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MANLY ACTS: BUENOS AIRES, 24 MARCH 1996

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT


by

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Ethnographic fieldwork and writing are employed to explore how men in Buenos Aires construct and contest masculinity. The fieldwork is focused on three sites of manly performance: asado (Argentine barbecue), soccer, and tango. Asado serves to construct an Argentine national identity that privileges the masculine over the feminine, but that represents the male as powerless in the face of female flesh. Practices of feminizing male and female flesh are examined in the context of the military dictatorship of 1976-1983. Texts pertaining to asado, animal slaughter, and the dictatorship are used to argue that anal penetration precedes vaginal penetration among Argentine practices of feminization, and that the Argentine phallus is marked by its associations with bovinity. Debates concerning the politics of soccer are examined. Vanguardists assert that soccer is an opiate of the people, while populists assert that soccer stadiums are a transgressive and occasionally progressive space. Intellectuals reason that soccer is somehow homosexual, soccer fans cast aspersions on the sexuality of intellectuals, and fans of opposing clubs accuse one another of either sodomy or effeminacy. An argument is advanced that soccer promotes an oppositional, corporeal, working-class consciousness that refuses bourgeois sexual identities. The assignment of sexual identities is examined in the context of tango-dance. Speculations about the sexual identity of tango-dancers appear in tango performances that represent tango's primal scene as homosocial, in rumors purporting the
homosexuality of a prominent tango figure, in homoerotic tango literature, in the manly act of men practicing tango-dance together, and in heteronormative tango choreography. Repeated references to written texts in this ethnography and in the speech of informants in Buenos Aires raise questions about ethnographic methodology and about the disciplinary relationship of Cultural Anthropology to Cultural Studies.
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Joseph Tobin and Beth Fowkes Tobin brought me back to academia after an eleven year sojourn in the kitchen. Living down the mountainside from them inspired me to reconsider my educational disillusionment. Our reading groups in Hawai‘i proved to be the intellectual and political basis on which my education has been built. Joe’s comments on a late draft were crucial, helping me to recognize the novelty of my narrative and some of its implications.

Marta Elena Savigliano has been intimately involved in this dissertation from start to finish. Meeting and marrying Marta led to my developing a research interest in Argentina. Almost all of the above-acknowledged people I met through or with Marta. As an anthropologist specializing in Argentina and an Argentine, Marta could be considered both my resident expert and my principal informant. She graciously verified translations and answered countless questions ranging from the most mundane matters of porteña geography to the most esoteric aspects of critical cultural theory. She encouraged all my ethnographic interventions, even when they went against her better judgment. She was the first, last, and most invested reader of every draft of every version of every chapter. To her I dedicate this dissertation, with profound gratitude and love.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Lately, stumped by lingering qualms I climbed the stairs, bearing a bag of leather in which a newspaper lay atop six croissants. A yellow stripe girdled the blue jersey that I sported to venture out in the mild morning air. I held the bag aloft and announced:

—Aca estoy. What a beautiful day.

Halted I peered into the dark, shuttered bedroom and called in coarsely:

—Wake up, Marta. Wake up.¹ I already bought medialunas [croissants] and the paper. I’ll make coffee.

I am not always so eager early in the morning, but on this day I was anxious. My fieldwork was not progressing and I had a very full day ahead: an asado [barbecue] at midday, a soccer game in the late afternoon, and a milonga [tango dance] at night. I feared there was a connection. My fieldwork on the silence surrounding the so-called “Dirty War” was not going well because I was spending too much time at asados, soccer games, and milongas instead of with psychoanalysts and military men. Or so I thought as I returned from my morning shopping expedition on Sunday, 24 March 1996.

Fieldwork as Failure

There is a typical—perhaps normative—story about fieldwork. Sometimes it is told

¹ “Any resemblance of the following [or preceding] to fictional narrative is intended and purely noncoincidental” (Viswesaran 1994: 62; cf. Joyce 1961: 2-3).
casually in the corridors of meetings and other times, such as this, it finds its way into the
introduction to an ethnography. The anthropologist recounts that she arrived in the field
with a proposal to study a particular phenomenon in a particular way, but eventually
discovered that the proposed project was undoable, at least as planned, or not worth
doing, or not as worthwhile as another, unforeseen project. The following examples of
such stories are selected practically at random. From Jack Bilmes’ Discourse and
Behavior:

This essay has its origins in the failure of my dissertation research. In 1971, I set
out to discover how Thai villagers make decisions. This study was to be the first
step toward a distant goal: to learn what makes people do what they do. But
when I tried to take that first step, I found that I was facing an impenetrable wall.
[...] I was stuck. For some time thereafter, I agonized over possible alternate ways
to achieve my purpose, but the wall proved unyielding. I finally ended my useless
thrashing about by giving up, conceding that the project was misconceived. The
act of surrender, as it turned out, was liberating. The meaning of my data, which
were actually made up largely of villagers’ explanations of their intentions and
actual behavior, was transformed (Bilmes 1986: 1).

From Renato Rosaldo’s Ilongot Headhunting:

When, in the early summer of 1967, I looked forward to field research, I did not
intend to write an ethnographic history. Even after a short stay among the
Ilongots, their lifeways seemed perfectly suited for a synchronic study in social
anthropology. [...] Yet the more I understood how central bērtan were in the
workings of Ilongot social life, the more puzzled I became about their nature. [...] Eventualy, the baffling capacity of bērtan to shift from trivial labels to collective
identities that were crucial in such life-and-death matters as the feud became
intelligible when seen in a diachronic perspective (Rosaldo 1980: 14-15).

And from Billie Jean Isbell’s To Defend Ourselves:

I not only changed the design of my doctoral research while in the field and then
further refocused my analysis after returning to the United States in 1970, but I
also reoriented my professional direction after my Andean experience (Isbell 1978:
3).
These stories call attention to the near impossibility of knowing in advance what one will find in the field. There is perhaps something suspicious about a project that follows too smoothly from proposal to fieldwork to ethnography. One of the writing strategies by which we seek to establish our "ethnographic authority" is to note that our book-oriented proposal was lacking in ways that only fieldwork could correct (Clifford 1988). Sometimes the problem is that one's library research was simply inadequate to the task of formulating meaningful questions, or the questions one formulated proved to be theoretically wanting. Other times the problem is that the situation in the field has changed.

I went to Buenos Aires in May of 1995 with a proposal to study the silence surrounding the military repression of 1976 to 1983. In the first few years following return to civilian rule, Argentina set the international standard for documenting and remembering state terrorism. *Nunca Más*--the 1984, government-commissioned report on the *desaparecidos* [people "disappeared" by the military regime]--was translated into many languages and was invoked as a model for similar publications throughout Latin America and the world (J. Taylor 1994: 193). By 1989, when Carlos Menem succeeded Raúl Alfonsín as President, experts inside and outside of Argentina were expressing concern that Argentines were faltering in their role as exemplary rememberers. Menem's very first presidential act was to pardon the Generals who had ordered the military repression and the *guerrilleros* [guerrilla soldiers] who had resisted the military government. Some critics feared that Menem's message was that it was time to forgive and forget the "Dirty War."
My proposal to study Argentine silence was heavily influenced by a dinner conversation I had in August of 1991 with a group of North American psychoanalysts who were in Buenos Aires for a meeting of the International Psychoanalytic Association. The analysts were disappointed that most of the Argentine analysts were unwilling to talk about their experiences during the military repression. The analysts concluded that Argentina’s economic crisis was an effect of its people’s inability to discuss the “Dirty War,” and that a “talking cure” was necessary for Argentina to develop socially and economically. I recalled that dinner in March of 1994, when I saw El Muro de Silencio [The Wall of Silence], an Argentine film about an English film-maker who comes to Argentina to make a film about the “Dirty War.”2 Like the North American psychoanalysts, the Englishwoman of the film is frustrated by “the wall of silence” she runs up against pursuing a story of the military repression. Seeing that film and talking with its co-screenwriter Graciela Maglie, helped me focus my thoughts on the international politics of silence and violentology [the study of violence]. I decided to study silence in the context of state terrorism, in which silence is a result of political repression, and in the context of psychoanalysis, in which silence is sometimes interpreted as psychological resistance to the therapy. My hypothesis was that the Argentine silence surrounding the “Dirty War” could be interpreted as resistance to the voyeuristic gaze of First World violentologists. My plan was to write about the international discourse that surrounded the Argentine silence, rather than the terrors that the silence surrounded. I

---

2 El Muro de Silencio, released in 1993, was directed by Lita Stantic, and had a screenplay by Graciela Maglie and Lita Stantic.
enjoyed the prospect of writing the first study of Third World terror that would not include a single account of torture.

When I arrived in Buenos Aires in May of 1995, I found that the legendary silence was broken. My plan to study silence was swept away in a hurricane of words. Suddenly, the Argentine media were filled with confessions by military repressors, *Nunca Más* was made required reading for all high school students, and seemingly everyone was talking about the “Dirty War.” Clearly, some revisions were in order. I tried to revise the project, to expand it to include the politics of talking, in addition to the politics of silence, but I found that I had been much more eager to study the silence surrounding terror than I was in studying talk about terror. Now that several of the long-since pardoned torturers were talking, I felt obliged to include their voices in my ethnography, but studying accounts of torture and terror and military repression disturbed me. I shuddered at the prospect of devoting much of the next few years of my life to talking and reading and writing about violence.

I sought refuge from my morbid research in making asados, fanatically following soccer, and learning to dance tango. For several months, I conceived of each of these activities as an escape from my fieldwork. I pursued them avidly, but with pangs of guilt because they were keeping me from my proposed project. Perhaps to mitigate the pangs, I began thinking of papers I could write on the side, articles that did not fit into my dissertation project, but that were nonetheless based in my fieldwork in Buenos Aires. I started working on a paper on the gender identity of meat in asado. I also started clipping newspaper articles pertaining to a controversy about homosexuals on Argentina’s national
soccer team, and I informally asked some of my soccer companions for their opinions of the controversy. One evening in May 1996, Marta and I dined with Graciela Maglie and her husband Miguel. Graciela asked me how my writing about her screenplay was going and I answered telling about my flight into asado, soccer, and tango. The four of us proceeded to discuss my dilemma and by the end of the evening a new dissertation topic appeared, scribbled down on my napkin. Masculinity had emerged as a theme to link asado, soccer, and tango to my research on military repression. Eventually, I all but dropped military repression from my research. The project with which I arrived in the field was nearly scrapped. In its place, I wrote the pages you now hold. So goes my typical—perhaps normative—story about fieldwork: my account of how I arrived in the field with a proposal, but eventually discovered that the proposed project was undoable, at least as planned, or not worth doing, or not as worthwhile as another, unforeseen project.

I was, perhaps, lucky that my applications to study the silence surrounding the military repression in Argentina were rejected by the Wenner-Gran Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, the Woodrow Wilson Center, the MacArthur Foundation, the Fulbright Program of the Institute of International Education, and the National Security Education Program. As a result, my dissertation fieldwork was funded only by Rice University’s Anthropology Department and Office of Graduate Studies. My departmental funding was not dependent on my dissertation proposal. I liberally interpreted the Ora N. Arnold Award I received from the Office of Graduate Studies as a mandate “to conduct dissertation research in Spanish or Portuguese” rather than as an obligation to carry-out the exact project on military repression and silence that I submitted in applying for that
award. I felt relatively free to alter my research midflight.

Unfortunately, most of us arrive in the field with a more binding proposal in hand. Few are the anthropologists who can request funding or time off by saying, “I am going to go hang out in an exotic—or familiar—place and see what I find interesting.” To apply for most grants, we must have a theory to test and a plan to gather the appropriate data to test it. When the time comes to ask for money, even anthropologists who position ourselves on the humanities end of the discipline find it necessary to conform to a laboratory model of investigation. We formulate questions that require data collection to answer, and then we go to the field where we collect data that often have little to do with the proposed questions. At the very least, our questions undergo extensive revision in the field. Just as often—or so I suspect—the proposed questions are scrapped in favor of others that are born wholly of the fieldwork experience. Thus, there is often a mysterious association between the project that was proposed and the project that is completed.

Here and Now, There and Then

Taken together, the second, fourth, and sixth chapters tell the story of how I spent a single, very full day in Buenos Aires. I believe the story produces the fiction of a temporal and subjective continuity among the three ethnographic pairs. I hope this fiction will help the reader, as it has helped me, integrate my ethnographic excursions.

One day, even one very full day, cannot capture a culture, but neither can a year.

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3 I take this opportunity to note that all translations from Spanish and Portuguese language sources are my own.
or two, or three. Our truths are always partial and our knowledge local. I do not regret or apologize for the partiality and the locality of my ethnographic research, nor do I seek to minimize them. Between July 1991 through August 1996 I spent a total of thirty months in Buenos Aires, including thirteen of the eighteen months between April 1995 and August 1996. I suppose that is a little above the average for dissertation fieldwork. Nevertheless, it is an absurdly short time to get to know a culture. Compressing the representation of my fieldwork into a single day foregrounds the impossible brevity of even a relatively lengthy fieldwork experience.

Specifying the date 24 March 1996 is a response to problems of ethnographic production and representation identified by Johannes Fabian. Responding to Fabian, George Marcus and Michael Fischer observe,

Because anthropology in the field employs a different concept of time [...] than that in its written reports, any hope of overcoming this contradiction or discrepancy lay in moves toward exploring the historical consciousness of ethnographic subjects as well as fixing the historic moment of the actual doing of fieldwork in the writing of ethnography—this is the only way to eliminate the embedded denial of coevalness that Fabian critiques (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 97).

24 March 1996 locates me and my fieldwork in a historic moment that is familiar and near, as opposed to the exotic and far off time of “peasants,” “primitives,” and “the people without history.” The specificity of the date locates my fieldwork precisely and in a calendar shared by “us” and “them.” I believe it is quite enough to produce interpretations—such as they are—of acts that transpired on a single day. By compressing my fieldwork into twenty hours that have already come and gone I foreground the historically narrow scope that this ethnography shares with all ethnographies. I also
endeavor to explore and evoke the historical consciousness of porteños [residents of Buenos Aires]. The stories I tell about the history of asado, of soccer, and of tango are shaped by stories porteños told me. To a great extent I locate these stories in the context of my fieldwork: who told me what story, where, when, and why. Many of the stories call attention to the colonial relations that preceded and shaped my fieldwork and that now shape my ethnography. In narrating and interpreting asado, I draw on passages of gauchesco poetry quoted to me standing over a grill. The practice of quoting such poetry leads me to consider romanticization and deployment of the rural past in Buenos Aires on 24 March 1996. I also draw on the history of the beef industry in Buenos Aires, including the central role of Chicago (my home for thirty-one years) in that history. In narrating and interpreting soccer, I focus on conspiracy theories I heard and read regarding the 1994 World Cup, held in the United States, and in particular about the expulsion of an Argentine player prior to a game in Dallas (not far from where I studied for my Ph.D.). I argue that these conspiracy theories are indicative of a historical consciousness shaped by I.M.F. mandates, international businessmen, and corrupt politicians. In narrating and interpreting tango, I call attention to the stories told me by porteño tango professionals about knife-fighting in turn-of-the-last-century Buenos Aires and about performing on stage in Los Angeles (where I am writing) in May 1994. I relate the knife-fighting stories to Borges’ mourning for tango’s lost ruffian edge. The stories of performing in Los Angeles relate to me, a consumer of tango, taking classes along with other North American and European tourists in Buenos Aires, and attending the stage-tango shows in Los Angeles.
Despite such efforts to demonstrate coevalness, I do not presume to escape the “denial of coevalness” (Fabian 1983: 31) imbedded in ethnographic research and writing. I, the ethnographic writer, and my readers are still removed from me, the ethnographic fieldworker, and my informants. I believe, however, the datedness of my ethnography tempers the denial of coevalness that is heightened by structuralist, symbolic, and textualist textual conventions. The opposition between the writer-reader here-and-now and the fieldworker-informants there-and-then is evoked by my text, in the opposition between the familiar, ethnographic discourse set in roman type and the less-familiar, narrative fiction set in italicized type. There are inevitable and intentional leaks between the ethnography and the narrative. My ethnographic discourse, like all ethnographic discourse, seeps back and forth between interpretations written “now” and anecdotes experienced “then.” My narrative, too, is tinged by ethnographic reflections. The Other time of fieldwork is represented as already the time of analysis and writing. My intention is that such leaks within my text will call attention to leaks between the time of my text and the time of my fieldwork.

The title of this dissertation indicates that it is about Buenos Aires, not Argentina or the Río de la Plata region. The narrative, too, does not pass a step beyond the borders of the capital city. It follows me from one end of the city (Palermo) to another (Líneers) to yet another (San Telmo). Argentina and Argentines appear in the text of the dissertation, but as a rule I save these national labels for nationalist contexts. Asado in Buenos Aires contributes to Argentine national identity. The national soccer team is dominated by porteños and plays most of its games in Buenos Aires, but the team is Argentine. The
tango danced in Buenos Aires is called "Argentine tango" for the purpose of contrasting it with the ballroom-style tangos developed and danced abroad. I introduce the complexities of these geo-cultural categories early in Chapter Two, and as necessary throughout the text. I make a point of distinguishing between asado as it is prepared on balconies in Buenos Aires and asado as it is prepared out on the pampa. Much of my analysis of soccer is centered on class conflicts among the fans of soccer clubs located in different Buenos Aires neighborhoods. Differences among Buenos Aires neighborhoods also figure in my comments on tango-dance styles. I trust that repeated references to Buenos Aires and porteños will prevent my text from being read as a study of Argentine national character. I hope that repeated references to class and neighborhood differences will inhibit readers from generalizing even about porteño character. There are, of course, styles of talking, gesturing, and dressing that are characteristic of porteños. People throughout Latin America know a porteño when they see and hear one. My purpose, however, is not to catalogue the clues that mark a porteño as a porteño and not as a Rosarino, a Montevideano, or a Paulista. My purpose is to produce an understanding of activities that are alternately boquense, porteño, popular, elite, rioplatense, Argentine, and Latino, to name just a few of the many gradations of specificity. I feel no compulsion to confine my investigations to a geo-cultural object of analysis vigorously defined. Sliding up and down the continuum of geo-cultural specificity mimics the fluidity of the identities I encountered on the streets of Buenos Aires. From one moment to the next the same informant performed identities associated with his neighborhood, class, ethnicity, city, nation, continent, and language.
Manly Acts

Following this introduction, the dissertation is composed of three pairs of chapters. Each pair is devoted to a manly act: cooking, kicking, and dancing, or more specifically, cooking meat on a grill, kicking a soccer ball, and dancing tango. These manly acts are manly in the sense that they are commonly—but not exclusively—performed by men. In Buenos Aires and the rest of Argentina, asado is the one and only meal typically prepared by a man. As such, making asado is routinely invoked by porteño men as a definitively manly activity. There is something suspect about a man who does not make asado, and there is something intrusive about a woman who does. Soccer in Buenos Aires and the rest of Argentina is played almost exclusively by boys and men. Up until puberty, girls also play soccer, though not as much as boys, but very few adult women play soccer. Going to soccer games is also a predominantly male activity in Buenos Aires. Women’s attendance is on the rise, but it remains a small fraction of men’s, and in stadiums’ popular sections—where the “real fans” are found—there are extremely few women to be seen.

Tango is danced by men and women, typically with one another, so dancing tango is not a manly act in the same way that cooking asado and playing and talking about soccer are manly acts. I could argue that to dance tango per se is not a manly act, but to lead in tango (llevar or marcar [to carry or to mark]) is manly, whereas to follow (seguir la marca [to follow the mark]) is womanly. Following in tango—at least following docilely—may indeed be womanly, but my argument is that dancing tango—including following not docilely—is manly even when it is done by women. To make this argument I draw on the history, mythology, and choreography of tango to suggest that the tango-dancing couple is
comprised of two active, manly subjects, even if one is a woman.

These manly acts I study are manly, but my study of them does not add up to a theory of masculinity in general or of porteño masculinity in particular. I address certain theories of masculinity throughout these pages, weighing their relevance to the manly acts under consideration. Though I thereby flirt with the field of Men's Studies or Masculinity Theory, I resist entering this men's club. I resist entering men's clubs in general. It has been said that we choose to investigate as scholars that which mystifies us as participants in everyday life. According to this reasoning, cultural anthropologists as a group are those who experience as an imposing chore the everyday manners that most people handle effortlessly. Who is so anxious about kinship that she would think twice about what to call her mother's brother or her father's sister? Who is so troubled by everyday conversations that he would write whole articles about how to answer the telephone or when to say "thank you"? And who is so mystified by manly acts that he would write a dissertation about them? I confess. At home, in my own culture, I cook, but not Texas-style barbecue or hamburgers on the grill. I have never been to a professional (North American) football game and I do not read the sports section first. Nor do I dance the man's part in fox trot, waltz, salsa, swing, or two-step. In fact, I spend most of my time in the company of women and I flee from men's talk about the bodies of women, athletes, or automobiles. Manly acts are indeed a mystery to me, which I believe helps to explain how I could write a dissertation about them.

There is little that it is new in Men's Studies. It is what we in the academy have been doing for centuries. My own undergraduate education allows me to confirm that as
recently as twenty years ago, what was called a “liberal arts education” might just as well have been called “Men’s Studies.” As Jeff Hearn observes, “What is new is the relatively rapid growth of interest within the social sciences in men and masculinities as an explicit and gendered topic of inquiry” (Hearn 1996: 202, my emphasis). The difference nowadays is that instead of calling it “Ancient Greek Philosophy” we might call it “Ancient Greek Masculinity,” and instead of calling it “Military History” we might call it “Militaristic Constructions of Manhood.” Tania Modleski suggests that such new-found gender specificity is a reaction to feminism and feminist theory and she calls attention to “the extent to which male power is actually consolidated through cycles of crisis and resolution, whereby men ultimately deal with the threat of female power by incorporating it” (Modleski 1991: 7). Masculinist theory can be read as a move by which men incorporate the threat of feminist theory. In practice, what Judith Butler (1993a: 230) calls the “democratizing” of feminist, gay, or lesbian studies is often—and not incidentally—a straight male appropriation of women’s, gays’, and lesbians’ oppositional positions and critical theories. Matthew Gutman’s The Meanings of Macho (1996) and David Gilmore’s Manhood in the Making (1990) are but two particularly blatant examples of anthropological texts that have as their primary effect “simply to give men more options than they already have in patriarchy” (Modleski 1991: 88). Like the films Tootsie and Mrs. Doubtfire, such masculinity studies confirm that we men can be great women, too.

As an alternative to gender studies that defend men’s claims to women’s roles and feminist theory, Modleski commends gender studies that focus “on the construction of patriarchal power, and on the place of the female subject within this construction” (ibid.: 11,
emphasis in the original). I have found Modleski’s arguments helpful for my study of porteño men. In the chapters on asado (Chapters Two and Three), I examine the place of female and feminized subjects in the construction of patriarchal power. I argue that women as such constitute a threat, which is overcome by submitting women to acts of feminization. In Chapter Six, I observe that men can and do dance the “woman’s role” in tango. My argument is not, however, that men therefore have the option to dominate or submit. Instead, I argue that to the extent that tango was and is a homosocial dance, the woman’s role was constituted as active and competitive, but the heterosexualization of tango-dance has involved re-choreographing the woman’s role as docile and submissive. This is not to say that female subjects docilely accept the place they are assigned in the tango construction of patriarchal power.

These manly acts are manly acts in the sense that they are acts performed by men. In his critique of masculinity studies, Hearn calls for a turn away from depth psychologies, both explicit and obscure, toward an analysis of practice.

Whatever the possible meanings, definitions or theoretical perspectives of masculinity, the question remains: how does this “quality” relate to what men do, to men’s material practices? Not only do most versions of masculinity fail to address that question, but more fundamentally, they tend to divert attention away from material practices, whether in work, sexuality, violence or elsewhere, and away from materialist or materially based analyses of gendered power relations (Hearn 1996: 208).

I have followed Hearn in my decision to focus on what men do as opposed to what masculinity is. I engage very little with anthropological studies of masculinity as a “quality” intrinsic to men’s genes, anatomy, or procreative function. Neither masculinity nor masculinities appears in these pages as even a partial explanation for what men do.
Instead, I address masculinity as a constructed and contested identity. Masculinity is a substance invented by men (and women) who, having invented it, proceed to debate who has the most and who the purest. From an (illusory) ethnographic distance, contests over masculinity can appear like games played by little boys with imaginary guns: Whose gun is the biggest or the most powerful? Who got whom first and with what effect? It is a mistake for anthropologists to enter into such debates. In ethnomethodological terms, the boys’ guns are, from the researcher’s point of view, topics not resources. We cannot determine whose gun is the biggest or the most powerful. What we can determine is how the boys go about inventing and debating the size and power of their guns. So it is that men of various classes, nations, and ethnicities debate whose masculinity is the best, the most potent, the most precise, the most effective. As ethnographers we can no more see their masculinities than we can see the little boy’s imaginary guns. What we can observe are the manly acts men use to invent and debate masculinity.

Hearn wonders “to what extent masculinity is an ethnocentric or even Eurocentric notion” (Hearn 1996: 209). Is masculinity a colonizing construction, one of the discourses with which We naturalize our domination of Them? Mrinalini Sinha, writing about the English colonization of Bengali India, suggests that it is.

[T]he point of my discussion of colonial masculinity is not to stage an encounter between discrete British and Indian conceptions of masculinity. Rather, it is to understand the prior significance of imperialism in the construction of both ‘national’ British and ‘colonial’ Indian politics of masculinity in the late nineteenth century (Sinha 1995: 7).

Studying masculinity across cultures contributes to this colonizing construction of masculinity if masculinity is posited as an object for comparative analysis. Comparing
masculinities can foster the illusion that everyone has one and that each is ready to be measured—and found wanting—next to ours. Writing about men it is difficult to avoid reifying masculinity. It might be tempting to eschew the word, but not mentioning “masculinity” does not make it disappear, anymore than not mentioning “race” makes race disappear. Masculinity and race have already been loosed on the world—both, perhaps, by Europeans. Whether or not I write about porteño men, they have and will discuss masculinity, maleness, manliness—in terms such as machismo, virilidad, varonil, hombredad, and masculinidad. I can and do call attention throughout the chapters that follow to the colonial contexts in which porteño masculinity is contested, and also to how masculinity is deployed across class, regional, and generational divides in Argentina. My focus is not on masculinity per se, but is on manly acts and how they serve to create masculinity. Accordingly, my approach can be located comfortably within the shift across the social sciences from structure to practice and from text to performance.

These manly acts are acts in the sense that they are performances. Engagements with theories of performance and performativity intervene throughout this dissertation. In Chapter Two I consider Butler’s reading of Derrida’s reading of Austin’s theory of performativity (Butler 1993a, Derrida 1988, Austin 1961). In particular, I examine Butler’s theory of the citational performativity of gender in relation to porteño masculinity. In Chapter Three I draw on Diana Taylor’s reading of the performance of gender in Argentina’s so-called “Dirty War.” Despite my best efforts to avoid thinking about the so-called “Dirty War” itself (as opposed to the silence that surrounded it), I find to my dismay that I have produced what is probably the most anatomically explicit reading
to date of the Argentine military state's torture practices. Victor Turner's framework for studying "social dramas" runs barely beneath the surface of Chapter Four and Five. My analysis of soccer returns repeatedly to the relation of the liminoid time and space in which soccer is played to the profane politics of everyday life in Buenos Aires. In Chapter Six I return to Butler and, this time, to her reading of masculinity and melancholia. I argue that like many contributions to performance theory, hers could benefit from greater cultural specificity.

These manly acts are acts also in the sense that I present them as three, distinct segments in my narrative. Act One is set out of doors, on the patio behind an apartment in Palermo. The dramatis personae include Enrique the host, and Jeff the ethnographer, plus their wives and a few friends. The dramatic tension revolves around Jeff's intrusive presence. Even though he is not porteño (or Argentine), he has insisted on buying the meat for Enrique to cook. Is the meat good enough? Too good? The right cuts? Is there too little or too much? A secondary plot involves Marc, a guest at the asado who is from Surinam. How much meat will he eat? Act Two is also set out of doors, in the seats of a soccer stadium in Liniers. Jeff the ethnographer is now accompanied by Julio the fan, plus 40,000 or so other fans who go nameless. Dramatic tension is now centered on a jersey, blue with a yellow horizontal stripe. Jeff and Julio agreed that each would wear such a jersey, but Jeff is not wearing his. How did this fashion faux pas come about? Can it be rectified? Act Three is set indoors, at a tango club in San Telmo. Jeff, who is also the playwright, has once again inserted himself in the center of the action, but this time he is joined by both Enrique the host and Julio the fan, both of whom, it turns out, are expert
tango-dancers. Most of the guests from the asado also return to the stage, including Marc and the wives. There are several dance numbers and a couple of songs with lyrics, too. The dramatic action reaches a climax when Enrique and Julio meet and exchange words.

A three-act play (Chapters Two, Four, and Six), with an introduction (Chapter One), two theoretical intermissions (Chapters Three and Five), and a conclusion (Chapter Seven) is not a traditional ethnographic dissertation. These pages are not a monograph. There is no “introduction” to “the subject, method and scope of this enquiry” and no demographic or geographic survey. There is scarcely a mention of the village's means of production and distribution, or of its principal resources and products. Myths, rituals and linguistic data are presented piecemeal, and worst of all, there is no problem, no big question that is either asked or answered. Instead of a traditional monograph, this dissertation is a collection of essays, which, as William Roseberry, following Marcus, observes has “become our principal means of communication” (Roseberry 1989: x).

The modernist form of the essay [...] opposes conventional systematic analysis, absolves the writer from having to develop the broader implications of his thought (while nonetheless indicating that there are such implications) or of having to tie loose ends together (Marcus 1986: 191).

I acknowledge that my own recourse to essays is in part a flight from the compulsion to develop the broader implications of my thought and to tie loose ends together. I do, however, indicate what some of those implications are. Kamala Visweswaran asks if the privilege of writing a collection of essays instead of a monograph should be reserved for “senior members of the discipline”? I am aware that young anthropologists typically produce an ethnographic monograph before they are awarded the essay, a privilege of status normally
confferred upon the senior members of the discipline. And yet if I have broken the
form, surely those same senior writers also recognize that some of the conditions
for producing that first monograph have broken down (the tenure system
notwithstanding) (Visweswaran 1994: 11).

Perhaps we are at a point in the history of cultural anthropology at which it is more
difficult than it has been to pull off an ethnographic monograph. If so, I suggest it is better
to leave the perilous ethnographic monograph in the expert hands of senior
anthropologists, and not trust its future to those of us who are just starting out.

Previews

In Chapter Two I address some of the literature pertaining to the anthropology of
food. Anthropological research on food has tended to polarize between cultural
ecological studies of food production on one end, and nutritional and symbolic studies of
food consumption on the other. Cooking has occupied an imprecise middle-ground: the
last stage of production and the first stage of consumption. I follow asado from the
slaughterhouse to the plate, but my focus is firmly on the grill. I examine how standing at
a grill full of bovine muscles and organs, porteño men contest masculinity. They culinarily
construct an Argentine national identity that is finely marked by class and regional
distinctions. There are frequent disagreements about the quality of various cuts of meat
and how to arrange each cut on the grill, about when to add salt, and about which form of
asado is best and why. The masculinity constructed on the grill locates men on a heirarchy
relative to one another, but even as the men compete to establish their asadoistic mastery,
they agree that there is something special about the Argentine cow that renders their best
efforts superfluous and overcomes their worst mistakes. In asados, female subjects are generally banished or marginalized, but female flesh figures prominently as a substance men cannot ultimately affect but they can incorporate. I argue that asado is therefore both a glorification of manly acts and a confession of men’s ineffectiveness faced with female flesh.

In Chapter Three, I reflect further on the gender identification of bovine bodies in Argentina. I distinguish between the female and the feminine (or feminized). I argue that feminine bodies are bodies that are dominated through certain penetrative practices, whereas female bodies thwart stable domination. My examination of feminization leads to an analysis of bodies in the industrialization of slaughter and of political violence. (Here are remnants of what was to have been my study of the silence surrounding the so-called “Dirty War.”) I focus on three texts: the nineteenth-century short story El Matadero [The Slaughterhouse], an ethnography of slaughterhouses in France (Vialles 1994), and a confessional interview with an Argentine naval officer (Verbitsky 1995). I use these texts to establish connections between the history of Argentine political torture and the history of animal slaughter. In particular I draw on the nation-founding discourse of Argentine slaughterhouses to invert inversion. Derrida argues that the first step in deconstructing a hierarchical opposition is to invert it. Homosexuality is routinely constructed as a secondary term in relation to a primary heterosexuality. It is categorized as an inversion of a “normal” heterosexual object choice. Rather than presume to transcend the binary logic of heterosexuality/homosexuality, I do endeavor to deconstruct that opposition. I read Argentine political torture practices to argue that sodomy is the primary case of
penetration, and that heterosexual genital intercourse is the secondary case. The result of this reading is an inversion of inversion.

In Chapter Four I discuss several scholars’ arguments regarding the politics of soccer. In particular I take up the well-worn question, is soccer an opium of the people? Many fine writers are discussed—including the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco and the Argentine cultural critic Juan José Sebreli—but the chapter is written mostly in the shadow of the Uruguayan historian Eduardo Galeano’s brilliant book on soccer, which appeared just as I made the transition from playing with soccer to working on soccer (Galeano 1995). I follow Galeano in exploring the oppositions of work and play, business and pleasure. What does it mean to categorize politics and economics as serious and to categorize cooking (e.g., asado), sports (e.g., soccer), and dancing (e.g., tango) as playful? What gender and class interests are served by these categorizations? I draw on the Brazilian anthropologist Roberto Da Matta’s interrogation of these oppositions to conclude that they are untenable (Da Matta 1982). The serious inevitably intrudes on the playful, and the playful on the serious. Soccer despite being played is serious business.

I continue my examination of soccer in Chapter Five, turning to the sexual politics of the sport. I focus on a debate launched by the late Argentine gay-rights advocate Carlos Jaúregui in July 1995 regarding whether or not gays are or should be allowed to be on Argentina’s national soccer team. As background to this debate, I review some of the purported relations between soccer and homosexuality, including the sexual insecurities of intellectuals confronted with so much virility, opposing fans’ attempts to brand one another as sodomites or fags, the differences between sodomy and faggotry, rumors about
rampant pedophilia in the locker room, and some wild speculations concerning the anality of goalkeepers. The anthropological works that most helped me tackle this topic are Marcelo Suárez-Orozco’s study of latent homosexuality in Argentine soccer (Suárez-Orozco 1982) and Eduardo Archetti’s ongoing study of soccer and masculinity (e.g., Archetti 1994c, 1995a, 1996a, and 1997). Paintings by porteño artist Jorge Azar figure prominently in my discussion, along with a poem by Azar’s partner, Luis Amaya. In his own way, Azar and Amaya each resists sexual identities without denying his sexual practices. I read their positions as a will to pleasure despite the identities imposed by rational, colonial, and heterosexist economies.

