The rhetoric of surveillance in the archive of the intelligence directorate of the police of the province of Buenos Aires

Maria Alejandra Vitale

University of Buenos Aires, Argentine

Abstract
This essay paper addresses, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the rhetorical dimension of surveillance exercised by a specific Repressive State Apparatus, the Intelligence Directorate of the Police of the Province of Buenos Aires (DIPBA), Argentine. This agency was created in 1956 and closed in 1998. I analyze documents that were not declassified until 2003, such as the Institution's Internal Regulations, the Internal Regulations of the Intelligence School and a Handbook of Intelligence and Counterintelligence. I am interested in the relevance of the notion of discourse community in understanding the central role of discourse in shaping this group of spies and their intelligence practices

Keywords: Argentine, discourse community, police, secrecy, surveillance.

Introduction

In this essay, I will use an interdisciplinary perspective to focus on the rhetorical dimension of a type of Intelligence practice belonging to what Louis Althusser (1971) calls the Repressive State Apparatus. I will refer specifically to the case of the Intelligence Directorate of the Police of the Province of Buenos Aires (known in Spanish as the DIPBA). The DIPBA was created in 1956, shortly after President Juan Perón was overthrown by a military and civilian uprising in 1955. Both Perón and the Peronist Party suffered a proscription that lasted until Perón's return in 1973. During this time, the role of the Argentine security forces was redefined within the context of the Cold War, especially after the Cuban Revolution turned to socialism (Funes, 2007). Nevertheless, the DIPBA also inherited files from earlier agencies of "social and political order" dating back to 1932.

The DIPBA was dissolved in 1998 by León Carlos Arslanián, the Minister of Security and Justice of the Province of Buenos Aires, under the governorship of Eduardo Duhalde (1991-1999). Arslanián was a judge during the presidential administration of Raúl Alfonsín and in 1985 he had had sentenced members of the *de facto* military government that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983 in the so-called Trial of the Juntas. The building which had housed the DIPBA was transferred together with its files to the Provincial Memory Commission in 2000 and in 2003 these records were made available to the public. The building and its archive are thus, to use Pierre Nora's (1989) term, a "*lieu de mémoire.*"

The Archive of the DIPBA is an extensive and detailed record of the criminalization of ideas. The Archive consists of approximately four million pages, more than 300,000 police files, 750 VHS video cassettes with police footage and recordings of television programs and 160 audio cassettes with recordings of events. The DIPBA Archive is the only comprehensive documentary collection that allows us to reconstruct the reasoning and methods underlying political and ideological espionage in Argentina. After the overthrow of Perón in 1955, Argentina was marked by a succession of coups led by the Armed Forces, culminating in systematic state terrorism under a military dictatorship (1976-1983) calling itself the "National Reorganization Process." State terrorism included murder, forced disappearances, and imprisonment and torture

in secret detention centers as well as the abduction of children of parents subjected to enforced disappearance. The Archive of the DIPBA was an important part of the "bureaucracy of evil." Indeed, the intelligence services were part of the machinery of terror in a "century of barbarism" and genocide.

All the DIPBA records are the result of surveillance and the infiltration of assemblies, meetings (public or private), demonstrations and protests, conferences, lectures and talks. The DIPBA was headquartered in the city of La Plata, the capital of the Province of Buenos Aires but received information from branches all over the province. Also, DIPBA files contain records produced by other national intelligence agencies of the Argentine State.

Intelligence reports are accompanied by a thorough survey of press coverage (local, provincial and national) of each major political event and each organization the DIPBA spied upon. Sometimes, the source of these reports is an analysis of the partisan press. The press cuttings are usually attached, with militants' names or events chosen for further investigation underlined.

Recovering, declassifying and opening the DIPBA files to the public is in keeping with the ongoing process of opening files associated with repression in Latin America, such as the National Police archive in Guatemala, the State Department of Social and Political Order (DEOPS) in Brazil, the documents of the political police from the Stroessner period in Paraguay and documents of the Catholic Church during Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile (Jelin 2003). The DIBPA file is currently being used to draft reparation policies for victims of state terrorism and as evidence in court cases for crimes against humanity. It is also used as a source document by historians, sociologists and social anthropologists researching Argentina's recent past - including the perpetrators' mindset (Flier, 2006) - and to construct a historical memory of the last military dictatorship.

