

The Argentine 1960s

David William Foster

It was the time of the Beatles, of high school studies, of "flower power," of socialist revolution, of a new French movie house, of poetry, of Sartre and Fanon, of Simone de Beauvoir, of Salinger and Kerouac, of Marx and Lenin. It was all of that together. It was also the time of the Cuban Revolution, which opened our hearts, and it was the time of a country, Argentina, which took the first steps toward violence that was to define our future (Fingueret 20-21).

El cine es una institución que se ha modificado tanto que ya perdió su carácter de "región moral". Las salas de cine hasta los primeros años de la década del sesenta eran lugares de reunión social donde la gente iba a estar como en un centro de reunión social, un club o un café del que se era habitué....Las antiguas salas tenían personalidad propia y algunas cumplían otras funciones que aquellas para las que habían sido creadas; en tiempo de represión sexual, eran frecuentadas por parejas heterosexuales que se besaban y masturbaban. Los homosexuales tenían su espacio en ciertas salas llamadas "populares" no frecuentadas por familias, y en muchos casos sus espectadores eran varones solos. "Hacer el ajedrez" se decía en el argot de los habitués, en esos cines, a cambiarse constantemente de butaca en busca de la compañía adecuada (Sebreli 344).¹

In Argentina, it was the best of times, and it was the worst of times. It was the best of times because Buenos Aires,² after the overthrow of Juan Domingo Perón in 1955 and his nativized version of social fascism, exploded with an enormous creative potential, abetted by all of the now-legendary social and cultural forces of the 1960s (Sigal; Terán). Perón—who had strong affiliations with European national socialists, especially the Spaniards and the Italians, had been able, with the immense wealth that Argentina had amassed by serving all interests during World War II and in a cli-

WORKS AND DAYS 39/40, Vol. 20, Nos. 1&2, 2002

mate of general Argentine Germanofilia, to finance vast social and public programs that played out along basically national socialist lines that co-opted the Left. After Perón's disappearance, the country remained as a whole quite culturally and intellectually conservative, retaining much of the onus that Perón had placed on "foreign" ideas. The U.S. traveler to Argentina still could sense something very similar to a traditional artisan lifestyle more reminiscent of the U.S. in the 1930s and 1940s. This would change with a series of initiatives—driven by the Right with military coups in the 1970s and by democratic governments in the late 1980s and 1990s—to modernize the Argentine economy and to "insert" it into the mainstream of so-called liberal or international capitalist processes.

But it was also the worst of times. The return to democracy after the fall of Perón was always an iffy venture, and it would require a whole page to list the major outlines of the shift of the power balance from democratically elected leaders to military interventors. Finally, in June 1966, a military coup assumed full control of the government, suspending all constitutional guarantees and plunging the country into a spiral of neofascism; Argentina only returned to constitutional democracy in 1983 (*The Argentine Right*).

The intent of this essay will be to examine cultural production in Argentina during the 1960s and to suggest the extraordinarily complex relationships between this production and international cultural movements that found a particularly fertile field of reception in Argentina. Because of limited space, my approach is essentially synecdochic, and I will be limiting my discussion only to some of the most outstanding cultural manifestations. My emphasis will fall on theater, the legendary Instituto Di Tella, and intellectual publications like the review *Mundo nuevo*; by stressing these more "public" phenomena, I wish to underscore the enormous visible presence in Buenos Aires of radical, avant-garde, and experimental culture of the period.³ Moreover, I will be looking specifically at the ways in which cultural production, against the backdrop of interlocking patriarchal institutions such as the Catholic Church, the Peronista legacy, and military institutions can be seen to have a specific dimension of antipatriarchal sexual politics, and looking forward to how the military coup of 1966 will view the culture of the 1960s (Graziano; Foster, *Producción cultural* 161-62; Reati 44-45; Sebrelí 324-26).

Because of the 1966 coup, the halcyon sixties in Buenos Aires, if they did not come to a screeching halt, were at least braked considerably. There were the beginnings of censorship of both print culture as well as public spectacle (Avellaneda; Graham-Jones). Issues relating to morality in Argentina (as elsewhere in Latin America) have mostly to do with what is publicly visible rather than what constitutes private acts. Thus, homosexual acts have never been banned and have been only persecuted when they have been part of a public scandal; this has extended historically to any display of gender—i.e., what can be taken as effeminacy or a "fag look"—that constitutes a public scandal. By the same token,

prostitution in general has never been illegal, yet houses of prostitution have at times been banned (but not at the present moment), and pimping remains illegal even today; since the return to democracy, sexual services are openly displayed and advertised, one supposes because it is public rather than because it is an abusive exploitation of women (Guy).

During the 1960s, however, there is little evidence in Argentina of the much vaunted sexual revolution, though, to be sure, there are some oblique traces, as in some adoption of the modish swinging London clothes styles, the presence of voguish night spots like the legendary jungle/tropical Mau-Mau in downtown Buenos Aires, and in the incursion of the music of the Beatles, Elvis Presley, and the like. However, in terms of sexual mores, matters are still firmly traditional and grimly heterosexist. Indeed, there is a confluence of three factors to explain this fact: 1) the archconservatism of the Argentine Catholic Church: most Argentines are nonchurchgoers and rather outspokenly anti-Church, but the Church continues to wield a heavy hand in the public morality of the country⁴; 2) the moral cleansing of the neofascist dictatorships after 1966, which worked hand-in-hand with the Church⁵; 3) left-wing politics, which we might call specifically at this time the Che Guevara syndrome (one will recall that Guevara was Argentine): the helpmeet role of women in the revolutionary struggle and the total exclusion (to the point, according to some documentary evidence, of execution) from the ranks of the resistance/revolutionary movements of anyone even remotely suspected of homosexuality, in any of its multiple and often contradictory definitions⁶. There may be some evidence of an influence of nascent Western feminism in Argentina during the 1960s: the female playwright Griselda Gambaro, about whom I will speak below, can certainly be characterized as having engaged in a feminist theater, even if *avant la lettre*, in her inaugural work in the 1960s. With few exceptions in cultural production, the landscape is quite bare with regard to anything constituting public consciousness or cultural production of homoerotic desire.