In Chapter Six, I discuss arguments concerning the genders and sexualities of tango-dance. Though I draw on anthropological studies of tango by Archetti (1994d) and Julie Taylor (1976 and 1992), the work I repeatedly turn to is that of my wife, Marta Savigliano (1994 and 1995). Here I follow Marta’s lead regarding the touchy topics of homosexuality and machismo in the tango world. I delve as deep as I can into the issues of women and homosexuality, and into another sore spot, as well: tango’s Black roots. I draw on written texts and tango-lyrics regarding the true sexual desire of tango-singer Carlos Gardel. Is Gardel the epitomal man’s man or lady’s man, and which of those men is sexually more suspect? I also draw on dance reconstructions and my own embodied investigations of tango-dance to address widely-diverging interpretations of the gender roles performed by tango-dancing couples. Is tango a paradigm of heterosexist gender relations? Or is it a fundamentally homosocial dance, even when it is performed by the obligatory heterosexual couple? My argument about tango’s homoerotic roots overlaps at
several points with that of Jorge Salessi, especially in its most recent incarnation (Salessi 1997; see also Salessi 1991 and 1995). My chapter concludes with an attempt to disentangle my argument from his and from Judith Butler’s psychoanalytic excavations of straight male melancholia (Butler 1995).

In Chapter Seven, I conclude with a belated literature review pertaining to ethnographic research in Buenos Aires. In particular, I draw on discussions by the native anthropologists Archetti and Savigliano regarding the use of literary texts and other written material to conduct fieldwork in Buenos Aires (Archetti 1994b, 1994d, and 1995a, and Savigliano 1997). I use their comments to reflect on my own use of short stories, paintings, poetry, lyrics, cookbooks, newspapers, and magazines in ethnographic research. What are the methodological and disciplinary ramifications of engaging ethnographically with the written? Is ethnography, as Richard Handler claims, what separates anthropology from cultural studies? These questions prompt me to consider the metaphysics of ethnographic presence and the challenge and desire to maintain ethnographic authority conducting research in a literatate and literary culture.

Silence Afterall

Silence, irrepresible, returns. Try as I might to avoid doing so, I find I have written a dissertation around and about silence. As already noted, the “so-called ‘Dirty War’” is spoken for in Chapter Three, but silence is not limited to words not-spoken about that war. What I now find more disturbing are the silences between and beneath all my words. Desaparecidos, to be sure, but also Blacks, Sodomites, Fags, Castratos. To a
great extent, what I have found worth writing about is precisely what I have found porteños do not talk about. Tango’s Black roots? Porteños hide them, deny them, dismiss them. I reveal them (Chapter Six). Sodomy? Porteños are not eager to talk about that either. I document that it is at work in the nation’s foundational fiction, its “Dirty” War (both, Chapter Three), and in soccer stadium chants (Chapter Five).

Homosexuality? Again, porteños may not tell you about it. I suggest it is to be found in soccer locker rooms (Chapter Five) and alongside Blackness at tango’s roots (Chapter Six). My good friend Jorge Azar told me repeatedly that his paintings are not about homosexuality. Jorge appears in these pages, along with his paintings and my weak effort to accommodate his identity-refusal, all placed in the context of a debate about homosexuality and soccer. And most vile violation of all: I write down the words that are at most whispered about a certain tango singer and national icon (Chapter Six).

Castration? The porteños say the meat on their grills is “carne de vaca” [cow meat, beef]. I call attention to the act that makes much of their famous carne de vaca “de vaca.”

Perhaps my habit of breaking silences is due not only to the prurience of my interests. Breaking silence may be structurally inherent in ethnographic interpretation. Every theory is a conspiracy theory to the extent that it purports to reveal unseen causal connections. Similarly, every commentary purports to say what is unsaid. As Foucault observes, “commentary’s only role is to say finally, what has silently been articulated deep down” (Foucault 1971: 13, emphasis in the original). Though Foucault emphasizes “finally” and “deep down,” I emphasize “silently.” In these pages I studiously avoid invoking deep meanings, whether psychological (e.g., psychoanalytic) or social (e.g.,
structuralist). Nevertheless, I cannot avoid invoking silence. To produce commentary is to produce silence: that which the commentary reveals and replaces. I hope the wide margins and double spacing required in a dissertation will serve to remind the reader of the voices that are silenced by the written words.
CHAPTER TWO
COOKING AND MALE PERFORMANCE

The relationship between food and identity has been a topic of speculation at least since Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin formulated his aphorism, "Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are" (Brillat-Savarin [1826] 1972: 3). In this chapter I focus on the related observation that you are what you cook. What is the relationship between cooking and Argentine national identity? How do gender, class, and regional differences intersect with a culinarily constructed national identity? I believe that ten years ago, such questions would have most likely led to a consideration of the politics of representation. In those days, much cultural criticism was focused on who represented whom and on whose interests were served by representations. These days, I believe, the focus of much cultural criticism has shifted, as Dwight Conquergood observes, from "the 'world as text' to the 'world as performance'," from the analysis of colonizing representations (Said 1979) to the analysis of postcolonial mimesis (Bhabha 1996), from the semiotics of gender (de Lauretis 1984) to queer performativity (Sedgwick 1993), and from "the crisis of representation" (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 10) to the crisis of identity politics (Reinelt 1994).

Then again, maybe it is my peculiar experience in the academy and not the academy itself that has changed. From 1986 to 1991, I lived in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, among political activists who taught me to see issues, including those of gender and class, in the shadow of U.S. colonialism. Not surprisingly, my anthropological research was focused
on critiquing colonizing discourses (see Tobin 1994 and 1997). Since 1992 I have lived primarily in Riverside, California, among performers and performance-oriented critics who have taught me to see issues, including those of colonialism and national identity, in the light of lesbian and gay politics. Again not surprisingly, my anthropological research has become focused on the sexual politics of performances (see Tobin 1998a and 1998d). Here, I examine the relevance of certain queer theories to the culinary performance of porteño masculinity. Can manliness be read as masquerade? Is macho performativity subversive? These questions lead me to consider the politics of appropriating feminist and queer theories developed in the First World for reading asado, a (predominantly) straight (predominantly) male performance located in the Third World. Along the way I argue that class, gender, and nationality cannot be addressed independently. Porteño masculinity is always class conscious, and class consciousness in Argentina is always colonial. Will “we Argentines” identify up with the colonizers and their local agents? Or will “we” identify down with the colonized? The macho porteno responds to such questions on a daily basis: dancing a tango, watching a soccer game, grilling a piece of meat.

Asado

I met Enrique in the tango scene in Buenos Aires. By day, he was working as a film and television extra and as a carpenter and painter. He is married to Ana, who by day is a career counselor and a Lacanian psychoanalyst. By night, Enrique and Ana dance tango. They are recognized at all of the milongas [tango dance halls] and prácticas [tango practice sessions] from San Telmo to Almagro, and they teach tango-
dance in the living room of their apartment in Palermo Viejo. The apartment is on the
ground floor in the back of the building, so they have a patio de atrás [in the back], and
the patio, of course, has a built-in parrilla [grill].

On my first visit to the apartment I noticed the parrilla, so I mentioned to Enrique
that I love asado. From experience, I knew that he would not only invite me to an asado,
but would also offer to teach me, a yanqui [yankee, applied to all Unitedstatesians] how
asado is made.

There are several, well-marked varieties of asado in Argentina. Asado criollo
[creole-style] refers to meat stretched out on a stake that is tilted over a pit of glowing
embers. Asado al horno [in the oven] is baked, usually by a woman, and is hardly an
asado at all. Somewhere in between on the scales of authenticity and masculinity is asado
a la parrilla [on the grill]. Unlike asado al horno, asado a la parrilla is almost always
made by a man, but unlike asado criollo, asado a la parrilla is not closely associated with
gauchos out on the pampa [plains]. Yet another category is asado con cuero [with
leather]; it indicates asado made with beef that still has its hide attached, cooked either on
a stake or a grill. Asado con cuero is probably the most criollo of all, but is rarely found
within the confines of the city, where I have conducted my fieldwork. During several
years of fieldwork in Buenos Aires, I have focused my research on asado a la parrilla. It is
by far the most prevalent type of asado in the nation’s capital and surrounding suburbs. In
Buenos Aires, one is never more than a block or two from a parrilla--literally a grill, but in
this case it metonymically stands for a restaurant in which grilled meat is featured. The
Sunday-afternoon family *asado* is also invariably an asado a la parrilla, as are the asados shared by a group of guys as a break from work or after playing soccer. Asado criollo is a luxury of the very rich, who have land enough and time for it, or of tourists and Argentines in search of an authentic Argentine experience. Asado a la parrilla, by contrast, is quotidian and middle-class. Buenos Aires is a city not of estates, but of balconies, terraces, and patios, each of which, more often than not, is home to a parrilla. It is standing at such parrillas that I have conducted my fieldwork.

Nation, Class, and Gender

*Actually, I taunted Enrique into inviting me to an asado. Marta and I had only recently returned to Buenos Aires when I mentioned my interest in asado to Enrique. So, Enrique asked if we had been to an asado yet, on this visit to Argentina?*

“Yes,” I replied, “we just had an asado made by una amiga [a female friend]”.

*Enrique asked if I really meant to say that the so-called asado was prepared by “una mina [a broad]”? I think he hoped that I was confusing genders again—as I sometimes do, at least when I am speaking Spanish—but I assured him that la amiga in question is not un amigo. Predictably, Enrique said that in that case we had not yet been to an asado, and he invited us to "a real asado"—that is, an asado prepared by un macho argentino [an Argentine male].*

Historically, asado is related to the Argentine beef industry and, more specifically, to gauchos, who thrived in the nineteenth-century in central Argentina, Uruguay, and
Southern Brazil. Vicente Rossi argues that the gaucho is more properly Uruguayan than Argentine (Rossi 1958). Rossi overstates the case when he dismisses Argentine and Brazilian gauchos as secondary in relation to Uruguayan gauchos. Rossi is right, however, in arguing that gauchos have inhabited the whole of Uruguay, whereas they have inhabited only a small portion of Brazil, and much but not all of Argentina. It follows that asado--to the extent that it is a gaucho meal--more accurately represents Uruguay than it does Argentina, but in fact gauchos and their asado do not correspond with any single nation-state. The same is true of tango. At the Copa América soccer tournament held in Uruguay in 1995, each country’s national soccer association was required to select a danceable song to be played as the team entered the stadium. Uruguay and Argentina wanted to select the same song: “La Cumparsita,” an early tango, written by the Uruguayan Matos Rodríguez and first arranged and performed by the Argentine Roberto Firpo. As a compromise, neither country was allowed to select a tango. In fact, much of what is called “argentino”--including asado, tango, mate [an herbal tea], and perhaps even a certain style of playing soccer--would more properly be called “rioplatense” [pertaining to the Río de la Plata region], since it is shared by Uruguay and the Province of Buenos Aires, but not by the rest of Argentina. Yet asado has come to be the meal that is associated with Argentina as a nation, including tropical, mountainous, and arid regions that do not have a history of beef production, gauchos, or estancias [cattle-bearing estates].

Asado in Argentina is, like bullfighting in Spain, “an effective national symbol where one region (and class) dominates the rest” (Douglass 1984: 255; see also Douglass
1997). As a national meal, asado privileges the central plain, where cattle have long been raised, and the harbor-city of Buenos Aires, where meat has long been packed for export.

Asado’s class connotations are complicated. Historically, asado, like bullfighting, has aristocratic connotations, pertaining to estancia-owners, but asado also has lower-class connotations, pertaining to gauchos. Thus, in contemporary Argentina asado is not a national symbol in which the upper class dominates the rest. Asado does, however, require certain cuts of meat that are beyond the means of many Argentines. Most Argentines, including those who belong to Argentina’s large middle class, can afford at least modest Sunday asados, but members of Argentina’s growing lower class are precluded from partaking of this national meal. As a symbol of Argentine national identity, asado also privileges men over women. I have eaten wonderful asado a la parrilla prepared by a woman, but significantly hers was a home without a male member. It is poignant that in Juana Gorriti’s compilation of women’s recipes, the recipe for asado is prefaced with the explanation that “a celebrated (male) cook has gallantly made me a present of this recipe” (Carmen G. de Vela quoted in Gorriti 1899: 281). The knowledge of asado belongs properly to men and is something that women possess due only to the absence or generosity of men.

Argentina has a rich and varied cuisine, including wonderful stews and empanadas [savory turn-overs], pastas and pizzas, but it is asado alone that has the status of a national meal. All of the other dishes have specific regional or ethnic markings, and they are made by women. Six nights a week, or more, women are responsible for putting often-elaborate dinners on the table, but it is the Sunday afternoon or holiday asado—the one and only
meal typically made by a man--that stands for the nation of Argentina both at home and abroad. I find this gender imbalance in Argentine cuisine especially striking because, as a (former) chef, I do not believe that asado deserves so much attention. Thus, I am tempted to write of asado in Argentine cuisine what Nick Fiddes wrote about the roast in British cuisine.

In the home the man may also be responsible for the roasting of a piece of meat, and particularly its carving--a significant activity for the male to have annexed, given its display of symbolic mastery whilst being devoid of any real requirement for skill or courage (Fiddes 1991: 158).

Whether or not asado, or carving, is devoid of any real skill, it does deserve less attention than tour-de-force dishes such as my mother-in-law's locro [a corn stew] or doña Petrona's flan de dulce de leche [a particularly intense creme caramel] (Gandulfo 1989: 594-595). Such dishes, made by women from the interior of Argentina, require dozens of ingredients or several steps to prepare. Asado, however, is a singularly simple dish, whose only required ingredients are meat and salt, and whose only utensils are a grill and a knife. The occasional addition of chimichurri [a sun-cured condiment] does little to alter this appraisal.

Many men assert that the best asados are not only prepared by a man, but are also eaten only by men. According to Raúl Mirad, women do not know how to eat asado because they do not know how to make asado. "The Asador Criollo [Creole Asado-maker], recognizedly 'machista,' [...] suffers when some damsel cuts into insignificant little pieces a tasty portion of asado, that deserves to be enjoyed in its just proportions" (Mirad 1991: 67). By contrast "the true and typical asado criollo [...] is only appreciated
in masculine gatherings” (Mirad 1991: 120). Mirad explains that this is because “the group of diners who surround the table, offer tribute not only to the victuals that they are presented, but, and above all, to FRIENDSHIP” (Mirad 1991: 113). “FRIENDSHIP,” at least when it is written in uppercase letters, as it is by Mirad, does not include women. Thus, the privileged place of asado in the culinary construction of the Argentine nation is consistent with George Mosse’s observation regarding modern European nationalism, that it has “had a special affinity for male society” (Mosse 1985: 67). When Mirad refers to asado as “this so Argentine manly ceremony” (Mirad 1991: 120) he confirms that asado is both manly in a nationalistically Argentine way and Argentine in a chauvinistically manly way.

Citational Masculinity

_Enrique’s response to hearing about a woman making asado was predictable because he can be counted on to make machista or other socially-conservative comments._

_For example, any time someone mentions Astor Piazzolla [an avant garde bandoneon player and tango composer], Enrique says “Piazzolla! He’s the one who killed the tango.” Enrique’s conservative comments are complicated, however, by several observations: (1) He says the same thing about Juan Carlos Copes [a modernist tango dancer and choreographer] and others that he says about Piazzolla—that is to say, Copes is also “the one who killed the tango.” (2) Sometimes Enrique confesses that he loves Piazzolla’s music and that it was listening to Piazzolla that he first became interested in tango. (3) Occasionally, Enrique winks as he makes the comments. (4) Enrique is a
Trotskyite who disdains politically-reactionary older men who say that women cannot make asado or that Piazzolla killed the tango.

There is, of course, no contradiction in Argentina—or the United States—between being class-progressive and gender-conservative. Still, when Enrique says that an asado made by a woman “is a waste” [of good meat], it could be said that he is playing a part, but it should be noted immediately that it is a part that he plays with ease and gusto. Like the actor who made a commercial, saying “I am not a doctor, but I play one on TV,” Enrique could say “I am not a machista, reactionary old fart, but I play one twenty-four hours a day.”

If, as Ernesto Sábato argues, the macho porteño “feels obliged to behave as a male to the second or third power” (Sábato 1963: 15), it is because his role models are larger-than-life literary heroes. The canonical texts for porteño masculinity are José Hernández’ gaucho epic, Martín Fierro, and the lyrics of just about any tango. In the most trite—but real—examples, Enrique says to someone who dares to suggest that it is time to turn over the vacío [brisket], “Yo soy toro en mi arena y torazo en arena ajena” [I am the bull in my ring and the biggest bull in the ring of another], or when he finishes dancing what he considers to be an especially successful tango he says to a nearby group of men, “Así se baila el tango” [This is how tango is danced]. The first line is from the Martín Fierro (Hernández 1992: 15) and it is so well known that one porteño man can hardly begin reciting the phrase without another jumping in to complete it. The second line is the title and refrain of a 1942 tango with lyrics by Marvil (Elizardo Martínez Vilas) and music by
Elías Randal (Romano 1990: 301-302). The scripts are not situation-specific. It is not unusual for a milonguero [tango-dancer] to quote from the *Martín Fierro*, for an asador to quote a soccer player, or for a soccer player to quote a tango. Eduardo Archetti recounts that the famous soccer player Diego Maradona appeared on a television program singing the tango “El Sueño del Pibe” [The Kid’s Dream] about a boy who dreams of becoming a First Division soccer player. According to Archetti, the fact that there is a tango that describes the kid’s dream allows soccer fans “to argue that it is destiny, fate, almost a natural development, or that it ‘was written’, as many [Argentines] would say” (Archetti 1996b: 10).

The written-ness to which Archetti calls attention is consistent with the fact that Buenos Aires is among the most literate societies in the world—literate in the sense both of “able to read” and “well-read.” Accordingly, if the macho porteño’s words are “identifiable as conforming to an iterable model” (Derrida 1988b: 326) this is because his model is very often a widely-known, written text. Rather than immerse himself in a role and attempt to perform it transparently, the macho porteño literally cites the script from which he is reading, calling attention to its written-ness. According to Derrida, every utterance “can be cited, put between quotation marks” (Derrida 1982: 320-321, emphasis in the original). On the most prosaic level, Derrida’s theory of citationality confirms that even the most original words are citations. This is the argument of a character in Ring Lardner’s short story “Rhythm,” in which a songwriting team is temporarily split up when the lyricist learns that the composer has been stealing melodies from operas. The composer responds,
I can recall four or five lyrics of yours where “I love you” comes in and I bet
you’ve used the words “heart” and “say” and “all” at least twice apiece during
your remarkable career as a song writer. Well, did you make those words up or
did you hear them somewhere? (Lardner 1929: 348).

Similarly, when a bridegroom says “I do”—to use one of J. L. Austin’s examples—he is
(mis)citing words from an English marriage ceremony. Derrida’s argument, as Gayatri
Spivak explains, is that “The possibility of citing or theatricalizing is structurally inherent
in every ‘intended’ speech act” (Spivak 1996: 87). Even performative utterances that are
“issued in ordinary circumstances” (Austin 1961: 22) are “parasitic” (ibid.). Just as much
as the words “said by an actor on the stage” (ibid.), words said by a man in the street are
inevitably taken from one context and inserted in another.

Judith Butler argues that “a performative ‘works’ to the extent that it draws on
and covers over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized” (Butler 1993a: 226-
227, emphasis in the original), but in porteño masculinity the constitutive conventions are
flaunted rather than hidden. Like the male-to-female cross dressing read by Argentine
psychoanalyst Oscar Masotta, porteño masculinity expresses “the desire to reveal the trick
at the very moment in which it tricks” (Masotta 1976: 185). When a macho porteño
affirms his masculinity by quoting a tango, he simultaneously exposes the constructedness
of that masculinity by confirming that it is scripted. If, for example, a husband is caught
by his wife flirting with another woman, he might say, “If I’m like this, what am I gonna
do? With women I can’t contain myself.” In this case, both the husband and wife know
that he is quoting a line from the tango “Si Soy Así” (1931, lyrics by Antonio Botta and
music by Francisco Lomuto, in Romano 1990: 226-227). They are probably also familiar
with the original, serious version by Carlos Gardel and with the subsequent, comic version by Fidel Pintos. Pintos was a comedian with a huge nose who was sure to get a laugh with another line from the same song: “If I’m like this, what am I gonna do? I was born handsome and wound up for love.” The contemporary porteño who performs a fragment of “Si Soy Así” evokes both a Gardelian romantic hero and a burlesque of that heroism. Most tangos do not have specific burlesque versions in the collective consciousness, but tango as a genre always verges on the burlesque. Whenever a man recites a line from a tango, the potential for a burlesque version intervenes between the man who performs and the masculinity that is performed.

The paradox of porteño masculinity is that the always-implied burlesque version does not contradict the authenticity of the performance. Butler makes a related observation about queer identity.

Paradoxically, but also with great promise, the subject who is “queered” into public discourse through homophobic interpellations of various kinds takes up or cites that very term as the discursive basis for an opposition. This kind of citation will emerge as theatrical to the extent that it mimes and renders hyperbolic the discursive convention that it also reverses. The hyperbolic gesture is crucial to the exposure of the homophobic “law” that can no longer control the terms of its own abjacting strategies (Butler 1993a: 232, emphasis in the original).

Butler argues that critical queerness subverts the “queer” label, converting the homophobic interpellation into a homophilic identity. Queerness is simultaneously exposed as an anti-lesbian-and-gay slur and championed as a label for lesbian and gay pride. Similarly, the macho porteño mocks machismo at the same moment in which he asserts it. To paraphrase Butler, the subject who is “machified” into public discourse through colonialist interpellations cites that very term as the discursive basis for an
opposition. The macho takes up what I will argue is a label for colonized masculinity and converts it into a positive identity.

I find Butler's reading of citational performativity useful for grasping the apparently paradoxical conventional and subversive character of Argentine masculine performance, but I follow Sue-Ellen Case (1996) in taking exception with Butler's loose use of the "theatrical." Austin wrote that a particular utterance (such as "I do") is performative unless it is theatrical (such as "I do" spoken on stage), in which case it is "in a peculiar way hollow or void" (Austin 1961: 22, emphasis in the original). The core of Derrida's critique of Austin is that all utterances are theatrical, whether they are spoken on stage, in the street, or at the altar. Butler follows Derrida in recognizing that all performative utterances are theatrical, but she adds that some are more theatrical than others. In Gender Trouble and in Bodies That Matter, an act is "theatrical" to the extent that it is "hyperbolic." Butler--like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick--repeatedly uses the word "hyperbolic" as a synonym for theatrical performance (e.g., Butler 1993a: 232, 233, and 237; Sedgwick 1993: 8 and 11). For Butler, to act is to over-act; theatrical performance is false, exaggerated, and distorted. Her repeated references to "hyperbolic theatricality" are a regretable retreat from Derrida's deconstruction of Austin's distinction between the "normal" and the "theatrical."

Umberto Eco and Sue-Ellen Case each retains the theatrical as a special category without relying on the metaphysics of presence. They both make the point that the body in live performance is semiotic, but not graphematic. It made sense in a critique of orality for Derrida to draw attention to the written-ness of speech, but it is wrong to generalize
Derrida’s critique of orality into a privileging of writing over all other semiotic systems. As Case argues, this is what Butler and Sedgwick do when they use performative writing as the model for performance, instead of recognizing the specialness (but not the essentialness) of theatrical performance. Whereas Sue-Ellen Case calls for “performing lesbian,” Butler praises “performing excessive lesbian sexuality and iconography that effectively counters the desexualization of the lesbian” (Butler 1993a: 233.) Case champions the presence of the lesbian body, live, on stage, in performance as a political act that matters despite the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence. Eco similarly warns against reading theatrical performance according to literary semiotics. The body on stage, as Eco argues, is a semiotic device that derives its peculiarly-theatrical signifying effect from pretending not to be a semiotic device. “In order to be accepted as a sign, [the ostended body] has to be recognized as a ‘real’ spatio-temporal event, a real human body” (Eco 1977: 111). Eco borrows from C. S. Peirce the example of “a drunkard exposed in a public place by the Salvation Army in order to advertise the advantages of temperance” (ibid.: 109). In this example, a drunkard performs (perhaps unwittingly due his drunken state) a part in a morality play the morals of which he might not accept as his own. In another example, a lesbian such as Lois Weaver or Peggy Shaw performs a lesbian part in a political play the politics of which she does accept as her own. Lois Weaver’s ostended lesbian body is still a semiotic device, but it is also a political device. The essential lesbian body may be logically untenable, but it is politically effective. In addition to the metaphysics of presence there is a politics of presence, visible in the “here” of “We’re here and we’re queer.” Neither “here” nor “queer” can stand up to the poststructuralist
critique of essentialism, but queers can and do stand up to homophobia and heteronormativity, whether or not "queers" are real and whether or not they are really "here." In other words, a performing lesbian differs politically and theatrically from a man performing woman (drag à la Butler) and from a straight woman performing butch (lesbian chic à la Sedgwick).

Differences of Class and Era

Since I felt I had taunted Enrique into making this asado, I insisted on buying the meat. I knew Ana and he—and everyone else I know in Argentina—were short of money. (Per capita meat consumption in Argentina has decreased dramatically in recent years, and that is not because Argentines share North Americans' obsession with cholesterol.) Nevertheless, Enrique insisted on sharing the cost of the meal. Sharing the cost was a compromise from the traditional practice, in which the host pays for everything and the guests bring only wine.

Tension builds as I unpack what I bought for the asado. The chorizo [Italian sausage] is fine, but the Basque-style morcilla [blood sausage] is a problem because it is sweet. The more typical Creole-style morcilla is savory. The chinchulines [tripe] cause alarm since I asked the butcher to braid them. Enrique acknowledges that the chinchulines are pretty this way, but he warns that the extra thickness of being braided makes them impossible to cook: When they are crisp on the outside, they will still be gummy on the inside. Next out of the bag is my prize purchase: the most beautiful mollejas [sweetbreads] I have ever seen. I hope the sight of them will appease Enrique
and convince him that the yanqui does know how to shop for asado after all, but I already know that's a long shot.

It turns out that Enrique is not sure what mollejas are, or at least he does not know how to cook them. He looks at Ana, who confirms that mollejas are grillable, and that these mollejas are beautiful. Enrique asks me what part of the cow they come from. Now I understand why, as a rule, the asador buys the meat for the asado. I know and love Basque-style morcilla, braided chinchulines, and mollejas, and I have a good idea of how to cook them, but it is wrong for me to impose these upscale acharas [offal] on Enrique. He's the one who will be praised or blamed for the asado, so it would have been better if he had control over the shopping.

The tira de asado is fine, except that I paid $5.50 a kilo for it, at the market in Plaza Freud, near where Marta and I live. It costs only $3.90 at the market near Puente Pacifico, where Enrique and Ana live. Both apartments are in the same general neighborhood of Palermo, and are only about 15 blocks apart, but Marta and I live below the street Juan B. Justo, whereas Enrique and Ana live above Juan B. Justo. The difference in socio-economic status between the sub-neighborhoods is $1.60 a kilo.

I reach the bottom of my bag. I have lost my illusions of winning Enrique's approval. In fact, I am already apologizing, as I pull out the tapa de nalga [top of the rump], explaining that it is "just like vacío," even though I know it is not. I bought tapa de nalga instead of vacío precisely because it is different from the standard vacío; tapa de nalga is "better," meaning less fatty, more tender, and more expensive. Enrique has never heard of it and he suggests that the butcher stuck me with it because, being a
yanqui, I didn't know any better. Ana has heard of tapa de nalga and she assures
Enrique that it is a grillable meat, valued even more than vacío, but he remains obviously
unconvinced. I offer to take the tapa de nalga back home with me, to use for something
else. Enrique rejects my offer and says that he will use it in the asado, but he asks Ana to
go to the local butcher for a kilo of vacío, "por las dudas" [just in case].

As a rule, one buys half a kilo of meat per person for an asado, but this rule is
open to widely varying interpretations. Some say half a kilo of carne per person, plus
achuras. Others include the achuras in the calculations, except for the chinchulines
since, as Enrique explains "when they are cooked, almost nothing remains." By any
interpretation, we have too much meat. I bought a half kilo per person plus the
chinchulines as ordered by Enrique plus the mollejas, which I bought on impulse after
buying everything else, and on top of that we will have the vacío that Ana is out buying.

It is standard practice to have leftovers from an asado, but within reason.

Enrique, Ana, and I are worried that there is much too much meat, but we reassure
ourselves that the quantity is fine because Marc shows signs of being a good eater.

Marc, a tango dancer from Surinam, is to be the guest of honor at today's asado. We
met him at a milonga, dancing, so none of us has seen him eat, but he has a prominent
stomach, which is what we are taking as a sign that he eats well.

The citability of porteño masculinity indicates a différence—that is to say, both a
difference and a deferral (Derrida 1976). The difference, at least among my informants, is
most often rooted in class. The model of masculinity that middle-class porteño asadores
cite is at once that of the under-class gaucho and the upper-class estanciero [estate-owner]. The deferral is the unbridgeable lapse between now and the age when men were men: the age of gauchos and beef barons, cafisios milongueros [tango pimps] and compadritos [ruffians]. For example, a tango-dance teacher in Buenos Aires attempted to explain to me the importance of maintaining a low center of gravity by saying that "dancing tango is like knife-fighting." I am certain, however, that the teacher, no more than I, has ever been in a knife fight. Rather, he was inviting me to join him in performing a role that pertains to another (lower) class and another (rougher) time.

Middle-class men's performance of lower-class roles is complicated by the downward mobility of most members of Argentina's middle class. My informants reflect Argentina's economic woes in that many of them are in danger of falling out of the middle-class--depending on how membership in a class is defined. It is common for a contemporary forty year-old porteño to have been a child of a family that possessed its own home and automobile, but now to be an adult member of a family that rents an apartment and travels by bus and subway. It could be argued that these men's performance of lower-class roles marks a transition to a lower- or working-class consciousness, but I observe that there are no middle-class--bourgeois--models of porteño masculinity. Gauchos are pre-capitalist, unlanded, pastoral figures, and compadritos are under-employed, marginal (sub)urban figures, while estancieros are upper-class--aristocratic--figures. This observation could be taken as support for the argument put forward by Wallerstein, that "multiple factions tend to reduce to two [classes] by virtue of the forging of alliances."
in conflict situations [...] it is by definition not possible to have three or more (conscious) classes. There obviously can be a multitude of occupational interest groups which may organize themselves to operate within the social structure. But such groups are really one variety of status-groups, and indeed often overlap heavily with other kinds of status-groups such as those defined by ethnic, linguistic, or religious criteria. To say that there cannot be three or more classes is not however to say that there are always two. There may be none, though this is rare and transitional. There may be one, and this is most common. There may be two, and this is most explosive. (Wallerstein 1974: 351).

Wallerstein argues that there is often only one class because the “capitalist class (the bourgeoisie) has claimed to be the universal class and sought to organize political life to pursue its objectives against two opponents”: the pre-capitalist aristocracy and the workers. Wallerstein may be right that a single bourgeois class predominates in the core of the modern world-system—including the United States and Western Europe—but class consciousness in the periphery and semi-periphery is necessarily more “explosive” or at least more polarized. In the core, colonizing nations, middle-class-consciousness reflects the colonizer’s privilege that even workers share in along with professionals and capitalists per se. In peripheral and semi-peripheral, colonized nations, the putative middle-class tends to identify up, with the colonizers, or down, with the workers. Argentina is routinely cited as one of the few Third World nations with a strong middle-class, but even in Argentina, the middle-class is more of an economist’s abstraction than it is a citizen’s consciousness. When Argentine men seek a model of masculinity they look down, to rural and suburban margins, or up, to the world-system’s cosmopolitan core.

Alternatively, I would call attention to the distance intrinsic to citational performativity. Perhaps downwardly-mobile porteños confirm the distance that still separates them from true descamisados [the shirtless underclass championed by Eva
Perón] by self-consciously performing lower-class roles. After all, "slumming" is an activity that is available only to those who do not really live in a slum. Performing marginality may be a way to confirm that one is not marginal because one is performing it, not being it. If, in the contemporary Buenos Aires tango scene, men studiously avoid mentioning such mundane matters as the existence of wives, children, and day-time jobs, this may be to facilitate their performances of milonguero masculinity. So long as a milonguero does not mention that he earns his daily bread—and mate—working as an usher or a jeweler, it is possible to maintain the fragile illusion that he is a compadrito who derives his income from intimidating other men or from seducing women, or that he is an aristocrat playing at being a compadrito.

The difference between the macho porteño and the scripts he cites is enforced by the colonizing gaze. The middle-class porteño cites lower-class and rural scripts because those are the scripts that have been approved by the Argentine elite, who cultivated "nativism" via the culturalism imposed by European spectators. As Marta Savigliano (1995) documents, lower-class and "primitive" spectacles such as tango or asado were chosen by Europeans to represent Argentina on the world stage, over the objections of the Argentine middle and upper classes. Only after Europeans appropriated such spectacles to represent Argentine-ness did the upper and middle classes in Argentina reappropriate those spectacles for themselves. When gauchos really roamed the pampa and compadritos really inhabited the suburbios, they were disdained by middle-class porteños. European immigrants to Buenos Aires competed with criollo estancieros to be the dominant sector in Argentine society, but now that they are primarily nostalgic figures, the once-spurned
gauche, compadrito, and estanciero are mandatory role models of masculinity for middle-
class porteños. In Savigliano’s words, performances of these roles are “practices of
autoexoticism—of looking for identity through the Western mirror” (Savigliano 1995:179).
The urban asador—or the contemporary compadrito—sees himself as an other, and he sees
the (Western) other as the only true self.

Macho porteño subjectivity is split. The inversions of seeing the self-as-other and
the other-as-self are reproduced in a series of oxymoronic labels. Peter Smith locates the
contradiction of Argentine identity in Argentina’s oxymoronic “beef industry.” He
observes that Argentina seems to have become a modern, industrialized nation primarily
through an “industry” that is not industrial in the usual sense. Rather, the exemplary
“economic development of Argentina was above all based on the export of primary
materials and the import of manufactured products” (Smith 1968: 16). Smith argues that
the so-called beef industry is both industrial and pastoral, modern and primitive. A similar
contradiction can be found in the “beef barons” who represented Argentina in the
European imagination at the turn of the last century. The beef baron was also a hybrid,
who combined the aristocratic wealth of a baron with the beefy smell of the farmyard. His
wealth gained him access to European society, but he could never quite escape the taint of
his wealth’s rural, colonial roots. Similarly, Fernando Assunção observes of tango, “it is
the product of the encounter and disencounter of the European culture itself, in the
context of a new America, exotic, reiterative and unknown” (Assunção quoted in
Savigliano 1995: 111-114). Argentine soccer is also identified as the product of European
soccer’s encounter and disencounter with its prodigal sons, and like tango, Argentine
soccer conforms to "the modern capitalist condition of the exotic. It was an exotic on the move, unlike previous versions of crystallized exoticism" (Savigliano 1995: 110). The Argentine soccer player is on the move between the Black and the White, the South and the North, the Third World and the First. His special talent is located in his ability to juggle such oppositions, to keep both balls in the air. Argentina's two principal soccer clubs, River Plate and Boca Juniors, embody the contradictions of the Argentine identity. River Plate players are nicknamed the millionarios [millionaires] while Boca players are nicknamed bosteros [manure-handlers]. Thus, like the "beef industry" and the "beef baron," the Argentine soccer fan is split between baronesque or industrial wealth, on the one hand, and rural, colonial beefiness, on the other. Asado reproduces these contradictions. Is eating so much beef at one sitting proof that one is--as the belle époque expression put it--"as rich as an Argentine"? Or is it proof that one is primitive, eating the way Europeans supposedly ate back when they lived in caves? Argentines often deploy a social science discourse to address this same conundrum. The compelling question in political debate in the early nineteen-nineties was, is Argentina a First World or a Third World nation? Regardless of the direction in which a particular politician or ideologue leaned on the issue, his answer was that Argentina is both.

