epithet with which they referred to the residents from inland, that is, all those who were not an oligarch or from Buenos Aires.

The Peronist proposal committed an outrage against the middle-class from Buenos Aires. The image of *Palito Ortega*, a young man from Tucumán who arrives at the capital city and achieves success with familiar songs, catches on the popular culture. He becomes the icon not of a American, but Argentinian, dream. When afterwards, the government of Isabel Martínez Perón fall by the government de facto, this character gains more relevance. His resonance joins the wave of musicians dominating the media: Vieja Guardia, Música en Libertad, Sótano Beat, Sandro, Leo Dan, Leonardo Favio, among other artists that during the 1960s and 1970s do corner the Argentinian music market; a cliché that Diego Capusotto takes up again in his show. Moreover, Bombita Rodríguez, among other characters, is part of the

### **NOTES**

- 4 | Also see Hoggart (1970), Jordan (1986), Williams (2000) and Johnson (2004)
- 5 | During this period, Argentina experienced several changes of government, usually resulting from a coup d'état. Those governments were characterized by continuous social and labor demands. Thus, the armed groups, from the left and the right wings, appear, many of which join with the Peronism, though there are also other non Peronist radicalized groups gaining force, like PRT - ERP (Worker's Revolutionary Party -People's Revolutionary Army). Among the Peronist armed organizations, the nationalistcatholic, the Montoneros, the Marxist-Peronist, FAR (Revolutionary Armed Forces) and, to a lesser degree, FAP (Peronist Armed Forces) and FAL (Armed Liberation Forces), did stand out. The action of these groups lied in the use of bombs directed at specific persons and places. Bombita refers to the terrorist dynamics, but in diminutive, going deeply into the character's parodic nature. Moreover, the abbreviations are used as parts of the song La sonrisa de mamá es como la de Perón, from the apocryphal musician.

'Parnassus of the idols': Nicolino Roche and his Pasteros Verdes, a pop band formed by three musicians addicted to the psychotropic drugs who can only say incomprehensible sentences due to the excess of medication; Quiste Sebáceo, a musician adoring Satan who nobody takes seriously because he talks with the Z; Berverly Di Tomasso, the Uruguayan rocker the audience stopped booing the day he included special effects in his concerts because he noticed that «nowadays, only music is not enough in shows»<sup>6</sup>, among others. Capusotto laughs not only at rockers, but at the whole music industry.

## 1. La sonrisa de mamá or the popular music in the construction of subjectivity.

As we mentioned previously, the character is introduced as *el Palito Ortega montonero*. The reminiscences to the Argentinian dark past are explicit. Montoneros was a guerrilla organization that, since 1970 until 1979, struggled for the demand of power of Juan Domingo Perón. Its main objective was to undermine the de facto government of Alejandro Agustín Lanusse and, through the General, to establish a «national socialism» in the country. The armed confrontation culminated in the overthrow of the government of Estela Martínez de Perón the 24<sup>th</sup> of May, 1976. The military bloody dictatorship begun then, lasting until 1983.

Bombita Rodríguez's epithet is absolutely justified. In his songs, the apocryphal musician shows the ideology<sup>7</sup>, in tone of parody, of the Montoneros organization. The show Peter Capusotto y sus videos shows, in its different programs, a part of the life of this «popular singing» from the 1960s: his story as a musician, movie actor, his media success and later exile in Cuba, where he takes part in advertising campaigns and TV shows. «He achieved to amalgamate the virulent ideological lyrical poetry of some, with the popular intuition of other products for massive consumption. Revolution and cheap and catchy melodies to build up an idol...», this is how the commentator differentiates Bombita8. The musician is introduced over a black and white video full of library pictures. The synthesis of an era, the commentator says: «What a time, the 1960s. Politics, rebelliousness and dreams of a better world». His discography consists of two records: Ritmo, amor y materialismo dialéctico and La sonrisa de mamá es como la de Perón. His movie career: Amor y frente de masas, Me gustan tus ojos y tu pensamiento leninista, Que linda es mi familia. Lástima que sean unos burgueses sin conciencia Nacional, Las aventuras del montonero invisible and Montoneros y los burócratas sindicales del espacio. He made his TV shows in Cuba, where he is in exile: Video Marx and 100 % lucha de clases.