As a consequence, with the first military government in the late sixties, film (e.g., the banning of William Friedkin's *The Boys in the Band*), theater (the suspension of the opening of Alberto Ginastera's *Bomarzo* at the Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires's legendary opera house, based on Manuel Mujica Láinez's homonymous novel), television, and art were more likely to fall under censorious scrutiny than print media. Thus, Mujica Láinez's D'Annunzio-like novel, set in the Italian Renaissance and with a patently gay subtext, remained unbanned, despite the fate of the opera, which subsequently premiered in the United States. But this does not mean that other novels that dealt in overt and direct ways with the Argentine sociohistorical text escaped censorship, as did works in other genres, including Argentina's immense magazine culture (Avellaneda). In this way, there remained some measure of dynamic and even radical culture in Argentina in the 1960s, although by the time of the military junta that came into power in March 1976 via the coup that most affirmed neofascist principles and undertook

the holocaust of the Dirty War, a very heavy pall had fallen over Argentine cultural production.

Argentina, like Latin America in general, is a country in which a certain portion of its cultural production is exile in nature; many significant works of Argentine literature have been written in exile and published originally in exile. The two founding texts of Argentine literature were written in exile: Esteban Echeverría's story "El matadero," written in Uruguay in the 1830s and not published in Argentina until 1871, and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Civilización i barbarie*, written in Chile and published there in 1845. Social, political, and economic factors repeatedly conspire to oblige writers to work from exile, and this is equally the case in other sectors of cultural production that create material or textual works of art.

What all this means is that it is impossible to render an adequate account of Latin American textual and material culture if one speaks only of what is produced and published or exhibited within the country. Many works published in exile have been published or exhibited subsequently in Argentina during periods of return to constitutional democracy (e.g., the opera *Bomarzo*, written in 1967, finally had its Argentina premier at the Colón in 1972). A notable example in the case of fiction is that of Manuel Puig, whose 1968 novel *La traición de Rita Hayworth* almost did not get published in the first place: Editorial Sudamericana abandoned it after a typesetter complained about its "pornographic nature," and it was eventually published by Editorial Jorge Alvarez (which was in turn closed down by the government in the 1970s).

Puig left Argentina, published the bulk of his novels in Spain, and never resided again in Argentina (he died in Mexico in 1990; Levine 204-05), yet Puig is considered one of the most important Argentine novelists of the latter third of the 20th century (to be sure, at the present moment, all of his works are available in Argentina, mostly in Argentine editions). One of the most important dimensions of Puig's fiction was the utilization of popular cultural materials and a firm anchoring in gay camp, and in this sense he brings to Argentine fiction in the 1960s the beginnings of Western queer fiction. Although there is a strong history of homosexuality in Argentina (Sebreli) and a concomitant homosexual writing, the camp dimension of Puig's fiction moves it closer to the militant gay activism that is part of the 1960s cultural record in the West (Amícola).

Such a situation complicates enormously the attempt to understand the impact of some of the cultural production of the period, because it is far more complex than the standard U.S. model of the artist who produces a work in the U.S. that is published in the U.S., then reviewed critically and studied academically in the U.S., with all of the attendant discussion over influences on it and its place in an overall tapestry of cultural production, circulated openly in the U.S. in bookstores and libraries, read openly in the U.S., and discussed in open forums such as book clubs, talk shows, classrooms, scholarly conferences, and the like. A novel like Puig's *El beso de*

la mujer araña, published in Spain in 1976 at the time of the onset of Argentina's most neofascist regime, could only be acquired clandestinely in Argentina, and there was no way that it could be commented on in the media, much less taught in the classroom. By the time Héctor Babenco made his award-winning film version, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985), Argentina had returned to democracy, and Puig's novel, and the film, were widely available, but neither Puig nor Babenco returned to their native country.

In the case of Argentina in the 1960s, one of the direct effects of the military coup is not only censorship (and it is important to understand the dynamics of self-censorship at work) coupled with various aggressive acts of repression and oppression against cultural producers and their venues, but, concomitantly, the cyclical resurgence of the importance of Argentine literature from/in exile—other Latin American countries, Spain, other European countries, and the United States, typically. This undoubtedly led to the sort of transnational and transcontinental solidarities that characterize the Latin American Left of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, the boom in the development of U.S. universities in the 1960s meant that one important destination for Argentine intellectuals and artists was the American classroom.

It is important to understand the circular process at work here. The enormous expansion of the U.S. university establishment in the 1960s brought with it an interest in Spanish, which began to outstrip all other languages in enrollment, and Latin American literature and culture, which was one reason why Argentine and other Latin American writers and professors could find positions in the U.S. Accordingly, the presence of Argentine intellectuals and artists in the U.S. contributed to the expansion of Latin American Studies in this country. Jorge Luis Borges made his first, much touted, visit to the U.S. in 1961, invited as a Visiting Professor by the University of Texas-Austin. Mention should also be made of Argentine scholars who came to the U.S. during the Peronista period (Enrique Anderson Imbert, for example); however, the development of Spanish-language programs was still in its infancy at that time.

What I would like to do now is to review some of the major areas of Argentine cultural production, both in Argentina and from exile, in order to characterize more fully the importance of cultural exchanges between that country and the U.S. and Europe; cultural exchange between Argentina, Brazil, and Cuba is important here, since each one played its own unique role in developing and diffusing forms of guerilla theory, and each held its own special position with regard to the power dynamics—and cultural politics—of Latin America at that time. In discussing these areas of Argentine cultural production, I wish to place special emphasis on sexual politics, because of the way this period constitutes the multiple layering of traditional Hispanic conservatism (strongly shored up in Argentina by an ultraconservative Catholic Church), the general awareness of the issues of sexual liberation inherent to the the avant-garde society of the 1960s, and the strategies of containment of sexual desire and gender deviance wielded by the neofascist

regimes.

Theater

Buenos Aires has always been the theatrical capital of Latin America, and, between official and independent productions, main stage and experimental theaters, and conventional theater and alternative spectacles, spectators have had at their disposal stagings of works by Argentine and Latin American dramatists, as well as Argentine productions of U.S., European, and other foreign works. During the period in question, the theater particularly flourished (Foster, *Teatro argentino independiente*; Pellettieri, *Teatro argentino de los '60*).