These inversions of self and other are reproduced in porteño geography. The "interior" refers to the rest of the country--the provinces to the North, West, and South of the capital--while the "exterior" refers to the world, outside of Argentina. Thus, Buenos Aires is neither inside nor outside. It is the border between the two. From another angle, the port of Buenos Aires--whence porteños take their name--is so far out that it is in the
core. The world system does not fade out or drift off into oblivion. Rather, it reaches a solidly cosmopolitan border, where boats and airplanes turn around and head back home. After crossing thousands of miles of rainforests, Indians, tropical beaches, peasants, vast plains, cows, Inca ruins, and no ATM machines, the traveler—whether tourist, businessman, or anthropologist—seems compelled to exclaim that Buenos Aires is “so European.” The culis mundis [faux Latin for “ass of the world”] is what porteños sometimes call it. The term indicates a center of sorts, inverted though it may be.

To a great extent, Octavio Paz’ examination of Mexican machismo as a colonized masculinity (Paz 1961) applies as well to Argentine machismo. While masculinity marks a dominant position relative to femininity, the colonized marks a dominated position relative to the colonizer. Machismo, as the label for a peculiarly latino brand of masculinity, is the dominant gender within a dominated nationality. The macho is at once patriarchal and colonized, a male subject who traffics in women and a colonized Other who is the object of European trafficking. He comes into language as the One in relation to the sex which is not one, but the language he comes into is never his own but is always that of the Spaniard, the Englishman, the Yanqui. Machismo thereby disrupts gender analyses that do not take colonialism into account and colonial analyses that do not take gender into account.

Cookbooks and National Identity

Enrique has a standard parrilla, about 140 cm. in width and half as much in depth. It is comprised of two sections, separated by a wall of bricks. The smaller
section, to the right side of the wall, is about 30 cm. wide and has a very rough grate. This is where the fire is started. The larger section, on the left of the wall, is where the meat is cooked. This larger section is further divided into two sub-sections. On the left side of this larger section, the grate is very fine and crossed. In the middle—between the fine grate on the left and the rough grate on the other side of the wall to the right—the grate is medium and runs in one direction only, from front to back. This division between the fine and medium grates corresponds with the two types of animal parts that make up an asado. Achuras include sausages and offal and are cooked on the fine grate, whereas carne includes meat with and without bones and is cooked on the medium grate.

Enrique begins routinely, making a fire with crumpled-up newspapers and carbón [charcoal]. I am not surprised that he uses carbón, as opposed to leña [firewood]. Asado a la leña is an upscale treat here in the capital, and Enrique is not upscale. I note, too, that he is using the cheaper carbón, made out of scraps of wood recovered from demolition projects, as opposed to carbón made from the unprocessed wood of trees and bushes. I have not seen this cheaper carbón sold in any of the markets near Plaza Freud. I have not seen U.S.-style charcoal—machine-formed lumps of carbonized vegetable matter—anywhere in Buenos Aires, but I assume it is for sale at the new Wal-Mart out in the Province.

Enrique trims fat from the meat, so I tell him about the time I went to a potluck asado in Montevideo and I trimmed fat from the meat I brought. The asador teased me about making a yanqui-style "diet asado." Enrique confirms that he is not trimming the fat from the meat in order to reduce the calorie count, but in order to make "criollo
kerosene." Some asadores use real kerosene to help get the carbón burning, but the practice is a little shameful. Every time I have seen an asador use kerosene, he has explained that he usually does not, but "today I'm running late." Both Ana and Marta complain that when kerosene is used to start the fire, the meat ends up tasting of it, though I, for one, cannot detect it. Perhaps my palate is not so discriminating, or perhaps it is the memory of the smell of burning kerosene that taints the meat.

Enrique strategically places some of the scraps of fat in crevices in the pile of smoldering carbón whereupon the scraps burst into flame. I doubted that the superficial flames produced by the burning fat helped the carbón burn, but whether or not the trick worked, it was new to me and I was happy to have a new entry for my list of asado techniques. Then, Enrique laughed and explained that the fat does not, of course, work like real kerosene to get the fire started. Instead, he pointed to the smoke rising from the chimney of the parrilla and said that the purpose of the burning fat was "to make the neighbors envious. The asador's revenge." This I understood because I used to work in a bakery in which we directed the oven-exhaust into the street in front instead of into the alley in back. We referred to turning on the exhaust system as "doing some advertising."

The role of cookbooks in the formation of national identities has been the topic of studies undertaken by Jean-François Revel (1982) and Arjun Appadurai (1982). Revel argues that haute cuisine collections of regional recipes contributed to the formation of French national identity, and Appadurai argues that professional-class housewives' collections of regional recipes contributed to the formation of Indian national identity. In
Argentina, I find that until quite recently, cookbooks—written almost exclusively by and for women—have not contributed much to a peculiarly Argentine national identity, especially not in comparison with *asado*. Consider the two great Argentine cookbooks: Juana Manuela Gorriti’s *Cocina Ecléctica* and *El Libro de Doña Petrona* by Petrona C. de Gandulfo. The first, *Cocina Ecléctica*, was published in Buenos Aires in 1890. The book is comprised of two hundred eleven recipes sent to Gorriti by one hundred seventy-five women and one man (Jesús Bustamente of Arequipa, Peru). The following table records the origin of the recipes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th># of recipes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina (Buenos Aires)</td>
<td>126 (104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru (Lima)</td>
<td>58 (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that only sixty per cent of the recipes were contributed by women residing in Argentina. *Cocina Ecléctica* does not represent Argentine cooking so much as it represents a community of Latin American women, concentrated in Buenos Aires, Lima, and smaller cities in between, but spread out across three continents. In this, the book reflects the life of its compiler. Gorriti is a well-known author. She was born in Salta (in the Northwest of Argentina). When she married it was to a Bolivian (Manuel Isidoro Belzú, the president of Bolivia from 1848-1855). When she left her husband, she took
refuge in Lima, and she passed the last decades of her life in Buenos Aires. I have not conducted genealogical research on the list of Gorriti's contributors, but I suspect that a large proportion are related to one another by marriage. For example, Carmen Gorriti de Montes and María Luisa Montes of Buenos Aires, and Edelmira Belzú de Córdova and Margarita Córdova of La Paz all appear to have been related to the author by birth or marriage. There are also recipes contributed by Emilia Puch de Caballero, Constanza Puch de Weigel, Cármen Weigel de López Benedito, and Matilde Weigel de Puch—all apparently related to one another by birth or by marriage. Many of the recipes are identified with a certain place (e.g., *sopa salteña, budín a la platense*). For the most part *limeño* recipes are contributed by women living in Lima, *salteño* recipes come from Salta, and so on. Some recipes, however, have a subtext of migration and nostalgia, such as *puchero limeño* and *chuletas a la puneñita* contributed by women living in Buenos Aires, and *cazuela mejicana* and *camarones a la panameña* contributed by women living in Lima. In sum, the book is more properly South American and upperclass than it is specifically Argentine.

*El Libro de Doña Petrona* reflects many of the changes that occurred in Argentine society in the decades following the publication of *Cocina Ecléctica* because Doña Petrona's book, like Gorriti's, is indicative of its author's life and times. While the earlier book represented a transnational community of upper-class women, the later book represented Argentina's emerging middle-class. Doña Petrona was born in Santiago del Estero--in the North of Argentina--but she was one of the many provincial Argentines who migrated to Buenos Aires, where she was one of many who either rose or fell into the
middle-class. In Buenos Aires, she taught cooking on the radio and television (with her assistant, Juanita), she wrote articles about cooking and the art of entertaining, and she published cookbooks. Though Gorriti's book was popular, Doña Petrona's was (and is) far more so. Through 1989, seventy-nine editions had been printed, and more continue to be released. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of *El Libro de doña Petrona* in Argentina. So far as I know, I have not been in a home in Argentina that did not contain a copy. The book has a place in Argentina similar to that of *The Joy of Cooking* in the United States, but with the upscale connotations of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* and *Martha Stewart's Entertaining*, as well. Doña Petrona, like Julia Child and Martha Stewart, achieved a larger-than-life presence on television, but *El Libro de doña Petrona* is fancy without being French. A good part of what makes the book fancy is its recipes' exorbitant quantities of eggs and butter, which most of the cooks I interviewed said they reduced for everyday occasions. The book does contain many French recipes, but it contains provincial Argentine recipes, too. Doña Petrona's use of indigenous ingredients is quite different from a French chef's use of those same ingredients. She does not submit indigenous recipes or ingredients to a European culinary system. In sum, the cuisine of Doña Petrona is *criolla*—that is to say, it has European roots, but it also has a very definite location in South America.

Like Gorriti, Doña Petrona constructs her *criolla* identity in opposition to Europeans and not necessarily in opposition to other South Americans. To be sure, *El Libro de Doña Petrona* is Argentine, but the book's location in Argentina is taken for granted, as opposed to being deliberate. Overtly nationalistic references are limited to a
couple of occasional, patriotic cakes: *torta para aniversario* "independencia argentina" [cake for the anniversary of "Argentine independence"], which is decorated with sky-blue and white fondant to look like the Argentine flag (Gandulfo 1989: 698), and *torta mundial 78* [World Cup 78 cake], created to commemorate the 1978 World Cup, which was hosted and won by Argentina (Gandulfo 1989: 694). Otherwise, the Argentine-ness of *El Libro de Doña Petrona* is mentioned only in passing or indirectly. For example, there is a section titled "Products and utensils that change their name in some countries" (Gandulfo 1989: 38-39). The section includes explanations of dishes that are more common in Argentina than they are elsewhere in Latin America, such as locro and various Italian pastas: *canelones* [cannelloni], *lasañas* [lasagne], and *ñoquis* [gnocchi].

In recent years, criollo cookbooks have assumed a more explicitly Argentine identity. Margarita Elichondo’s *La Comida Criolla: Memorias y Recetas* (1990) and Choly Berreteaga’s *La Cocina de Nuestra Tierra* (1991) are each organized geographically—systematically presenting recipes from the center, the *cuyo* region (the central Andes), the Northwest, the Northeast, and the South of the country. *El Gran Libro de la Cocina Argentina* (Magne 1991) follows the same order of things, except that the *cuyo* region and the Northwest are collapsed into a single category. Elvira Robles de Daher provides a typical explanation for having written *Platos Típicos de la Cocina Argentina* (1990), another nationalist cookbook.

Such is the path of our criolla cuisine that this book presents to our reader so that he or she will know and understand our dishes. It is a form of respect for our traditions, the continuing strength of our roots and our customs, that I have upheld during the eighteen years I taught criolla cooking classes in the “School of Traditional Arts and Crafts” at the “Folklore House” of Mar del Plata. It is a way
to contribute to the permanence of our cuisine along with the gastronomy of other countries of the world (Robles de Daher 1990: 15).

Robles, like other recent authors, evokes criolla identity with much self-consciousness—a quality that is wholly lacking in Gorriti’s and Doña Petrona’s work. Richard Handler has called attention to the importance of this self-consciousness as it relates to both national identity and folklore (Handler 1988). He argues that the history of nationalism is intimately bound up with the discipline and practice of folklore. Both nationalism and folklore, according to Handler, were founded on nineteenth-century, European, romantic objectifications of peoples and their traditions. Folklore does indeed figure in the spate of recently-published Argentine-nationalist cookbooks. These cookbooks are folkloric, in Handler’s terms, because they represent highly deliberate attempts to construct an Argentine national cuisine. Featured dishes such as empanadas [savory turnovers], locro, and ravioli may, however, contribute more to separatist regional or ethnic identities than to Argentine national identity. As Arnd Schneider (1992) argues, there is no clear line between regional and ethnic identity in Argentina. He finds great overlap between Italian and porteño eating habits. The granddaughter of Italian immigrants might claim authority regarding pasta based on being a tana [ethnically Italian resident of Buenos Aires]. Similarly, a criolla woman who moved to Buenos Aires from Córdoba might continue to make locro for her family as a way of maintaining her criolla-cordobesa identity. Thus, these cookbooks written and read primarily by women help produce an Argentine national identity that is fragmented, as opposed to the unified identity imposed by asado. Recipes from the many provinces are brought into a loosely ordered text. Regional-ethnic dishes
are placed side by side between the covers of a single volume, constructing a culinary map of the nation (cf. Appadurai 1982). The result, however, is not a melting pot in which distinct dishes are fused into a whole, as is the case with asado. The result is more like a puchero, a typical Argentine boiled dinner in which an Argentine hen, Italian chorizo, Spanish chorizo colorado, and indigenous sweet potatoes and squash (Gandulfo 1989: 361-362) are served together, but each retains its distinct identity. Like ethnic groups, the various ingredients contaminate each other, but their differences are not erased.

Manly Nostalgia

As the carbón or leña burn and turn to embers, they fall through the grate, onto the cement slab below. Enrique is running a little late, but instead of kerosene, he uses an electric fan to help the embers form more quickly. The fan appears to be at least twenty years old. It is made all out of metal and is about 15 cm. in diameter. The protective cage that once surrounded the blades is mostly missing. Again, I inform Enrique that this is a trick I have never before seen. “Yes,” he jokes, pointing at the decrepit fan, “a high-tech asado.” The fan seems to work quite well. Embers soon form and Enrique shovels them to the other side of the brick wall, beneath the grates where the cooking is done.

As the grate above the embers heats up, Enrique takes the remaining fat that he has trimmed from the meat and forms it into a ball. He rubs the ball of fat over the grate so that the meat will not stick to it and, presumably, to produce a little more envy in the neighbors.
A very thin layer of embers is spread out beneath the cooking surface and Enrique proceeds to place the achuras and carnes on the grate above. He puts the chinchulines in the back of the achura section of the parrilla and he puts the mollejas in the front. The morcillas and chorizos are placed on long two-pronged churrasco [Brazilian asado] forks that Enrique brought back to Argentina from Brazil. (Enrique went into exile in Rio de Janeiro shortly after the military coup in March of 1976 and he only recently returned to Buenos Aires.) The fork with chorizos is placed directly on the parrilla, next to the chinchulines, and the fork with morcillas is suspended above. The tira de asado goes on the back of the carne section with the bone side down, and the vacio and tapa de nalga, in front, with their fattier sides toward the heat.

Enrique pushes away most of the embers that are beneath the mollejas and relocates them under the braided chinchulines. He also shifts a few embers from the middle of the carne section to the front. The purpose, I see, is to start cooking all of the achuras and carne at the same time, yet to have each one finish cooking just when its time comes to be served. An alternative is to make an even layer of embers and to start cooking some items earlier and other items later, depending on their relative cooking and serving times. This is how mi amiga Cristina makes asado. Enrique, however, presents himself with the greater challenge of arranging the embers so that widely disparate animal parts will each take roughly the same amount of time to cook—the only differences corresponding with the order in which they are served.

Once all the embers are properly positioned, Enrique proceeds to salt the meat. Perhaps the single biggest controversy in the world of asado involves when to add salt.
At one extreme there are those who rub salt on the meat as much as an hour before putting the meat on the grill “so that the salt will penetrate the flesh.” At the other extreme are those who wait until the meat is done cooking on one side, and only when they turn the still-raw side down do they apply salt to the cooked side. Their reasoning is that salting raw meat “draws out the blood and makes the meat dry.” Enrique belongs to a more moderate school that applies salt early, before it is fully cooked, but after it is on the grill.

As the meat cooks, Enrique adds carbón to the diminished pile on the right side of the parrilla, so that he will have more embers available when they are needed. The pace of his job slows and Enrique asks Ana to bring out a bottle of wine and some glasses. She has been inside the house, performing the usual female asado activity: making the salads that will accompany the meat.

Enrique and I settle down to drink wine and watch the meat cook. I use the lull in the activity to ask Enrique about the “asados for 200 people” that I once heard him mention. I ask him if those were asados he made at Unidades Básicas [Peronist social centers]. He confirms that he did participate in Peronist asados, but that the really big asados he made were at the local market, in Lomas de Zamora [a working-class suburb of Buenos Aires], when he was sixteen and seventeen years old. Late Saturday afternoon, each of the many vendors would contribute something for the huge asado. For grilling there were achuras from the achura vendor, carne from the butcher, chickens from the chicken vendor, bell peppers from the produce vendor, and provolone cheese from the cheese vendor. There were also bread, salads, and wine to have on the side. Enrique
and some other young men would construct an enormous parrilla out of four metal bed frames. He tells me that it was a very high-pressured asado; a vendor would become very angry if his contribution to the asado was badly cooked.

Enrique turns over the various achuras and cortes de carne [cuts of meat], and applies more salt—this time to the cooked sides. He also moves some more embers from the right side of the parrilla to the left. I wince as Enrique pierces the chinchulines, causing the milky liquid inside to squirt out. I prefer chinchulines unpierced—crisp on the outside and liquid in the middle. We drink some more wine and the guests begin to arrive.

Despite being Argentina's national meal, asado is remarkably under-represented in Argentine cookbooks. Asado accounts for only eight of the two hundred and eleven entries in Gorriti's compilation and for only three out of the more than eight hundred pages in El Libro de Doña Petrona. The pattern continues in the more recently published books. Asado occupies only seven out of two hundred pages in El Gran Libro de la Cocina Argentina, five out of the two hundred thirty-seven pages in Berreteaga’s Cocina de Nuestra Tierra, four out of the two hundred fifty pages in Elichondo’s Comida Criolla, and two out of the one hundred eighteen pages in Robles de Daher’s Platos Típicos de la Cocina Argentina. There is, to my knowledge, only one cookbook devoted entirely to Argentine asado. It was not published until 1991 and it was written by a man. Raúl Mirad, the author of this Manual del Asador Argentino [Manual of the Argentine Asado-maker], claims that there was no need for an asado cookbook before because all Argentine
men knew how to make asado without having to consult a cookbook.

The surprising fault that I have encountered in asado-istic activity can only be explained by accepting that the gene corresponding with ASADO has suffered a regressive mutation for reasons until now unknown [...]. In addition, the wave of emigration of the last twenty years has dispersed thousands of Argentines all over the planet and they have carried with them their eating habits. This has stimulated in many Foreigners an appetite for Argentine Criollo Asado, which is translated into a sincere interest in knowing its techniques. For the MUTANT ARGENTINES and for the CATECHIZED FOREIGNERS I have written this book (Mirad 1991: 1).

Mirad’s claim about an asado gene—"unbreakably united with genes corresponding with soccer [and] tango"—is obviously made in jest, but his underlying observation stands, that in recent years "some Argentines produced an asado that, if it could well qualify as very good according to the ‘International Standard,’ it nevertheless did not achieve the high level of excellence that by obligation it should offer" (Mirad 1991: 1). Mirad explains that he wrote his Manual del Asador Argentino because it was necessary to help deficient Argentine men preserve Argentina’s international asado reputation.

Mirad’s work substantiates Appadurai’s observation that “cookbooks appear to belong to the literature of exile, nostalgia and loss” (Appadurai 1982: 18). In his study of Indian national cuisine, Appadurai demonstrates that nationalist cookbooks written in English serve the nostalgic yearnings of migrant mental laborers, both within India and abroad. Post-colonial government officials, engineers, researchers, and intellectuals leave their home provinces and find work in the cosmopolitan centers of India and abroad. Their positions are similar to those of the nineteenth-century South American intellectuals whom Anderson credits with inventing nationalism (Anderson 1983). If Indian national cuisine is consistent with postcolonial nostalgia, then French cuisine is consistent with
what Renato Rosaldo calls “imperialist nostalgia” (Rosaldo 1989). French chefs mourn the passing of “authentic” regional cuisines, whether in Provence, Morocco, Bahia, or Fiji, and of pre-industrial raw ingredients—such as real crème fraîche [semi-sour cream] and vine-ripened tomatoes—much as Lévi-Strauss wistfully witnessed the passing of indigenous cultures (Lévi-Strauss 1974). France’s culpability in the destruction of the culinary—and colonial—Other is thereby masked behind the innocent quest for the freshest, most natural ingredients.

Mirad’s book demonstrates that in the case of asado, the nostalgia is for a masculinity lost. He claims that, until recently, all Argentine men simply knew how to make wonderful asado, but now many only make acceptable asado. As Savigliano argues, “Machismo is a cult of ‘authentic virility’ fed by a sense of loss ... brought about by Civilization” (Savigliano 1995: 43), a lament for masculinity lost (Savigliano 1994: 85).

Porteño masculinity is inherently nostalgic. Accordingly, porteño masculinity shares much with “salvage ethnography.” The middle-class porteño yearns to recover the lower- and upper-class masculinities that were vanquished by the rise of the porteño middle-class, much as the salvage ethnographer attempts to recover the pristine culture that was contaminated by the arrival of “Westerners” such as himself. Modern urban-dwelling men mourn the waning of a more real masculinity, pertaining to a lower or darker class, to the infamous suburbios [outskirts] of turn-of-the-century Buenos Aires, or to the wide-open rural space of the Martin Fierro. Jorge Salelli observes that already in 1908,

[Carlos Octavio] Bunge located the masculinization of men in the countryside, the space that—when the great immigration settled in the cities—changed signs, left off representing the barbarism of Sarmiento and was transformed into the repository
of 'real' Argentine values, that were those of the land-owner class (Salessi 1995: 196).

In my reading, Mirad and other porteño asadores continue to locate true masculinity in the countryside, though not exclusively with the land-owning class. The location of vanishing, authentic Argentine culture in the countryside is consistent with Raymond Williams' study of the English construction of the countryside as the way we were (Williams 1973). Overseeing parrillas on balconies or patios in Buenos Aires, urban asadores evoke both the land-owning estancieros and the nomadic gauchos of yore. What was often an adversarial relation in the nineteenth century—between estancieros and gauchos—is now collapsed into a single category of idealized, rural masculinity.

The Law of the Father

*Today's asado is at "mid-day," which means that the guests were invited for about 12:00 and that they arrive between 12:00 and 1:00. As a rule, asados are not hurried, but today is an exception since I am supposed to leave for the soccer stadium at 3:00. As the guests arrive, the women go directly inside, to help Ana with the salads.*

*The men come straight to the parrilla, to admire the meat. Their comments include jokes about the electric fan and observations regarding the thickness of the tira de asado, the redness of the chorizo, and the special inclusion of mollejas.*

*Ana and the other women emerge from indoors with salads and wine and place-settings for the table, which is laid outside, on the patio. Enrique and I are the only ones who remain at the parrilla; everyone else begins to drink wine and pick at the salads.*
Enrique calls my attention to a thin end of the vacio that is already cooked, ahead of the rest of the meat. He explains that it is "the asador's right" to eat that piece. He cuts it off and generously shares it with me. As a rule, there is one and only one asador, but Enrique pretends that we two—and not just he—are manning the parrilla.

Enrique knows to keep his back to the guests as he chews on this first piece of meat, but I carelessly turn to face the guests with my mouth full. Ana exclaims that I am already eating and I realize that I have made a mistake. Enrique admits that the asado is ready to serve but he is waiting because Marc has not yet arrived. Enrique manages to stall awhile, in hopes that Marc will show. Ostensibly, Enrique is heating some bread to have with the chorizo, but I note that the embers beneath the bread and meat are almost spent, and Enrique is no longer replenishing them with embers from the right side of the parrilla. After several minutes, Ana asks how long it takes to heat bread?

Asado is cooking at its simplest, even its most primitive. As El Gran Libro de la Cocina Argentina puts it: "[It is] certainly a paradoxical subject, that of a culinary art that attempts to know all the secrets of the oldest and most elementary form of cooking, which occurred to man as soon as he invented fire" (Magne 1991: 8). What secrets could such an elementary, primitive form of cooking contain? What, I thought, is there to know about throwing meat on a grill? What I was told time and again by the Argentine men who deigned to teach me the secrets of asado is what Mirad also explains:

For the Argentine Criollo Asador there is nothing worse than to find himself with a casual, boastful asador who 'throws the meat on the grill,' a man who, without the required respect for the art of asado, believes that the location of the fire, the
cooking time, or the form of placing the meat on the grill is all the same thing. But no: each one of the details deserves the greatest attention from he who wants to make a good asado (Mirad 1991: 9).

Details. The world of asado is filled with impassioned debates about details ranging from the design and the construction of the grill, and how to select the proper wood, through how and where to buy the meat, and which cuts to include, to the perennial question of whether to salt the meat before or after cooking it. Every Argentine man to whom I have expressed my interest in studying asado has had at least one such tip for me, and each tip was more esoteric than the last. One man even demonstrated for me the proper method for splitting wood so that it would burn in the right way to produce the optimal embers for cooking the meat. I will not contest the possible real impact that a particular method for splitting the wood has on a finished asado. Every cuisine that I have studied has rules and tips that often seem to fly in the face of scientific explanation. Both as an anthropologist and as a cook, I have learned to accept the details that I cannot explain. What is important—to me as a researcher and, I believe, to the cook—is the feeling that a particular trick works. I certainly have many such tricks of my own, a conviction that something has to be cooked in a particular way, though I could not explain why. Mirad argues that these tricks are what make asado “not a tedious job but a gratification,” and that the experience of preparing asado is “a mystique, bound by tradition, […] a spiritual state, a philosophy of life […] a truly liturgical act” (Mirad 1991: 34 and 113, emphasis in the original). What, then, is this experience, this mystical gratification that is derived from making asado?

An anonymous contributor to *El Gran Libro de la Cocina Argentina* echoes Mirad and my informants by referring to “the indescribable something of being a born
asador,” and to

the mystery of the art [that includes] the love of fire, [...] the pleasure of
distributing the heat to the cuts that most need it, a deep enjoyment of the
landscape or the sky, the feudal right to the bride that every asador has, of tasting
or giving away the best morsels and the wisdom to cut and distribute them in a
ritual not explicitly legislated, but well known. It is not reckless to confirm, that
the role of the asador gives back to the Argentine man the law of the father, the
part of distributor of goods and interpreter of codes, in general forgotten in our
urban society (Magne 1991: 11, emphasis in the original).

Note that this “feudal right to the bride” is, in the original Spanish, el derecho de pernada,
literally, “the right to insert a leg,” but in practice a lord’s right to be the first to penetrate
his vassal’s new wife. Standing at his parrilla, the asador is, if not the king of the castle, at
least the lord of the manor. Note, also, that the reference to the “law of the father” is an
overt reference to Lacan.¹ I believe the anonymous author’s argument is that performing
the role of asador allows the imaginary father to occupy the place of the symbolic Father.

As Masotta—perhaps the preeminent spokesman for Lacanian psychoanalysis in Argentina
—writes: “In order for the father to be able to ascend, so to speak, to the place of the
symbolic function, it will be necessary for the subject to restore him to that place”
(Masotta 1976: 173). Asados very often include more than one imaginary father among
the company, but the diners restore one and only one of the men who are present to the
place of symbolic Father by recognizing his authority not only to man the parrilla but also
to distribute the meat (and to eat the first piece of vacío). The asador as Father assigns to
each of the diners his or her proper piece of meat, and his or or place in the symbolic order

¹ This is an example of what Hugo Vezzetti calls “centrifugal psychoanalysis.” He
observes that in Buenos Aires, psychoanalysis spills out over the borders of
“professionalized psychoanalysis” and seeps into the entire intellectual culture of the city
(Vezzetti 1992), including cookbooks.

Like the Mexican-Americans whom José Limón describes making *carne asada* [Mexican asado] on a "*rancho*" of "less than one-quarter acre" (Limón 1994: 127), the asador who exercises feudal rights from the balcony of his high-rise apartment—or even from his one-acre *quinta* [weekend home] in the countryside—is aware of subvertible incongruities. There are, however, vital differences between the carnivalesque carne asada shared by working-class men belonging to an oppressed minority in the United States (Limón 1994) and the asado shared by middle-class men in Buenos Aires. I would not read any of the asados I witnessed as carnivalesque. Even if Enrique’s asado were camp or parodic, it was not a subversive inversion of bourgeois values. I do not rule out the possibility that working-class asadores mock estancieros, but I have not had the opportunity to find out. Neither the professionals nor the manual laborers who made up my sample mock estancieros so much as they assert a patriarchal affinity with them.

Argentine asado is not democratic in the way that Mexican carne asada is. In the carne asada studied by Limón:

> Everyone brings his low-prestige meat—a symbol of societal aggression—and contributes it to a central collective pile; everyone at some point or another takes a turn at shooing flies away, broiling and cutting the meat, and making the sauce (Limón 1994: 137).

The asados I have studied in Buenos Aires are rarely potluck and even those that are have one and only one asador. Mirad writes what I have heard many times: "An asado, like a ship, should be in the hands of just one captain. No asador would accept the help of another" and "The Asador is, almost always, the Head of the Family, or an older son"
(Mirad 1991: 7). Or, as asadores often recite, “Soy el toro en mi arena ...” Middle-class porteñó asado, as opposed to working-class South Texas carne asada, is patriarchal, not fraternal. The porteñó asador buys into bourgeois society by asserting his primacy over women and over other, junior men.

Manliness and Masquerade

Enrique surrenders to the group pressure and proceeds to serve chorizo, morcilla, and bread even though Marc has yet to arrive. I am relieved when the Basque-style morcilla I bought receives all around approval.

Next come the braided chinchulines, which, as Enrique foresaw, are chewy. Marc, at last, arrives, and he is immediately informed by Enrique and Ana that big things are expected of him in the way of eating. It is a bad sign that Marc accepts only half a chorizo and no morcilla. I hope he is saving himself for the carne, but I already worry that his stomach is not an accurate indicator of his appetite after all.

Enrique serves the mollejas. Ana asks for a double portion, but I notice that Enrique does not serve any to himself. Marc accepts a small slice of molleja and another half a chorizo. I do my part, eating a whole chorizo and a whole morcilla and two portions of mollejas. I try to eat my fair share of chinchulines, but they are, as Enrique foresaw, quite chewy.

Enrique serves the tira de asado so now the asado begins in earnest. Even though we have already consumed a quarter kilo each of achuras, those were only preliminaries. Now we arrive at the meat of the matter. I am still holding out hope that Marc’s appetite
will do justice to his stomach, but he asks for just a taste of tira de asado. Enrique exercises the asador's right to give Marc more than he asked for.

Marc absolutely declines Enrique's offer of vacio and tapa de nalga, since he has not yet finished his tira de asado. The rest of us eat what we can, but we are winding down and the parrilla is still half full of assorted bovine parts. The conversation shifts to praise for leftover asado. There is consensus that carne is even more delicious cold than hot but that leftover chinchulines are inedible. Some of us speak up for leftover chorizo, but Enrique argues that it is too greasy to eat cold.

Porteño masculinity—and indeed, masculinity in general—can be read as masquerade (see Holmlund 1993), but unlike Joan Riviere's "Womanliness as Masquerade" (Riviere 1986), masculinity performed by men does not conceal the absence of a penis; rather it conceals that a penis is not the phallus. Masotta, following Lacan, argues that the function of clothing in general is "to conceal as much what one has as what one does not have" (Masotta 1976: 186). In the case of a man masquerading as masculine, what he conceals having is a penis and what he conceals not having is the phallus. As Eugenie Lemoine-Luccioni argues, "if the penis were the phallus, men would have no need of feathers or ties or medals" (Lemoine-Luccioni quoted in Holmlund 1993: 226, n. 1). The trappings of porteño masculinity may be different—including, for example, a gaucho-style belt or a Gardelian lenque [silk scarf]—but the compensatory motive is the same. From another point of view, sons may grow up to become fathers, but in his own eyes, no man is ever the Father, even though his own sons may see him as such. Rather,
the Father is a role that men perform self-consciously, always aware of what they lack to
do the role justice. Similarly, contemporary, middle-class porteño men perform masculine
roles from which they are irredeemably cut off. Contemporary tangueros [men immersed
in the culture of tango] may citationally perform Gardel—who citationally performed an
even earlier generation of tangueros—but always as a masquerade.

Masculinity may be, like femininity, a masquerade, but the politics of the one
masquerade are different from those of the other. Performing feminine docility or
rebellion differs from performing masculine domination or dependence. Consider the man
who mocks himself about being machista for not doing any housework even though his
wife works outside the home just as much as he does. No matter how self-effacing his
comments are, the fact remains that he stays sitting at the table sipping wine while his wife
does the dishes. Writing about “cultural cross-dressing” in eighteenth-century Britain and
North America, Beth Fowkes Tobin observes:

Much of the theoretical discussion of mimicry, masquerade, and parody in
Bhabha’s formulations and in the work of feminist and queer theorists assumes that
the one who engages in mimicry or parody is in the oppressed position and is
trying to subvert the dominant discourse (B. Tobin n.d.: 22).

Fowkes Tobin argues that “the sexual, racial, ethnic, and class position of the cross-
dresser shapes the performance so that cross-dressing can subvert or reinscribe the
dominant codes, or do a little of both” (ibid.: 23). Even if the middle-class macho porteño
subverts some dominant codes, he certainly reinscribes others. There are some uncanny
similarities between middle-class porteño men’s renditions of the Gaucho, the Estanciero,
the General, and the Compadrito on the one hand, and a concert by the Village People on
the other, but there are also significant political differences, just as there are political
differences among lesbian butch, gay male butch clone, and straight male citations of the
same roles (de Lauretis 1994: 105, n.14). Differences between camp and straight (not
camp) are obscured by the postmodernist straight (not gay-or-lesbian) appropriation of
modernist gay-and-lesbian camp (Case 1989; see also de Lauretis 1994: 105). In the case
of a straight man performing straight manliness, Yvonne Tasker wisely chooses to “cast
doubt on the possibility of making a distinction between a parodic performance of
masculinity and the oppressive enactment of that performance” (Tasker 1993: 243).
Enrique’s performance of masculinity contains clues that could support reading it as
parodic, but at the same moment that Enrique might be mocking porteño masculinity, he is
availing himself of its privileges. When I suggest to Enrique that he is a *personaje*
[character], he denies it, but the denial is fully in character.

*As soon as the women begin clearing the meat from the table, I take my leave to
go to the soccer game. Ana encourages me to stay for a sip of mate before running off,
but I am already late, so I decline.*
CHAPTER THREE

BOVINE SEXUALITY

In the previous chapter, I argue that asado contributes to the construction of male (cooking) subjects. In this chapter, I argue that asado also contributes to the construction of (cooked) bovine bodies as feminine, but not necessarily as female. I draw a distinction between bodies that are dominated through practices of feminization and bodies whose femaleness thwarts stable domination. After reviewing the gendered semantics of beef in contemporary Buenos Aires, I look back to the nineteenth-century Argentine short story El Matadero [The Slaughterhouse] by Esteban Echeverría. The story begins with a debate about the gender identity of a bovine body that has been presented for slaughter, and ends with the political torture of a “dandy” whose gender identity is also debated. I read the story for differences between the gender stigmatization of effeminate men and the sexual stigmatization of active sodomites.