### **NOTES**

- 6 | http://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=DL8kPgIBzTA
- 7 | We use Louis Althusser's (1971) concept of ideology, understanding it as a system of representations through which both men and women live their relationships with the conditions of existence. It is the sum of a body of ideas and a set of practices.
- 8 | Bombita's part usual presentation in the show.

Moreover, he took part in numerous commercial breaks promoting different products associated with massive consumption.

The analogy with *Palito Ortega* allows us to reflect on the role of art in the production of representations. The musician from Tucumán achieves some success in the 1960s and 1970s. While in Argentina thousands of people were entering the sad denomination of «disappeared», *La felicidad*, *Despeinada*, *Media novia*, *Bienvenido amor*, *Creo en Dios*, *La sonrisa de mamá* and other popular songs were played in the media. With this analysis, we do not mean to issue a value judgment about the musician's participation in the Process of National Reorganization, but to demonstrate the practices of reproduction and/or naturalization of concepts.

La música es un discurso cultural más que no sólo refleja la realidad en la que surge, sino que también contribuye a su creación a través de la afirmación o deconstrucción de estereotipos. (Viñuela y Viñuela, 2008: 296)

We want to analyze one particular song to see, precisely, the affirmation in one case and the deconstruction in the other of stereotypes. Ortega, as we mentioned previously, personifies the hegemonic speech and affirms binary representations about woman. Bombita Rodríguez's apocryphal song is about this same chosen song. In 1972, Palito leads, together with Libertad Lamarque *La sonrisa de mama* movie. The film, directed by Enrique Carreras, emphasizes the family values and the image of a mother in the moment of the moral configuration of her children. The main song, *La sonrisa de mamá*<sup>9</sup>, is a duet between the both main characters.

Esa flor que está naciendo. Ese sol que brilla más todo eso se parece a la sonrisa de mamá.

Esa rosa que despierta ese río que se va todo eso se parece a la sonrisa de mamá.

La dulzura de tus ojos tu mirada, tu candor la sonrisa, la ternura de tu voz. Tu palabra es el ejemplo es el remanso del amor ella borra mi tristeza, mi dolor.

### **NOTES**

9 | http://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=VR- CdRn4yM Me contagio de alegría cuando tu conmigo estás porque tengo tu cariño mi sonrisa brilla más.

A tu lado tengo todo tu eres mi felicidad tu tristeza es la mía y tu canto mi cantar.

The analogies on which this song is built are about elements of nature: «flower», «sun», «river», «rose». These concepts are equivalent to mum's smile. Moreover, it is associated with warmth and protection. Eduardo y Laura Viñuela (2008) highlight the fact of the genre identities within the patriarchal system in popular music. The system binary basis (man-woman) sets out, in turn, two antagonistic models of women: the «good» and the «bad». In the first group, we find the mother, the faithful wife, the virgin. In the second one, we have the prostitute, the *femme fatale*. The chosen song responds to the first model: «Tu palabra es el ejemplo/ es el remanso del amor/ ella borra mi tristeza mi dolor»; verses intensifying the unconditional maternal love and protection.

Bombita Rodríguez, the character created by Capusotto, has an apocryphal song of the one previously discused. In this case, the song is titled: La sonrisa de mamá se parece a la de Perón. The parody is obvious. «His mother, Evelyn Tacuara, the most famous star of the Argentinian catholic nationalism, inculcated in him the passion for music, but his father, Grunkel Cacho Abramov, better known as Payaso Barricada, the most renowned clown of Trotskyism, bequeathed him his passion for masses», the commentator explains. The musician's genealogy is also parodied. In the show, the popular singer shows his ideological enmity with his mum, Evelyn Tacuar. This opposition is due to the fact that mother and sun are on opposite streets; Bombita is a montonero and Evelyn, a middle-class capitalist. The Tacuara National Movement was an extreme right-wing political organization that used terrorism (1955-1965). The group was related to the most conservative sectors of the Peronist movement and directly inspired by the preaching of Julio Meinville, a catholic priest, and Jaime María de Mahieu, a French sociologist. Tacuara defends a strongly nationalist, catholic, fascist, anti-communist, anti-Semitic and antidemocrat ideology.