During the 1960's, Arthur Miller's allegorical *The Crucible* was reallegorized in terms of Argentine sociohistorical realities, both the witch hunts of the Peronistas in the 1940s and 1950s and the witch hunts of the military in the 1960s and 1970s. Miller joined other notable American dramatic icons such as Elmer Rice, Clifford Odets, Eugene O'Neill, Thornton Wilder, and Tennessee Williams in exercising an enormous influence on the Argentine theater. In many cases, productions of the works of these authors—as well as in the case of foreign authors—were specifically designed to highlight allusions to local events and to encourage interpretations in this light (versions of Shakespeare were also significant in this regard). This is an important strategy in Latin American culture for fighting censorship: if overt political commentary can be repressed and the production of cultural works cannot deal directly with local events, readings can be promoted that allow for an “allegorical extension” of foreign works to those events. This was the case with Miller's *The Crucible*, and it certainly was the case with Williams's plays, whether seen in terms of social decadence and ethnic and class tensions, or, for a theater community that contains many queer folk and other marginalized individuals, in terms of Williams's own allegories of homo-eroticism (*Cypess*); Wilder was another dramatist whose work allowed for queer spaces of meaning, although queer folk might well have been familiar with the possibilities of such meaning that have been attached to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Mirta Arlt has studied the importance of the American Edward Albee in the theater of the 1960s, whom she characterizes as having a “strong projection” (95). Albee rivals the importance of Miller, whose works were extensively performed during this period. Arlt, exercising conventional Argentine caution and reticence about identifying queer elements in culture, unfortunately does not suggest any ways in which the queer dimensions of Albee's works were perceived in his Argentine stagings. Works by British playwrights such as John Osborne and Harold Pinter were also prominently performed.

Perhaps the most important influence of American theater in Argentina in the 1960s was the “happening” (Masotta), which arrived in Buenos Aires along with a general enthusiasm during the period for American theater.⁷ As a forerunner of today's per-

formance art, the happening was a

[t]ype of theatre activity that does not use a pre-established text or programme (at most a scenario or directions for use), proposing what has variously been called an *event* . . . , an *action* . . . , a device, a movement, [performance art]. This is an activity proposed and carried out by performers and participants based on the random and unexpected, with no attempt to imitate an outside action, tell a story or produce a meaning, using all imaginable arts and techniques as well as surrounding reality (Pavis 167).

However, as Oscar Masotta points out, the happening in Argentina, despite one of Pavis's characterizations, did often have a specific sociohistorical meaning, one that allowed for the happening to refer to the political activism integral to the Argentine cultural scene of the period. As such, the happening improved upon the allegorical/reallegorizing potential of the conventional theater. If the latter was seen by a limited group of people in an enclosed space (and often in spaces that were incredibly marginal and precarious), the happening carried performance spectacle into more frequented spaces than conventional theater stages, out into places like Buenos Aires pedestrian malls and broad boulevards, or into the many parks and plazas that are an integral feature of the city—in more recent years, even into the subway system. Since in many of these spaces the public did not belong to the city's sophisticated coterie of theatergoers, who are well trained to see multiple layers of meaning in even the most apparently simple dramatic text and its performance, the happening, like the related concept of guerilla theater that was designed to deal transparently with social and political themes, had as its goal some measure of audience engagement and even participation in order to ensure a maximum collaboration between art and activist commentary. Masotta includes descriptions of happenings in Buenos Aires in which he was himself involved, including happenings staged in a parking lot close to the Instituto Di Tella; there is an appendix of the "scripts" of fourteen happenings in Buenos Aires during the last half of 1966. Masotta's book also has a section on three Argentine artists whose work was shown in galleries in New York during the 1960s: Luis Felipe Noé, Julio Le Parc, and Marta Minujin.

Certainly, there were happenings that were more ludic in nature, but, given the enormous concerns in Argentina over both internal affairs (the issue of Peronismo, both its influence and its proscription, the tenuous nature of the democratic governments of the period and issues of injustice that it was either unable to solve or only served to exacerbate, and the continual saber-rattling of the military) and external affairs (the overall issue of American imperialism in Latin America and omnipresently in Argentina, the war in Vietnam, and the Cuban revolution), there was a wealth of materi-

al for the creation of such paradigmatic events and actions. Concomitantly, Megan Terry's 1966 rock musical *Viet Rock* was performed in Buenos Aires in the late 1960s at the Teatro Payró, one of the most important experimental theater spaces in Argentina, and it is still operating as of this writing.

Finally, in addition to a long tradition of the influence of French and British theater in Argentina, along with considerable relations with the Italian theater—in large measure because of the Italianate origins of the majority of the population of Buenos Aires (Pirandello made a triumphant tour to Argentina in 1927—the likes of Bertolt Brecht and Eugene Ionesco, who visited Buenos Aires and lectured at the Teatro Municipal General San Martín—the combined Kennedy/Lincoln Centers of Buenos Aires, prominent in theater resources (Toro; Pellettieri, *De Bertolt Brecht*). Equally influential in Buenos Aires was the Brazilian Augusto Boal, whose work in his native country goes back to the early 1950s. Boal's major texts were published in Argentina until the 1970s (Boal, *Teatro del oprimido* and *Técnicas latinoamericanas*), but there is no question that he is the figure most associated with a radically political theater in Latin America. It is a theater specifically designed to address the "oppressed" and their sociopolitical issues and to forge an institution of the theater that will produce works by and for the oppressed.

Indeed, in this conception, the theater is a social realm of the oppressed, and one of Boal's goals was to stimulate a continuity between life and the theatrical event that has come to be a basic premise of contemporary performance art. Certainly, Boalian theater, which was of a whole with the modality of audience-participation theater that dominated the vanguard in the period, was an important phenomenon in Argentina. This was so because the principle of participatory theater was to bring audiences to fear what they might learn about themselves and society through the theatrical event, a fear that was deemed to be integral to bourgeois decency. Such resistance to knowledge was exponentially greater during the periods of military dictatorship when what was being portrayed and what audiences were being asked to become physically involved with were representations of sociohistorical realities, the very articulation of which could lead to police oppression and an array of repressive violence. In this sense, the sort of theater being discussed here was committed to overcoming an audience passivity that was seen as something much more serious than a general societal passiveness: it was seen as the very condition of Argentine bourgeois life that made military tyranny possible. Historically, timorous citizens have reacted to repression with the phrase "Por algo será" (there must be some reason), and the goal is to show that all society is guilty of enabling dictatorship, not just a sector of miscreants who allegedly deserve to be brutalized by it.

Instituto Di Tella

Located toward the northern end of the great pedestrian street of

Buenos Aires, the then-upperclass Calle Florida, and near the majestic anchor Plaza San Martín (which is dominated by the imposing patriotic gore of the statue of General José de San Martín, the Liberator of the Andes), the Instituto Di Tella, was the hub of post-Peronista culture in Argentina, funded in part by the Di Tella manufacturing family and by international funding such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation, (King, *El Di Tella*). It was founded in 1958 and withered away in the early 1970s for financial reasons as well as hostility from the military government.