I argue that there are parallels in Argentina between the slaughter of cattle and the torture of political opponents, and between early nineteenth-century political torture and the political torture practiced one hundred forty years later, in Argentina’s so-called “Dirty War.” By the time of the so-called “Dirty War,” both the slaughter of cattle and the torture and slaughter of people were industrialized. This industrialization included a move away from public view to clandestine sites in which the act of killing was hidden even from the killers. In Argentina similarities between the treatment of cattle and the treatment of political opponents converged in the electric cattle-prod, a phallic object that I argue has
come to lend its own bovine connotations to the Argentine phallus. Scholars have suggested that military torturers in Argentina have feminized their victims by penetrating them with cattle-prods and other phallic objects. I argue that in the sexual politico-hermeneutics of Argentine men, the feminization of men and of women has not been accomplished by penetration per se. Men have been feminized by anal penetration, whereas women, to the extent that they have been feminized, have also been feminized by anal, not vaginal penetration.

Bovine Semantics

The Mexican men studied by José Limón use wordplay to associate the meat they consume with male genitalia (Limón 1989). By contrast, the Argentine men I studied associate meat with female bodies. The word “carne” indicates both human and animal flesh. Even when it is used in obvious reference to one and not the other, “carne” always carries connotations both of (human) flesh and of (animal) meat. Porteño men routinely exploit this intrinsic ambiguity. One of the common píropos [compliments] that Argentine men bestow on women who pass them in the street is “¡Qué lomo!” [What a tenderloin!], the same words that are regularly heard among men standing at a parrilla, admiring a piece of beef. Similarly, Julio Mafud observes that “a woman who is beautiful: ‘She’s a kilo!’ Or a female passerby who violently breaks into one’s field of vision is espetada [skewered] with a phrase that weighs heavily: ‘What a kilo and a half!’” (Mafud 1992: 129). A kilo or kilo and a half of what? Mafud’s reference to “skewering” supports reading that what she is a kilo or more of is grillable meat. Moreover, in Argentina bovine
flesh is called “carne de vaca,” whereas in Mexico, Spain and other Spanish-speaking
countries it is more often called “carne de res.” Strictly speaking, “carne de vaca” [cow
meat] is too narrow to refer to what in English we call “beef,” since it incorrectly excludes
the meat of steers. “Carne de res,” however, is too broad, since it includes the meat of
sheep, deer, and boar in addition to that of bovines (Real Academia Española 1992).
Given that neither “carne de vaca” nor “carne de res” precisely corresponds with bovine
flesh, the choice of one or the other can be considered motivated.

One of the butcher shops where I bought beef in Buenos Aires is called “La Vaca
Atada” [The Roped Cow] even though much of the beef sold there is certainly not derived
from cows. On occasion, La Vaca Atada even sells bull’s testicles. Argentines are, of
course, perfectly aware that testicles come from bulls, so they are not, strictly speaking,
“carne de vaca,” but Argentines are likely to refer to testicles not with the word
“testiculos,” but with the less-aggressively male term, “criadilla” [scrotum]. In Argentina,
a bull as such is male. but once separated from his testicles, both the bull and his testicles
are marked as female— that is to say, as “carne de vaca.” Carole Adams argues that across
many cultures, “Part of making ‘beef’ into ‘meat’ is rendering it nonmale” (Adams 1990:
48). She cites the characterization of beauty pageants as “meat markets” in support of her
argument. She could also observe that champion bulls are displayed as if they were beauty
queens (see Figure 1). In Argentina and other beef-producing countries, a prize-winning
bull is typically adorned with ribbons attached to the back of his neck or his face and a
banner proclaiming the name of his ranch across his middle.

A man’s role in relation to beef is that of an admirer to his admired. The gaucho is
famous for his ability to judge animals still on the hoof, to know what kind of asado each one would make. For the contemporary urban asador, the challenge is to know how and where to shop for beef. What is absolutely necessary is to be "a knower of carne" (Mirad 1991: 49). As both Raúl Mirad and the fiction-writer Ana María Shua observe, the true, infinitely resilient secret of the asado resides not in the Argentine asador, but in Argentine carne.

Mirad:

[T]he nobility of the carne is such that it 'forgives' the errors of the Asador. [...] This same carne makes it difficult to achieve levels of excellence and exquisiteness. Only a very eminent Asador (an Asado Master or Artist), a nearly extinct

Shua:

If the mollejas are rubbery, the [tira de] asado is burnt, and the colita de cuadril [rump roast] remains scorched on the outside and raw on the inside, if the tapa de nalga is as tender as a block of concrete, the chichulines seem like chewing gum, and the riñon
Figure 2. Alfredo Astiz and Female Adolescent. “He likes going out with [male] friends, dancing, and beautiful [female] adolescents” (Gallo 1995: 38-39).

species, is capable of bringing the carne to its optimal point. [...]he “inedible” asado is as rare as the exquisite asado. Only a good-for-nothing can produce an asado so raw or burnt that it could not be eaten (Mirad 1991: 69).

[kidney] is carbonized, stay calm and serene. eat it all with a smile and praise him. Keep in mind that even for the most inefficient Master Griller the result is that it is difficult to ruin an entire Argentine cow (Shua 1991: 39, emphasis in original).

Shua mocks asadores while Mirad takes asadores quite seriously, but they agree that only the nearly extinct Asado Master or the rare good-for-nothing can have much effect on the noble Argentine cow. The man’s contribution, after all the smoke has cleared, is mainly that of a connoisseur. Similarly, what one of Alfredo Astiz’ friends finds most admirable in the infamous Navy Captain is his ability to appreciate women.
He is a radar for sighting pretty women, sometimes surprising me. He says “Look at the girl, she is fantastic. Do you know her?” And when you look you ask yourself how he was able to see her among so many people (Astiz quoted in Gallo 1995: 39) (see Figure 2).

What is being praised here is not an ability to seduce or dominate women, but an ability to discern them in a crowd. Similarly, the asador admires and appreciates carne--female flesh, both bovine and human--and recognizes that he cannot do much to improve or diminish it.

Asado is, to be sure, a thoroughly patriarchal ritual, but at the same time it is a confession of putative male ineffectiveness in relation to the female. Shua’s protagonist resigns herself to the infidelity of her MAP (marido argentino promedio [average Argentine husband]) because she understands that MAPs are incapable of resisting female temptation. In the 1931 tango “Si Soy Así,” (lyrics by Antonio Botta and music by Francisco Lomuto, Romano 1990: 226-227), the protagonist makes the same point:

**Shua:**

Struck down by the circumstances of a fierce street, overflowing with these examples [of beautiful women] that saucily pass his way and even have the shamelessness to cross the street in front of him, the poor MAP is altered, he is confused, he wants everything, his pupils dilate, the wings of his nose flutter, the MAP sniffs, he arrives home late, he runs red lights or stops at them longer than is necessary, his car suffers small dents provoked by the distraction (Shua 1991: 22).

**Botta:**

If I’m like this, what am I gonna do, with women I can’t contain myself. Where I see a skirt I don’t get caught up in the color. Young widows, wives, or single girls, for me they are all pears in the tree of love. I size them up with one of my trademark compliments [...] If I’m like this, what am I gonna do, it’s fate that makes me unfaithful to you.

In each case, upon seeing a woman, the man cannot help but desire her. The sight of
female flesh supposedly renders him powerless and therefore not accountable for his actions. Locating the power of male desire in female flesh absolves men of responsibility for their transgressions. Much as rape-victims are blamed for inciting rapists’ desire or Palestinian “terrorists” are blamed for compelling Israeli repression, female flesh is blamed for provoking patriarchal, carnivorous appetite (see Brownmiller 1975 and Said and Hitchens 1988).

Standing at the grill, meticulously overseeing the cooking of various cuts of beef, the asador practices his mastery over feminized bodies, and he contemplates the mysteries of female flesh and the powers that flesh is supposed to have over him. The power that porteño men locate in female flesh is, of course, not an essential quality of that flesh, but is a projection of male desire cultivated across several centuries and several cultures. So, too, the nobile Argentine cow is the historical product of carnivorous desire. The carnivore’s power is displaced into an animal body where it appears to compel the carnivore’s appetite. Nevertheless, it is significant that porteño men constitute female flesh as powerful. I will argue that while they often express admiration for the essentially anatomical female, they also often express a preference for the socially constructed feminine. There is a pleasure to be derived from femininized bodies that female bodies per se do not provide.

The Slaughterhouse

The gender-identity of a bull is at the center of Echeverría’s foundational fiction, El Matadero [The Slaughterhouse]. Written in 1839—but published in 1871--El Matadero
is generally considered to be the first Argentine short story. In the first of two parallel halves, an animal is brought into the slaughterhouse who “had the appearance of a toro [bull] and a novillo [steer]” (Echeverría 1984: 132). Two of the slaughterhouse workers debate the matter:

“Isn’t the one coming now an old bull?”
“As if he were still a bull. Show me the b[alls] to see whether he looks like a bull, b[allbrai]n.”
“He has them there between his legs. Don’t you see them, pal, bigger than the head of your roan horse, or did you go blind on the way to work?”
“You’re mother better be the blind one, to give birth to such a son. Don’t you see that all that stuff is mud?” (ibid.: 133)

Before its gender can be fixed, the ambiguous bovine bolts, but is eventually recaptured.

Lacking a resolution to the doubt concerning the genitals of the dead animal, he was provisionally classified a bull because of his indomitable fierceness; but they were so tired from the long task, that for the time being they forgot about it. Suddenly a rough voice exclaimed:
“Here are the balls!” And taking them from the animal’s belly and showing them to the spectators he exhibited two enormous testicles, an unequivocal sign of the bull’s dignity (ibid.: 138).

As every Argentine high school student learns upon reading El Matadero, “A bull in the slaughterhouse was something rare, even forbidden” (ibid.: 138). The posthumously castrated bull in the story is a rare violation. By law and custom, Argentine beef comes from infant, female, or castrated male animals. Terneros [calves] can be males or females, so long as they are less than eight months old; they are more likely to be consumed in the form of milanesas [breaded veal cutlets] than as asado. Vacas [cows] and vaquillonas [young cows, ranging eight to twenty-four months of age], are used for asado, but as Raúl Mirad affirms, “The criollo prefers el macho castrado (novillo) [the castrated male (steer)] of some 500 kilos. He thinks it is more tasty” (Mirad 1991: 50). In my reading, the steer
is feminized but not female. He is, perhaps, the bovine version of a mid-operative (unreconstructed) transsexual, who is also feminized but not anatomically female. In her reading of *El Matadero*, Elizabeth Garrels writes of the posthumously castrated toro, “now, without testicles, he is a steer, a diminutive male, a second sex that can be legally slaughtered, disemboweled, and eaten” (Garrels 1994).¹ Deprived of his testicles, the steer is no longer male, but neither is he fully female. Rather, he is a feminized male, which, I argue, makes him more vulnerable and more tasty than the bull that he was and the cow that he can never be.

In the second half of the story, an *unitario* [partisan of the Unitarian political party] happens to pass by the slaughterhouse. The unitario, like the bull, is of debatable masculinity. The slaughterhouse workers—who are *federales* [partisans of the Federalist political party]—call him a “*cajetilla*” [dandy] (Echeverría 1984: 139). They pull him from his horse and discuss what to do with him. One of the workers says to the slaughterer, “slit his throat like you did the bull’s” (ibid.: 140). Others suggest giving him “the slippery one,” “the candle,” “the *verga* [prick],” “the scissors,” and “the *mazorca*” (ibid.: 139-140). The mazorca has special significance. Besides being the Spanish word for “corn-cob,” it was “a form of torture that “has as it aim the introduction into the rear flank of an *unitario* enemy, the tasty fruit from which it has taken its name”” (Juan María Gutiérrez 1835 quoted in Salessi 1995: 61). Garrels (1994) explains that there are two procedures that can remake a male body “into one that will be perceived as explicitly female and

¹ Note that in Spain, but not in Argentina, “novillo” means not only a castrated bull, but is also used to indicate “a man whose woman commits adultery” (Real Academia Española 1992).
degraded: castration and rape"—which is another way to say, the prick and the scissors. Salessi offers a similar argument, observing that the controlling metaphor in El Matadero is that of "the man made ‘feminine’ by being sodomized" (Salessi 1995: 57).

Hearing the workers discuss his fate, the unitario becomes "furious like a wild bull" (Echeverría 1984: 142). "The Judge," that is to say, the meat inspector, decides what to do with the body in question: "Down with the pants of this dandy and bare-assed give him the prick, well tied up on the table" (ibid.: 144). The unitario is tied down to a table by four workers, at which point he proclaims: "Better to slit my throat than to strip me of my clothes" (ibid.: 144), and he dies. The parallels between the toro and the unitario in El Matadero are obvious. Both are ambiguously gendered and both are threatened with having their throats slit. Note, too, that the toro was infuriated "above all by two sharp picanas [cattle-prods] that spurred his behind" (ibid.: 134). It is the threat of anal penetration that causes the bull to bolt and the man to die from rage.

Literary historians agree that Echeverría intended his text as a condemnation of the federales and a defense of the unitarios. At the time El Matadero was written, the unitarios represented the European-oriented elite in Argentina who were in favor of centralized, Buenos Aires-based government. Their opponents were the federales, led by Juan Manuel de Rosas, who represented the criollo and nationalist-oriented sectors. Neither political party exists today, but the issues they fought over resonate for many contemporary Argentines. In broad terms, the unitarios are now taken to stand for rational economic development and First World values, while the federales are taken to stand for nationalist and populist values. Thus, the propaganda value of El Matadero
continues to be relevant and to be a reason for some Peronist-populists to object to its use. It is important to recognize the unitario bias in *El Matadero*, but it is also important to recognize that despite Echeverría’s political affiliations and intentions as an author, the story is a polyglossic text in which voices of unitarios and of federales can be heard. Salessi observes that unitarios and federales employed discourses of sexuality and gender to stigmatize one another.

The unitarios used [accounts of the mazorca] to stigmatize Rosas’ government and his partisans, representing them as sodomites, at the same time that the federales represented the unitarios as effeminate, ‘fags.’ Sodomites or fags, what is significant is how the two political groups used the figure of sexual or gender transgression to stigmatize the other (Salessi 1995: 61).

Salessi locates *El Matadero* as an example of an unitario text that stigmatizes federales, but *El Matadero* can also be gleaned for a federal subtext that stigmatizes unitarios. The slaughterhouse workers are identified as federales and are clearly represented as foul-mouthed brutes who express what Echeverría believes is a reprehensible desire to sodomize the unitario, but the federales are also heard, calling the unitario a “dandy” and mocking his sideburns as an effeminate vanity. Moreover, the unitario occupies a place in the narrative traditionally occupied by a woman. In Echeverría’s *La Cautiva* [The Captive], for example, it is a woman who is taken captive by a barbaric horde. The Indians of *La Cautiva* perform a dark and savage function that is similar to that performed by the slaughterhouse workers of *El Matadero*. The honor of the unitario, like that of the cautiva, is threatened. The cautiva dies in virginal rapture (Echeverría 1984: 106) while the unitario dies, as Garrels observes, expressing a sentiment that echoes the typical woman’s line, “Better to kill me than dishonor me” (Garrels 1994). Even though
Echeverría intended *El Matadero* as pro-unitario propaganda, the text can also be read to find a federal view that stigmatizes unitarios as effeminate.

It is important to observe not only that "the two political groups used the figure of sexual or gender transgression," as Saelessi observes, but also that there are differences between sexual transgression and gender transgression. Unitarios attempted to stigmatize federales as sodomites. Penetrating another man is clearly a sexual transgression, but whether it compromises the penetrator's masculine male identity is contestable. Similarly, federales attempted to stigmatize unitarios for having an effeminate, dandyesque style, but whether this gender transgression compromises a man's masculine sexual identity is also open to debate. It seems that federales did not consider active sodomy any more shameful than unitarios considered refined manners. The groups were not disputing the facts—that federales practiced sodomy or that unitarios had refined manners—so much as they were disputing the definition of masculinity. Was it more shameful to be a sodomite or a fag? Was it more masculine to display animalistic passion or civilized control? Was the real man he who could physically dominate other men or he who could skillfully seduce women? In Chapter Five I argue that these debates still have currency in Argentina. Fans of the River Plate and Boca Juniors soccer clubs attempt to stigmatize one other using the same terms that unitarios and federales, respectively, used one hundred and sixty years ago.

The Industrialization of Slaughter

Moving ahead one hundred and forty years, from the time *El Matadero* was
written, torturers operating in the service of the military Juntas of 1976-1983 put into practice the human-bovine confusion that was for Echeverría a literary device. The Juntas’ practice of disappearing their victims owes much to the Nazi industrialization of genocide (see Paoletti 1987). Both the Argentine and the German military practices of slaughtering humans appear to have drawn on techniques that originated in the animal slaughternhouses of nineteenth-century Chicago (Tobin 1998b). Note that “the first industrial production lines were in fact slaughter lines in the Chicago abattoirs” (Vialles 1994: 51).

As Carole Adams observes, “The division of labor on the assembly line owes its inception to Henry Ford’s visit to the disassembly line of the Chicago slaughterhouses” (Adams 1990: 52 quoting Ford 1922). The Chicago-style “factory in reverse” that “disassembles rather than assembles” (Iglesias 1996: 9) spread to Buenos Aires and, eventually, to all of the “developed world.” This connection is clear in Argentina, where the porteño neighborhood in which slaughterhouses were located throughout most of this century is commonly called “Nuevo Chicago.” The predominance of Chicago in the capitalization and design of Buenos Aires’ slaughterhouses is also reflected in the fact that by 1910 more than half of the chilled (as opposed to dried) meat exported from the Río de la Plata region was shipped by companies headquartered in Chicago (Smith 1986: 64; see also Gilberti 1970: 147-148). Vialles also suggests connections between the industrialization of animal-slaughter and the Nazi’s “Final Solution.” I will not here argue about the relationship of Nazi practices to animal-slaughter beyond noting that Nazis used cattle cars to transport their victims, their extermination camps, like slaughterhouses, were not labeled as such, and their extermination procedure occurred along an industrialized
disassembly line, such as was pioneered in the slaughter of cattle. I will argue that there are parallels between the industrialized slaughter of cattle and the Argentine Juntas’ practice of “disappearing” its victims, but I will leave aside the question of how much the Juntas borrowed from the Nazis and how much they borrowed directly from the meat industry.

There are many parallels between the industrialized slaughterhouses studied by Vialles and the clandestine camps used by the military Juntas that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983. Like a slaughterhouse, each of Argentina’s “clandestine detention centers” was, as Vialles observes of slaughterhouses, “a place that is no-place” (Vialles 1994: 15): no signs on the outside of the building indicated what went on inside (ibid.: 20-22), and inside, “euphemisation” helped distance workers from their deeds (ibid.: 22-27). Former Navy Captain Francisco Scilingo provides an example of euphemisation in the military repression in Argentina, explaining that the Navy did not engage in “clandestine kidnappings, tortures, and [executions]” but in “detentions, interrogations, and elimination[s]” (Scilingo quoted in Verbitsky 1995: 44). Vialles also argues that in slaughterhouses no worker accepts responsibility for an animal’s death. Similarly, Navy Captain Alfredo Astiz claims “I was not a torturer, I only followed orders. My job was to gather intelligence. Thus, I infiltrated the group of nuns of Santa Cruz Church and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo” (Gallo 1995: 39). Astiz denies his own responsibility for the torture and death of the nuns and Madres, even though he recognizes that the women he signaled out—by a kiss on the cheek—were the ones who were kidnapped, tortured, and killed by others, who were also only following orders.
In the case of slaughterhouses, Vialles observes that the fragmentation of work helps each individual worker dodge personal responsibility. This fragmentation is centered on the moment of death, from which it spirals out to include the entire transition from animal to edible.

[The first man does not really kill, he anaesthetizes. The second [...] does not really kill either, he bleeds an animal that is already inert and, in the terms that are in constant use, 'as if dead'. The result of disassociating death from suffering in this way is as follows: since anaesthesia is not really fatal and since painless (or supposedly painless) bleeding is not really killing we are left without any 'real' killing at all, nor do we have any one person who 'really' kills (Vialles 1994: 45).

According to Scilingo, a similar fragmentation was practiced in the Juntas' murder of so-called "subversives." First, a doctor gave the victims a "vaccine," which was actually an injection the purpose of which was to *atontarlos* [to stun them or to make them stupid] (Scilingo in Verbitsky 1995: 30). Scilingo says the drugged victims were "like zombies" and "they were content." Then, the victims were taken up in an airplane at which time "the doctor on board gave them a second dose, an extremely powerful sedative" (Scilingo quoted in Verbitsky 1995: 57). Finally, the victims were thrown into the waters of the Río de la Plata. As in the slaughter of cattle, the job of stunning-sedating was strictly separated from the killing that followed. "The doctor gave them the second injection and [did] nothing else. [...] They said it was because of the Hippocratic oath" (ibid.: 61).

Stunning and sedating the victims were not considered harmful, but neither was throwing them out of an airplane since, as Scilingo explains, they were "totally asleep. Nobody suffered absolutely anything" (ibid.: 60). What were thrown into the river were doubly dehumanized not just as "subversives" but also as "bodies of subversives" (ibid.: 60).
Referring to the sedated people as “subversives” suggested that they deserved to die. Referring to them as “bodies” suggested that they were already dead.

In the slaughter of animals, the separation of stunning and bleeding is attributed to humane considerations (Vialles 1994: 45). Similarly, a Navy chaplain explained to Scilingo that the method employed at ESMA “was a Christian death, because they did not suffer, because it was not traumatic” (Scilingo quoted in Verbitsky 1995: 38). In his interview with Horacio Verbitsky, Scilingo tried to defend drugging and throwing people from an airplane as more compassionate than a firing squad.

**Scilingo:** Who suffers more, he who knows that they are going to shoot him or he who dies by this method?

**Verbitsky:** The right to know that one is going to die should not be denied to any human being. It is a simple measure of respect for human dignity, even in a situation of last resort.

**Scilingo:** I agree with you about that. If I were on the other side I would have preferred to know it. You’re right. At that moment I did not think so. I thought it was true that ...

**Verbitsky:** It doesn’t seem to you that to do it in that way is, apart from everything else, a great cowardice, to avoid the gaze of the person who you are going to kill, to take them happy, with tricks, in order to be able to return and to pretend that nothing happened, in order to remember neither a scream nor a look? (Verbitsky 1995: 39-40).

I quote this passage at length to make two points. First, Verbitsky argues that the method of stunning-sedating prior to killing is immoral because the victim is a “human being” so it is a violation of “human dignity.” The implication is that the method used at ESMA may be moral for killing animals—namely, cows— but not for killing human beings.

Significantly, Scilingo seems never before to have thought of the victims as human; it is only at Verbitsky’s prompting that Scilingo thinks about what he would have preferred if he were “on the other side.” Second, Verbitsky observes that the motive behind the
ESMA method was not to lessen the suffering of the victims, but to make the deaths less traumatic for the murderers. After all, prior to being stunned, sedated, and thrown into the river, the victims had been subjected to the most brutal tortures the Navy officials could imagine. From the moment they were kidnapped to the moment they were murdered, nothing was done in order to lessen the victims’ suffering.

The purpose of the murder method described by Scilingo was for the murderers to be able “to pretend that nothing happened.” While the slaughter of animals is rendered invisible by the production of meat (Adams 1990), the Juntas’ murder of humans was rendered invisible by the production of desaparecidos [disappeared people]. In the cases described by Scilingo, there were no cadavers to confirm that deaths had occurred. The last time the victims were seen, they were happily—or at least stupidly—drugged. The moment of death itself was disappeared, occurring without witnesses, in the Río de la Plata. We all know the truth about meat, that it is dead animal flesh, but we usually prefer not to think about it that way. Similarly, the production of desaparecidos helped not only Argentine civilians, but even the murderers themselves avoid recognizing the far greater horror of killing human beings. Nick Fiddes argues that one of the ways modern butchers disassociate meat from animals is by the studious occulting of blood (Fiddes 1991).

Marketing tips for English butchers include meticulously removing all signs of blood or bloodiness from display cases and publicly visible areas. Argentine military repressors also seem to have found the sight of blood distasteful. This would help explain not only the bloodless murders described by Scilingo, but also the bloodless methods of torture that were preferred: suffocation and electric shock.
In addition to the parallels in the practices of slaughtering animals and disappearing humans, there are also telling verbal associations. The drug administered to the victims was not, of course, a vaccine, but that is what the victims were told they were getting. The relationship between a *vacuna* [vaccine] and a vaca is more obvious in Spanish than in English, so the decision to call the injection a “vacuna” as opposed to an “anti-biotic,” for example, may be considered motivated. The decision is consistent with my thesis that the victims were being positioned as vacas or carne de vaca. Note, too, that the man in charge of transporting the victims from the ESMA to the Airport was called “*el teniente Vaca*” [lieutenant Vaca]. There was a Navy lieutenant whose real name was Vaca, but “it turned out that [Scilingo’s boss] was not that Lieutenant Vaca, but a civilian lawyer contracted [by the Navy]” (Verbitsky 1995: 30). The use of a code name was mandatory, but it was unusual for a code name to include a rank. In any case, the civilian lawyer was not a lieutenant, so his decision to use that specific rank is significant. “Teniente” means not only “lieutenant” but also “having or tending something,” so “*el teniente Vaca*” might be glossed as “*el teniente [de] vaca[s]*” [the one who tends cows]. Again, this supports the thesis that the military repressors positioned their victims like cows. Bovine imagery was also used at ESMA and other clandestine torture camps to associate torture with asado. Torturers tied their victims to “a box spring that they [the torturers] called ‘parrilla’” (CONADEP 1984: 43; see also Walsh 1995: 303), obviously playing on the box spring’s use as a parrilla at large-scale asados, especially associated with Peronists. The military repressors carried the metaphor through to the end, using the phrase “to make an asadito [little asado]” in order to indicate the practice of burning the cadavers of their
victims (CONADEP 1984: 137).

Lacan’s Phallus

Scilingo gave the following, succinct summary of the interrogation methods at
ESMA: “[The female lawyer] was being interrogated employing the methods that [...] were those that were used ... In a word, she was being tortured with a picana” (Scilingo quoted in Verbitsky 1995: 71). This picana is a cattle prod, like the picana that most infuriated the bull in El Matadero, but it has been brought up to date. It is a picana eléctrica [electric cattle prod], the touch of which causes muscles to contract violently. Frank Graziano explains that the picana eléctrica is “a kind of prod attached to a voltage regulator with which the shock’s intensity was adjusted. A medical doctor was generally in attendance to diagnose the victim’s ability to endure without cardiac arrest” (Graziano 1992: 38). The picana is a recurring figure in the accounts of those who survived abduction by the military government (see CONADEP 1984: 26-54 et passim). Also, it was revealed in 1996 that Argentine experts trained military and paramilitary torturers in Central America in the use of the picana eléctrica.

From the picota [lance] of the Spanish conquistadores to the mazorca and the picana of the federales to the picana eléctrica of twentieth-century military governments, one phallic object or another has been employed in Argentina to torture political opponents (Graziano 1992: 158). In 1968 and 1969, Rodolfo Walsh—a journalist, disappeared by the Junta in 1977—devoted a series of articles to “the picana sect” in which he documented the use of the picana by police in Avellaneda, a suburb of Buenos Aires
(Walsh 1995: 289-314). The use of the picana eléctrica as an instrument of torture pre-dates the Juntas of 1976-1983, but I find no evidence that the picana—with all its bovine connotations—was ever nearly so central to a regime of torture as it was for that of the Junta of 1976-1983.

The significance of the picana is central to Graziano’s study of torture in Argentina’s so-called “Dirty War.” In particular, he deploys Lacanian theory to read the picana as a “phallic object.” I will not dispute Graziano’s reading of the picana as phallus, but I will add that the function of the picana as picana is also significant. A cigar may be a phallic object, but it is also a cigar, and as such it lends smokey connotations to the phallic signifier. Similarly, a picana may be a phallic object, but it is also an instrument designed and used for controlling cattle, and as such it lends bovine connotations to the phallic signifier. I believe the same logic helps to explain the confusion in Lacan’s work between the phallus and the penis. The penis may be a phallic object, but it is also a penis, and as such it lends penile connotations to the phallus. Lacan is adamant in his assertions that the penis is not the phallus, though it is a phallic object, but he implies that the penis is the phallus by observing that the difference between male and female is the difference between having and being the phallus. Man does not really have the phallus, any more than a woman really is the phallus, but it is because of their penises that men are (mis)recognized as having the phallus. Moreover, Lacan cannot will away the psychoanalytically-oriented literature in which the phallus is represented as penile. Graziano is true to this literature in observing that the picana is a “phallic-like instrument” and that “the torturers stressed and exploited the instrument’s phallic form” (Graziano 1992: 38 and 157). In these cases it is
clear that to be "phallic-like" or to have a "phallic form" is to resemble an erect penis. Apologists for Lacan might argue that this slip is Graziano's, not Lacan's. As Jacques-Alain Miller observes, "all the logic of the phallic function in Lacan is made to thwart this idea of biological division" (Miller 1990: 48). Nevertheless, Lacan, too, represented the phallus as penile when he wrote that "it is, given its turgidity, the image of the vital flow as it goes into a generative state" (Lacan 1985: 672). I believe the Lacanian phallus is erect and ready to ejaculate—and impregnate—because it has so regularly been associated with the penis. The signified always signifies something back onto its signifier. Every "phallic object," including especially the penis, gives something of itself to the phallus.

There is no transcendent, one-way signifier that remains untainted by the others. Metaphysicians, including Lacanians, try to keep the signifying flows pure by ensuring that no signifier goes up the one-way street reserved for the phallus, but to no avail. As Derrida observes, no matter how long and hard they rub, the bodily stains will never quite come out (Derrida 1982: 211-213). Even once all the color is removed, the texture remains: The phallus retains its turgidity. I would argue that the metaphysician's attempt to control signifying flows has a heteronormative function. Salessi demonstrates a connection between the nineteenth-century hygienist discourse concerning the flows of water and sewage and the early twentieth-century medical discourse concerning sexuality in Argentina (Salessi 1995). He argues that the hygienist's concerns to prevent animal blood from slaughterhouses from contaminating rivers and to prevent barbarism from contaminating civilization were translated into the physician's anxiousness to prevent homosexuals from contaminating straights. In each case the focus was on keeping the
clean and the dirty in their proper, separate channels. I suggest that the metaphysician’s concern to keep the object of desire from contaminating the phallus is a continuation of the same discourse. The goal remains to prevent the straight male phallus from being tainted by hazardous channels.

Penetrating Questions

Military torturers of the nineteen-seventies carried on a tradition of political sodomy in Argentina that dates back at least to the Mazorca sect of the eighteen-thirties. Each group centered its authority on a phallic object that it used to penetrate its victims anally. Diana Taylor argues that such acts of sodomy served to gender its (penetrated) victims feminine.

All those abducted, regardless of their sex, were gendered feminine. Before being killed, men were routinely raped and sodomized with the *picana eléctrica* (electric cattle prod) as a means of transforming them into the penetrable, disposable bodies of misogynist fantasies (D. Taylor 1994b: 283).

This relationship between penetrability and femininity has been widely argued. In his study of Attic Greek sexuality, Foucault observed that male-male sexual relations “feminized one of the partners” (Foucault 1985: 222, emphasis in the original). Only one, not both, of the partners was feminized because what counted, as Foucault observed in his study of Roman sexuality, is “who penetrates whom” (Foucault 1986: 29-30). According to Roger Lancaster, the pattern identified by Foucault is reproduced in Nicaragua in the dichotomies of “penile-anal, active-passive, honor-stigma” (Lancaster 1992: 270), and Salessi confirms the relevance of such a pattern in nineteenth and early twentieth century
Argentina.

Apparently, already in 1835, it was not the choice of sexual object but the insertive position adopted in an insertive/receptive couple that defined the man’s gender as "masculine". The receptive position made the man "feminine" because it confused the roles and hierarchies considered traditional in the "feminine" (receptive) woman and the "masculine" (insertive) man (Salessi 1995: 62).

Marcelo Suárez-Orozco finds the same schematization in his study of the contemporary soccer scene in Argentina: "It is fine to engage in homosexual acts as long as one’s role is the active, penetrating aggressor and not the passive, weak, female-like recipient" (Suárez-Orozco 1982: 22). In sum, sexual stigmatization in contemporary Argentina appears to conform to a pattern, identified throughout the Mediterranean and Latin America over several centuries, in which being penetrated renders male or female bodies feminine.

These readings of Mediterranean and Latin American sexualities are phallocentric in that they are centered on the penis. It would seem that all that counts is that a penis penetrates an orifice, and that the orifice being penetrated is insignificant. As in the Lacanian discourse of the phallus, the penis marks but is unmarked. Oral, anal, and vaginal intercourse are collapsed into a single, two-sided equation of penetrator/penetrated. Masculinity is performed by penilely penetrating, while femininity—for a woman or a man—is performed by being penilely penetrated. There is an alternative schematization, which is "modern" as opposed to "ancient," Northern-Germanic as opposed to Southern Mediterranean, and Anglo-American as opposed to Latin-American. A modern heterosexual couple who perform oral or anal sex are considered only mildly perverse, and of a different order from the homosexual couple who perform the same acts.
To a great extent, this is the difference between the “sodomite” and the “homosexual” documented by Foucault (1978: 43). Sodomy is, as Foucault observed, “that utterly confused category” (Foucault 1978: 101), used to indicate all sorts of sexual transgressions, including bestiality, oral penetration, and homosexuality. Here, I use the word to indicate anal penetration. In this sense, sodomy is a juridical category—a “forbidden act” or “a temporary aberration”—that typically stigmatizes only a penetrated man or woman, whereas homosexuality is a medical category comprised of two stigmatized “individuals” of the “same sex.” In the medical discourse, a man is stigmatized as homosexual because his sex-partner is a man, with little or no regard for “who penetrates whom,” and a woman is stigmatized as lesbian because her sex-partner is a woman, whether or not the two engage in penetrative sex. This modern medical schematization, too, is phallocentric because it dictates that there be one and only one penis, just as there is one and only one phallus. Again, it is relatively unimportant where that penis is put.

An immediate byproduct of these phallocentric readings of sexual transgression is that there is a lack of specificity regarding orifices. In particular, as Leo Bersani observes, there is a “widespread confusion in heterosexual and homosexual men between fantasies of anal and vaginal sex” (Bersani 1994: 251, emphasis in the original). I believe this confusion marks both Freudian and Foucauldian theories of sexuality. Freud argued that in the infant imaginatiation “sexual intercourse takes place at the anus” (Freud 1955: 78). Lee Edelman observes that this infantile belief has the effect of placing sodomy at the origin of heterosexual desire.
Thus in the first instance the primal scene is always perceived as sodomitical, and it specifically takes shape as a sodomitical scene between sexually undifferentiated partners, both of whom, fantasmatically at least, are believed to possess the phallus. In a sense, then, the primal scene as Freud unpacks it presupposes the imaginative priority of a sort of protohomo sexuality (Edelman 1994: 180).