So far, interest in the DIPBA Archive has focused on the dictatorship and has not included its rhetorical features. To explore these aspects in a meaningful fashion, I believe we need to view the DIPBA files as the product of a discourse community and, additionally, to investigate how the Archive functioned after Argentina's return to democracy in 1983.

To this end, I have taken three key institutional documents as primary sources: the DIPBA's own Internal Regulations, which remained in force from 1983 until they were revised in 1993; an Intelligence and Counterintelligence Handbook dated 1992; and the Internal Regulations of the School of Intelligence, introduced in 1983. I will focus here on three dimensions of the DIPBA discourse community: discourse genres, the identity of 'us' as opposed to 'them', and disciplinary procedures applied to the bodies of those who formed the community of spies.

Genres, 'us' and body

The DIPBA group can be seen as a discourse community. For Dominique Maingueneau (1999), this means a group or network of groups producing discourses that are inseparable from the group's modes of organization, practices and, indeed, its very existence. In this sense, espionage and intelligence work carried out by those who worked for the DIPBA were inseparable from the texts themselves. Each text was molded by the discourse genres that intelligence officers necessarily produced as part of their work. The notion of discourse genre is essential for addressing the rhetorical dimension of intelligence practices and for conceptualizing the group that carried them out as a discourse community. As Jean-Claude Beacco (2004) points out, discourse genres help to give coherence to the discourse community that produces, circulates and receives them. In the DIPBA, these genres can be described – to use Dominique Maingueneau's term - as "institutionalized" because they have become highly conventionalized for socio-historical reasons, especially regarding purpose, status of legitimate participants and

textual organization. They are highly resistant to change and construct a community with a hierarchical structure.

The *Intelligence and Counterintelligence Handbook* explains that Intelligence is a cycle consisting of four stages. Each stage involves the use of specific discourse genres. The first stage, called the 'Procedure for Procurement of Information,' deals with the *need* for Intelligence. This stage corresponds to a genre used only by police and political leaders called the Procurement Plan, which must contain the questions to be answered. In the jargon of the Intelligence Services, these are known as EEI (Essential Elements of Intelligence) and ORI (Other Intelligence Elements). The second stage is called Information Gathering and includes the search for information by an agent who may or may not belong to the DIPBA (e.g. through phone tapping, infiltration or interrogation). The third stage is seen as the most important in the cycle and involves the process whereby intelligence is produced, in other words, the conversion of "raw" information into a finished product. This third stage is carried out by specialized personnel and is broken down into several steps. The first step is to register information using a genre called the Information Logbook, including date and time of entry of the information into the DIBPA, a summary of the information, its source and its intended final recipients. The second step is the evaluation of information. Sources are ranked on a scale from "reliable" to "unreliable" or "cannot be assessed" and the value and the degree of accuracy of the information are also assessed on a scale from "certain" to "improbable" or "cannot be assessed." The last step is interpretation, which draws conclusions from the hypothesis that guided the research.

The fourth and final stage of the cycle is called Information Dissemination, in other words, its distribution to the authority or body that needs to make a decision. In this way, the entire intelligence cycle is legitimized as a necessary means for an authority to make a decision. In this last stage we find the genre known as Intelligence Report, which allows the DIPBA community to communicate with other communities, such as politicians.

Interestingly, both the DIPBA's *Internal Regulations* and *Handbook of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* presuppose that a good intelligence agent is a good writer; hence these documents gave priority to the rules that should govern the writing of intelligence reports. It is also worth pointing out that those who drew up these recommendations were clearly competent teachers of composition and rhetoric, judging by the documents themselves.

The *Regulations* place writing in a communicative circuit in which the agent must consider the purpose of the report, the readers and the need for brevity. Referring to the distinction has between *Inventio* and *Elocutio*, the Regulations state sententiously: "First the thought, then the word". As for what we could consider the *Dispositio*, the Regulations set out the three types of pyramid used in narrative (normal, inverted and combined), advising writers always to give the most important information first, while laying down specific rules on sentence length and explaining the use of paragraphs.