The Instituto (see figure 1) was a curious mixture of political activism and elitist culture. On the one hand, it promoted the most dynamic aspects of the Argentine artistic and intellectual elite, and it was not surprising that its focus was on alternatives to the sort of populist (or pseudopopulist) art promoted during the decade of the Peronista establishment (1946-55). Since vanguard cultural producers who were tied to an international vanguard (which meant, more precisely, France, England, and, increasingly, the United States) saw Peronista support for the arts as demagogic and anti-intellectual, it is not surprising that they would prize the founding of the Di Tella as a space that was primarily to serve as a venue for their interests, which explains to a large extent its strate-

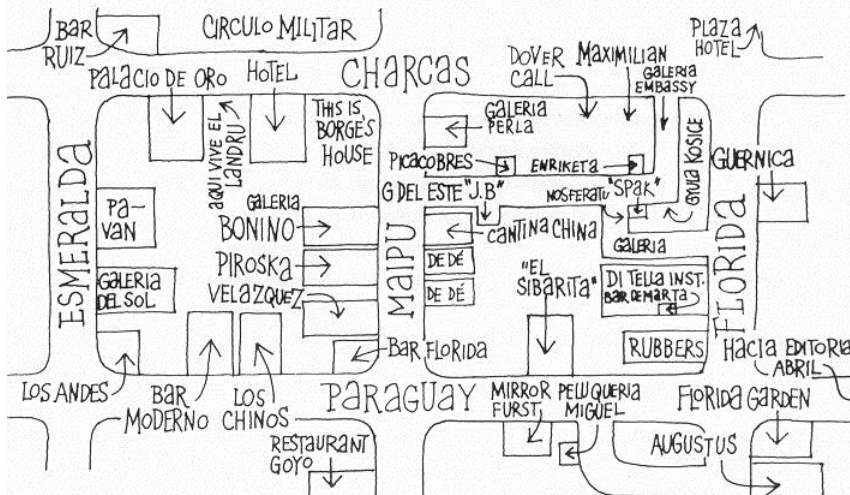


Figure 1: Di Tella Instituto, seen center right (drawing by Rep)

gic geographic location in the most Europeanized sector of Buenos Aires. One of the final major programs of the Instituto occurred in 1968, the Experiencias '68 constellation of exhibits, theater, performances, all in the context of growing intervention in culture—including outright censorship and the confiscation of works of art—by the military government because of the alleged dissident

nature of the program and accusations of its connections with international communism. Patricia Rizzo analyzes this show and the conflicts with government authorities; interestingly, she also includes information about artists, such as Pablo Suárez who, in the context of the military's tyrannical oppression of popular sectors of Argentine society, could no longer support what they felt to be the elitism of the Instituto. Thus, the Di Tella project collapsed because of opposition both from the official power of the Right and the Left, which throughout the next decade became more committed to a militancy that included armed resistance and guerrilla operations.

But stepping back to its early halcyon years, not only did the Instituto Di Tella promote the post-Peronista resurgence of internationalist trends in Argentine art, but it also served to showcase artists who had left Argentina during the Peronista period, such as the experimental plastic artist Julio Le Parc, who traveled from Paris to see his work prominently displayed in the gallery of the Di Tella in 1967 (Romero Brest). Nineteen sixty-seven was also an important theater date associated with the Di Tella, specifically with a division known as the Centro de Experimentación Audiovisual. Griselda Gambaro, who was just beginning to hit her stride as a dramatist and went on to become one of the most important Latin American dramatists of her generation (certainly the most important feminist dramatist), saw her major play *Los siameses* open that year. Part theater of cruelty, part absurdist, part explicit allegory of Argentina's fratricidal history, it turns on two supposedly Siamese twin brothers who, although they look nothing alike (i.e., they represent radically opposing ideologies) are so bound/bonded together that the physical death of one is the psychological death of the other.

Although Gambaro has objected vociferously to the attribution of absurdism to this play and to her other work from the period (Boling 6), it is now clear that she is not characterizing the metaphysical absurdity of the human condition (one of the common characterizations of the French theater of the absurd that was originally viewed as a source of inspiration for her plays [Esslin]), but rather the oppressive absurdity of the Argentine sociohistorical text that can only generate cruel suffering for the nation. In turning away from the rather distant formulations of the French theater of the absurd during this period, Gambaro relentlessly assaulted her audience with cruelly allegorical figures of the texture of Argentine daily life, viewed particularly in terms of masculinist aggression, which allowed for Gambaro in subsequent decades to serve as an important model for theories of masculinity, feminism, and even queer studies. The way in which Gambaro deals with issue of stifling patriarchal powers—even when fragmented into presumed opposing camps—is very much seen by her treatment of men, for they are, the problem in her view of masculinist Argentina. As a consequence, Gambaro's initial plays, which correspond to the first period of neofascist military dictatorship (1966-73), all deal with patriarchal violence, and with the way that violence involves contests between agents of the patriarchy, which

may or may not include women who have become, as the radical feminist position argues, “token torturers” of that patriarchy.

Concomitantly, the victims of patriarchal violence, in addition to women (excepting those who have assumed the role of token torturers), include men who, because of their insufficient adherence to the norms of violent masculinity, are feminized. In *Los siameses*, one man destroys another via this process of feminization, while in *El campo* (first performed in 1968), both a woman and a feminized man are the objects of institutional violence. Gambaro’s artistic interpretation mirrors the material historical reality of how the apparatus of torture in Argentina, beginning in the 1930s, involves the genital mutilation (usually via the *picana*, the electric probe) and the rape (via the penis of the torturers, the *picana*, animals, or other devices) of both men and women, who are equally abused as the nonmasculine other⁸. The spectator viewing Gambaro’s plays, as well as the plays of others who also deal with masculinist violence and its use of torture—such as Eduardo Pavlovsky’s major works—without a knowledge of this sociohistorical horizon is simply unable to understand the impact they had for the audiences of the time⁹.

An iconic event in this regard was the way in which the Instituto served as a forum for the public repudiation of the banning of *Bomarzo*, Alberto Ginastera’s opera based on Manuel Mujica Láinez’s novel, in which a hunchback son of the princely Orsini dynasty becomes a figure of the social subject who falls short of prevailing masculinist norms. In view of Mujica Láinez’s own homosexuality (which was fairly common knowledge: his own aristocratic backgrounds protected him from outright persecution) and his treatment of ambiguous and nonconforming sexuality in his prior fiction, made it quite obvious to many readers, including the censors, that the Orsini offspring was an outcast not because he was a hunchback, but because he was queer—or that his condition as a hunchback led him to being queer. From a homophobic point of view, the difference is inconsequential, since the problem was the treatment of queerness in the first place, no matter how it was metaphorized or explained in terms of consequences and effects. Ginastera, as one of Argentina’s great symphonic composers, was certainly always welcome in the salons of the oligarchy and its cultural venues, but it was the idea of doing an opera whose text was clearly scandalous, i.e., homophobic, that had consequences. The Ginastera/Mujica Láinez opera was to be performed at the Teatro Colón, the country’s great opera venue and the most celebrated house in Latin America, but it was banned at the instigation of the wife of the dictator, General Juan Carlos Onganía, thus pitting his government against the artistic community identified with the Instituto Di Tella: both were anti-Peronista, but the former sought to squelch anything it could identify with the Left, while the latter was definitely sympathetic to at least a general international cultural Left.