Note that vaginal intercourse, in this formulation, is constituted as secondary to sodomy.

Since both the mother and the father are believed to possess the phallus—even if it turns out that the mother’s is missing—the prototypical sex act is not only sodomitical, it is also arguably homosexual. From the male infant’s point of view, the primal scene comes to represent a choice between penetrating or being penetrated. Male heterosexuality, for Freud, involves forfeiting the potential pleasures of being penetrated analy in order to retain the potential pleasures of penetrating a non-differentiated anal-vaginal orifice. The sight of male homosexuality is disruptive, according to Edelman (1994) because it reveals that it is possible to do both: penetrate and be penetrated. The homosexual sodomite can identify with the sodomized mother in the primal scene, without paying the price of castration. Female heterosexuality seems to involve identifying with the presumably sodomized mother because according to Freud, for females as well as for males, the vagina does not exist except as a substitute for the anus.²

Foucault observes that Plutarch “borrowed from the erotics of boys its fundamental and traditional features” and used them as a model for heterosexual love (Foucault 1986: 205). I would argue that Foucauldian theories of heterosexuality are also

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² Freud argues that “there are a few isolated reports of early vaginal sensations [...] but it could not be easy to distinguish these from sensations in the anus or vestibulum” (Freud 1965: 146). Thus, he supposes that even an infant female who somehow discovers her vagina confuses it with her anus.
borrowed from the erotics of boys. The putative logic of Foucauldian theories is that being anally penetrated feminizes a man because women are vaginally penetrated in heterosexual genital intercourse. A man’s anus is supposed to be read as a substitute for the vagina, but it is more accurate to read the vagina as a substitute for the anus, at least in the Argentine discourse of sexuality. In Argentina, sodomy has been routinely imagined according to the binary logic of active-dominant-masculine-penetrator and passive-dominated-feminine-penetrated, but there are indications that vaginal intercourse has not been so securely imagined according to this logic. Donna Guy, in her study of prostitution in early-twentieth century Buenos Aires, notes that female prostitutes were represented as dangerous in general and as receptacles of venereal disease in particular, but that male prostitutes “were ignored as a source of illness” (Guy 1991: 86). It seems that the vagina was considered dangerous and contaminating in a way that the anus was not.\(^3\)

Roger Lancaster makes the important observation that there is no natural basis for the association of penetration with activity.

By what necessity is the penis ‘active’ and the anus (or vagina) ‘passive’ in sexual intercourse? Intercourse could just as easily be imagined the other way around. Or any participant in any position could be seen as an ‘active’ partner in intercourse (Lancaster 1992: 273).

Andrea Dworkin offers an example of imaging heterosexual intercourse the other way around.

Remarkably, it is not the man who is considered possessed in intercourse, even

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\(^3\) The current fin de siècle discourse of AIDS thereby inverts last century’s fin de siècle discourse of syphilis. As Bersani (1994) argues, it is now the anuses of gay men that are constituted as infinitely dangerous, while the vaginas of straight women are represented as safe.
though he (his penis) is buried inside another human being; and his penis is surrounded by strong muscles that contract like a fist shutting tight and release with such a force that pushes hard on the tender thing, always so vulnerable no matter how hard (Dworkin 1987: 64).

Rather than imagine the penis as penetrating the vagina, it is possible to imagine the vagina as “invaginating” the penis (Derrida 1985: 98). The figure of the vagina dentata [the toothed vagina] suggests that vaginal intercourse has not been consistently read according to the active-passive dichotomies of masculine-feminine hermeneutics. Fellatio is usually theorized as an act of penile penetration, yet in the case of consuming food, it is the penetrated eater who is typically imagined to be the active agent, and the penetrating food that is imagined to be a passive object. Sodomy could be similarly re-imagined.

Psychoanalytic theorists usually associate anal eroticism with a subject deriving pleasure from asserting active, even obsessive control of his bowels and his surroundings. It is possible to imagine the anus as “analating” the penis. Because it is possible to imagine each of the acts “the other way around,” it is important to study how each act is, in fact, imagined, and to note that they are each imagined differently from one another in different cultural contexts. Suárez-Orozco, argues that in soccer, “the goals do not in fact symbolize vaginas, [...] but they symbolize the horto (“ass hole”) of the opposite team” (Suárez-Orozco 1982: 19). That is to say, anal penetration should be distinguished from vaginal penetration. Suárez-Orozco also argues that “the lowest role imaginable to a macho [is] performing fellatio to another macho” (ibid.: 22), which is to mark a distinction between oral penetration and anal penetration, too.

The penetrator-penetrated schematization theorized by Foucault, Andrea Dworkin,
and others, fits well the top-bottom politics of homosexual anal intercourse theorized by Foucault (1988), but it fails to account for the more frequently contested politics of heterosexual vaginal intercourse. My own morbid survey of the literature pertaining to the treatment of victims of the military repression in Argentina confirms that women as well as men were routinely sodomized. The picana eléctrica was placed on eyes and penises, and was inserted into mouths and vaginas, but the anus seems to have been its supreme target in women's bodies as well as in men's (e.g., CONADEP 1984: 43 and 47). I believe anal penetration was used against female bodies—as well as against male bodies—because it is the epitomal act of masculinity-femininity. For the torturers, anal penetration feminized both the male and the female. Anally raping women as well as men—either with a penis or with a picana—was a way that the military torturers asserted their own dominant masculinity and their victims' dominated femininity, whereas raping female victims vaginally was not sufficient because it was more open to alternative readings based on female difference, attractiveness, and power.

Here, I am distinguishing between the female and the feminine. Certainly there are overlaps between the categories. To feminize is to dominate, and the female is routinely subjected to dominating practices, but the feminized is still not the same as the female. The criollo, Mirad observes, prefers the meat that comes from a steer over the meat that comes from a cow. That is to say, he marks a distinction between the feminized (steer) and the female (cow). Note, too, that “a gaucho would never ride a mare” (Slatta 1983: 65). A horse is, of course, feminized by his rider: the rider mounts the horse and is on top. Thus, gauchos distinguished between trained-feminized male stallions and always
already female mares. In preferring to eat the meat of steer and to mount stallions, the Argentine male chooses the feminized male over the female. He extracts a distinct pleasure from the feminized male that cannot be reduced to the feminized male’s approximation to the female as such. To extract a comparable pleasure from the female requires feminizing her, too. Feminizing the female is not accomplished through penetrating her vaginally, because vaginal penetration is fraught with contradictory and dangerous readings. Instead, feminizing the female is accomplished—to the extent that it is accomplishable at all—by subjecting her to the same acts that serve to feminize the male.
CHAPTER FOUR
OPPOSITIONAL GOALS

"In this world of the end of the century, whoever does not die of hunger, dies of boredom" (Galeano 1995: 244). The goal of this chapter is to interrogate the distinction between these two causes of death identified by Eduardo Galeano: starvation and boredom. Social scientists routinely consider hunger to be a serious issue and boredom to be a frivolous issue. To the extent that social sciences are scientific—in the sense of being fundable by the National Science Foundation—they are concerned with topics such as hunger, the production of food, the division of labor, and government. Topics such as boredom, entertainment, leisure, and sports are looked at with suspicion by many social scientists, politicians, and funding agencies. Intellectuals on the right and on the left usually consider sports frivolous. The playfulness of soccer stigmatizes the adult fans who appear to waste time and energy on an infantile passion and the scholars who appear to waste time and energy on a frivolous topic.

It is possible to study soccer seriously by focusing on hooliganism and violence, or by condemning it as an opium of the people. My approach to soccer’s perceived lack of seriousness is to examine the relationship between seriousness and play. What does it mean to categorize politics and economics as serious and to categorize cooking (e.g., asado), sports (e.g., soccer), and dancing (e.g., tango) as playful? Is dying from hunger more “serious” than dying from boredom (in addition to being more real)? What gender and class interests are served by these categorizations? I begin to answer these questions
by locating the categorization in the context of distinctions that are routinely drawn
between big "P" Politics and little "p" politics and between big "C" Culture and little "c"
culture. In each case, the capitalized wordform corresponds with what tend to be
masculine or bourgeois interests whereas its uncapsulated counterpart corresponds with
what tend to be feminine or working-class interests. I conclude by arguing that such
distinctions are untenable. The serious inevitably intrudes on the playful, and the playful
on the serious, and soccer despite being played is serious business.

Soccer Theology

*I first met Julio in Buenos Aires in 1992, when Marta was taking tango-dance
lessons with him, but I only got to know him in 1995, when he and his dance partner,
Paloma, were in Los Angeles performing in the Broadway-style show "Forever Tango."
Marta and I saw the show several times and each time we went out for dinner with them
afterwards. As is usual in Buenos Aires, the dinner table conversation fragmented into
Marta talking with Paloma, and me talking with Julio, and, also as is usual in Buenos
Aires, we men turned to soccer as the topic of our conversation. My occasional
friendship with Julio continued when Marta and I returned to Buenos Aires in January of
1996. Julio and Paloma were already back there, dancing in one of the top tango touristi
shows. By this time Julio was vaguely aware of Marta's standing as someone who wrote
about tango for publication in Spanish, English, and Japanese, so he invited us to see
Paloma and him dance. In return for getting us into an expensive show for free, I invited
Julio to be my guest at a soccer game.
When we made our plans, I explained to Julio that I would be coming from Palermo and that the game would be in the Vélez Sarsfield stadium, even though Boca was the “home team,” since Boca’s Bombonera stadium was undergoing renovations. Julio suggested that we rendezvous at the Torino Norte coffee shop, on the corner of Santa Fe and Juan B. Justo. The location was perfect since he could reach it with a single bus ride from his apartment in Almagro, I could get there with a single bus ride from my asado in Palermo, and it was also a single bus ride away from the Vélez stadium, at the end of Juan B. Justo in the barrio of Liniers. Coincidentally, I happened to know the Torino Norte because it was where I had coffee two mornings a week before seeing my psychoanalyst, whose office was a block and a half away.

I arrived about fifteen minutes late, but Julio wasn’t there yet. He arrived a couple of minutes later, with a Boca jersey draped over one shoulder. We were both eager to get to the stadium, so we decided to take a taxi. Noticing Julio’s Boca jersey, the driver did not wait for instructions. He just said, “They’re playing in Vélez today, right?” I saw a red ornament hanging from the rearview mirror, so I asked the driver if he was a fan of Independiente. Julio stared at me reproachfully. I realized that he had also noticed the ornament but had determined that it was better not to comment on it. The driver confirmed that he was an Independiente fan, but he said that he hoped Boca would win because “there is only one Maradona, and he belongs to all of us.”

“In what way does soccer resemble God?” The riddle is posed by Eduardo Galeano, an Uruguayan historian, essayist, and fiction-writer. The answer, according to
Galeano, is “in the devotion placed in it by many believers and in the distrust placed in it by many intellectuals” (Galeano 1995: 36). We intellectuals are a contentious lot, yet we tend to share a distrust of or a distance from both soccer and religion. As intellectual soccer coach Jorge Valdano concludes, “when all is said and done, few were the times intellectuals expressed amicable opinions with respect to soccer” (Valdano 1995: 13).

Consider Umberto Eco’s account of attending a soccer game and, for the first time, doubting the existence of God:

And one day, as I was observing with detachment the senseless movements down there on the [soccer] field, I felt how the high noonday sun seemed to enfold men and things in a chilling light, and how before my eyes a cosmic, meaningless performance was proceeding. Later, on reading Ottiero Ottieri, I would discover that this is the sense of the “everyday unreality,” but at the time I was thirteen and I translated the experience in my own way; for the first time I doubted the existence of God and decided that the world was a pointless fiction (Eco 1986: 167-168).

The thirteen year-old Umberto Eco may have felt alone among thousands of cheering soccer fans, but in observing the spectacle of soccer “with detachment,” he was already well on his way to joining the community of intellectuals, who sometimes have little in common other than their positions as professional thinkers and their conclusion that soccer, like religion, is an “opium of the people” (see Marx 1978: 54).\footnote{Perhaps it is necessary to specify when one uses the words “people” and “popular” in the strict sense referring to the lower classes. I find useful Néstor García-Canclini’s distinction between the terms “la popularidad” [popularity] and “lo popular” [popular-ness] (García-Canclini 1992: 241). Applied to soccer, “popularity” would refer to its being “prevalent” or “wide-spread,” whereas “popular-ness” would refer to it being “common” or “low class.”} It seems that intellectual distaste for participating in popular activities translates into distaste for studying those activities. In any case, there were few intellectual studies
of Argentine soccer published before 1994. Among those that were, Juan José Sebreli’s 1981 book *Fútbol y Masas* [Soccer and Masses] stands out as by far the weightiest in both its scholarship and influence, but significantly, Sebreli was apologetic about devoting an entire book to soccer. He hoped, rather defensively, that it is not wholly gratuitous to dedicate oneself to the task—like that which I have attempted with this book—of demystifying the ideological fallacies of contemporary society, and among these fallacies one of the most powerful, sports and soccer used as means of indoctrinating the youth and the masses, in order to depoliticize them and accustom them to alienated labor, to pure compliance, to competition, to social aggression, to sexual repression, to fanaticism, to irrational activism, to the disparagement of the individual in favor of the cult of idols, to the submission to authoritarianism, to the suspension of the critical spirit and of independent thought, to mystical fusion into totalitarian collectivisms (Sebreli 1981: 184).

Whether they would find Sebreli’s book “wholly gratuitous” or only partially so, most of the intellectuals who have written about soccer—in Argentina and elsewhere—agree with Sebreli that soccer either distracts the people from what ails them or trains them for submission to fascist or capitalist discipline. The German Marxist Gerhard Vinnai is notable for demonstrating that sports, including soccer, were used to promote patriotism in Nazi Germany (Vinnai 1974: 131). Similarly, Sebreli observed that Mussolini, Franco, Stalin, Perón, and Pétain were great proponents of sport and their example has been followed by the majority of contemporary world leaders for whom totalitarianism triumphs without violence by way of the persuasion that emanates from those apparatuses of propaganda (Sebreli 1981: 154).

More recently, Argentine journalists José Luis Ponsico and Roberto Gasparini documented that during the 1978 World Cup, held in Argentina at the height of the so-called “Dirty War,” “Argentina displayed on hundreds of millions of televisions all over the
world an image of an organized, well-behaved, and efficient country under military
guidance" (Gasparini and Ponsico 1983: 78). In all of these cases, soccer is considered to
be, like religion, an opium of the people that fosters fascism.

Politics and the State

*We arrived at the stadium where thousands of Boca fans were already assembled.*

Security guards frisked us as we passed through the outer gates. Once inside, other
guards asked us if we were Boca fans before allowing us to proceed to the Boca Juniors
side of the stadium. We climbed several flights of stairs and ramps before finding our
section. Down on the field, junior squads for Boca and Platense were winding up their
preliminary game. *We watched the game, without knowing the score or the players.*

Soon the senior squads took the field, along with the officials, led by Argentina's
most controversial referee: Javier Castrilli. Castrilli called the captains to the center
for the coin toss. *The Boca fans were torn between booing Castrilli and booing
Platense's captain and goalkeeper, Luis Islas. They called Castrilli "facho" [slang for
fascist], and Islas they called "maricón" [roughly equivalent to faggot].* Maradona
seemed to go out of his way to demonstrate his friendship with Islas, who was his
teammate on Argentina's national team in the 1994 World Cup. *The two embraced and
kissed one another on the cheek.*

*Because this Sunday—24 March 1996—was the Sunday closest to the twentieth
anniversary of the military coup that launched the "Proceso," the Asociación del Fútbol
Argentino ordered a minute of silence before the start of each game played that weekend*
(Clarín 25 March 1996, política: 4). The players were all in position on the field, with Maradona and Caniggia standing in the middle of the central circle, ready for the kick off when the silence began. A few seconds into the mandated minute, Maradona began to jump up and down, and immediately the vast majority of the more than 45,000 fans in attendance began to jump up and down in unison with Maradona, and to chant:

Hay que saltar,  You have to jump,
Hay que saltar,  You have to jump,
El que no salta, He who doesn’t jump,
Es militar.  Is pro-military.

It is difficult to convey the power of the experience of tens of thousand of soccer fans chanting to the rhythm marked by Maradona, especially considering how hesitant most Argentines have been to discuss the “Proceso.” Julio never made any sort of “political” comment to me concerning his opinion of President Menem, of the amnesty granted to the Generals, or of the current wave of privatizations. Now, however, in the soccer stadium he turned to me and excitedly explained, “This is a chant from the crazy years. It was terrible. Many people were killed.”

Intellectual critics of soccer have adopted the 1978 World Cup, held in the midst of Argentina’s so-called “Dirty War,” as the paradigm for understanding the relationship between soccer and politics. According to Eco, to the extent that we ponder sports instead of politics, we are all like the Argentines who welcomed the spectacle of the

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2 Meanwhile, in the San Lorenzo soccer club’s Nuevo Gasómetro stadium, the fans chanted, “Paredón, paredón, a todos los milicos que vendieron la Nación” [The firing squad, the firing squad, for all the military men who sold out the Nation] (Clarín 25 March 1996: 4).
World Cup as an escape from thinking and talking about the military dictatorship.

[Sports debate [...] which in Italy is nearly coextensive with talk about soccer] is the easiest substitute for political debate. Instead of judging the job done by the minister of finance (for which you have to know about economics, among other things), you discuss the job done by the coach; instead of criticizing the record of Parliament you criticize the record of the athletes; instead of asking (difficult and obscure question) if such-and-such a minister signed some shady agreements with such-and-such a foreign power, you ask if the final or decisive game will be decided by chance, athletic prowess, or by diplomatic alchemy. In short, it allows you to play at the direction of the government without all the sufferings, the duties, the imponderables of political debate. [...] And at a moment like this, concerning oneself with the running of the government (the real one) is traumatic. So faced with such a choice, we are all Argentines (Eco 1986: 171).

For Eco sports debate is not political, but what, then, is political? Note that Eco argues that “sports chatter has all the characteristics of a political debate [...] only the object is not the city (or the corridors of the state house) but the stadium, with its locker rooms” (ibid.: 163), and that sports debate “deceitfully passes itself off as talk of the City” (ibid.: 165).

Given Eco’s heightened linguistic consciousness, it should come as no surprise to observe that his understanding of the word “political” is etymological. It seems that for Eco the political is that which pertains to the πόλις [polis] in the narrowest sense of “city” or “city-state.” Eco’s understanding of the political never strays from “the corridors of the state house,” “the record of Parliament,” or “the running of the government” (ibid.: 171). He even specifies that when he says “government” he means “the real one” (ibid.: 171) as opposed to an ersatz government, such as the “governing body” of a soccer club.

Anthony Mason also identifies politics exclusively with affairs of state and nation. In a chapter on “Fútbol and Politics,” Mason offers a chronological list of government involvement in soccer clubs and competitions. His argument is that soccer has served the
state and the state has served soccer. Mason seems unaware of South American soccer’s capacity to serve counter-hegemonic, as well as hegemonic interests. For example, he calls attention to a chant at Argentine soccer games that begins, “You must jump! / You must jump! / He who does not jump / is ...”. Mason observes that in the final match of the 1978 World Cup between Argentina and Holland, he who did not jump was a Dutchman, and that in the midst of the Malvinas/Falklands War, he who did not jump was an Englishman (Mason 1995: 73). Mason concludes that the chant served nationalist and pro-Junta interests, but he fails to note that during the same period, at certain Argentine soccer stadiums—most notably, that of Boca Juniors—he who did not jump was “un militar” [pro-military]. As Eduardo Archetti and Amílcar Romero observe, “since 1979 stadia have been used by fans for protesting against the military junta and many matches were and are still transformed into political happenings when fans loudly comment upon political events and judge governments and politicians” (Archetti and Romero 1994: 68). Later in his book, Mason does mention in passing that soccer “can occasionally be used to dramatize social conflict,” but the only example he gives is of a soccer club that “became involved in the campaign to restore free elections in Brazil” (Mason 1995: 129). Again, the example confirms a definition of the political that pertains only to government per se and not to cultural politics, which is the domain in which soccer does most of its political work.

Fans and Class Conflicts

As the game began, Julio took off his dress shirt and replaced it with the Boca
jerdy he had been carrying over his shoulder. He asked me where my jersey was, and he scolded me for not having brought it. Julio had told me on the phone when we made plans to go to the game that he would be wearing his Boca jersey and that I should wear mine, but I worried that he was joking. The year before a a group of us, including the artist Jorge Azar, discussed the upcoming exposition of a series of Jorge’s paintings devoted to the theme of soccer and homosexuality. Jorge suggested that everyone wear soccer jerseys to the show, but when I arrived at the exposition in my Boca jersey I was the only one so attired. It turned out that Jorge had made the suggestion in jest.

I had no idea of what it meant to wear any soccer jersey, much less that of Boca Juniors, but I soon learned. Upon arriving at the art exposition in my blue and yellow jersey, I went to the bar where the bartender immediately asked me, “How did the game go?” It took me a second to realize that—because of my shirt—he was asking about the Boca game. I had to answer that I didn’t know. The bartender was a Boca fan and he explained that he didn’t know the result of the game either because he was working at this high-brow art exposition, where there was no radio or TV. Seeing me in my Boca jersey, he assumed I was a fellow bostero [Boca fan], who—as it happened—arrived at the party just about half an hour after the completion of the game because I watched the game on TV. He seemed disillusioned that I did not know the result of the game, and he tried to put the world back in order, saying, “I already know what you want to drink.

3 “Bostero”—derived from bosta [manure]—literally means one who handles cow manure. It is also a name for fans of Boca Juniors that was coined with derogatory intentions by fans of Boca’s arch-rival, River Plate. Over the years, however, “bosteros” have defiantly adopted the originally-derogatory label, much as many “queers” in the United States have adopted that label (see Butler 1993b).
Beer in the can, right?" He handed me a Quilmes without a glass, which I at least had the sense to accept.

The bartender was not the only person at the exposition who assumed that my wearing a Boca jersey meant that I was an avid Boca fan. Throughout the evening I found myself addressed with greater warmth or coldness than usual, accompanied by comments for or against Boca Juniors and their fans. Fellow bosteros commiserated with me while fans of other clubs taunted me over—as it turned out—Boca's loss. In short, wearing the blue and yellow shirt, I had unwittingly and in no uncertain terms identified myself as a bostero. My mild attempts to explain that I was not really a Boca fan did not come close to overturning the statement to the contrary that I was making with my clothing. In Argentina, the clothes make the fan. Thanks to the jersey, I made several contacts that would prove to be vital to my research on soccer, and thanks to the jersey, each and every one of those contacts was built on my identity as a bostero.

In fact, it was by chance that the jersey I wore to that exposition was that of Boca Juniors. Once a week I played soccer with my brother-in-law and a bunch of his childhood friends. On the field, each of the players wore the jersey of his favorite soccer club. Since I did not have a soccer club, or a jersey, I decided to wear a Chicago Bulls T-shirt instead. One week one of the players offered to trade his soccer jersey for my Bulls T-shirt, and it just happened that he was a Boca fan.

In Argentina, on those frequent occasions when soccer intrudes on to the front page of the national newspapers, certain intellectual, political commentators—most
notably, television journalist Bernardo Neustadt--lament that "soccer is not the patria" (Alabarces and Rodríguez 1996: 43)--that is to say, the "motherland" (D. Taylor 1997: 4).

They share Benedict Anderson’s recognition that newspapers are central to the imagining of the nation, so they are particularly upset when La Nación--the newspaper of record--devotes half its front page to yesterday’s game between Boca Juniors and River Plate.

Such contemporary complaints about soccer’s role in defining the nation are reminiscent of an earlier generation’s complaints about tango, as documented by Marta Savigliano. Soccer, like tango, is "a practice close to the identity of a different/inferior class of argentinos" (Savigliano 1995: 140). Argentine tango “conquered” Europe in the years immediately preceding the first world war, and became one of the principal images that Europeans had of Argentina. Argentina’s national soccer team won the World Cups of 1978 and 1986 and became one of the principal images that masses of people around the world have of Argentina. In both cases, members of the intellectual, professional, and elite classes in Argentina resented the way they, as Argentines, were identified abroad.

They believed that

    legitimate representatives of a nation can be distinguished from illegitimate ones
    and that the morally superior sectors should represent the morally inferior ones,
    usually meaning that the civilized, wealthier ones should represent the uncivilized,
    poor ones (ibid.: 141).

Consider the case of a contemporary engineer from Argentina who, like many men of his
class, considers Maradona an uneducated, misguided, and drug-addled soccer player.

Traveling abroad, the engineer comes in contact with taxi drivers, waiters, and even fellow
engineers, who upon hearing that he is from Argentina inevitably and infuriatingly respond
“Argentina? Maradona!” (see Alabarces and Rodriguez 1995: 43). The contemporary engineer’s resentment is analogous to the “beef baron” who eighty or ninety years earlier found his nationality reduced to “Argentina? Tango!” Now as before, the superior Argentine believes that his country should be known for the industry, education, or refinement of its best citizens, and not for the passionate bodily practices of its lower sectors.

There are important differences between tango’s role in Argentine national and class identities and soccer’s. The dancing couple in tango is typically comprised of a heterosexual couple, whereas soccer is an almost exclusively male activity. As a representation of Argentine national identity, tango at least includes women, however exoticized or masculinized they may be (see Chapter Six). By contrast, women are all but absent from the world populated by soccer players, coaches, referees, and fans. Another difference involves the early histories of tango and soccer, which to some extent are mirror images. Tango arose in the last third of the nineteenth century among marginalized African, Southern European, and Creole residents of Montevideo and Buenos Aires (Savigliano 1995). By contrast, soccer arose in the mid-nineteenth century among workers in England, and its rules were formalized soon after at elite public schools (Mason 1980). By the end of the century, a professional soccer league was established in England that included many working-class players, but soccer was introduced to the Río de la Plata region via exclusive English high schools and then English and Anglo athletic clubs (Mason 1995). At the close of the century, soccer was a distinctly elitist activity in Montevideo and Buenos Aires, while tango was a distinctly popular activity. An upper-
class man might dance tango, but not with his wife, and a lower-class man might kick a ball around with his friends, but he could not belong to a soccer club. The major soccer associations in the region—the English-named Uruguayan Association Football League and Argentine Football Association—conducted their business in English until 1910.

Around 1903, European elites discovered Rioplatense tango, and Rioplatense elites discovered European soccer. From then until the outbreak of the World War, Rioplatense tango performers found employment in Paris, London, Amsterdam, and Berlin, while English soccer clubs found employment in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. In each case it was clear where expertise resided. Soccer was still a gentlemanly sport in South America, so it fell on Europeans to teach it to South Americans; tango was a passionate dance, so it fell on South Americans to teach it to Europeans. Tours were organized in both directions, bringing soccer professionals South and tango professionals North (Savigliano 1995; Mason 1995). Soon after 1910 in both Argentina and Uruguay, elite Creole players—with Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese surnames, as opposed to English surnames—came to dominate Rioplatense soccer (Archetti 1994c; Mason 1995: 4). The nationalization of soccer in Uruguay has been attributed to the generation of 1910, in which ‘creole’ players with Italian surnames replaced most of the British-born or British-descended players, and the nationalization was considered complete on March 14, 1914, the date on which the Central Uruguay Railway Cricket Club changed its name to Club Atlético Peñarol (Anonymous 1969: 18).

Nevertheless, in 1916, Rioplatense soccer’s upper-class and European connotations were still so strong that a Chilean journalist accused Uruguay of cheating in a soccer
tournament since two of the Uruguayan players were Black and were therefore presumed to be lower-class "African professionals" and not upper-class Uruguayan amateurs (Mason 1995: 30). South American soccer remained nominally a gentlemen's game until the nineteen-thirties (Scher and Palomino 1988). Everyone knew that players were paid under the table, but it was still presumed that the players were at least skilled laborers, and not mere workmen. Since the nineteen-thirties, however, soccer fans and players have been overwhelmingly working-class in Argentina and throughout the world.

Until recently, few fans and almost no players came from the middle or upper classes. In the last decade there has been an increase in soccer's appeal among middle-class men and, to a lesser extent, among women of both the lower and middle classes, but the middle-class men who are fanatical observers of soccer usually do not identify themselves as fans. Galeano is typical of intellectual admirers of soccer in confessing that "as a fan, I also left much to be desired" because no matter how hard he tried to hate the star players on the rival team, "I could not help but admire them and they even gave me the urge to applaud them" (Galeano 1995: 1). A true fan rarely admires his rivals and would never consider applauding them. I found a similar attitude in Santiago, a high-school teacher who lives in the Liniers neighborhood, where the Vélez Sarsfield stadium is located. Despite going to the neighborhood soccer stadium for every home game, Santiago told me he is not an hincha [a fan]. 4 I was puzzled at first, unable to see how

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4 "Hincha" is derived from the verb "hinchar," meaning literally "to inflate." Thus, "hincha" is similar to the English word "fan," which is also derived from a word indicating the directed movement of air. The airiness of both words—"hincha" and "fan"—captures something of the simultaneous intangibility and tremendous influence of cheering. It's all air, and yet it has a very real effect, like the air that inflates a ball or fans flames.
someone who goes to the stadium more regularly than many self-identified fans could not identify himself as an fan. Santiago explained that he also goes regularly to the movie theater, but he is not a fan of any particular film director.

I don’t want Woody Allen to beat Bernardo Bertolucci. I just want to see a well-made movie. If Woody Allen makes a good movie, it pleases me, and if he makes a bad movie, it doesn’t. It would be absurd to be a fan of Woody Allen no matter what, but that’s what fans of Boca or River do. Vélez happens to be playing well these days, so I applaud them. But sometimes I go to the stadium and I see a bad game and it does not matter to me if Vélez wins; it’s just a bad game.

Santiago, like Galeano and many other intellectual observers of soccer, is first of all a lover of great soccer and is only secondarily devoted to a particular club, whereas most working-class fans are, above all, devoted to their clubs, and only after that are they concerned with the abstract quality of their club’s play. The petit-bourgeois intellectual demonstrates tasteful restraint in opposition to the worker’s display of unbridled passion.

Popular Culture and Big “P” Politics

My first response to the Boca Juniors soccer club was distaste. Boca is the most popular soccer club in Argentina, counting on the support of almost half of all the country’s fans. Boca, along with its arch-rival River Plate, are significantly wealthier than even the three other “big clubs,” which are much wealthier than the fifteen other first division clubs, which are much, much wealthier than the scores of clubs that belong to the lower divisions of Argentine soccer. I sympathized with the fans of other clubs who complained that Boca and River are favored by the press and the referees. My inclination was to cheer for Racing Club, one of the other three “big clubs,” but not one
of the big two. I appreciated the offensive, risk-taking style that the club was playing at the time, and I was touched by the club’s three decades of frustration.

It turned out that Julio also had a soft spot for Rácing. He told me that Perón claimed to be “first, a fan of Rácing, because of the flag, and second, a fan of Boca, because of the people.” (The Rácing jersey is sky blue and white, like the Argentine flag, while Boca is the most “popular” soccer club in Argentina, both in terms of having the most fans and in terms of having fans who identify most with the popular class.) Julio explained that Perón had to pretend to put the flag first because, after all, he was President, but in his heart, he put the people first, which meant that he also put Boca ahead of Rácing (see Figure 3). Julio also explained that his own soft spot for Rácing had less to do with the flag than with Carlos Gardel—the tango idol—who was indisputably a Rácing fan. In fact it is common for fans of Boca or River to have a secondary favorite among the smaller clubs, just as it is common for fans of smaller clubs to have a secondary preference between Boca and River. Secondary affiliations do not pose a threat to the fan’s primary affiliation.

Fans do not choose a club so much as they are chosen by it. Like most Argentine men, Julio inherited his club affiliation as a child from an older male relative. His adulthood fascination with tango contributed to his preference for Rácing over their arch-rivals, Independiente, but Julio’s lifelong devotion to Boca was beyond doubt.

Sebreli is clearly among those Argentines who object to the popularization of Argentine culture. He is especially critical of intellectuals who romanticize soccer as part
of an effort to identify with "the people."

The declarations of "national and popular culture" self-proclaimed by populist writers who "reach out to the people" do not, of course, have the least impact on the people themselves. The fan has a need alienated from something that, lacking any other name, we continue calling "culture," "knowledge," and that in reality is nothing more than something to talk about. But the fan's culture does not consist, to be sure, in reading poems, sociological essays, or narratives by populist writers. The fan whose life is stripped of all useful knowledge, just as of all thought, is impelled by mass media to memorize with obsessively minute pedantry the players' career statistics, the dates of the games won or lost for each squad over the years, and even the rosters of other countries and all types of superfluous data related to soccer, about which he speaks and debates all day long as if it had to do with something truly important and serious (Sebreli 1981: 150-151).

Upon first reading this passage, I was taken aback. No doubt owing to my education in cultural anthropology, I did not immediately grasp Sebreli's disparagement of "popular culture." I was well aware of arguments that the term "popular culture" was problematic
because with the rise of mass media the "popular" can no longer be isolated from the "bourgeois" and the "elite." Sebreli's argument, however, was not that of Nestor García Canclini—that cultures are now hybrids of what were once supposed to pertain to distinct classes, ethnicities, and nations, to name just three modern taxonomic headings (García Canclini 1992). Whereas García Canclini questions whether "popular culture" is "popular," Sebreli questions whether "popular culture" is "culture." Sebreli's argument is that rather than valorize "supposed popular, national, or proletarian culture," intellectuals should "endeavor so that the people will learn to assimilate classic culture, accepting the rich inheritance of the past, that up until now has been the privilege only of the enlightened elites" (Sebreli 1981: 152). He argues not only against the idealization of the people—an argument with which many but not all anthropologists would agree—but for the valorization of the elites—an argument that few if any anthropologists would accept. Sebreli's argument, I came to realize, is based on a decidedly non-anthropological definition of "culture." Sebreli's definition of "culture" does not correspond, for example, with any of the fifty-two "technical and anthropological definitions" of culture famously compiled by Kroeber and Kluckhorn (1952). Instead, to locate Sebreli's "culture" I found it necessary to turn from E. B. Tylor to Matthew Arnold and to turn from Kroeber and Kluckhorn's "Culture" to Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958).

I suspect that I am far from alone in being troubled by the disparagement of popular culture, whether by Argentine intellectuals who argue that "soccer is not the patria" or by Eco who narrowly defines "the political" as pertaining to the state. I believe that many anthropologists would be troubled by the restriction of "the national" or "the
political” to mark, in effect, that which political scientists, economists, and historians have traditionally studied. There are, to be sure, those among us who do focus on “the political” in Eco’s narrow sense of the term. Archaeological studies of state-formation or ethnographic studies of community resource management spring easily to mind, but so do studies of cooking, dancing, surfing, healing, child rearing, and tending cattle. We anthropologists are also “Argentines” to the extent that what we study is indistinguishable from what Eco calls “sports chatter.” A similar observation is at the heart of Orin Starn’s critique of Billie Jean Isbell (Starn 1992; Isbell 1985) and, by extension, of all of us who in the midst of governmental turmoil, general strikes, and even revolutions, persist in asking questions such as, “How did you become a Boca fan?,” “What do you call that bird?,” “Who taught you how to weave baskets?”, or “Do you salt the meat before or after putting it on the grill?”