The ideal that underlies the two documents is that of a transparent language which should tell the facts as accurately as possible. The subjective opinions of the agent-writer are seen as dangerous because they produce inaccuracies or distort the information. Hence the explicit order to writers separate and distinguish the facts from their own assessments. Both the *Regulations* and the *Handbook* demand the eloquent virtue of clarity and reject ambiguity as dangerous.

Another stylistic trait that was required of intelligence officers was what Bakhtin (1968) calls 'monologism.' This means that writers were expected to use citations in order to clearly separate the words of each person under surveillance, while the agent's opinion was to be as muted as possible unless explicitly signaled as such in the evaluation section of the report.

But intelligence officers were not just required to be good writers but also good listeners, and for this reason the DIPBA Regulations explicitly recommend "distancing oneself sufficiently

from the orator or speaker (source) and not necessarily accepting his or her views at face value." Intelligence officers are instructed to look closely at the techniques used by the speaker, breaking them down into their component parts and retaining only what is relevant to the information requested by their superiors.

The professional identity of intelligence officers was predicated on their ability to write and to listen since they needed these skills to do their job properly. In particular those involved in the third stage of the intelligence cycle, the production of intelligence itself, are given the valued identity of highly trained specialists using analytical methods, logical processes and inductive and deductive reasoning. In this way, the meaning of the word intelligence as an intellectual faculty is activated by syllepsis.

In the same vein, the *Handbook of Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence* legitimates Intelligence as a scientific practice used by anyone handling large amounts of data. In a democratic context, spying and intelligence practices are not legitimized, as they were in the documents of the dictatorship, by concerns about national security or military values, but through expert and scientific discourse.

Hence, the documents also refer to what they call the "discipline of secrecy," whereby agents are trained not to divulge information and to obey orders to the letter. Here, the word 'discipline' is also a syllepsis, since it acquires the sense of knowledge and obedience. With reference to the causes that may drive agents to be indiscreet and disclose information, the passions of hatred and enthusiasm are perceived among the most dangerous. The so-called "intelligent man" is one who exercises self-control.

The *Handbook and Regulations* implicitly build an 'us' opposed to 'them', the latter being "criminals or opponents" who are the objects of surveillance. About this 'them', the Handbook states: " It is necessary to know, in a society, the different ways in which people behave, especially conflict or deviant behavior, as this generates instability, disorientation and demoralization, and is closely linked to all criminal activities."

The 'us' is implicitly associated with an absence of conflict, respect for rules, stability, guidance and morality. The 'other' in relation to the DIPBA is also termed an "undesirable element," a phrase-cliché whose inanimate nucleus "element" dehumanizes the offender. The metaphorization of opponents as inert matter is indicative of a discursive memory of the military dictatorship which, although residual during the democratic era, continued to direct repressive actions against the bodies of political adversaries and criminals without the precautions normally afforded to living persons. The 'other' also appears in the guise of "stranger" against which the 'us' is drawn implicitly as familiar, known, normal and ordinary. The interesting thing is that the documents do not explicitly state what is strange and therefore refer to a naturalized perception shared by the community.

Criminals or opponents were classified on a grid made up of social, political, trade unionist, educational, economic, religious and police "factors," as they were known in the jargon. How, then, were offenders or opponents constructed? The social factor included information about foreigners, illegal settlements and the inhabitants of shanty town; the educational factor included high school dropout rates and illiteracy; the trade unionist factor included unemployment rates. The political factor, however, does not mention political movements. This seems to indicate that offenders or antagonists are discursively constructed as social activists in shanty towns, poor immigrants, protesters, and the unemployed. This approach, rooted in the incipient neoliberal policies that would later characterize the 1990s, was quite different from the figure of 'the subversive' - the 'other' that had haunted the DIPBA during the military dictatorship.

Bearing in mind that the 'other' of the DIPBA community is constructed as a foreigner, it is worth recalling that the only two occurrences of personal deixis in the Handbook are in the

expression "*our* country." The collective identity providing a strong bond is "Argentine" since the 'us' reference is to "we the Argentine people."