The fact that *Bomarzo* could not be identified with either Peronismo or the Left was particularly ironic, given the coordinates of

this event. But one of the great ironies of Latin American neo-fascism was its integral homophobia, which included the association of homosexuality with the communist threat (Sebreli 322-28), without ever acknowledging or understanding the overwhelming evidence that Soviet-style communism, as witnessed during the Cuban Revolution, was just as homophobic as the Right-wing armed forces in Argentina and other parts of Latin America¹⁰. Mujica Láinez's text clearly is an entrypoint—like Gambaro's play—into the revision by the Argentine 1960s of masculine power, both in the way in which it deals with masculine violence and the way in which it stands, itself, as a victim of masculinist violence: an opera dealing with homosexuality stands as the most notorious icon of censorship during the period of military dictatorship.

Mundo nuevo

Though theater and performance have played a significant role in its history, Argentina is essentially a print culture, and newspapers, magazines, and intellectual and cultural reviews dominate the kiosks that can be found on nearly every street corner in the downtown area. Not surprisingly, print culture played a major role in shaping the 1960s in Argentina, both in terms of popularizing intellectual and artistic trends and in serving as the forum for the unique contributions coming from Argentina and the rest of Latin America. One of the most memorable of the reviews was *Mundo nuevo*. *Mundo nuevo* promoted the new internationalist writing in Latin America. That is, it stood in open, antagonistic opposition to the notion of committed writing propounded by the Left in general, particularly the Left that took its cue from the Cuban revolution and the revolutionary culture espoused by the institutions that emerged with the Castro government. Without exactly defending queer culture, *Mundo nuevo* nevertheless ended up constituting both an alternative to the prevalent homophobia of the Left and the manifest homophobia of the material cultural production of the Left¹¹.

Mundo nuevo was in 1966 under the direction of the Uruguayan scholar Emir Rodríguez Monegal (1921-85). Monegal joined the faculty of Yale University in 1968 upon resigning from the editorship of the journal, and he played a crucial role in the leadership provided by major U.S. universities in forging a liberal, internationalist construction of Latin American studies in this country as a response to the socialist program promoted by the Cuban Casa de las Américas. Indeed, *Mundo nuevo*, established with a base in Paris but with major support from the Argentine literary establishment, functioned in direct ideological tandem with the Casa's own *Casa de las Américas* to vie for the allegiance of writers, scholars, and general intellectuals in the hotly contested space of the emergence of an international awareness of the social and political importance of Latin America.

There is a tripartisan model at work here. On the one hand, conservative and "strictly literary" journals such as the British *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, the American *Revista de estudios*

hispánicos (founded at Columbia University in the 1930s as the first forum for Hispanic studies in the United States), and originally Mexican and then American *Revista iberoamericana* remain tied to a concept of the privileged domain of the literary. In a second sphere of influence, *Casa de las Américas*, founded in 1960 as part of the officially decreed cultural institution of the same name (Cancio Isla), was designed to serve as a platform for the promotion of a revolutionary concept of cultural production and the appropriate socialist role of scholars and intellectuals (Weiss); both the Casa and *Casa* were important in stimulating a production tied directly to the interests of the Cuban Revolution and the Castro government and to the promotion of their enactment in other Latin American societies.

By contrast, and as a third cultural and scholarly option, *Mundo nuevo* represented a range of writers and scholars, many of whom were sympathetic to the Cuban Revolution and especially to the consequences of the American embargo and American Right-wing hysteria over Castro's successes at home and international recognition abroad, but many of whom were also tied to both liberal and democratic socialism. One other way of looking at their position would be to say that they were tied to long-standing institutions and institutional practices of cultural and intellectual production, such as the Western European university establishment and its American counterparts, as well as its (often precarious) Latin American counterparts, and they were urgently concerned with representing something like a responsible Left-wing intellectual bridge between Cuba and the international community (Mudrovic). Of particular concern for the reputation of *Mundo nuevo* was the monetary support of the journal by the Ford Foundation, which was seen by many Latin American intellectuals as a front for cold-war CIA operations (Mudrovic 28-33). Also problematical was its relations with the Congreso por la Libertad de la Cultura, an organization created, certainly with CIA funds, to promote the concept of a "democratic" culture vs. a "socialist" one (Vanden Berghe; Mudrovic 13-20).

Although *Mundo nuevo* was based in Paris and moved to Buenos Aires (only to die in 1971 as a consequence of military tyranny), the journal was rightly understood to be the major platform of the so-called boom in Latin American literature (especially fiction) and the role played by Buenos Aires, through its publishers, intellectual reviews, newspaper supplements, and general interest magazines in promoting the boom.¹² After all, it was in Buenos Aires that Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*, the quintessential boom novel and the basis of much of the subsequent international interest in the boom, was published in 1967. *Mundo nuevo* promoted the boom authors, often by publishing extracts of forthcoming novels; promoted criticism on them (most notably Emir Rodríguez Monegal's groundbreaking interviews with major voices such as Carlos Fuentes, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Elena Poniatowska, Severo Sarduy); promoted innovative and controversial interpretative works on Latin America (such as Oscar Lewis's

anthropological studies on Mexican and Puerto Rican marginal groups); and showcased non-Latin American intellectuals who were either directly interested in Latin American culture or were exercising an influence on it (e.g., Roland Barthes's influential essay on Sarduy).

It is worth noting that *Mundo nuevo* reflected categorically the masculinist nature of the boom (for example, women are virtually absent from its pages, as either authors or critics) and, concomitantly, its implied commitment to the still prevalent compulsory heterosexuality of the virtually all hegemonic sectors, Right and Left, of the 1960s. Yet, returning to the aforementioned case of *Mundo nuevo*'s promotion of the Cuban exile writer Severo Sarduy, it is also noteworthy that Barthes's essay on Sarduy in 1967 exemplifies an early example of criticism by one queer writer on another, although it could not immediately be identified as such. Equally, a fragment of Manuel Puig's 1968 novel *La traición de Rita Hayworth*, appeared in *Mundo nuevo* in issue No. 10 (1967). *La traición* is now recognized as a founding text of queer Latin American fiction, although *Mundo nuevo* was more directly interested in showcasing it because of the unpleasant episode of censorship involving Puig's first attempt to get it into print in Buenos Aires (Levine).