I hesitate to make too much of the fact that Starn is a man and Isbell is a woman, but I observe that the engendering of their dispute is thoroughly consistent with standard academic engenderings of “the political.” To a great extent, “the political”—as defined by Eco and Starn—coincides with the public as opposed to the private, with the weighty as opposed to the frivolous, and with the male as opposed to the female. The feminist claim that “the personal is political” is a move to disrupt these oppositions, but the disruption is only partially successful. A feminist theorist’s study of a Hollywood film is likely these days to be recognized as “political” but not in the same way as is a political scientist’s study of voting behavior. Gay and Lesbian Studies, Queer Theory, and Cultural Studies are also all fields devoted primarily to political analyses, but those analyses are construed
as somehow lacking the weightiness of Political Science.

I suggest that the distinction between the little “c” culture studied by anthropologists and the big “C” Culture studied by critics of “serious” music, art, and literature is related to the distinction between the little “p” politics studied by feminist theorists and other Cultural Studies types and the big “P” Politics studied by political scientists, political economists, and traditionally-oriented historians. Not coincidentally, in the little “p” political fields, female scholars are either dominant or at least well represented, whereas the big “P” Political fields tend to be dominated by men. As is usual in disciplinary categorizations, we anthropologists are a marginal case. For a few decades now, women have comprised around half of anthropology’s new Ph.D.s in the United States. Anthropology is also split between those who tend to focus on big “P” Politics, which usually correspond with men’s activities, and those who tend to focus on little “p” politics, which are often women’s activities. Soccer is a thoroughly male activity, but Eco locates it in the little “p” political camp and Sebrelli locates it in the little “c” culture camp. In part, these lower-case locations can be attributed to soccer’s being a bodily activity. Playing soccer, like dancing and cooking, is “manual” labor as opposed to mental labor, so even if soccer is thoroughly masculine, it is still disparaged by intellectuals for being related to the wrong class of masculinity.

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5 I recognize that “manual” has etymological roots associated with the hand, a part of the body infrequently used by soccer players. Perhaps, then, “pedal labor” would be more precise a term than “manual labor” to describe what soccer players do.
Opium or Stimulant?

James Cheek, the U.S. ambassador to Argentina, was another reason I did not wear my Boca jersey to the game with Julio. Cheek was photographed almost weekly wearing his San Lorenzo jersey or scarf, or emerging from a limousine bearing a San Lorenzo bumper sticker. When San Lorenzo won the national championship in 1995, El Gráfico assembled the club’s most famous fans for a photo, with Cheek seated in the middle. I believe every single Argentine soccer fan I interviewed commented to me about my ambassador’s devotion to the San Lorenzo de Almagro soccer club, but I winced whenever I was confronted with Cheek’s purported fandom because I knew that he was not really a San Lorenzo fan, no more than I could be a Boca fan. I believed that Cheek was taking club-affiliation lightly and manipulating it for his own diplomatic purposes, and I worried that for my own ethnographic purposes I was doing something similar. I knew that Cheek had been a Cali fan when he was posted in Colombia, and a Peñarol fan when he was posted in Uruguay. A true fan does not change affiliation just because he has moved to a new country. As the saying goes, “You can change your wife, but your club is forever.” Accordingly, at Galaxy soccer games in Los Angeles, there are fans from throughout Latin America who attend the games wearing the jerseys of their boyhood clubs, including Argentina’s Boca, Colombia’s América, and Mexico’s Nuevo León.

There are a handful of intellectuals who defend soccer against the opium charge. Uruguayan historian Franklin Morales argues that soccer is frequently used by oppressive
governments to control the working class but that it is "absurd to confuse the fever with the thermometer" (Morales 1969: 9). According to Morales, any activity, including working in a factory, can be and is exploited by oppressive governments, but it does not follow that the activity itself is soporific. Whereas Sebreli accuses working-class fans of scapegoating intellectuals (Sebreli 1981: 33), Morales accuses intellectuals of scapegoating working-class fans. "To unload collective responsibility comfortably onto soccer is a typical attitude of intellectuals who seek scapegoats to expiate their own impotence" (Morales 1969: 9). The implication is that intellectuals would do better to examine our own complicity or ineffectiveness in oppressive regimes than to blame soccer and its working-class fans for their complicity and ineffectiveness. Mason also argues that it is "fundamentally mistaken" to argue that soccer is an opiate of the people, a phenomenon commanding such intense interest over a long period of time that it deflects large portions of the populations from confronting the endemic economic, social and political problems of the region (Mason 1995: 129).

Instead, Mason argues, "Great victories are momentary distractions but the harsh realities of poverty and unemployment, class and race quickly return. Football may aid the rule of the rich but it does not by itself eliminate social conflict" (ibid.: 129). The problem with Mason's argument is his distinction between "momentary distractions" and "intense interest over a long period of time." No one who argues that soccer is an opium of the people claims that the drug's effects are complete or everlasting so that soccer "by itself eliminate[s] social conflict." Rather, they argue precisely what Mason argues, that soccer games—and other popular passions, such as telenovelas [soap operas], rock music, and
social dances—"aid the rule of the rich" by temporarily distracting the people from the harsh realities of poverty or political repression. The question is, do these momentary distractions effectively deflect people from confronting political problems? Does soccer fandom inhibit labor organizing or other forms of political involvement? Does soccer directly serve fascist interests by promoting complacency or national identity?

These are precisely the questions that Galeano addresses in his response to Sebrelli and others. Galeano acknowledges that "the diffusion of soccer around the world was the result of an imperialist maneuver to keep oppressed people in a state of infancy," but he observes that this imperialist maneuver is frequently subverted.

[The club Argentinos Juniors was born calling itself club Martyrs of Chicago, in homage to the anarchist workers hung one May First, and May First was the day chosen to give birth to the club Chacarita, baptized in an anarchist library in Buenos Aires. In those first years of the century, there was no lack of leftist intellectuals who celebrated soccer in place of repudiating it as an anesthetic of consciousness. Among them, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who praised "this kingdom of human loyalty exercised in the open air" (Galeano 1995: 37).

Galeano acknowledges that soccer has been used to promote patriotic fervor in favor of fascist regimes. He points out, however, that it has also been one of the principal sites in which opposition to such regimes has found expression.

In the years of Franco’s dictatorship, the two stadia, Barcelona’s Camp Nou and Bilbao’s San Mamés, served as refuge for forbidden national sentiments. There the Catalanians and the Basques yelled and sang in their own languages and waved their clandestine banners. And the place where a Basque flag first appeared without police pummeling those who carried it was a soccer stadium: One year after Franco’s death, the players of Athlétic and Real Sociedad appeared on the field clutching the flag (ibid.: 127; see also MacClancy 1996).

Similarly, Sebrelli acknowledges that with "Perón fallen in 1955, soccer clubs became the refuge of outlawed Peronists, following in this the example of the Radicals of 1930"
(Sebreli 1981: 167). Sebreli is anti-nationalist and, especially, anti-Peronist, so these are examples of soccer serving regressive interests. For Galeano, these are examples of soccer fostering oppositional—working-class or separatist—causes, and they are not incidental. Galeano finds soccer intrinsically playful, which places it in opposition to capitalist rationalization. Because soccer is a bodily and popular activity, it serves Galeano as a prime example of manual, working-class labor striving to be liberated from colonialist and capitalist exploitation.

Class differences are also expressed in Argentines’ interest in a particular club relative to their interest in the national team. Like intellectuals, middle- and upper-class men in general tend not to be fans of any particular club. Their interest in soccer is more often focused on the national team. Working-class fans by contrast, tend to be much more interested in the success of their chosen clubs than in the success of the national team, which invariably includes players with histories on several, opposing clubs. Sergio is a leader of the barra brava [hard-core fans, hooligans] of Boca Juniors and he professes to be not at all devoted to the national team. To be sure, the current coach of the national team has a history of playing for and coaching Boca’s arch-rival, River Plate, and not coincidentally, River players have been over-represented on the national team in recent years, and Boca players under-represented. Sergio claims, though, that he is never interested in the national team per se, but is interested in it only to the extent that it includes players from the Boca club. At the time I interviewed Sergio, Argentina’s national team included only one Boca player. Cameroon’s national team also included one Boca player and there were rumors that Boca would add another member of Cameroon’s
national team to its roster. I tested Sergio’s devotion to Boca by asking whom he would cheer for in a game between an Argentine team with one Boca player and a Cameroon team with two Boca players. “Cameroon, without a doubt. I would hope for Tchami to score two goals for the Africans and for Fabbri to score one goal on a header for Argentina,” he answered. Sergio obviously spoke tongue in cheek, but his message is consistent with the “República de Boca” signs that grace many walls in the vicinity of the Boca Juniors stadium, and it is borne out in my interviews with working-class fans of several different clubs, who consistently said they would rather see their club win the Copa Libertadores [the South American club championship] than see the national team win the Copa América [the South American national team championship]. For many working-class the neighborhood or the soccer club takes the place that the nation or the national team occupies for most middle-class men.

Vanguardism vs. Populism

It was not a great game. Platense is one of the poorer clubs in the first division and was on its way to a fourteenth-place finish, while Boca was on its way to a disappointing fifth-place finish. As often happens, the better team played down to the level of the worse team. Nevertheless, sixteen minutes into the first half Maradona brought the game briefly to life. The ball was heading out-of-bounds, over the end line to the left of the Platense goal after deflecting off a Boca player. Maradona gave chase, to try to save the ball from going out, but a Platense defender blocked Maradona’s path. Maradona appeared to give up, which lulled the defender and his teammates into letting
up. Then, at the very last moment before the ball crossed the end line, Maradona slid
around the defender and saved the ball from going out by kicking it back and toward the
center of the field where La Brujita Verón was waiting. Verón received the ball at the top
of the penalty area, directly in front of the goal, and as the defenders raced desperately
to guard him, they left Caniggia alone on the right side of the penalty area. Verón
noticed the gap in the defense and slipped the ball over to Caniggia. Islas scrambled
toward Caniggia, to reduce the angle, and Caniggia calmly sent the ball back across the
goal mouth so that it entered the goal near the far, left post.

Latin Americanists will recognize Sebrelli and Galeano’s disagreement as part of
the ongoing battle between vanguardists and populists. According to vanguardists, such
as Sebrelli,

the many are ignorant, retrograde, apathetic [...] because of the barriers that
poverty, illiteracy, and social prejudices impose, and because the few who hold the
broadcast media and culture use it in order to keep the many in a state of misery
and abjection (Sebrelli 1981: 139).

Sebrelli argues that the leftist intellectual should

not lower culture to the level of mass consciousness, as the populists try to do, but
the other way around, elevate this consciousness up to the most complex forms of
culture [... and] endeavor so that the people would learn to assimilate classic
culture, accepting the rich inheritance of the past, that up until now has been the
privilege only of the enlightened elites (ibid.: 151-152).

According to populists, such as Galeano, the “classic culture” that Sebrelli extols is racist,
sexist, and colonizing (Galeano quoted in Palaversich 1995: 135). Intellectuals, as mental
laborers and members of the professional class, are the ones who are thoroughly immersed
in that culture, whereas soccer fans—who tend to be working-class, manual laborers—have daily, bodily experiences that make it possible for them to understand, as no intellectual can, the nature of their own oppression and the requisites for their own mobilization.

Sebreli responds that Galeano is “a typical example [...] of the mentality of the petit bourgeois intellectual of the pseudo left” who has “the naive belief that soccer is an authentic expression of the people” (Sebreli 1981: 143). “True solidarity with the masses,” Sebreli argues, “does not consist in admiration and respect for their indigent current state, but on the contrary, in the denial of their present reality, of what the masses are, which is not what the masses can and should be” (ibid.: 182). The Cuban revolution looms large for both camps. Che Guevara—another Argentine leftist—identified the revolution as populist, with a political agenda that rose out of the struggle, from the ground up. He observed that the revolution did not even have the support of the vanguardist Communist Party in Havana. Yet, one could also observe that Guevara, Castro, and the other passengers on the Gramna were intellectuals—a doctor, a lawyer, etc.—and even though they had more respect for the “people” than did the Party leaders back in Havana, they were of necessity vanguardists.

Sebreli claims to reject “all paternalism that tries to breed ‘consciousness’ in the masses from outside or from above,” but he still considers the leftist intellectual essential “for the difficult and long task of developing [the people’s] capacities to lead themselves, and converting them from passive objects to active subjects of their own history” (ibid.: 183). What I question is whether intellectuals can have any productive role in the people’s struggle. I identified a similar debate in my analysis of the role of left-leaning
anthropologists relative to Pacific Island nationalists. There, anthropologists such as Roger Keesing fretted that Natives were reproducing a conservative ideology, which it fell on the anthropologist to critique. "Now as before," I concluded, "the educated White man offers to open the Native's eyes, to expose superstitions to the light of reason [...]"
The message may be to decolonize, but the relationship remains colonial" (J. Tobin 1994: 132). Just so, vanguardists' attempts to "develop" or "convert" the people into revolutionaries reproduce the capitalists' attempts to "develop" or "convert" the very same people into workers. In both cases, mental laborers claim the right and even the responsibility to determine the fate of manual laborers.

Maradona and Argentine Cultural Studies

Upon scoring, Caniggia ran toward Maradona, not Verón, who being the player who made the last pass would typically be the first to embrace the goal scorer. What everyone in the stadium knew was that Maradona had vowed to kiss Caniggia on the mouth if Caniggia scored a goal, but as El Gráfico noted, "The celebration included the expected kiss from Maradona ... but not on the mouth" (El Gráfico no. 4006, 26 March 1996: 90).

The rest of the first half passed without incident. Boca, under the direction of its new coach, Carlos Bilardo, seemed intent on preserving their 1-0 lead rather than risk sending many players on offense to score again, since that would leave fewer players on defense. The purpose was to prevent Platense from tying the game. As a reporter from El Gráfico observed, Bilardo’s Boca is "a team [that is] very good friends with 1-0
games, perhaps, with all the risks that involves. You would have to ask the fan if this is
good or bad” (Adrian Maladesky in El Gráfico, no. 4006, 26 March 1996: 87). The
reporter’s not so subtle implication is that playing to preserve a 1-0 victory would not
please Boca’s fans. In fact, it is Boca’s arch-rival, River Plate, who is generally
considered to be the sort of team that would prefer to protect a 1-0 victory. The most
standard criticism of Boca that I heard from River fans is that Boca players and fans
think it is more important to play well than to win, whereas River players and fans
understand that what counts is winning, not entertaining. Conversely, Boca fans
represented River players and fans as cold and calculating and too focused on winning,
without appreciation for effort or showmanship.6

If, as John Fiske argues, Madonna is a canonical “text” for English-language
cultural studies, Maradona is certainly a canonical “text” for Argentine cultural studies.
Like Madonna at her peak, but even more so. Maradona has a knack for stirring up
controversies that students of culture love to interpret.7 Galeano observes that “This

6 In *El Negocio del Fútbol* [The Business of Soccer], Sergio Levinsky attempts to
explain why Argentine soccer has suffered so many financial crises off the field despite its
remarkable success on the field (Levinsky 1995: 11-12). Levinsky settles on several
factors, beginning, as is customary, with Argentina’s devastating defeat to Czechoslovakia
in the 1958 World Cup. As a result of this loss, Levinsky argues, Argentine clubs adopted
a more defensive, boring style of play, which led to a decrease in goal production and in
stadium attendance (ibid.: 65).

7 There is also the purely coincidental similarity of the names “Madonna” and
“Maradona.” According to Alan Parker, “rumor has it that Jimmy [Nail], an avid
Newcastle United football fanatic, perhaps only did the film *Evita* because he thought
Maradonna [sic] was in it” (Parker 1996: 16).
back-talking and hot-headed runt has the habit of launching blows upward” (Galeano 1995: 236). Hardly a week goes by in which Maradona does not make a public pronouncement on a controversial issue. He has criticized the U.S. boycott of Cuba and expressed great admiration for Fidel Castro; and he has spoken out against North/South discrimination within Italy and between Europe and South America (Levinsky 1996: 284 et passim). Thanks to such declarations, most of the arguments in Argentine cultural studies about opposition and resistance, class and (neo)colonial relations can and are routinely applied to Maradona. Sergio Levinsky argues that intellectuals thereby “find in him an ideology that he does not have” (ibid.: 268). In Maradona’s own words,

I am of the left, completely of the left, my foot, my faith, my head. But not in the sense that you give to the political term in Europe. I am of the left in the sense that I am for [ex-President Raúl] Alfonsín, for my country’s progress, for improving poor people’s quality of life, for everyone having peace and freedom (Maradona quoted in Levinsky: 1996: 274).

Levinsky returns repeatedly to such statements to demonstrate that Maradona is rebellious without having a consistent political position. In effect, Levinsky’s argument is that political coherence is a peculiarly bourgeois expectation, which Maradona effectively resists. Argentine intellectuals made much of Maradona’s inconsistency in praising both Cuba’s Castro and then Argentine Minister of the Economy Domingo Cavallo. Their point was that it is impossible to reconcile Castro’s socialist politics with Cavallo’s commitment to free-market ideology. Levinsky makes it clear that neither Maradona nor his working-class fans are troubled by the charge of political inconsistency, and that they do not accept the intellectuals’ political categories. Levinsky writes, “I do not believe Maradona has his ideology clear but he returns to Cuba and says intuitively positive things
about that country" (Levinsky 1996: 267). Similarly, he argues that Maradona’s support for Cavallo “was, as always, because of common sense and not because of ideologisms that he does not know” (ibid.: 352), and that Maradona struggles “against the established order, against nameless power, because his struggle is against Power as such” (ibid.: 21).

My main quibble with Maradona, Rebelde con Causa is the title, which Levinsky clearly likes very much, since he also used it for newspaper articles he published in 1991 (ibid.: 232) and 1996 (ibid.: 273), and for a public lecture in 1992 (ibid.: 372). Rebelde con Causa is, of course, a play on the title of the film Rebel without a Cause. What I do not understand is why Levinsky changed the title from “Rebel without a Cause” to “Rebel with a Cause” (my emphasis). Levinsky’s strongest point is precisely that Maradona, much like the film’s Jim (played by James Dean) does not have a cause. Levinsky demonstrates that Maradona, like Jim, is a rebel in search of a cause. For example, Levinsky’s 1991 “rebel with a cause” article deals with Maradona’s suspension by FIFA for testing positive for cocaine use, whereas the 1996 article deals with Maradona’s determination to participate in a benefit game despite once again being under suspension by FIFA. As Levinsky demonstrates throughout the book, Maradona is a rebel whose struggle is against “nameless power.” As such, that struggle itself defies naming.

María Elena Rodríguez also attempts to use Maradona as a key to understanding Argentine culture. Her approach involves comparing and contrasting Maradona and O. J. Simpson. Rodríguez claims Maradona and Simpson are comparable because “both are examples of characters that are hard to classify” since they were raised in lower-class
environments—one black and the other “cabecita negra”\textsuperscript{8}—but both have made money through sports and that money allows them to mingle with the upper class. Rodríguez proceeds to argue that because of these parallels, the differences in the media discourse surrounding each man are indicative of differences in their respective societies. In particular, she argues that the Simpson case raises issues of racism since racism is the unresolved conflict confronting the U.S., while the Maradona case raises issues of national identity, since nation-building projects in peripheral countries, such as Argentina, are not as developed as in core countries, such as the U.S. She concludes that “if the two cases are compared (and the characteristics that their protagonists present seem to permit this), the difference is more in the topics and the debates that both generate than in the attributes that are attributed to them” (Rodríguez in Alabarces and Rodríguez 1996: 51). It is true that both athletes had humble origins, but it is misleading to equate being black in the U.S. with being cabecita negra in Argentina. Moreover, Simpson abandoned his first, black wife and used his celebrity to befriend white businessmen and lawyers. Maradona, by contrast, never separated from his lower-class background and used his celebrity primarily to befriend populist heroes, such as Fidel Castro. If Simpson has a counterpart in the soccer world, it would be Pelé, who is also a black man who has chosen to court the favor of white businessmen, while Maradona’s closest counterpart in U.S. society must be Mohamed Ali, with whom he shares a gift for speaking out in defense of leftist causes.

\textsuperscript{8} Cabecita negra: literally, “black, little head,” in practice, used to indicate a dark and low-class person.
Conspiracy Theorizing

What the Boca fans most appreciate is extreme effort and aggressiveness, even if it costs their club a goal, and what they most disdain is a player who shows signs of laziness or caution, even if he gets the job done. At the time of the Boca-Platense game, the Boca fans’ favorite players was Giunta, an aging, lifelong Boca player who displayed more desire than talent. When he entered the game twenty-one minutes into the second half, the fans responded with a roar of approval, and Julio explained to me that the fans were cheering because “Giunta has garras” [literally “claws,” used to indicate tenacity]. The least popular Boca player was Basualdo, whom Boca had just bought from Vélez Sarsfield. At Vélez, Basualdo was a central player on a winning machine that had just won the national championship playing with a style that Boca fans considered chillingly rational.

Throughout the stadium there were fans who simultaneously watched the Boca-Platense game and listened on a Walkman to the game between Rácing and Belgrano. Rácing was the only club ahead of Boca in the standings going into today’s game, so the Boca fans were all hoping for them to be upset by the lowly Belgrano club from the province of Córdoba. Since the game was being played in Córdoba, it seemed reasonable to hope for a tie, which, coupled with a Boca victory, would place Boca and Rácing in a tie for first place, along with Vélez (which beat River earlier in the weekend) and Lanús (if they beat Independiente). Thanks to the Walkmen, we all knew at halftime that Rácing was leading 1-0. If that score held, Rácing would remain out of Boca’s reach, but five minutes into the second half, a mild cheer erupted among the Boca fans as
word spread that Belgrano had scored two goals in three minutes, to take a 2-1 lead.

Inocente [Innocent], one of the best selling novels in Argentina in 1995, is co-authored by Fernando Niembro, who is a prominent Argentine sports journalist, and Julio Llinás, an Argentine novelist and essayist. On the surface, the novel offers a farfetched explanation for Maradona’s expulsion from the 1994 World Cup, held in the United States, and for Colombia’s disappointing performance in that same competition.

According to one of the many CIA agents in Inocente, Maradona was targeted by the CIA because

he was [Cuba’s] principal apologist, the most effective, the most credible [...] Nobody believed Castro. But the other one [Maradona] they believed in London, in Moscow, in Jakarta, in Teheran. He is the great white-washer. The great danger (Niembro and Llinás 1995: 34-35).

It stretches credulity to call Maradona Cuba’s most effective or most credible apologist, but it is true that Maradona has frequently praised Castro in public, and prior to the 1994 World Cup, Maradona promised to dedicate the Cup to “Fidel and the people of Cuba” if Argentina won. Colombia was favored by many soccer experts to win the 1994 World Cup, and according to Inocente, that caused concern in the CIA since “we cannot allow the team of the greatest cocaine-exporting nation to win this championship” (ibid.: 73).

The motives established, the novel’s action begins when CIA agent Anthony Llás is sent undercover to Colombia. On the plane Llás meets a beautiful and wealthy Argentine, Rubra Robirosa, the president of the largest PR firm in Latin America. Once landed, Llás meets up with Coco Cardo, a Colombian CIA operative. Under Llás’ orders,
Cardo arranges for the Colombian team to be provided with a skin cream doctored with an undetectable drug that will make them lethargic. After Llás departs Colombia, Robirosa uses her great charm and some champagne to loosen Cardo’s tongue, getting him to reveal that he and Llás work for the CIA and that thanks to their employers, Maradona “is finished” (ibid.: 170). Despite her executive position, Robirosa is naive because this is a book about soccer. As she explains, “Soy argentina, no argentino” [I am a female Argentine, not a male Argentine] (ibid.: 79). That is to say, the nationality that would qualify her as an expert on soccer is negated by the gender that excuses her from attending to her nation’s national game. Robirosa’s female intuition tells her that something is up, but she lacks the masculine skills—pertaining to soccer and politics—needed to figure out what that something is. She thinks the CIA is going to assassinate Maradona as part of a plot to have the United States win the World Cup. Being an argentina, and not an argentino, she does not understand that even in a farfetched novel, the United States could not be a candidate to win the World Cup. As Galeano observes, “Here [in the United States] soccer is the sport of the future, and always will be” (Galeano 1995: 223).

Next, Robirosa rushes off to New York to warn the World Cup organizers of the plot. World Cup organizer Alan Rothenberg dismisses Robirosa’s warning that Maradona’s life is in danger by explaining that “the Cuban groups [in Miami] are completely under control” (Niembro and Llinás 1995: 210). Meanwhile, Llás directs CIA agent Mel Kennedy not to kill Maradona, but to frame him for doping. Kennedy happens to have a boyhood friend who is a native-speaker of Spanish and a priest, so he arranges for the priest to administer a drugged communion wafer to Maradona before Argentina’s
match with Nigeria. In one of the book’s many incredible coincidences, FIFA’s medical
director happens to be not only a former CIA agent but also an accomplished magician,
which lands him in the right place with the right skills to select Maradona’s number in the
lottery that determines which two players will be tested for drugs at the conclusion of the
match. Maradona’s urine sample tests positive for the drugs the CIA put in his
communion wafer, so he is expelled from the tournament. The book concludes with
Robirosa arranging a meeting with Maradona in order to tell him, “I do not really know
how they did it, but they framed you” (ibid.: 275). In this, the fictional character Robirosa
echoes the statements of actual observers commenting on Colombia’s loss to the United
States in the 1994 World Cup. “The experts, frustrated, did not know what to say. Men
like Menotti, Sívori, Pelé, and Zico proposed multiple theories, all of them possible, all of
them empty, trying to explain the unexplainable” (ibid.: 186).

I take Robirosa’s words to be a commentary on the novel itself. Niembro and
Llinás present an entertaining but implausible theory of how and why and who framed
Maradona, but they are the first to acknowledge that they, too, do not really know how or
why “they” did it—or even who “they” are. Like Robirosa, all the authors pretend to
know is that Maradona was framed. As an ethnographer, I find Inocente of interest
because it neatly corresponds with my fieldwork among soccer fans in Buenos Aires,
during which I heard many theories about why Maradona was expelled from the 1994
World Cup. Most of the fans I interviewed speculated that Maradona’s previous
suspension for drugs was also a frame-up, ordered by the Italian mafia to retaliate against
Maradona for leading Argentina to a victory over Italy in the 1990 World Cup.
Such speculations correspond with Frederic Jameson’s observations regarding the relationship between conspiracy theories and cognitive mapping. Jameson argues that at an earlier stage of capitalism, it was a fairly straightforward process to link one’s “lived experience” to “the true economic and social form that govern[ed] that experience” (Jameson 1988: 349). A serf, for example, worked in the fields from which most of his own food came, and he could see the lord who profited from the his labor. If the serf’s point of view did not provide a complete picture of the social relations in which he was enmeshed, it still provided a less partial picture than that provided by any late twentieth-century point of view. Now, Jameson argues

the truth of that limited daily experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place. The truth of that limited daily experience of London lies, rather, in India or Jamaica or Hong Kong; it is bound up with the whole colonial system of the British Empire that determines the very quality of the individual’s subjective life. Yet those structural coordinates are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people (ibid.: 349).

A cook in London may work in a Japanese-owned restaurant, using knives made in Germany, drive a South Korean car, and eat a steak from Argentina while watching a Brazilian score a goal for his local London soccer club. In Salman Rushdie’s words, “The trouble with the English is that their history happened overseas, so they don’t know what it means” (Salman Rushdie quoted in Bhabha 1990: 317). According to Jameson, all contemporary history happens overseas or at least out of any individual’s sight and away from anyone’s “immediate lived experience.”

anthropology,” yields fruit that has outlasted its cognitivist orientation. It is clear that Jameson has transplanted “cognitive mapping” to our discursive age, in which much that used to be located and sought in brains is now located and sought in discourse. Jameson uses the term “cognitive mapping” to refer to “that mental map of the social and global totality we all carry around in our heads in variously garbled forms” (Jameson 1988: 353). Conspiracy theories, according to Jameson, are often attempts to imagine “the unimaginable decentering of global capital” (ibid.: 351).

Conspiracy, one is tempted to say, is the poor person’s cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter’s system, whose failure is marked by its slippage into sheer theme and content (ibid.: 356).

Jameson does not argue that conspiracy theorizing is peculiarly postmodern. He is surely aware that there have been conspiracies and conspiracy theories across cultures and epochs. Modernist critical thinking, for example, is conspirational in the sense that depth analyses—whether Marxist, Freudian, or structuralist—provide speculations about the intentions and practices of unseen actors. Jameson’s point is that in the age of late capitalism conspiracy theorizing is a popular form of conceiving of economic and political relations that are increasingly hidden from view.

Soccer experts and fans alike try out theories to account for soccer results, and more often than not, these theories evoke back room deals and international intrigues. The result is a map of the occult economic and political forces that structure the soccer fan’s everyday life. In Argentina, no event or result in the soccer world passes without conspiracy theorizing. All losses are explained by stories of bribes paid to players or
referees, or of deals struck between players or referees, or of players unhappy with their coach or their paychecks. Argentina’s loss to England and Uruguay’s loss to West Germany in the 1966 World Cup are widely rumored to be the result of an arrangement involving the Englishman who refereed the West German game and the West German who refereed the English game. Also, Argentina’s 6-0 victory over Peru in the 1978 World Cup is rumored—though usually not by Argentines—to be the result of a behind-the-scenes deal. And Racing Club’s repeated failure in recent years to measure up its promise is often rumored to be the result of its players’ disgruntlement about being paid late. In these ways, soccer fans construct an image of the world in which “fair play,” like “free trade,” is exposed as an illusion, trusted only by giles [suckers].

The Stadium and the Street

Meanwhile, Boca was playing to protect their 1-0 lead. At the thirteenth minute of the second half, Bilardo replaced the striker Dario Scotto (who probably started this particular game because he began his career with Platense) with the midfielder Walter Pico, thereby leaving Maradona and Caniggia alone on offense. Accordingly, Platense pushed all but two of their players forward, to try to tie the score, thereby leaving themselves vulnerable to a Boca counter-attack. The counter-attack came just seconds after the substitution. Maradona received the ball at midfield on a long pass from a Boca defender, and took off toward the Platense goal, with Caniggia accompanying him. As Maradona approached the left side of the penalty area, Islas charged out, but a little late, so it seemed Maradona had an excellent opportunity to shoot the ball to either side
of the goalkeeper. Instead, Maradona passed the ball to Caniggia, who was on the right side of the penalty area. Caniggia received the pass and scored easily. The linesman, however, raised his flag to indicate that Caniggia had been offside, so the referee, Castrilli, annulled the goal. The video replay confirmed that the younger and much swifter Caniggia was half a step ahead of Maradona when Maradona passed him the ball, which would have made Caniggia offside, except that there was a Platense defender standing in the goal mouth, covering for Islas. Whatever his faults, Castrilli is known as a very able referee, but in this case he and his linesman simply failed to notice the player standing on the end line, so they made the wrong call.

Maradona has a reputation for protesting calls that go against him and his team, even when he has no cause. And Castrilli has a reputation for running a very tight game, with little tolerance for players’ complaints. Smaller clubs, such as Platense, like Castrilli because he is believed to be one of the few referees who does not bow to the pressures to favor big clubs, such as Boca.\(^9\) On this occasion, just three weeks into the season, with Boca leading Platense 1-0, and tied for first place in the standings, Maradona did not protest the annulment. Some Boca fans, however, threw various objects at the linesman who had indicated the offside. Play was stopped and Maradona went over to the linesman and shook his hand, gesturing to the crowd that there were no

\(^9\) Later in the season, in a game between Boca and Vélez, Castrilli made some calls against Boca that resulted in a near riot of Boca’s barra brava. The police wanted to turn high-pressure water hoses on the crowd to bring order, but Maradona intervened, persuading the police and the crowd to settle down. As he returned to the field, Maradona passed Castrilli and said, “This is all your fault.” Castrilli expelled Maradona from the game, and pandemonium broke out again.
hard feelings. The barrage stopped and play resumed.

What is the relationship between soccer conspiracy theorizing and Eco’s argument that in talk about soccer, “the strength that the citizen had at his disposal for political debate is vitiated and disciplined” (Eco 1986: 163)? Or Sebrelli’s argument that talk about soccer is a “defense against any type of inquiry that would seek a solution to man’s problems” (Sebrelli 1981: 151)? I assume Eco would argue that soccer conspiracy theorizing is precisely a vitiation of a citizen’s political energy, and that Sebrelli would argue that the energy spent on conspiracy theorizing would be better spent solving man’s problems. I observe, however, that in contemporary Argentina, big “P” Political debate is almost entirely a technocratic discussion of Chicago Boys macro-economic theory, which leaves little or no room for issues such as social justice. Moreover, Sebrelli writes that thinking about soccer “is a sort of training in escaping from oneself, in not doubting, not criticizing, not discussing, not thinking” (ibid.: 151), but I would argue that conspiracy theorizing trains soccer fans precisely to doubt, to criticize, to discuss, to think. Is critical thought a scarce resource that is depleted in talk about soccer? Or, does thinking critically about any topic—including a topic as frivolous as soccer—lead to more, not less critical thought about other topics? Is the soccer stadium a transformative space, where oppositional consciousness is raised, or a conservative space, where critical thought is vitiated and confined?

Such questions call attention to the wall that purportedly separates the stadium from the street, or play from politics. There are indications that talk about soccer may
escape the walls of the stadium and become talk about politics. Soccer conspiracy
theories, in particular, often engage directly with big "P" Politics. For example, following
Argentina’s loss to Cameroon in the 1990 World Cup, there was a conspiracy theory that
the players threw the game because President Menem was in attendance. In fact, Menem
immediately stopped attending games played by the national team, presumably for fear of
being blamed for any subsequent losses. Many players endorse political candidates or
otherwise comment on political issues, while club officers routinely run for real political
office, and many clubs have definite partisan political connotations (Aizpeolea 1994; Scher
and Palomino 1988: 194-197). Working-class men who gather in a café to speculate on
how soccer games are fixed often speculate on how the affairs of State and of multi-
national corporations are also fixed.

In addressing the relationship between the soccer stadium and the street, Alabarces
argues that the soccer stadium is a ritual space, separated from the world of commerce
and history.