The structural metaphor "escalón" (Spanish, 'step', 'stair') used to denote an agent gives the DIPBA community a hierarchical character, while enabling semantic connotations of abusive practices, such as a superior "treading" on a lower rung of the ladder.

Finally, I will refer briefly to the way the bodies of DIPBA agents are constructed, controlled and disciplined in the Internal Regulations of the School of Intelligence. First, as Foucault (1987) points out, discipline is first and foremost about consigning individuals to a particular place. In this way, students of the School of Intelligence are distributed in classrooms by the so-called "Head of the student body," a name in which the literal meaning of "body" hints at the discipline to which the students' physical bodies are subjected. In the dining room, each student's place is predetermined; each table has a 'head' and students must "make way for their superiors" as they enter and leave.

Rules on personal hygiene, dress and personal belongings in dormitories are intended to produce a clean and orderly body. Power required the body to exhibit certain signs, including clothing, such as the uniform to be used by students during class. While they may enter and leave the Institute in civilian clothes, the regulations stipulate that they "must be soberly and correctly dressed." The word "correctly" again refers to an unspecified norm – an assumption shared and naturalized by the community.

The word 'control' is repeated time and again in the regulations, including control of the way students should dress, delivery of original notes by teachers, control of class topics, and the movement of books.

As we have seen, Intelligence work is a practice with own rhetoric. It presents itself as subordinate to the police and political power of current democratic systems it; but it makes 'intelligent' decisions that, in all probability, promote crime rather than fighting it.

This rhetoric regulates the use of language and the body, establishing legitimate genres and styles in terms of what, to use Bourdieu's term, could be called the accepted hexis. "*em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*" (Bourdieu 1997: 94). The regulations define an 'us' that is distinguished from 'them' – referred to as offenders or opponents, with the latter term legitimizing the surveillance of anyone who thinks differently or actively opposes the government. The practice of Intelligence is legitimized by a disciplinary normalization in which the 'us' functions as an implicit model for separating the normal from the abnormal, the familiar from the strange (Foucault 2009) and friend from foe.

Conclusions

To conclude, I would like to emphasize that the notion of discourse community allows us not only to integrate the social and the textual, but also to study genre, identity construction and bodies. Accordingly, it provides a very useful approach to the rhetorical dimension of intelligence practices such as those carried out by the DIPBA group.

The study provides insight into the performative role of discourse in shaping intelligence practices. Indeed, intelligence is built on a network of discourses that comprise procedures for inclusion and exclusion, principles for classification and comment, and "rituals of speaking." In this sense, the documents analyzed carried the DIPBA conceive intelligence as a specific order of discourse (Foucault, 1981).

Finally, I wish to stress that the analysis of the DIPBA documents helps us understand how this network of discourses shapes the subjectivity of the intelligence agents, without which intelligence work would not be possible.

Acknowledgments

This work is based on the results of UBACyT Project 20020120200039, funded by the University of Buenos Aires. Invitational support by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (NRF) is also recognized (grant 81695). Any opinion, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and therefore the NRF does not accept any liability in regard thereto.

Address correspondence to: vitaleale@fibertel.com.ar

References

Althusser, L. (1971). Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. In L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (pp. 121–176). New York: Monthly Review Press.
Bakhtin, M. M. (1968). *Rabelais and His World*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
Bourdieu, P (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Beacco, J.-C. (2004). Trois perspectives linguistiques sur la notion de genre discursif *Langages* 153, 109-119.
Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Pantheon.
Foucault, M. (1981) The Order of Discourse. In R. Young (Ed.), *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (pp. 51-78). Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Foucault, M. (2009). *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*. New York: First Picador Edition.
Funes, P. (2007) 'Engineers of the soul' reports from the Argentine military dictatorship's intelligence services on Latin American popular song, essays, and the social sciences *Varia historia* 23 (38), 418-437.
Jelin, E. (2003). *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
Maingueneau, D. (1999) Analyzing self-constituting discourses, *Discourse studies*, 1 (2), 183-199.
Nora, P. (1989). Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire, *Representations* 26, 7-24.