Mundo nuevo was widely distributed and read in Argentina, and there was a spate of other publications during the 1960s and early 1970s that were directly related to its crucial cultural role. Of primary interest was *Los libros* (1969-76), which followed the book review and review essay format of *The New York Review of Books* (a U.S. cultural publication that enjoyed considerable visibility in Argentina), and *Crisis: ideas, artes, letras en la crisis* (1973-76; in various incarnations, *Crisis* survived until 1990).

Finally, in the context of publishing, an enormous role was played throughout the 1960s in Buenos Aires in the publication of Spanish translations of major international writers, particularly French, British, and American ones. This is an extension of the powerful role Buenos Aires played as a publishing and intellectual center beginning in the 1880s, one that continued virtually unabated (except for points of censorship) throughout the twentieth century. It is also specifically the role played by Victoria Ocampo's review *Sur* (1931-79) and its publishing imprint (King, *Sur*). *Sur* was staunchly committed to liberal notions of intellectual freedom. It published authors who were of an ideological whole with the generation highlighted by *Mundo nuevo* (some of whom also were promoted by *Sur*) and included writers, like Sartre, who were committed to the cause of socialism and the Cuban revolution.

Structuralism

One of the most stunningly important contributions of publishing in Buenos Aires in the 1960s was the series of translations of French intellectual thought, specifically structuralism, which was then the rage of interdisciplinary cultural thinking, by the publishing house

Nueva Visión. Nueva Visión was basically committed to publishing Spanish translations of a wide range of titles in art, theater, and architecture; it was primarily known for having the rights to the publications of the works of Bertolt Brecht, whose influence on Argentine theater has been mentioned. In the mid-1960s, Nueva Visión began publishing selected work of the structuralists, fully ten years before their work began to be translated into English to any comprehensive degree; other publishers involved in like projects were Editorial Signos, Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, Editorial de la Universidad de Buenos Aires, and Editorial Jorge Álvarez.

These translations were particularly influential in developing a structuralist climate in Argentina, so much so that some of the vocabulary entered general conversation among the educated. Three outstanding examples of collections of translated papers are *Estructuralismo y literatura*, whose cover bears in large block letters, the iconic term ESTRUCTURALISMO (see figure 2) and includes essays by such “popes” of structuralism as Barthes, Gérard Genette, Roman Jakobson, Claude Lévi-Strauss, J. M. Lotman, Tzvetan Todorov, and Boris A. Uspenski; *Análisis estructural del relato*, which includes essays by, Roland Barthes, A. J. Greimas, Claude Bremond, Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette et al. (this vol-

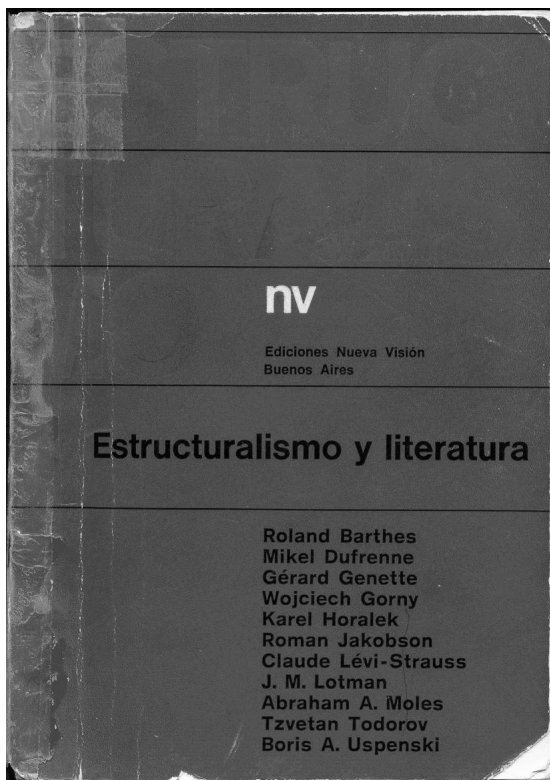


Figure 2: *Estructuralismo y literatura*, featuring Roland Barthes, Roman Jakobson, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tzvetan Todorov, Boris Uspenski, et al.

ume enjoyed at least three printings between 1970 and 1974); and *Lingüística y comunicación*, originally a 1967 UNESCO position statement. While it has become de rigeur to denounce structuralism as a form of bourgeois antihistoricist thought, one that is antithetical to a proper marxian dialecticism, it is important to recall how the proposition that sociosemiotic phenomena were involved in a tight dynamic and process of meaning, rather than being isolated or disconnected phenomena, was considerably revolutionary. This was especially true in the area of historical and philological thought, which, it was alleged, had difficulty in seeing culture as a system, and where it was difficult to understand the interrelationships, beyond a superficially thematic fashion, of the constitutive elements of a text, or of the text as, in line with the etymology of the word, a densely woven sign.

Conclusion

With the military coup in 1966, Argentina began a long slide into ever darker realms of neofascist tyranny, and it was not until 1983 that the country returned to constitutional democracy and officially attempted to re-create a truly redemocratized culture. The 1960s must be remembered—despite significant backdrops of repression—as a period of intense intellectual energy in that country and its capital city of Buenos Aires. The challenges to liberal democracy, the attempt to maintain a stand against military intervention in daily life and, more specifically, government, and the desire to renew national culture through an aggressive interest in exciting developments on the broader European, American, and Latin American scene all contributed to the cultural work undertaken in the city—not an inconsiderable amount of which survived at first the 1966 coup, if in many cases by going underground or exercising a fragmentary influence from foreign exile.

My interest here has been on only a few major examples, and I have organized these examples around the motif of sexual politics. Clearly, both traditional Argentine Catholicism and brutal military dictatorship were inimical to any Argentine version of the sexual revolution. Yet revisions of sexuality did occur, in the homoerotic dimensions of important works at the Di Tella (especially in its defense of *Bomarzo*) and in the antipatriarchalism of Gambaro's leading works. Even though Argentine theater remained generally heterosexist, the emergence of a feminist voice like Gambaro's was significant, and I would suggest it is now possible to do a queer reading of many of the mainline texts of the period¹³. In the case of *Mundo nuevo*, the review contributed to the creation of a new canon for Latin American literature, inserting into Argentine literature Manuel Puig, the first commercially successful Latin American gay writer, and bringing to its readers the work of gay European scholars like Roland Barthes. Part of the agenda of the 1966 military coup dealt with sexual politics, and it is therefore not surprising that all of these cultural manifestations were eventually to come under attack.