[I]n soccer one acts what one is, one simulates what one wants to be/to do. In
soccer, as in a ceremony, one experiences the victory that does not abound in
commercial time; in soccer, dribbling, madness permit the weak to defeat the
powerful, the oppressed to humble the oppressor. Two feats that Sasturain recalls:
the caño among Argentines, the sombrero among Brazilians, the feats that for
Corbatta or Garrincha are the risk, the adventure, the play at the corner of the
ledge of life where both finally slipped off: because soccer is the suspension of
history, and there there is no punishment for the transgressor. With the
reestablishment of historical time, sanctions appear: misery, cirrhosis of the liver”
(Alabarces in Alabarces and Rodriguez 1996: 31-32, emphases in the original).10

10 Note that the caño involves dribbling the ball between the legs of an opponent
(Suburú 1968: 35), while the sombrero involves kicking the ball over an opponent’s head
and then running around the opponent to receive the ball one just kicked (Pabloe
Alabarces, electronic communication, 3 August 1997). Juan Sasturain attributes the
Alabarces follows Galeano (1995) and others in seeing soccer as a liminoid setting in which the poor can triumph over the rich, and the Third World over the First, but unlike Galeano, Alabarces uses Garrincha’s and Corbatta’s post-soccer destitution as an allegory for the ephemerality of what happens within the soccer stadium. Alabarces turns to anthropological studies of ritual to argue that the soccer stadium is “the classic ahistoric space of ritual [...] a zone that is imagined as free, as if it were removed from the time of history and economy” (Alabarces in Alabarces and Rodríguez 1996: 69). It seems Alabarces would agree with critics of other rituals, such as Brazilian carnival, that the subversive inversions that occur within ritual space and time are safely contained from the space and time of everyday life. Accordingly, Alabarces argues that “in Argentina, politics will continue for many years to be constructed outside of the stadium” (ibid.: 160), making it clear that politics are not effectively constructed in the stadium. Maradona may be a soccer player who speaks out about politics, but he is not, according to Alabarces, a political player. It seems Maria Graciela Rodríguez, Alabarces’ co-author, disagrees, suggesting that soccer can “supplement politics” (Rodríguez in Alabarces and Rodríguez 1996: 45). She writes, and I agree, that “in the face of the decline of public debates, other forms of political action have appeared that, without replacing them, would alter dramatic arguments and the spaces for entering the debate” (ibid.: 48). Rodríguez supports her

former move to the Argentines and the latter, to the Brazilians (Sasturain 1994: 49) and Sasturain identifies the Brazilian Garrincha and the Argentine Corbatta as the masters of, respectively, the caño and the sombrero (ibid.: 63-67). Garrincha was the star wing for the Brazilian national teams that won the World Cup in 1958 and 1962, while Corbatta was the star wing for Rácing Club’s championship teams of 1958 and 1961, but each player sank into alcoholism and poverty after his retirement from soccer.
speculation by providing examples of soccer serving to intervene in big "P" political debates, on both conservative and progressive sides.

Like Alabarces, Sebrelli argues that transgressive behavior within a soccer stadium is insulated from transgressive behavior outside. His reasoning is that what happens inside soccer stadiums happens there precisely in order to keep it from happening outside, on the street. "As happened with the Roman circus, and the Byzantine racetrack, the modern stadium is converted on some occasions into the last refuge of the confusingly political discontent of the masses" (Sebrelli 1981: 167). Sebrelli explains that the soccer stadium is so filled with passion, that oppositional displays there leave fans mystified and spent, not enlightened and mobilized. To enlighten and mobilize the people, according to Sebrelli, reason, not passion, is required. Other times, of course, soccer stadiums are sites of conformity, not of resistance, as was the case in the 1934 World Cup in Italy. On such occasions, Sebrelli argues, soccer is no longer insulated from the outside world of big "P" Politics, but is intimately connected with that world. Somehow the same passion that prevents oppositional displays from being effective, becomes effective when it is put at the service of a fascist regime.

Galeano shares Sebrelli's commitment to leftist politics, but he disagrees on how to read soccer politics. For Galeano, soccer is not an opium but a stimulant, serving to awaken, not anesthetize resistance. Sebrelli and Galeano agree on the observable facts; where they differ is in how to read those facts. Consider the example of Maradona leading 45,000 fans in an anti-military chant. Galeano and Sebrelli could each use this report as evidence for his own take on soccer and politics in Argentina. Each could begin with the
observation that there has been very little public discussion in Argentina of the military
dictatorship of 1976 to 1983. Galeano would then argue that Maradona’s intervention in
the moment of silence demonstrates that soccer is one of the precious few sites of political
discourse in contemporary Argentina and that it serves to awaken oppositional sentiments.
Meanwhile, Sebreli would argue that one of the ways that true resistance is prevented is
by channeling it into meaningless displays at soccer games, which give people the illusion
of having done something political when they have not.

I have a way of reading Sebreli that may undermine his argument. I note that
Sebreli published his book Fútbol y Masas in 1981, past the peak of the military
repression, but before the return to civilian rule. Though the book includes critical
discussions of soccer’s role in Hitler’s Germany, Mussolini’s Italy, and Perón’s Argentina,
it says nothing of the role of the 1978 World Cup in Videla’s Argentina. I read the book
as a thinly veiled critique of that event and of the ongoing military repression in Argentina.
Like the fans in 1955 who used the shield of the soccer stadium to sing Peronist marches,
Sebreli may have used the shield of soccer to write against fascism. Galeano could use my
reading of Sebreli to argue that soccer provided Sebreli with a space to breed resistance
when direct assault on the Junta’s fascism was impossible. Sebreli, however, could argue
that his own descent into the soccer world in 1981 is indeed much like that of Peronism in
1955: a feeble effort. In each case, real, big “P” Politics were channeled into a little “p”
political world, where they were spent ineffectively.
The Limits of Play

Over the last thirty minutes of the game, Boca continued to play defensively, and Platense continued to attack, coming close on several occasions to scoring the tying goal. Nineteen minutes into the second half, Platense coach Luis Blanco replaced the defensive midfielder Marcelo Romagnoli with the striker Cristian Ruffini, and the Boca coach Bilardo replaced the offensive midfielder Verón with the defensive midfielder Giunta. Three minutes from the end, Bilardo further debilitated the Boca offense by replacing midfielder Kili González with defender Rodolfo Arruabarrena. Julio complained each time Boca took a more defensive stance, though he was relieved when Castrilli at last signaled an end to the poor play with Boca still on top. Julio said he did not like the way Boca won, but that it was still better than losing. Maradona expressed a similar sentiment in an interview after the game. Asked to comment on Boca's defensive win and Platense's three near-goals, Maradona said, "I don't know if the win was just, but in soccer there is no justice" (El Gráfico no. 4006, 26 March 1996: 87).

The distinction between seriousness and playfulness is at the center of the academic debate involving Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of John Austin's theory of the performative. Shoshana Felman reads the exchange as a failure of communication between scholars belonging to English and French philosophical traditions (Felman 1983). She argues that not only Emile Benveniste, but also the North Americans John Searle and H. P. Grice mistake Austin's English humor for seriousness. Spivak makes a similar point,
arguing that Derrida’s playfulness escapes Searle. According to her, “Derrida is ‘making fun of’ Searle” because “the charge is precisely against that seemingly impenetrable but ultimately perhaps even stupid seriousness of the academic intellectual” (Spivak 1996: 95).

Given that Austin was an English man and Derrida is a French man, it should not come as a surprise to note that each turns to the soccer field to illustrate his argument. Austin asserts that for a performative utterance to succeed there must be an accepted procedure for the utterance to follow, and then he considers “what could be meant by the suggestion that sometimes a procedure may not even exist”? (Austin 1975: 30). He mentions (1) procedures that no longer exist, such as challenging someone to a duel, and (2) “the case of procedures which someone is initiating.” Regarding the second point, Austin explains that “[s]ometimes he may ‘get away with it’ like, in football, the man who first picked up the ball and ran” and thereby invented rugby. Derrida also invokes soccer in his response to Searle’s assertion that according to Derrida “intentions must be conscious.”

What a fake-out [contre-pied], leaving me flat-footed in the camp of those insufficiently aware of the unconscious! I always love to watch a good fake-out, even if it’s at my expense. But my delight, unfortunately, is short-lived. I cannot imagine how Sam Weber is going to translate “fake-out.” For his benefit let me specify that, ever since my adolescence, I have understood the word above all as a soccer term, denoting an active ruse designed to surprise one’s opponent by

11 Note that when Cambridge University was about to award Derrida an honorary degree, an international group of philosophers protested on the grounds that Derrida’s writings consist in no small part of elaborate jokes and the puns “logical phallusies” and the like, and M. Derrida seems to us to have come close to making a career out of what we regard as translating into the academic sphere tricks and gimmicks similar to those of the Dadaists or of the concrete poets (Barry Smith et al quoted in Derrida 1995: 420).
catching him off balance” (Derrida 1988b: 73).

For Derrida as for Austin, soccer provides an example of creative citation. Austin invokes the image of the soccer player who violated an old convention and thereby created a new one, while Derrida uses the feint in soccer to characterize Searle’s mis-citation of Derrida’s writings. Both Austin and Derrida find in soccer marginal cases, between convention and invention, between citing one text and creating another, and between a serious utterance and a playful utterance.

The Brazilian anthropologist Roberto Da Matta also uses a discussion of soccer to question the boundaries between seriousness and play, between the stadium and the street, and between “society” and “soccer.”

Soccer is an opium of Brazilian society, in the same way that the economic domain is its base. As if soccer and economics would be exogenous realities, that could exist in isolation from society. From this point of view, soccer is seen as a mode of diverting the attention of the Brazilian people from other more fundamental problems. If we were, however, faced with a political party or with an economic activity, the same equation could be established, but, in all probability, the social scientist would be more cautious in saying that a certain party is “an opium of the people,” simply because in his conception of society, the “political” or the “economic” are things that are more serious and relevant than “sports” or soccer (Da Matta 1982: 21-22, emphasis in the original).

Brazilian social scientists tend to use the Portuguese word “sociedade”—which I translate in the above passage “society”—in a more precise and limited way than North American social scientists tend to use the English word “society.” As is clear in the above passage, Da Matta uses “sociedade” to refer specifically to the “political” and the “economic” domains. In fact, it is this social science taxonomy that bears the brunt of Da Matta’s critique. He follows Marshal Sahlins (1976)—and therefore Jean Baudrillard (1981 [1972]
and 1975 [1973])—in finding that utilitarian and functionalist paradigms reproduce the logic of capitalism that constitutes “work” and “war” as “real,” while constituting “religion” and “sports” as “illusory.” Da Matta’s argument is that “sports are a part of society, as much as society is also part of sports” (Da Matta 1982: 23). The two are not “exogenous realities” that could exist apart from one another, nor is theirs a hierarchical relation. Rather, according to Da Matta, sports and society are “two sides of the same coin.” The sides cannot be separated, nor does the coin always land with the same side facing up.

The boundaries that would separate sports from society, soccer from politics, and play from work, are everywhere blurred. These are “the paradoxes of abstraction” that Gregory Bateson finds in all but the very simplest communications (Bateson 1972: 193). For the professional soccer player, to play soccer is to work, or as Richard Schechner observes, gladiators’ combat had life-or-death seriousness for the gladiators at the same time that it was an afternoon of entertainment for the audience (Schechner 1985: 298). The game of soccer is very big business in Argentina and in most of the rest of the world. Billions of real dollars are circulated globally, buying and selling players, athletic equipment, and broadcast rights (Levinsky 1995). In Argentina, and throughout Latin America, “real” political careers are often launched in the “marginal” world of soccer, and soccer terms are regularly employed to discuss political events (Aizpeolea 1994). President Menem is just one of millions of Argentine men who usually seems more concerned with the national soccer team than with the national bank.

The Brazilian political actor Augusto Boal suggests that watching soccer on
television fosters ordinary people's sense of agency. Interviewing Boal, Richard Schechner observed, "[I]f you want to express the contingency of history and the possibility that ordinary people can affect history, [...] then you have to be on the side of live performance" as opposed to the side of television. Boal responded, "Except for sports. We watch TV and wonder who is going to make the next goal" (Taussig and Schechner 1994: 21-22). According to Boal, viewers may experience other television programming as disenfranchising, but televised soccer retains the immediacy and unforeseeability of live performance. Spectators at a live performance or in front of a televised live game sense that history is not yet made, and that they can still affect it.

Real wars have also started because of soccer games, and soccer games have taken on special meanings because of real wars. In 1986, four years after the Malvinas/Falklands War, Argentina and England played a World Cup soccer match. Ten years later, Maradona reflected on what that match meant.

I felt—and I feel, I do not deny it—that with this [victory] we won something more than a soccer game. We defeated a country. It was our contribution, in our way. We all declared before the game that soccer had nothing to do with the Malvinas war ... A lie! ... In our skin was the pain of all those kids who had died there, so close and yet so far. Emotionally, I blamed every one of the English players—our rivals—for what had happened. And my goals—both of them—had special significance: the first was like sticking my hand in the pocket of an Englishman and removing the money that did not belong to them; the second ... topped everything (Maradona quoted in El Gráfico no. 4003, 25 June 1996: 78, emphasis in the original).

Maradona recognizes that the absolute distinction between the game and the war was a lie. I am not suggesting—and neither is he—that there are no differences between dying on a battlefield and giving up a goal on a soccer field, or between maintaining political
sovereignty over a territory and maintaining control of a soccer ball. There are
differences, but there are also blurrings. The Malvinas/Falklands War was a board game
before a single shot was fired, much as for many North Americans the Gulf War was
primarily a video game. I have no doubt that for many soccer fans in both Argentina and
England, the 1986 soccer game was more “real” than was the 1982 war, and there are
indications that many North Americans do not believe that the Gulf War really happened
(cf. Martin Scorcese’s Wag the Dog).

It could be argued that it is a mystification to believe that a victory in the World
Cup was a victory for the Argentine people, but it could also be argued that it is a
mystification to believe that a victory in the Malvinas/Falklands war was a victory for the
English people, and not just for the multi-national corporations who control the Islands’
oil and fishing industries. Is the jersey that soccer players so frequently invoke any less
real than “the flag which men will die to save” (Bateson 1972: 183)?

As we filed out of our seats and down the ramps, a nearby fan with a Walkman
announced to the rest of us that Rácing scored a last minute goal to tie Belgrano 2-2.
The Boca fans would have preferred a Rácing loss, but even a Rácing tie meant that
Boca’s victory over Platense placed Boca in a tie for first place. So despite the poor play
they had just witnessed, most of the Boca fans seemed content with the result, and
optimistic that Maradona would be able to lead Boca to a championship, the way he did
in 1981.

It was not to be. Sixteen games later, Boca finished the season in fifth place.
During the course of the season Maradona set a world record by missing five successive penalty kicks. The season's one saving grace was Boca's 4-1 victory over River, a game which for many boisteros is more important than all the others combined.

The last time I saw Maradona live was the second to the last game of the season, on 11 August 1996. I went to the newly-remodeled Bombonera with my friend Jorge Azar. Maradona looked terrible: old and slow and weary. Two days later he announced that he would miss the last game of the season because he was going into drug rehabilitation at an exclusive clinic in Switzerland, after which he would visit his friend Fidel in Havana.
VOLUME II

MANLY ACTS: BUENOS AIRES, 24 MARCH 1996

by

JEFFREY P. TOBIN
CHAPTER FIVE

A QUESTION OF BALLS

The balls question is one of the three topics that intellectual critics of soccer seem obliged to address. The other two are the opium-of-the-people debate that I review in Chapter Four and the hooliganism-and-violence exposé that I purposely avoid. In the first sections of this chapter I review some of the purported relations between soccer and homosexuality, including the sexual insecurities of intellectuals confronted with so much virility, opposing fans’ attempts to brand one another as sodomites or fags, the differences between sodomy and faggotry, rumors about rampant pedophilia in the locker room, and some wild speculations concerning the anality of goalkeepers. I might have avoided addressing such sexual suspicions, but the issue was thrust on me and my fieldwork in July 1995 when gay rights activist Carlos Jáuregui announced that there were gays on Argentina’s national team. Soon the media in Argentina were filled with reactions to Jáuregui’s statement, and so were my informants. As a result, I undertook a bewildering interview with my good friend Jorge Azar, an artist who painted a series of paintings that seemed to me and to everyone else to be about soccer and homosexuality. They did not seem that way to Azar, at least not when my tape recorder was running. I was forced to reflect on my own ethnographic desire to locate Azar’s paintings within Jáuregui’s political discourse, and to give a name to “that which refuses the symbolic law of binary

1 I borrow the title for this chapter from Pablo Alabarces and María Graciela Rodríguez’ book Cuestión de Pelotas: Fútbol, Deporte, Sociedad, Cultura (Alabarces and Rodríguez 1996).
differentiation,” to borrow Lee Edelman’s words. I do not presume to give a name to Azar’s or Edelman’s refusal, but I do associate it with the “well-formed class-consciousness of the grito [cry]” that José Limón heard among men dancing in South Texas. In soccer fans’ cheers I hear a less well-formed celebration of Third World bodily workers’ capacity for pleasure despite the disciplines imposed by rational, colonial, and heterosexist economies.

Sexual Suspects

There is a confessional convention among intellectuals who write about soccer—a moment when the writer admits that his spirit may be strong and willing, but his flesh is weak.² Eduardo Galeano begins his history of soccer with a “confession” of his adolescent nocturnal fantasies and of his failure to realize those fantasies on the soccer field.

Like all Uruguayans, I wanted to be a soccer player. I played so well, I was a marvel, but only at night, while I slept: during the day I was the worst player with two left feet that had been seen on the playgrounds of my country (Galeano 1995: 1).

Galeano’s Fútbol a Sol y Sombra [Soccer in Sunshine and Shadow] is offered as an intellectual admirer’s contribution, as a writer, to the sport to which he was not able to contribute as a player or even as a true fan. Umberto Eco also begins one of his essays on soccer by confessing his failings as both a player and a fan. Unlike Galeano, Eco did not

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² For my part, I confess that in the soccer games I participated in during my fieldwork, I was repeatedly damned with the extremely faint praise that I did not play so badly “for a yanqui.”
channel an unfulfillable desire to play soccer gloriously into a desire to glorify soccer through writing.

Many malignant readers, seeing how I discuss here the noble sport of soccer with detachment, irritation, and (oh, all right) malevolence, will harbor the vulgar suspicion that I don’t love soccer because soccer has never loved me, for from my earliest childhood I belonged to that category of infants or adolescents who, the moment they kick the ball—assuming that they manage to kick it—promptly sent it into their own goal or, at best, pass it to the opponent, unless with stubborn tenacity they send it off the field, beyond hedges and fences, to become lost in a basement or a stream or to plunge among the flavors of the ice-cream cart. And so his playmates reject him and banish him from the happiest of competitive events. And no suspicion will ever be more patently true. I will say more. In an attempt to feel like the others (just as a terrified young homosexual may obstinately repeat to himself that he “has” to like girls), I often begged my father, a sober but loyal fan, to take me with him to the game (Eco 1986: 167).

Eco’s analogy between an intellectual boy who tries to like soccer and a homosexual who tries to like girls is not incidental. Eco recognizes a connection between compulsory soccer fandom and compulsory heterosexuality, and between non-fans such as himself and gays. Juan José Sebreli recognizes a similar connection between an intellectual’s failure as a fan and his failure as a man.

A laborer in a factory, an employee in an office, a student in high school, or a neighbor in the barrio who would prefer reading or serious music, will immediately suffer the quarantine decreed by his companions, and the suspicion of a dubious sexuality will weigh on him. The timid, weak, or introverted boy or adolescent male who does not play soccer is the victim of the aggression of all his companions and even his teachers. Soccer fanatics are not only hostile toward the fans of an opposing team, but principally against those who are in no way passionate about soccer, in whom they see their true enemies. For the fanatic, indifference or even silence are reason to suspect opposition and criticism. The whole world must be either caught up in the whirlwind of soccer passion or else swept away by it (Sebreli 1981: 32).

Sebreli recognizes that working-class fans are hostile toward the fans of an opposing club, but he claims that they are even more hostile toward “certain individuals—the intellectuals,
the strange, the different” who are not “passionate about soccer” (Sebreli 1981: 33). Note that “los raros” [the strange]—and, to a lesser extent, “los distintos” [the different]—can connotate homosexual in Spanish. In explaining “queer theory” to Argentines, I have found “raro” to be the best translation of “queer.” Sebreli’s observations about soccer fandom in Argentina correspond with Eco’s observations about soccer fandom in Italy. In both countries, working-class soccer fans suspect those who are not interested in soccer of having a “dubious sexuality.”

Reading Sebreli’s comments on the sexual stigmatization of intellectuals it is relevant to consider Sebreli’s position as an openly gay man as well as an intellectual. At a conference on sports and society held at the Universidad de Buenos Aires in August 1996, all the members of a keynote panel on soccer agreed that Sebreli’s 1981 Fútbol y Masas was seriously flawed because Sebreli “is not a soccer fan” and “does not have a real feeling for the game.” Fútbol y Masas is without a doubt one of the most intellectually rigorous Spanish-language studies of soccer, so it is impossible to escape suspecting that the facile dismissal of Sebreli’s work was due to his “dubious sexuality.”

Much as working-class soccer fans question the sexuality of intellectual non-soccer fans, Argentine intellectuals routinely question the sexuality of non-intellectual soccer players and fans. Sebreli argues that soccer players and fans tend to be “unconscious or latent homosexuals,” and that the homophobia of the soccer world is a defense against repressed homosexual desire (Sebreli 1981: 93). Similarly, Marcelo Suárez-Orozco identifies homosexual symbolism in Argentine soccer-stadium chants. Suárez-Orozco’s immediate aim is to distinguish his interpretation from earlier psychoanalytic
interpretations of soccer, in which the goal was read as the mother's vagina. Suárez-Orozco argues that soccer should be interpreted in terms of homosexual rather than heterosexual desire because "after one's team has scored a goal, the fans in orgasmic joy chant how their team has just put the ball 'through the asshole' of the rival team" (Suárez-Orozco 1982: 19). Eduardo Archetti is in general agreement with Suárez-Orozco, but he also cites two stadium chants that express "the normality of heterosexuality." Both chants are anti-English. In the first, following Argentina's defeat and insult by England in the 1966 World Cup, Argentine fans sang about the Queen that a star player "le clava su poronga," that is to say, "nails her with his prick" (Archetti 1997: 210). In the second chant, recorded at the 1986 World Cup, four years after Argentina's defeat by England in the Malvinas/Falklands War, the Argentine fans sang about Margaret Thatcher that Maradona "te anda buscando / para metérla por detrás," which is to say, "is looking for you / to stick it in from behind" (ibid.). For Archetti, the fact that Queen Elizabeth and Margaret Thatcher are women makes the chants heterosexual. It is not insignificant that the Queen and the (former) Prime Minister are women, that they are English, and that they wield political power. Nevertheless, to classify the chants cited by Archetti as "heterosexual" misses the point just as it misses the point to classify the chants cited by Suárez-Orozco as "homosexual." What the chants have in common is that they are sodomitical.

Sodomy should not be conflated with homosexuality. To state the obvious, sodomy is not necessarily homosexual and homosexuality is not necessarily sodomitical.

The chants cited by Archetti and Suárez-Orozco are primarily sodomitical and their
homosexuality or heterosexuality is of secondary, even incidental importance. In a chapter tellingly subtitled "The Anus and Its Goal Posts," Alan Simpson is generally in agreement with the analyses of Suárez-Orozco and Archetti, but Simpson places more emphasis on anal eroticism and less on homoeroticism and sexual violence (Simpson 1994: 69-93). I find Simpson's analysis of English soccer compelling because he is more consistent than Archetti or Suárez-Orozco in reading soccer in terms of the desire for and fear of anal penetration, and not in terms of a homosexuality, which could, for example, involve oral sex and not anal sex.

The goalkeeper in soccer occupies an especially charged position in relation to anality. Goalkeepers control access to their own goal, whereas the other players are oriented toward penetrating the opponent's goal. As a class, goalkeepers are considered both the manliest and the most effeminate of all soccer players. Their manliness is evident in their aggressive confrontations with opposing players, their generally defiant attitude, and their role as field generals, responsible for ordering their teammates into position on defense. Their effeminacy is evident in the hysterical urgency with which they shout out orders to their teammates, their fashion-consciousness on and off the field (they are the only players not limited to the team uniform), and in their reputation for being temperamental. Accordingly, goalkeepers in Argentina may confirm Lacan's curious observation that "the ostentatious display of masculinity itself seems feminine" (Lacan 1985: 675). River Plate goalkeeper Germán Burgos is one of the goalkeepers who has been criticized for crossing the thin line that separates masculine bravura from effeminate hysteria in the way he pleads with his teammates on defense. Meanwhile, Boca Juniors
goalkeeper Carlos Navarro Montoya and Vélez Sarsfield goalkeeper José Luis Chilavert maintain a running battle via the mass media in which they are alternately represented as gunslinging cowboys and bickering women. Chilavert cast rather obvious aspersions on Navarro Montoya’s sexuality when he said, “I am frontal: I say what I think. Not like him. Moreover, soccer is a man’s game. And Navarro Montoya knows very well why I say that” (Rubio 1996: 22). It is clear that Chilavert’s reference to soccer being a “man’s game” is an attack on Navarro Montoya’s manhood. I believe Chilavert’s choice of the image “frontal” is a similar attack, suggesting that Navarro Montoya is not a forward-oriented man but a backward-oriented sodomite. The most spectacular moments in Argentine soccer are those very rare occasions when a goalkeeper inverts his usual relationship to a goal by attacking the opposing goal rather than defending his own. When Chilavert scored a goal on a free kick from sixty meters away against Burgos, a journalist wrote, “He came to insert himself in the legend of soccer without asking permission. With determination, with courage, with the prepotencia [extra potency] of talent” (Alegre 1996: 12). For a goalkeeper to “insert himself” is read as an exhibition of more-than-expected potency. Similarly, when Estudiantes de La Plata goalkeeper Carlos Bossio scored on a header to tie a game in the last minute of play, his coach explained, “Every player should have the hope that he will score a goal, even the goalkeeper. Or why do we begin to play soccer? To make a save or kick the ball far? Nooo ... We all start playing to

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3 Note that players’ affiliations refer to the clubs they were playing on on 24 March 1996. I observe, for example, that as of mid-August, 1997, Navarro Montoya is no longer affiliated with Boca, and that it seems likely that Chilavert will become the new Boca goalkeeper in the next week or two.
make a goal" (Rubio and Aldao 1996: 8). In other words, even the goalkeeper should have a drive to score, because that alone is the proper aim for a man.

Epistemology of the Locker Room

The opposition between active, real men and passive, sexual suspects informs the exchanges between fans of opposing Argentine soccer clubs. The paradigmatic rivalry in the world of Argentine soccer is that between Argentina’s two biggest soccer clubs: Boca Juniors and River Plate. Like the federales and unitarios of the nineteenth century (see Chapter Three), Boca and River fans not only cast aspersions on each other’s masculinity, but they do so in different, telling ways. River fans tend to accuse Boca players of sodomy, while Boca fans tend to accuse River players of effeminacy. Each soccer moiety defines its masculine ideal by paying attention to bodily skills, manners, and morals that are partially opposed to and partially outside the rival’s categorization of masculine attributes. Opposing fans often talk past each other because the contest is not only about who is a sodomite and who is a fag. Also at stake is which is worse, sodomy or effeminacy? Whose categorization of masculinity will be used? To a great extent, a soccer fan’s answer will correspond with a particular partisan political position or a specific class consciousness. Not coincidentally, Argentina’s President Carlos Menem is an avid River fan, as were most of the generals who led the Juntas of 1976-1983. The historical record indicates that Juan Perón and some of his key supporters were fans of Rácing Club, but Boca fans are perceived to be overwhelmingly Peronist, and there is a populist chant that declares “Boca, Perón / Un solo corazón” [Boca, Perón / A single heart]. The fans of
both clubs tend to be workers, but fans of River Plate are more likely to identify up, with the bourgeoisie and to advocate rational, Menemist economic policies, while fans of Boca Juniors are more likely to identify with the working class and to advocate populist-Peronist social justice over economic rationalization.

The competing masculinities of Boca and River have been epitomized in the career of Héctor “El Bambino” Veira. Veira was a star player for River before becoming the coach of that club. His long, wavy, blond hair and prolific goal-scoring made him an idol of River fans, and a target for Boca fans, who teased him for being too pretty. By 1992 Veira was widely rumored to be Menem’s pick to become the coach of Argentina’s national team following the 1994 World Cup, but then he was arrested for sodomizing a twelve-year old boy (a River fan) and was sentenced to prison. When Veira had served only a portion of his sentence, Menem intervened with the court to have the charge against Veira reduced from “violation” to “molestation.” The reduction was based on the finding that there had been no penetration. Veira was not rehired by River Plate, and instead became the coach of the San Lorenzo soccer club. That team won the national championship the following season, but Veira’s comeback was marred by the taunting to which he was submitted by the fans of opposing clubs, who would lower their pants and pointing to their behinds shout, “Here’s an ass for you, Bambino.” In 1996, Veira became the coach of Boca Juniors, a turn of events that would have been unimaginable four years earlier, when Veira was firmly entrenched in the River Plate family.

During my fieldwork the Veira case was often in the news and was a frequent topic of discussion among soccer fans. Most fans said that it is common for star players
and coaches to avail themselves of the boys who eagerly solicit contact with their idols.

All that made the Veira case exceptional was that he was caught. There have been rumors about the prevalence of closeted, pedophilic sodomy in the world of soccer. The Brazilian star Pelé "confessed that he had been sexually initiated by a homosexual and that the majority of the players on Santos in that time period had done the same" (Pelé quoted in Bianco 1994: 4). Jorge "El Indio" Solari, formerly the coach of Newell's Old Boys in Rosario, suggests that pedophilia is also common in the Argentine soccer world.

[T]here are some coaches in the younger divisions who are not what we call _muy hombres_ ["real men" or "very manly"] and who take advantage of the boys. And what is most lamentable in all this is that the administrators know it and do nothing to prevent it (Solari quoted in Bianco 1994: 4).

In response to Solari's claim, Claudio Marangoni, the founder of several soccer schools, points out that would-be teachers are required to take "psychophysical exams" that "include one that determines whether or not they have traces of homosexuality" (Marangoni quoted in Bianco 1994: 4).

River fans I interviewed said that the Club was better off without Veira than they had been with him. Indeed, River has won several national and international championships in the years following Veira's dismissal. The Club's subsequent coaches adopted a strict code regarding players' dress (formal), jewelry (no earrings), and hair (short), perhaps in an effort to confirm the Club's manliness. Boca fans I interviewed in August 1995 were already calling on their club to hire Veira, who at the time was still coaching San Lorenzo. It seems Veira's sodomy conviction made him an outcast among the River fans, who for many years were his most devoted supporters, but at the same
time Veira became a favorite of Boca fans, who had long been his principal detractors. It is impossible to say whether Veira’s popularity with Boca fans was because of, or— as is more likely— despite his sodomy conviction.

As a rule, fans of River, San Lorenzo, and Boca all declined to label Veira “gay” or “homosexual.” Gay fans, however, tended to be strongly supportive of Veira, regardless of the fans’ club affiliations. They did not to identify Veira as “gay,” but did identify him as a victim of homophobia. Some argued that the boy was not innocent and that he got exactly what he wanted from the soccer star. Others worried that condemning man-boy sexual relations opened the doors to condemning man-man sexual relations. One gay Boca fan explained to me that gays should oppose any and all instances of sexual stigmatization since gays will always be among those whom society considers sexually deviant. The only soccer fan I interviewed who adamantly condemned Veira was a straight male fan of Argentinos Juniors. He expressed disgust that Menem used his influence to reduce the charge against Veira, arguing that “it does not matter to me if it is with a boy or a girl, what is reprehensible is for an adult to exploit a child.” In explaining that he had nothing against homosexuality, the fan echoed the legal decision that released Veira from prison: “When I go to the bar with my friends to watch a game, and Argentinos Juniors scores a goal, we hug and kiss. There’s no penetration, but it’s still homosexual.”

The controversy surrounding the Veira case reveals that in addition to taunting one another about practicing sodomy, Argentine soccer fans also tend to believe, regardless of their own sexual orientation, that sodomy is common in the soccer world. Soccer players
are admired as models of masculinity, and masculinity connotes a sex drive that is ultimately uncontainable, either by female resistance or absence. León Gindín, an Argentine sexologist, explains “If a guy is confined for four, five, or six years in a setting where there is an abundance of persons of the same sex, after a certain period of abstinence he will want to penetrate whatever surface is at hand” (Gindín quoted in Bianco 1994: 7). Sexual suspicions are inevitable. Fans know that their soccer-playing idols are virile—in the sense of strongly sexually driven—and that they are men who live in a world of men. Given this situation, a man who practices sodomy is, as always, a sexual suspect, but so is the man who abstains—whose sex drive proves less than compelling.

Fans, too, are sexual suspects because of the intensity and the depth of their fandom. “Boca is a passion” according to t-shirts and bumper stickers. “Rácing Club is my heart” according to a banner hung week after week at the Avellaneda stadium. And a

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4 First Division players stay in a hotel for two nights prior to each game in order to ensure their sexual abstinence during the forty-eight hours preceding a game (Anonymous 1994: 20). Abstinence is imposed on the players in the belief that it enhances athletic performance. This belief has a long history in soccer and in other sports. For example, a 1968 Uruguayan dictionary of soccer explains under the heading “Sexual Hygiene” that “nothing is as harmful for a soccer player as a disorderly sex life.”

It is calculated that each ejaculation signifies for the organism a loss equivalent to more than one hundred grams of blood. But it signifies an even greater waste for the nervous system, which needs time to consume reserves in order to replenish itself. (Suburú 1968: 86).

Such folk wisdom about the dangers of sexual expenditure was refined by Carlos Bilardo who, as coach of Argentina’s national team in 1986, not only required abstinence for forty-eight hours prior to each game. He also suggested to his players that they utilize a passive position during intercourse [... because] according to certain medical opinions, the player’s abductor muscles can end up damaged as a consequence of the great work they perform in a [sexual] relation, above all if the male is on top of the woman. And these muscles are the ones that produce the most force when one has to kick the ball (Anonymous 1994: 19).
River fan explained to me, “You can change jobs or even your wife, but never your club.”
Any man who does not have a club to feel that way about, is a sexual suspect, but so is the
man who does have a club to feel that way about—as do the millions of “real men” who
are never as impassioned or excited by a woman as they are by a natural-born goal-scorer.
Week after week, they go the stadium to admire strong and dexterous young men, and to
accuse opposing fans of sexually suspicious behaviors.

Do Dual Organizations Exist?

Up until now I have been focusing on conflicts between intellectual critics and
working-class fans. In fact, the most prevalent and immediate conflicts in the world of
soccer are among fans. Though fans do cast aspersions on the masculinity of non-fans,
their real passion (pace Sebrelli) is reserved for the fans of opposing clubs, whom they
constantly condemn as sexually perverse or inadequate. In a series of articles devoted to
soccer, Eduardo Archetti has identified several such conflicts. He finds that oppositional
pairs of clubs or teams are held up as prototypes of two, competing styles of masculinity.
Archetti quotes the distinction drawn in a 1928 article between soccer players who prefer
to jugar [“to play” as in playing a game] and those who prefer to tocar [“to play” as in
playing an instrument] (El Gráfico 1928 quoted in Archetti 1995a: 431), a passage from a
1949 novel by Ernesto Sábato in which elegance and beauty are opposed to efficiency and
achievement (Sábato quoted in Archetti n.d.: 9), and a 1986 interview in which then-
player Jorge Valdano contrasted ability and force (Valdano quoted in Archetti n.d.: 9-10).
Archetti also identifies the opposing soccer styles as happy vs. serious (Archetti n.d.: 26 n.
4), fantastic vs. disciplined, creative vs. forceful (Archetti 1994c: 234), technical vs. tactical (Archetti 1994a: 38), aerial vs. terrestrial (Archetti 1995b: 83), individual vs. collective, artistic vs. mechanical, virtuoso vs. methodical, and agile vs. strong (El Gráfico 1928 quoted in Archetti 1995a: 431). Although these oppositions clearly address differences in strategic choices and bodily techniques, soccer fans ultimately deploy such distinctions to establish markers of masculinity and sexual orientation. The opposition between active, real men and passive, sexual suspects informs the exchanges between fans of opposing Argentine soccer clubs. Within that general framework, however, there are variations according to which masculinity is advocated. In the nineteen-twenties and thirties, the Argentine was routinely opposed to the Uruguayan (Archetti 1995a: 432; 1994c: 234). By 1949, the clubs Boca Juniors and San Lorenzo were opposed to Independiente and Racing Club (Archetti n.d.: 26 n. 4). Nowadays, the clubs Boca Juniors and River Plate “represent in the popular imagination contrasting social classes, styles of playing and historical achievements” (Archetti and Romero 1994: 48; see all Archetti 1995b: 83).