In contrast to the song of *Palito Ortega*, Bombita sings, in Mother's Day, the song to be reconciled with her: La *sonrisa de mamá es como la de* Perón<sup>10</sup>.

### **NOTES**

10 | http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wc3Ob6OqNIc

Siempre veo tu sonrisa y yo pienso con amor la sonrisa de mamá es como la de Perón.

La sonrisa de mamá es como la de Perón.

Aunque odies al cabecita que genera plusvalía y que tomando las armas pronto te combatirá. Aunque seas una cerda vende patria y gorila yo te quiero porque vos sos mi mamá (ER-ERP)

Siempre veo tu sonrisa y yo pienso con amor la sonrisa de mamá (FAP-FAR) es como la de Perón (PRT)

The analogies with the elements of nature disappear, the mother does not protect anymore; she is not an example. In the association of the patriarchal system, women belonged to a given group, and mother belonged to the first, regardless of whether she was good or bad. In the version of Capusotto, she is in neither of them. The parody, according to Hutcheon, is «both deconstructively critical and constructively creative, paradoxically making us aware of both of the limits and the powers of representation, in any medium» (Hutcheon, 1993: 192). Bombita's complaints are due to the ideological stance of her mother. «Vende patria», «gorila» y «cerda» are the names linked to the middle-class, particularly, to the oligarchy from Buenos Aires.

We demonstrate a double ironic game in Bombita Rodríguez's parody. On the one hand, the deconstruction of the wife/mother model, supported by Ortega's song and, on the other hand, the frivolity and the irreverence with which Argentinian history goes by allows us to glimpse a criticism of the current politics. This aspect, to the best of our knowledge, represents the most crucial moment of the program. We ask ourselves what Capusotto says when he says what he says from the national channel. Linda Hutcheon reflects on the nature of the parody. It is a warning presented by the artist about others plays.

In this reflection we can read, ideologically, the projections of the program through the character of Bombita Rodríguez.

As form of ironic representation, parody is doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies. This kind of authorized transgression is what makes it a ready vehicle for the political contradictions of postmodernism al large. (Hutcheon, 1993: 194)

On the one hand, it legitimates the parodied text, that is, the popular culture of the Argentinian 1960s and 1970s and, on the other, it subverts it proving the level of the representations' codification. Now, we can ask what the reason for a character like *Bombita Rodríguez*, el *Palito Ortega montonero* is. The ridiculed political burden has a lot of detractors of the character. It is judged to trivialize the Argentinian obscure history. Linda Hutcheon gives an answer to the parodic game: all you have to do is «look around you» (Hutcheon, 1993: 199).

In May 2008, cannel 7 broadcasted the musician's first block in a political context convulsed by the quarrels between the government and the agrarian groups. During several months, the tension paralyzed the country. The squads on the roads, the lack of supplies in the inland and the inflexible attitude of the President caused the resurgence of words like «working class», «proletariat» and «middle-class», «exploiter» and «exploited», «national liberation», «socialism», among others. Government's rigid position and the extortionist attitude of agrarian groups' members kept the country in suspense. Again, social and political binomials were explicit and predicted a social struggle. Crossed speeches supported, on the side of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, a more equitable distribution of wealth, while agrarian groups were asking for keeping their incomes, appealing to the Grito de Alcorta, the agrarian rebellion of 1912.

In this high-spirited context, the presence of Bombita contrasts a lot. At this historical juncture, the character ridicules the same speeches that support her. There is a criticism to the way the current government makes politics, specifically, to its hyperbolic ideological speech. Both heads of state, the ex-president first, Ernesto Kirchner (2003-2007), and President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner now (2007-2011), based and base their government on a populist speech that refers us to the 1960s<sup>11</sup>.

It is not necessary to know the Argentinian history to appreciate Capusotto's brilliant creation. Only the parodied construction of the program is enough to give clear proof of the political representations. Both the television and the music industry are, as we already

### **NOTES**

11 | See Feinman (2005)

mentioned at the beginning, hegemonic speeches. However, the given examples are proofs of the interstice found by art in order to undo the warp tying us to the oppressive interests.

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