Notes

¹Movies are an institution that has changed so much that it lost its character as a “moral realm.” Movie houses, up until the first years of the 1960s, were social meeting places where people went to gather as though at a social event, in a club or a café where they might be regulars. . . . The old houses each had their own personality, and some fulfilled functions other than those for which they were designed. During the periods of sexual repression, they were frequented by heterosexual couples who kissed and masturbated each other. Homosexuals had their own spaces in certain movie houses, described as “popular,” unfrequented by families, and in many cases their spectators were strictly male.” Working the chessboard” was the slang phrase of the regulars of these haunts for the constant changing of seats in search of adequate companionship (my translation).

²Which really means Argentina for purposes of Argentine cultural and intellectual life (see Foster, “Prolegomenon”). The Argentines have a saying: “God is everywhere, but He only holds office hours in Buenos Aires.” Hence, with some implicit recognition of cultural activities in the second, third, and fourth cities of Argentina (Córdoba, Rosario, and Mendoza, respectively), I will be using Argentina and Buenos Aires somewhat interchangeably throughout.

³I regret that severe limitations of space exclude consideration of one other vital public spectacle: film. Buenos Aires is a city with an intense film culture, and this topic deserves an independent essay.

⁴Graziano discusses the “medieval” Catholic influences on the neofascist dictatorships; Mignone also deals with the Church and the neofascist dictatorships; see also the role of the Church as it is portrayed in Luis Puenzo’s 1985 Oscar-winning film *Historia oficial* and Mario David *Cruz invertida*, also from 1985; both films deal with neofascism.

⁵Perón’s scandalous break with the Church over the veneration of Evita Perón in the early 1950s, made it even more urgent for the Church to assert its moral agenda after the exit in 1955 of Perón and even more so with the advent of the military in 1966. Graziano is also an important source here.

⁶Gorbato reviews the evidence on this point with respect to the Montoneros; Sebreli refers to a similar situation with regard to the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo and also quotes Silvina Walger’s evidence with regard to the Montoneros (337).

⁷Masotta states that the American painter, assemblagist, and acknowledged creator of happenings, whose work was well known in Argentina, referred to Argentina as virtually a country of happenings (9).

⁸There is a large body of material on this subject, but one place to begin is with the description of torture in the official report com-

missioned by the new democratic government, *Nunca más*.

⁹Taylor studies this violence and its theatrical representation, especially as regards gender.

¹⁰The best known source on the homophobia of the Cuban revolution is the Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal's 1984 documentary *Improper Conduct*.

¹¹Mudrovcic, in her trenchantly critical analysis of *Mundo nuevo*, goes so far as to become absolutely shrill in her denunciations of how the journal promoted the Cuban queer writer in exile, Severo Sarduy (95-99).

¹²Of special importance was the *Time*-like magazine *Primera plana*, inaugurated in 1962 and suspended in 1973; resumed in 1973, only to be closed by the military censors. It was *Primera plana*, along with Editorial Sudamericana, which launched García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* in 1967 with their combined first prize in literature. *Primera plana* provided dedicated coverage to most of the important cultural production of the decade.

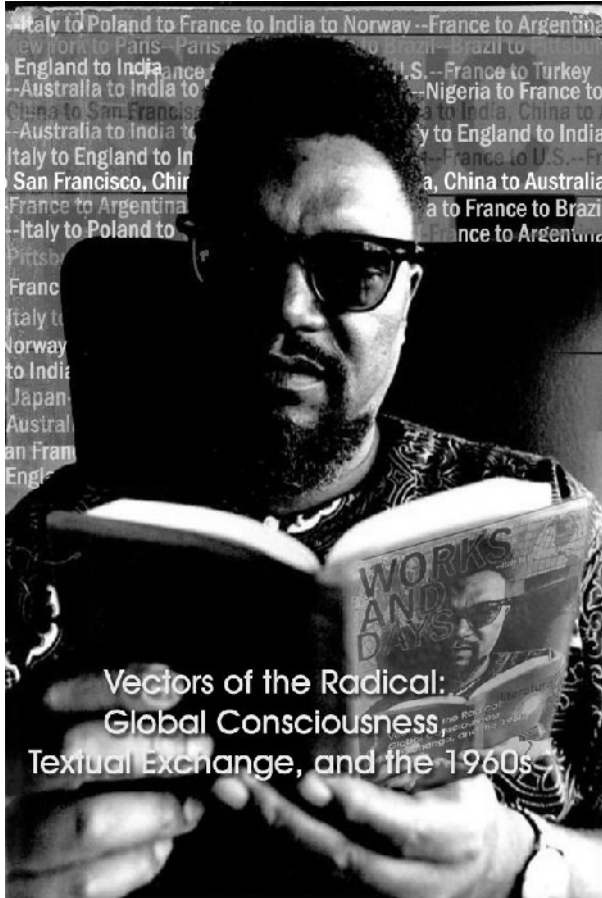
¹³I am thinking of plays by Osvaldo Dragún, Carlos Gorostiza, Ricardo Monti, Oscar Viale, and Ricardo Talesnik (Foster, "Consideraciones" and "El pacto homosocial").

Works Cited

- Amícola, José. *Camp y posvanguardia; manifestaciones culturales de un siglo fenecido*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 2000.
- Análisis estructural del relato*. Trad. directa del francés. Buenos Aires: Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1970. Trans. of *L'Analyse structurale du récit*.
- The Argentine Right; Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present*. Ed. Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald H. Dolkart. Washington, D.C.: Scholarly Resources, 1993.
- Arlt, Mirta. "El teatro de Edward Albee y el 'hiperrealismo' argentino." Pellettieri, Osvaldo, comp., *Teatro argentino de los '60—polémica, continuidad y ruptura—*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1989. 95-104.
- Avellaneda, Andrés. *Censura, autoritarismo y cultura: Argentina 1960-1983*. Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1986.
- Barthes, Roland. "Sarduy: la faz de barroca." *Mundo nuevo* 14 (1967): 70-71.
- Boal, Augusto. *Teatro del oprimido y otras poéticas políticas*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1974.
- Boal, Augusto. *Técnicas latinoamericanas de teatro popular; una revolución compernicana al revés*. Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1975.
- Boling, Becky. "Reenacting Politics: The Theater of Griselda Gambaro." *Latin American Women Dramatists; Theater, Texts, and Theories*. Ed. Catherine Larson and Margarita Vargas. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998. 3-22.
- Brest Romero, Jaime. *Arte visual en el Di Tella: aventura memorable en los años 60*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1992.

