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**Alternative Practices and Social Protest Movements
against Mass Media**

Mass media have become a socialization force that constantly reproduces specific stereotypes in favor of the interests of social powers. These stereotypes are generated by minorities who make decisions regarding the content, thus becoming taste and value judges that determine socially accepted behavior. The way journalism deals with the events occurred in Argentina since December 19 and 20 to date, explains the media dictatorship we are going through.

In this regard, it is necessary to stress the kind of objects used by various sectors for interaction. Such objects set up the horizon of their experience, from which detours and reinterpretations can occur. Cultural and social production passes both through media and outside media. Media are highly powerful, but social and cultural products outside them are also powerful. We cannot talk about media without relating them to economic, social and cultural transformations. The scope of discussion should, therefore, include what is inside and outside media.

Although media centralize and reproduce certain information, there are other social practices against mass media and alternative broadcasting channels that intend to narrate events from the point of view of social movements, thus promoting a committed and participatory reception.

In this respect, we can speak of three practices that question media's hegemonic monologue:

- Citizen practices: "escraches" (noisy citizen protests held at the presumed criminal's home) against media

According to José Gobello's New Lunfardo Dictionary, "escrache" is a word used by Genovese immigrants to contemptuously depict a person's photograph or image.

For a long time now, “escrache” has come to mean and express something different.

“Escrachar” means to show something up, to make it public. It is a practice created by the association H.I.J.O.S (Spanish acronym for *Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio* [Sons for Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence]). Its purpose is to make public the identity of oppressors of the last military dictatorship, so that neighbors can identify them in streets, bars, supermarkets, etc., and know that a torturer lives next door. Music, noise, masks, costumes, vestments and paint pots, are all elements that surpass traditional ways of making politics and that break out as a new way of making and understanding politics. Not long ago, the H.I.J.O.S’ practice used to be carried out in the neighborhood for a month and ended up as a “escrache” at the torturers’ door. However, nowadays it is a form of expression and social protest not exclusively used by this organization. Current “escraches” are much faster intervention practices.

“Escraches” against mass media began to occur after December 19 and 20, as a result of the large participation of Argentinean population on the streets. After actually facing reality, many people who attended later demonstrations also started reflecting on the way information is presented and cut down by mass media. Far from being objective, information is closely related to media tycoons’ vision of reality. Neighbors attending meetings began to talk about “escraches” against media as a result of their dissatisfaction with the way events are covered. In January 2002, the *Parque Centenario* Inter-neighborhood Assembly decided to broadcast a “escrache” against Channel 13 to protest against disinformation. Participants started writing graffiti such as, “We’re being pissed on and journalists say it’s raining”, and singing chants like “this hiding habit ... will have it / will have it”. Journals hardly published any news about it. Only alternative media did. In February, Assemblies organized another “escrache” in front of Radio 10 to protest against Hadad for news manipulation.

(Sample of the video-report of Argentina Arde’s [Argentina Burns] “escrache” against Channel 13 and Radio 10. This short film shows clearly what “escrachar” actually is).

- Counter-information Groups’ Practices

These practices intend to break down information barriers and to generate counter-information practices through a change project focused on communication for action and representation. Some of these groups are *Cine Insurgente* [Insurgent Films] and *Argentina Arde* [Argentina Burns]. (I belong to these two groups).

1- *-Argentina Arde*:

“*Argentina Arde*” is a counter-information group created on January 19, 2002 and inspired in the events occurred in Argentina on December 19 and 20, 2001. It is made up of several commissions —press, photography, and video— whose goal is to make films and to put an end to multi-media’s hegemonic discourse. Their activities seek to intervene reality and help spreading alternative views. Some of them are:

- First photograph exhibit on the December 19 - 20 Repression.
- Photograph exhibits in Assemblies and WUM (Workers’ and Unemployed People’s Movements)
- Video screenings that rescue events hidden by dominant media
- Newspaper delivery
- One year after the December 19 -20 Repression, posters were stuck up with the slogan “On the 19th and 20th, turn off the TV and hit the street”

Argentina Arde retakes previous experiences such as that of “*Tucumán arde*” [Tucumán Burns] (1968), where a group of artists tried to use mass media strategies to provide counter information to denounce reality in the Tucumán Province. Some of its slogans are: “Let’s not wait to be told what is going on. We all are reporters”, and “You lived it, don’t let them keep lying to you.” Various media (video, newspapers, photography) are used to provide new scenarios where neighbors can participate in news production and their own productions. In this way, they can build a multi-media network that offers new ways of expression and production based on counter information, to reflect faithfully social problems and needs that big media rarely report.

2- Insurgent Film Group:

The Insurgent Film Group is devoted to the production, distribution and reflection about the audio-visual phenomenon. For its members, the monopolistic concentration and domination of Latin America economy by imperialistic and international banking interests, are expressed through audio-visual discourse. This phenomenon is evident not only in the emergence of the so-called multi-media, but also in the uni-directional nature of audio-visual messages, which are increasingly focused on advertising and political efficiency.

The Group retakes team work experiences such as that of the school of Universidad del Litoral, founded by Fernando Birri, the *Grupo de Cine Liberación* [Liberation Cinema Group], and basically Raymundo Gleyzer's *Grupo de Cine de Base* [Base Film Group]. When economic powers neglect all possibilities of artistic development, the only solution is to link audio-visual production with those who face the system by setting up cameras on their side, and by searching among and beside them the final recipients of such productions.

The group is organized to create collectively distribution channels different from multi-media and commercial cinemas.

The activities carried out by the Group aim at producing documents that depict what big media do not show, or show distortedly. In all our productions, we establish face-to-face communication with the public in order to discuss and reflect about the omnipresence of mass media.

(Actions to be specified)

- Creation of alternative Communication Channels

In Argentina there are five air channels and hundreds of cable channels. Legal issues do not allow for the creation of new channels; thus, most channels operating outside major multimedia are alternative and have low frequencies.

At present, there are projects that attempt to set up channels other than those of multi-media to produce documentaries and journalistic programs that support social struggles and dismantle mass media's hegemonic discourse. Projects such as that of the "Mothers' Alternative Channel" seek to generate a production cycle where social actors participate. In this way, efficiency is achieved through dialoging and mutual questioning.