Shortly after arriving in Buenos Aires, I was able to contact and meet with the post-dictatorial writer and human rights organizer, Luisa Valenzuela, who offered insights into the lamentable condition of State-funded cultural events given the recent election of rightist Presidente Mauricio Macri. I was also able to meet with the wife of the recently deceased playwright and political organizer, Patricio Esteve, of the anti-censorship collective Teatro Abierto. I soon came to realize that there was a general malaise overlaying the porteño society, both in the cultural production I was sent to research and beyond. Barely a day went by during my month in Buenos Aires when there was not a protest at the National Congress, located a few blocks from where I was staying. Similarly, some of the largest demonstrations of the year took place against the new governmental regime in the emblematic Plaza de Mayo. In this space, the mothers of those tortured and disappeared during the most recent dictatorship that lasted from 1976 to 1983 have marched every Thursday for more than thirty years.

A few days prior to the day that the two-thousandth march was to be realized, nevertheless, the new government made an attempt to arrest one of the most reactionary (and certainly the most famous) of the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Hebe de Bonafini. This symbolic slight provoked sheer outrage among what seemed like the entire city, that in turn flooded the streets for the anniversary chanting protests that always seemed to link the present to the dictatorial past. These protests, a type of performance in themselves, revealed to a large extent the same kind of discontent with the current state of Argentine democracy as the alternative theatrical production that I was able to experience. In the protests, chants like “Macri,
“basura, vos sos la dictadura” or “Macri, trash, you are the dictatorship”, were more than common. Similarly, the chants involved threats about the chaos that would ensue were the government to dare touch a mother like Hebe de Bonafini.

Nevertheless, the distraught state of democracy would not prove so simple to assess. Hebe de Bonafini herself had been supposedly involved in a corruption scandal where funds had been stolen from a human rights organization, proving that the figurehead of the leftist current was perhaps not the totally benign symbol of incorruptible justice. The plays I attended, focused on the aesthetic of biodrama, or be it, any personal narratives. The philosophy behind this genre is inherently democratic, since it alleges that any story is worth telling, and that these stories deserve to be told in their own form and function. Given the recent absence of the State in cultural gestation, many alternative theatres are being hosted in houses and putting on rather intimate productions for a maximum of twenty-five spectators. Some of these plays that I was able to attend were “Las ideas” by Federico León, “Apátrida” by Rafael Spregelburd, “El grado cero del insomnio” by Emilio García Wehbi, all of which entered into a dialogue on the current grave state of democracy through the discussion of Argentine national identity.

During the second week of August, I attended and presented at the twenty-fifth International Congress on Iberian, American, and Argentine theatre and was able to listen to the talks of several extremely important researchers who study the relationship between contemporary theatre, human rights, and cultural production. A particularly significant round table discussion involved the members of Teatro Abierto, the main subversive theatre group during the dictatorship. Interestingly, Roberto Cossa, one of the most well known members of Teatro Abierto, voiced his concern that the playwrights of today are only concerned with their own subjectivities, or be it, that they have placed personal feelings and emotions in the place of
the revolutionary political values that characterized *Teatro Abierto’s* own protests against the dictatorship. It was a clear critique of the biodrama, a seemingly paradoxical criticism, since as I have found, the genre strives to be a highly democratic one.