- Cancio Isla, Wilfredo. "Casa de las Américas." *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures*. Ed. Daniel Balderston, Mike Gonzalez and Ana M. López. London: Routledge, 2000. 1.289-91.
- Cypess, Sandra Messinger. "Tennessee Williams en Argentina." Pellettieri, Osvaldo, comp., *Teatro argentino de los '60—polémica, continuidad y ruptura—*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1989. 147-60.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961.
- Estructuralismo y literatura*. Selección de José Sazbon. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1970.
- Figueret, Manuela. "The Judeo-Argentine Experience: An Inexhaustible Search." *Identity in Dispersion; Selected Memoirs from Latin American Jews*. Ed. by Leon Klenicki. Trans. by Donald W. Bleznick. Cincinnati: The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, 2001. Supplement to the *American Jewish Archives Journal*.
- Foster, David William. *The Argentine Teatro Independiente, 1930-1955*. York, S.C.: Spanish Literature Publishing Co., 1986.
- _____. "Consideraciones en torno al homoerotismo en el teatro argentino." *Tradición, modernidad y posmodernidad (teatro iberoamericano y argentino)*. Ed. Osvaldo Pellettieri. Buenos Aires: Galerna; Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (UBA); Fundación Roberto Arlt, 1999. 239-44.
- _____. "Gay Visibility in Buenos Aires." Unpublished manuscript.
- _____. *Tendencias estéticas en el teatro*. Ed. Osvaldo Pellettieri. Buenos Aires: Galerna/Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (UBA), Fundación Roberto Arlt, 2001. 217-22.
- _____. *Producción cultural e identidades homoeróticas; teoría y aplicaciones*. San José: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 2000.
- _____. "Literature." *Hispanic Journal* 14.2 (1993): 7-19.
- _____. "Queering Latin American Popular Culture." Unpublished manuscript.
- Gambaro, Griselda. *Los siameses; 2 actos*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Insurrexit, 1967.
- Gorbato, Viviana. *Montoneros: soldados de Menem. Soldados de Duhalde?* Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1999.
- Graham-Jones, Jean. "Broken Pencils and Crouching Dictators: Issues of Censorship in Contemporary Argentine Theatre." *Theatre Journal* 53.4 (2001): 595-605.
- Graziano, Frank. *Divine Violence; Spectacle, Psychosexuality, & Radical Christianity in the Argentine "Dirty War"*. Boulder: Westview P, 1992.
- Guy, Donna J. *Sex & Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1991.
- King, John. *El Di Tella y el desarrollo cultural argentino en la década del sesenta*. Trans. Carlos Gardini. Buenos Aires: Ediciones de Arte Gaglianone, 1985.

- _____. *Sur: A Study of the Argentine Literary Journal and Its Role in the Development of a Culture, 1931-1970*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.
- Levine, Suzanne Jill. *Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman; His Life and Fictions*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2000.
- Lingüística y comunicación*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Nueva Visión, 1971.
- Masotta, Oscar et al. *Happenings*. Con hechos y textos de Marta Minujin et al. Buenos Aires: Editorial J. Alvarez, 1967.
- Mignone, Emilio F. *Iglesia y dictadura; el papel de la iglesia a la luz de sus relaciones con el régimen militar*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional, 1986.
- Mudrovcic, María Eugenia. *Mundo nuevo; cultura y guerra fría en la década del 60*. Rosario, Arg.: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 1997.
- Pavis, Patrice. *Dictionary of the Theatre; Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*. Trans. by Christine Shantz. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998.
- Pelletieri, Osvaldo, comp. *De Bertolt Brecht a Ricardo Monti: teatro en lengua alemana y teatro argentino (1900-1994)*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1994.
- _____. Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1989.
- Reati, Fernando O. *Nombrar lo innombrable; violencia política y novela argentina: 1975-1985*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Legasa, 1992.
- Rizzo, Patricia Thompson. *Instituto di Tella: experiencias '68*. Buenos Aires: Proa Fundación, 1998.
- Romero Brest, Jorge. *Arte visual en el Di Tella; aventura memorable en los años 60*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1992.
- Sebreli, Juan José. "Historia secreta de los homosexuales en Buenos Aires." *Escritos sobre escritos, ciudades bajo ciudades 1950-1997*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1997. 275-370.
- Sigal, Silvia. *Intelectuales y poder en la década del sesenta*. Buenos Aires: Puntosur Editores, 1991.
- Taylor, Diana. *Disappearing Acts; Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.
- Terán, Oscar. *Nuestros años sesentas*. Buenos Aires: Puntosur Editores, 1991.
- Toro, Fernando de. *Brecht en el teatro hispanoamericano contemporáneo: acercamiento semiótico al teatro épico en Hispanoamérica*. Ottawa: Girol Books, 1984.
- Vanden Berge, Kristine. "El Congreso por la Libertad de la Cultura y la América Latina." *Estudios ibero-americanos* 25.1 (1999): 217-34.
- Weiss, Judith A. *Casa de las Américas: An Intellectual Review in the Cuban Revolution*. Chapel Hill: Estudios de Hispanófila, 1977.



Vectors of the Radical:
Global Consciousness,
Textual Exchange, and the 1960s

bina freiwald

B I N A F R E I W A L D

INSTITUTION:

Department of English,
Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

———— **FIELDS:** ————

Critical Theory, Women's Writing,
Autobiography and Identity Discourses,
Canadian Literature

RECENT PUBLICATIONS:

- "Identity, Community, and Nation in Black Canadian Women's Autobiography." *Identity, Community, Nation: Essays on Canadian Writing*. Ed. Christl Verduyn and Danielle Schaub. Jerusalem: The Hebrew U Magnes P, 2002.
- "Nation and Self-Narration: A View from Québec/Quebec." *Canadian Literature* 172 (Spring 2002): 17-38.
- "Becoming and Be/longing: Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw* and *My Gender Workbook*." *Biography* 24.1 (Winter 2001): 35-56.

———— **ABSTRACT:** ————

Careful inspection of the translation and reception of French feminist texts by North American scholars reveals an occluded history of nationalistic bias that has ultimately served to block the development of a more complex, nuanced, and efficacious international feminist movement.