The exact composition of the oppositional pairs changes, but the dual organization is constant. When scholars, journalists, or fans set out to analyze differences in soccer styles, they invariably select two prototypes and not three or four. For example, an Uruguayan who lives in Buenos Aires spoke to me about the differences between Argentine soccer and Uruguayan soccer. The Argentines, he explained, have technique, but the Uruguayans have garrá [literally, “claw,” used to indicate determination]. After a while, I asked him how the Brazilians fit into his schema, and he explained, “That’s
something else. The Brazilians have ability, but the Argentines and the Uruguayans have discipline.” Later in the conversation I asked him about the Italians, and he answered, “The Europeans are disciplined and the South Americans are creative.” In each case, rather than extend his schema to include a third or fourth term, he answered in terms of another binary division. A fan from Paraguay whom I met in Montevideo proved to be very aware of the dual organization of South American soccer. He told me he was a fan of the Cerro Porteño club in Asunción, and seeing that I did not understand the significance of that, he explained, “We have two big clubs, Cerro Porteño is like Peñarol, and Olimpia is like Nacional. Or in Argentina, it is like Boca and River.”

Argentina has won the World Cup twice—in 1978 under the coaching of César Menotti and in 1986 under the coaching of Carlos Bilardo—so it is not surprising that one of the most prevalent oppositions in the contemporary Argentine soccer world is beween Menottistas and Bilardistas (Archetti 1994a: 39). According to some critics, Menottismo expresses in soccer terms many of the values that the milicos [military men] expressed more violently during the military dictatorship of 1976 to 1983. Indeed, Menotti referred to his plan for the national team as the “proceso,” a word that paralleled the military dictators’ decision to label their 1976 overthrow of Isabel Perón, “El Proceso de Reorganización Nacional” [Process of National Reorganization]. In their stinging critique of Menotti, Gasparini and Ponsico refer to his tenure as coach of Argentina’s national team as “the proceso within the Proceso” (Gasparini and Ponsico 1983: 16, emphasis in

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5 Peñarol and Nacional are the two big clubs in Montevideo. Panschi et al (1994) demonstrate that yet another parallel opposition—between la “U” and Alianza—defines Peruvian soccer.
the original). Menotti titled his own book in which he defined his coaching philosophy, *El fútbol sin Trampa*, “Soccer without tricks.” Menotti’s commitment to honor, professionalism, and “fair play” has class connotations associated with the introduction of soccer in Argentina via *la gente* [the gentry or upstanding citizens]. Menotti’s coaching philosophy also evoked the rhetoric of the military dictatorship, who opposed the honorable warfare waged by professional soldiers to the trickery practiced by guerrilleros. For such reasons Menotti is frequently accused of having been complicit in the military repression. In an interview with *El Gráfico* Menotti responded to the charges by asserting that in 1978 he was affiliated with the Communist Party. Menotti thereby counted on the ignorance of the interviewer and the sports-reading public, since the Communist Party of Argentina supported the coup against Isabel Perón that carried the first military Junta to power.

Bilardo replaced Menotti as coach of the national team just when a democratically-elected government replaced the third military Junta. Dante Panzeri, writing well before the rise of either Menotti or Bilardo, identified two soccer styles—and their class associations—as “the child of the street” and “the child of the high school.” The street soccer championed by Bilardo is not about honor or elegance or fair play, but is about winning by any means necessary, including cheating, if you can get away with it. As Panzeri argued, “the ‘street kid’ is in continuous ‘training for soccer,’ in his constant need to avoid getting caught and in the laws of life pertaining to licentious loitering” (Panzeri 1967: 55). Archetti makes a similar point in his comments on the role of the potrero [vacant lot] in developing the prototypically Argentine soccer style. “The great players will
be, as a consequence, pure products of that freedom that permits them to improvise and create without the norms or rules imposed by experts or pedagogues” (Archetti 1995a: 436). The goal Maradona scored against England in 1986 by pretending to use his head, but in fact pushing the ball in with his hand, is emblematic of both Bilardo’s and Maradona’s devotion to street-smarts as opposed to Menotti’s devotion to sportsmanship. Bilardo’s defenders and critics also call attention to the national team’s performance in the 1990 World Cup. Defenders praise Bilardo for managing to win a string of games (on penalty kicks) that the team did not deserve to win, while detractors cite the same victories as evidence that Bilardo was more lucky than skillful. Menottistas also argue that Bilardo did not have to do much as a coach to win the World Cup in 1986 because he had Maradona on his team, while Bilardistas point out that Menotti won his World Cup at home, in Argentina, so it was a much greater achievement for Bilardo to win in Mexico.

Soccer fans continue to debate Menotti’s politics and to weigh his successes and failures as a coach against those of Bilardo, but my impression is that journalists are more interested in this debate than fans are. I believe that working-class fans in particular prefer to debate the relative merits of Daniel Passarella and Diego Maradona. The two debates (Menotti vs. Bilardo and Passarella vs. Maradona) are related since Passarella was the captain of Menotti’s 1978 World Cup championship team, and Maradona was the captain of Bilardo’s 1986 World Cup championship team. I believe the rivalry between the captains stirs up more passion than the rivalry between the coaches primarily because Passarella and Maradona are strongly identified with the clubs River Plate and Boca Juniors (see Figure 4). By contrast, Menotti and Bilardo are most identified with smaller
Figure 4. Maradona and Passarella. In 1981, when they played, respectively, for Boca and River. The photo was republished in 1995 with the caption "rivals forever" (El Gráfico, 5 October 1995, Edición Especial: 15).

clubs. Independiente and Estudiantes de la Plata, respectively. The most committed fans, as I argue in Chapter Four, are more interested in their club than in the national team, so they are also more interested in Passarella and Maradona than they are in Menotti and Bilardo.

The National Team

The national soccer team in particular, as Archetti observes, is a model and a mirror of male virtues (Archetti n.d.). As such it has been a major site for contests about Argentine masculinity. Whose style of masculinity will be exemplified by the national
team? Early in the century, there were major conflicts about whether Argentina would be represented by Anglo-Argentines or Creole-Argentines (Archetti 1994; see also Archetti 1995a: 431 and Archetti 1995b: 83). By the nineteen-twenties, upper-class Creoles had thoroughly replaced upper-class Anglos and the conflict came to be about whether working-class professional players would replace professional-class amateur players (Mason 1995). By the 1934 World Cup, Argentine (and other South American) players were changing their citizenship in order to play on the national teams of Italy and Spain. From that time until now, the relationship among ancestry, birth, residency, and citizenship has been hotly debated by fans in Argentina and much of the rest of the world. Argentines have also been hypersensitive to which region, club, or style is represented--or not represented--on the national team.

Daniel Passarella was a star player for River Plate, for Argentina’s national team, and for Italy’s Fiorenze soccer club before becoming the coach of River Plate in the wake of Veira’s sodomy conviction. As coach of both River Plate and the national team, Passarella instigated the policies prohibiting the inclusion of players with long hair or earrings. Passarella’s many critics also detect a racial bias in the coach’s policies. Passarella has chosen players for his teams who are not only clean cut and jewelry-free, but who also tend to look “European” as opposed to “criollo.” Passarella justified his choice of players by explaining that he had to consider the image of Argentina that the national team presents to the world when, for example, “they change planes in Frankfurt.” Sólo Fútbol—an Argentine weekly soccer magazine—reacted to Passarella’s reference to the Frankfurt airport by putting on the cover a photograph of twenty-three identical clean-
Figure 5. “The National Team to Come.” A soccer magazine’s critical response to the coach’s disciplinary policies (Sólo Fútbol 11(535) (18 September 1995): cover).

cut, square-jawed, blond-haired, Aryan-looking men wearing the uniform of the national team, standing in perfectly straight rows and columns, with the title, “The National Team to Come?” (see Figure 5). In fact, few Argentines and very few Argentine professional soccer players resemble the model used for the Sólo Fútbol cover. The references to Germany correspond with Passarella’s nickname, “the Kaiser,” which he earned because of his tough, disciplinary style, and because he was the captain of the Argentine national team that won the World Cup in Argentina in 1978, in the midst of the military
dictatorship. Maradona—who was left off of the 1978 team, but later replaced Passarella as captain of the national team that went on to win the World Cup in Mexico in 1986—speaks for many in comparing and contrasting Passarella and Videla, the leader of one of the Juntas that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983.

[Passarella is] trying to demonstrate an authority closer to that of the dictatorship. I am not saying that Passarella is Videla; let’s not exaggerate, because that is a barbarism. But yes, he is taking the joy out of the game for the soccer players. You cannot [...] go calling on [Fernando] Redondo and then leave him off the team because of his hairstyle ... Don’t fuck with us! [...] He has to admit that Argentine soccer was made great by guys with long hair. I would be the happiest guy on earth if he would understand that what counts is putting your huevos [balls] on the field (Maradona quoted in Arcucci 1995a: 8).

I am also not likening Passarella’s policies as coach of that national team to the policies of the generals who terrorized Argentine in the so-called “Dirty War.” I do suspect, though, that Passarella is among the many Argentines who would defend the military repression as having been necessary because of the threat so-called “subversives” posed to the nation. Whether or not Passarella would defend the military repression, it is clear that fans recognize a continuity between Passarella’s disciplinary coaching style and military discipline.

The media probe Passarella’s rigid comportment policies in full awareness of the nationalist, racist, masculinist, and homophobic associations those policies have in Argentine society. *El Gráfico* published an interview with Passarella on 4 July 1995, one year into his tenure as coach of Argentina’s national team. The interview was conducted by Alfredo Alegre (whose surname only coincidentally translates as “gay” in English). The seventy-third question in the one hundred-question interview was “Would you convoque a
homosexual?,” to which Passarella answered with a simple “No” (Alegre 1995: 13). That “no” soon became the center of a debate that filled several newspaper and magazine pages and many hours of radio air-time. Before turning to that debate, I would like to examine the subsequent questions in the published interview.

74) What cologne do you use?
[Passarella:] Givenchy’s “Gentleman” and another I am not going to reveal because I am sure they would copy me.
75) Do you like to cook?
[Passarella:] Just fried eggs. I am as bad in the kitchen as Gallego is at playing billiards (Alegre 1995: 13).

Note that immediately after Passarella says he would not select a homosexual player for the national team, Alegre calls attention to the fact that Passarella uses cologne. Using cologne does not, of course, carry the stigma of homosexuality, but it does, at the least, imply a level of dandyism that some working class men could constitute as a less manly masculinity (particularly given Passarella’s refusal to reveal his personal mixture).

Alegre’s next question, about cooking, also raises an issue related to masculinity and sex roles. Cooking, like using cologne, could be construed as a practice that is primarily female and which thereby marks a suspect masculinity. It is also interesting to note Passarella’s mention of Américo Gallego, Passarella’s longtime companion on the field, as a player, and on the side line, as the assistant coach for the national team. Given the psychoanalytically informed culture of Buenos Aires, it is likely that some readers of El Gráfico found it significant that Gallego entered Passarella’s thoughts so soon after Alegre’s question about homosexual soccer players. Alegre may very well have been fishing for more signs of latent homosexuality in a subsequent question:
93) What word would define your relationship with Gallego? [Passarella:] He is the brother that I do not have and I am the brother that he does not have. I met him at Rácing stadium, when Menotti called us for the Toulon tournament. He was in a corner, chubby, dark-skinned, and gloomy. He came up to me and instantly the feeling [in English in the original] was born (Alegre 1995: 13).

Again, it is difficult to refrain from reading a homoerotic content in Passarella’s description of this first, fateful meeting. Though Passarella is not describing a romantic relationship, the special “feeling” he describes is evocative of love at first sight.

A week after the publication of Passarella’s interview in El Gráfico, Carlos Jáuregui, the president of the organization Gays y Lesbianas por los Derechos Civiles, was asked on a radio program to comment on Passarella’s statement that he would not select a homosexual player for the national team. Jáuregui responded that Passarella’s policy against gay players was moot since “there is in fact a homosexual player on the junior national team and on the senior team, too, though I am not sure about this last one” (Jáuregui quoted in Clarín 13 July 1995: 43). In later comments, Jáuregui confirmed that there was, in fact, a gay man on the senior team, but that he was not necessarily a player—thereby suggesting that he belonged to the coaching staff. Despite pressure from journalists, Jáuregui refused to name names.

It’s that it seems nobody understands that there are gays everywhere. That is the reality: in the armed forces, in politics, in the art world, in the Church. They handle it with more or less hypocrisy, with more or less liberty, but we have been, are, and will be everywhere. Since yesterday morning when I said this, several journalists are pushing me to give names, but away from the microphones they know perfectly who I am talking about (Jáuregui quoted in Página/12 13 July 1995: 18).

Jáuregui explained that the news story should not be about the identification of the players
but about the fact that Passarella discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation (Jáuregui 1995a: 27). Jáuregui also deflected questions about the identities of one or two gay players on the national team by observing that there are many gays in the soccer world. In one article, he mentioned famous out-of-the-closet soccer players such as Holland’s Ruud Gullit and Brazil’s Leandro and Renato (ibid.: 27), and in an interview he said that “in the two or three most important gay discos in Buenos Aires, Saturday night you always see three or four famous faces from the world of soccer” (Jáuregui quoted in Enzetti 1995: 16).

Jáuregui’s claims were supported by Cris Miró, a prominent male-to-female transvestite. In Figure 6, Miró is posed in the jersey of her favorite club, Boca Juniors. In
the accompanying interview she claims, suggestively, that “there are many Boca players who have my autograph on their T-shirts” (Miró quoted in Olivera 1996: 94). Miró was an important figure in the Argentine debate about homosexuality because of her cross-over success as the only (known) transvestite to headline a straight, mainstream revue in Buenos Aires. She appeared as the principal vedette [female sex symbol] in a show on Avenida Corrientes, displaying her feminine charms to an audience that was in no way marked as gay. As a socially-sanctioned object of heterosexual male desire, Miró blurred the bourgeois boundary between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Miró’s attachment to Boca Juniors could be construed as consistent with Boca’s status as the prototypical lower-class soccer club—it is very hard to imagine Miró posed in the jersey of River Plate—but Miró also succeeded as a female sex symbol for a downtown audience. Middle-class men who identified themselves as straight accepted Miró as an appropriate object of masculine desire. In her own ways, Miró lent support to Jáuregui’s assertion that there are gays—or gay desire—“everywhere.”

Despite Jáuregui’s claim that many soccer players are gay and Miró’s claim to have boyfriends who are soccer players, and despite the widespread belief that sodomy is common in the soccer world, very few players identify themselves as “gay” or “homosexual.” Moreover, in the wake of Jáuregui’s comments, almost all of the players on the national team found it necessary to deny being gay or knowing of any gay soccer players. One reading of this discrepancy would be that gay players are closeted. Another reading is that most of the players who are sexually active with other men do not identify themselves as “gay” precisely because they are sexually active and not passive. Ron
Fashanu is a professional soccer player in England and is one of the very few professional soccer players in the world who identifies as “homosexual.” He explains, however, “I’m not a 5’2" effeminate stereotype. People say football is a macho business, but I think I’m very macho” (Fashanu quoted in Simpson 1994: 91). Alan Simpson concludes that

The Fashanu phenomenon seems to have shown that the active homosexual (and it matters not one jot what Fashanu in fact does in his bedroom—something about which the public knows nothing—compared to how he acts on the field) who takes part in active sports, apparently disavowing ‘the feminine’ and penetration as much as if not more than his straight pals, can now gain an honorary, if uneasy, membership of the male club (Simpson 1994: 91, emphasis in the original).

The active imperative may be even stronger in Argentina than in England. I suspect that among working-class, Argentine men, “the active homosexual” is no homosexual at all, so his membership in the male club is neither honorary nor uneasy. The “gay” label marks a man only if he is penetrated by another man. Almost all of the players come from the lower classes of Argentine society and there is reason to believe that they do not share the bourgeois definition of “gay” to indicate “same-sex sexual behavior.” Instead, they may have a categorization in which the “gay” label marks a man only if he is penetrated by another man. This distinction between working-class and middle-class men in Buenos Aires is analogous to the distinction between rural and urban men that Roger Lancaster finds in Nicaragua (Lancaster 1992). In both cases, structurally-inferior men identify gyness with sexual submission, while structurally-superior—urban or intellectual—men define gyness as same-sex sexual activity (or passivity).

Following Jáuregui’s statements, everybody in the Argentine soccer world was asked to comment on whether or not gays were or should be allowed to be on Argentina’s
national team. Passarella expressed resentment that his one word answer to one question in a hundred-question interview was overshadowing issues more directly related to the national team and its performance. He explained that “it is a personal taste. Like if I did not want a player who is too tall” and he argued that “this is a democratic country” in which everyone is allowed to have his own tastes and to act accordingly (Passarella quoted in Proietto 1995: 26). The editors of El Gráfico, probably in order to ensure their ongoing access to Passarella, published an article by Aldo Proietto that echoed Passarella’s self-defense.

The coach does not discriminate, he selects. And he has every right to do so. Nobody should be alarmed. He would call Blacks and Jews if they answered to the player profile that he prefers. He would not convoke homosexuals because he knows that they generate problems taking into account the mentality of soccer players. [...] And, in truth, Passarella’s mission is limited to the management of the team and not to the sexual reeducación of its members (Proietto 1995: 27-28, emphasis in the original).

Proietto’s logic—like Passarella’s—is obviously strained. Proietto suggests that to select is not to discriminate, yet: his reassurance that Passarella would select Blacks and Jews reveals that his argument is actually that it is Passarella’s right to discriminate against gays, but not against Blacks and Jews. Julio Grondona, who as president of the Asociación de Fútbol Argentino is Passarella’s boss, surprised many soccer fans by disagreeing with his coach. He said that he believed Passarella lacked tolerance because of his youth and that “if a homosexual respects the norms of the group, there would be no problems in

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6 In fact, one of Passarella’s surprising early selections for the national team was Juan Pablo Sorín, who is Jewish, though it is worth noting that Sorín had already been “discovered” by the coach of Argentina’s junior national team, José Pekerman, who is also Jewish.
incorporating him in the national team” (Grondona quoted in Clarín, 14 July 1995: 29).

Similarly, José Pekerman, the coach of Argentina’s junior national teams, recognized that some players might be bothered by having an openly gay teammate, but he said he would turn to psychological and medical professionals to handle group anxiety (Pekerman quoted in Página/12 14 July 1995: 20).

As is usual in questions concerning soccer, President Menem chose to comment. He declared that the decision to exclude gays from the national team was Passarella’s to make, but it seems Menem was opposed to that decision.

If it is that homosexuality has really become public, it would be good for those who really are in that situation to tell the truth, because in the end, if there are homosexual marches all over the world, if there are no longer any limitations, I believe the moment has arrived in which those who are in that condition to say what their life style is and what their situation is. I do not believe they will have problems (Menem quoted in Página/12 14 July 1995: 20).

Menem’s statement is—as usual—cryptic. Menem can be read as encouraging gay players to come out because “they will have no problems,” but given Passarella’s stated policy it is clear that openly gay players would have problems. Menem can also be read as daring gay players to come out. He is saying that if it is true, as Jáuregui and others claim, that gays are now a political force to be reckoned with, they should prove it by coming out of hiding and revealing their true numbers and political stature. I also find it interesting that Menem’s statement constitutes gayness as a “condition” or “situation.” To my ears, at least, it sounds as though Menem might be conflating homosexuality with pregnancy. My hunch is that Menem is thinking back to his youth when pregnancy and homosexuality were supposed to be kept private. Now, however, homosexuality, like pregnancy, “has
really become public” so “those who are in that condition” can say “what their situation is.”

Hugs and Kisses and Goals

The most polemical response to Passarella came, predictably, from Diego Maradona. Passarella and Maradona have been archrivals since 1981, when Passarella was the leading defensive player for River Plate and Maradona was the leading offensive player for Boca Juniors. Their rivalry intensified when Maradona replaced Passarella as the captain of the Argentine national team. Maradona responded to Passarella’s anti-gay policies by saying he hoped Boca Juniors would buy Ruud Gullit, an openly gay Dutch player, widely believed to be the best player in the world in the early 1990s (see Tobin 1998c). Maradona asked rhetorically, “If a player is gay and he scores three goals, what is Passarella going to do?” (Maradona quoted in Jáuregui 1995b: 17). Maradona also used the controversy to make a dramatic statement in favor of tolerance for sexual differences.

It’s that in this country of snitches that we live in, if they see two guys on a bus kissing each other on the lips, they make them get off the bus, no? Then we say we have freedom. But the guys are kicked off the bus, for sure ... So it’s simple: each goal that Cani [Claudio Caniggia] makes on an assist from me, I’ll suck his face, right on the mouth (Maradona quoted in Arcucci 1995: 14).

Argentine soccer fans routinely kiss one another on the cheek after scoring a goal, so what set Maradona’s vow apart was that it involved kissing Caniggia on the lips. From October 1995, when the vow was made, until July 1996, Maradona found few opportunities to make good on his promise, and on the few occasions he and Caniggia combined efforts to
score a goal, the celebratory kiss was too perfunctory to attract much attention. On 15 July 1996, however, Boca beat River 4-1, on three goals by Caniggia. The closest Maradona came to assisting on any of those goals was when he mis-kicked a penalty against a goal post and Caniggia scored on the rebound. The two took advantage of the historic victory to provide photographers with a prolonged and dramatic kiss. The caption on the photo of Maradona and Caniggia kissing that appeared in El Gráfico plays down the homoerotic content of the kiss, calling it “Kiss from the soul” with the explanation that
Figure 8. Maradona and Caniggia Kissing. The caption for this photo explains, “This is how Diego left [Caniggia’s] mouth sore. Love is like that” (Olé 15 July 1996: 3).

“they are friends and do not have complexes, so they celebrate an unusually happy afternoon in this way” (El Gráfico no. 4006, 16 July 1995: 114; see Figure 7). By contrast, the caption from Olé has more fun with the homoerotic content, calling it “The pecking show” with the explanation that “The Bird [Caniggia’s nickname] got wet three times. This is how Diego left his mouth sore. Love is like that. Cani leaves today for Rome [where his wife lives], also in search of kisses” (Olé 15 July 1995: 3; see Figure 8). The reference to Caniggia’s wife can be read as a hasty confirmation that the player is, in fact, straight, but the mention also places the kisses Caniggia shares with Maradona on a par with the kisses he shares with his wife, Claudia. The substitution of Claudio Caniggia
for Claudia Maradona is a recurring theme in reports about Diego Maradona. Their substitutability is facilitated by the coincidence of their having similar first names and similar long blond hair (though Claudio’s is natural and Claudia’s is dyed).

There is another subtext to the relationship between Maradona and Caniggia. Caniggia began his career with River Plate. He and Maradona became close playing together on the national team from 1987 through the 1990 World Cup. When Maradona returned to Boca Juniors in October 1995, he requested that the club also purchase Caniggia from the club Benfica of Portugal. At the time, Boca fans I interviewed expressed concern because they still identified Caniggia with River Plate, and they doubted that he was tough enough to play for Boca. As one fan said, “He’s too pretty to be a bostero.” Nevertheless, it seems most Boca fans, including the barra brava, deferred to Maradona and gave Caniggia a warm welcome. In my reading, however, they continued to identify Caniggia as too pretty to be a traditional Boca player, and the relationship between Maradona and Caniggia seemed to be confused at times with the relationship between Maradona and his wife. Caniggia’s ambiguous status as a star soccer player and a sex symbol is captured in a poster that El Gráfico published following his three-goal game against River Plate (see Figure 9). On the right side of the poster, Caniggia is shown on the soccer field, eluding River Plate defender Celso Ayala. To the side of this photo is the caption, “Para ellos un crack ...” [For the men, a crack].

On the lower left side of the poster, Caniggia is shown behind the wheel of his Honda automobile, with his

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7 “Crack” is borrowed from British English and is used in the Río de la Plata region to refer to a soccer player who possesses “ability plus intelligence” (Suburú 1968: 46).
Figure 9. Claudio Caniggia, Soccer Star or Sex Symbol? Seated behind the wheel of his Honda and speeding past an arch-rival (El Gráfico no. 4007, 23 July 1996: poster).

long blond hair down, and a pair of sunglasses hanging from the collar of his sweater.

Above this photo is the caption, “Para ellas un dios ...” [For the women, a god ...]. My question is, who is this glamor photo for? El Gráfico has few female readers. Moreover, when magazines aimed at women include a photograph of an attractive man, he is not sitting behind the wheel of a car. In Argentina, as in the United States, sexy bodies are typically placed in association with automobiles in order to appeal to men, not to women. The caption above the glamor shot may assert that Caniggia is “a god” for ellas, but I think there are indications that the ones for whom he is a seductive idol are ellos.

Soccer in the Garden of Sodom

The debates about the sexual politics of Argentine soccer that I have considered so
far share a negative view of homosexuality. It is clear that working-class fans accuse the fans and players of opposing clubs of sodomy and effeminacy with the intention of stigmatizing them. I am quite sure that none of the intellectual observers I have cited—Jáuregui, Sebreli, or Suárez-Orozco—intends the attribution of homosexuality to stigmatize working-class soccer fans or players. Indeed, Sebreli is openly gay and his critique may be that soccer players and fans repress their homosexuality instead of expressing it in a healthier way. Nevertheless, each of the intellectual critics identifies a negative homosexuality, a homosexuality that is either closeted, repressed, or imposed. Jáuregui focuses attention on gay players who keep their gayness secret from journalists and fans, and Sebreli focuses attention on a player or fan who keeps his gayness secret from himself, while, Suárez-Orozco focuses attention on sodomitical rape, a violent crime as opposed to a consensual, sexual act. By contrast, Jorge Azar, an Argentine visual artist, painted a series of pastels on paper in 1991, in which the relationship between soccer and homosexuality is cast in a more positive light. At first glance, the paintings depict everyday events in the soccer world. Players embrace one another after a goal, or pat one another on the behind, while the fans look on in delight (see Figure 10). Or the players stand naked in the locker room or the shower, on display for one another and for those privileged to have access to that inner sanctuary. On closer inspection, it becomes clear that the players not only embrace, they also penetrate one another, and the fans actively participate in the sporting festivities by masturbating as they look on (see Figure 11).

A short story by Adolfo Carlo titled “A Toda Pelota” [A Complete Ball] provides a complementary image of sodomy and soccer. The narrator purports to tell what
happened in the popular section of the stands in Córdoba, Argentina during a World Cup game between “Camerona” [close to the Spanish word for Cameroon] and a team of “Europingos” [close to the Spanish word for Europeans].\(^8\) The narrator was accompanied by his friend “Clemente,” which not coincidentally is the name of a cartoon character who

\(^8\) At the risk of being too literal, I observe that the fictional game might have been inspired by the 1978 World Cup game played in Córdoba between Tunisia and West Germany, though that game ended 0-0.
Figure 11. The Fans Get in on the Action. Untitled painting by Jorge Azar.

is famous for being a fan of Cameroon.

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paintings, become sexually excited by the action on the field (see Figure 12). Their excitement is no doubt fueled by the players. Those from Camerona take the field first, without shirts. They proceed to throw their shoes to the fans in the covered box seats ("because they were the most expensive"), their socks to the uncovered box seats, their shorts to the box seats where the government officials sit, "and of course: the jockstraps sailed into the popular section" (Carlo 1995: 24). Not to be outdone, the Europingos take the field wearing nothing but "little skirts in the colors of their flag." As their national anthem is played, each Europingo player "places one hand over his own prick and one over that of the guy next to him." The fans, too, are all soon naked, with their hands "in the same position as that of the Europingo team." A helicopter flies over the stadium, but
instead of dropping colorful balloons, it drops millions of condoms and tubes of lubricant. On the field, the referee is the only one still wearing a shirt, "in order to distinguish himself among so much nudity." Nevertheless, one of the blonde players is anally penetrating the ref who in turn is sucking the penis of one of the Black players. As the game begins, the Europingos are busy touching and kissing each other "and the Blacks take advantage of the situation to score the first goal." The fans soon get caught up in the action, engaging in an orgy of sodomy, fellatio, and mutual masturbation. The narrator explains that even after several orgasms, everyone's penis was "still hard because we were in the popular section." The game comes to an end, with all the players on the field and the fans in the stadium penetrating one another. The narrator coins a word to declare that "we were fucking multitudinally" [multitudinariamente] (emphasis in the original). The phrase expresses the sense of sexual communitas, shared by the multitudes of men who gather at stadiums and bars to watch soccer games together.

Carlo's story was published very soon after El Gráfico's interview with Passarella, and it appeared in an issue of NX--a gay magazine--that included several articles written in opposition to Passarella's anti-gay policy. It is safe to assume that the story was written, or at least published, as part of that protest. Azar's paintings, by contrast, were completed four years before the controversy surrounding Passarella. They hung unsold from Azar's own walls until the controversy brought them renewed attention. Then, two of the paintings were shown by Antonio Gasalla on his popular TV show, El Palacio de la Risa [The Palace of Laughter], and Azar agreed to re-present his paintings at an exposition. Like the journalists who contacted Azar during this period, I sought to establish a relation
between the paintings and the political controversy, but interviewing Azar, I found that like many artists he resists having his work located politically. Azar’s refusal of political labeling coincides with Edelman’s reflections on sodomy and the law.

Even to name it, for instance, as pleasure, would be to sentimentalize its opacity, its resistance to cultural “meaning,” by appropriating it for the order of recognizability and “truth.” Let it remain, instead, the unseen and the unsaid: not as a token of its mystery or as a gesture toward its ultimate ineffability, but rather as a figure for the demonization of that which refuses the symbolic law of binary differentiation, that which finds expression in the abjectified scene of homosexual desire (Edelman 1994: 170).

Azar, too, advocates letting it remain the unsaid, but not the unseen. For Azar as for others, ideology and its dangers reside in the realm of the verbal and can be avoided in painting so long as the paintings remain “Untitled”—as does Azar’s soccer series. Azar’s attitude is very similar to that of his partner, the poet and anthropologist Luis Amaya, who wrote (Amaya 1996: 16):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Uno se va} \\
\text{yendo de las identidades} \\
\text{herido de creación.} \\
\text{En esta época} \\
\text{de insoslayables dilemas} \\
\text{la medicina está en la selva.}
\end{align*}
\]

One leaves
fleeing identities
injured by creation.
In this time
of unavoidable dilemmas
the cure is in the forest.

Azar’s paintings, like Amaya’s poems, invoke a flight from Jáuregui’s identity politics, to a world outside history, in which the repression analyzed by Sebrelli is unnecessary, and the symbolic rape identified by Suárez-Orozco has no place. The soccer stadium for Azar, like the forest for Amaya, is a green and magical place in which men find innocent jouissance in the arms and eyes of one another. It is a pre-sinful Garden of Eden or, better said, a Garden of Sodom prior to the angel’s vengeance, where there is no need to
distinguish between homosexualities that are closeted, unconscious, or out in the open.

Azar even told me that he could not understand why most of the people who viewed his paintings insisted on classifying them as gay or homosexual. The paintings, according to Azar, are about the joy of soccer, period, and they should not be expected to speak to ideological issues.

The Global Traffic in Soccer Bodies

Passarella's concern with the visual impact the national team makes "changing planes in Frankfurt" and Carlo's selection of "Cameronas" and "Europingos" for his fantasy-game indicate that the sexual politics of Argentine soccer are racialized. In the Argentine soccer imagination, Germans and Cameroonians represent the two poles of soccer bodies. Germany's position was no doubt reinforced by the fact that they were Argentina's opponent in the final matches of the 1986 and 1990 World Cups. Cameroon came to occupy the dark pole following its victory over Argentina in the first game of the 1990 World Cup. In the global soccer imagination European teams in general represent the light, disciplined pole, while African and Afro-American teams represent the other, dark, creative pole.

Early in the century, the dark pole was occupied by Uruguay, who remain Argentina's nearby, familiar Other in soccer as well as in tango. Soccer was added to the Olympic Games in 1924, in Paris. Uruguay was the sole South American team entered in that competition and they surprised the European soccer fans by winning. Even more shocking to the Europeans was that Uruguay's star player, José Leandro Andrade, was
Black, and as Galeano observes, “Europe had never seen a Black person playing soccer” (Galeano 1995: 53). European fans said that Andrade seemed to have a body made of rubber, and they observed that he stole the ball through agility, without touching his opponent, and not by the more forceful means employed by European soccer players. The fans also marveled that once Andrade had possession of the ball, he would leave defenders sprawled on the ground through the use of head and body fakes and changes of direction. The French sportswriter Gabriel Hanot contrasted the style of Andrade and his fellow Uruguayans with that of the English.

The English professionals are excellent at geometry and [are] remarkable surveyors ... They play a tight game with vigour and some inflexibility. The Uruguayans are supple disciples of the spirit of fitness rather then geometry. They have pushed towards perfection the art of the feint and swerve and dodge, but they know also how to play directly and quickly. They are not only ball jugglers ... They created a beautiful football, elegant but at the same time varied, rapid, powerful and effective” (Hanon quoted in Mason 1995: 31).

The binary opposition identified by Hanot was not limited to soccer. The next year, a similar opposition prompted Jacques Charles to make last minute choreographic changes in the Revue Nègre when it opened in Paris.

The chorus line, which was typical of black revues in Harlem nightclubs and on the Broadway stage, did not seem authentic to the Frenchman. Precision dancing, he thought, might be appropriate for German or English girls, but not for blacks, who, as everyone knew, were instinctive dancers, incapable of discipline (Rose 1989: 5).

Whether playing soccer or dancing, Black bodies were expected to be different from White bodies. Instead of the geometry and discipline demanded of White bodies, Black bodies were expected to be flexible and creative. Accordingly, an improvisational “Danse Sauvage” was added to the Revue Nègre, to be performed by Josephine Baker and her
partner, Joe Alex. Andrade’s triumph on the field of the Olympic Stadium preceded Baker’s triumph on the stage of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées by just fifteen months, and it is certain that Andrade’s triumph contributed to the Parisian fascination with Blackness that made Baker’s performance bankable.\textsuperscript{10}

Andrade’s triumph in Paris also kicked off a worldwide fascination with South American soccer players. From the 1930s through the 1980s, Brazil was the archetypal dark, exotic soccer nation, in both the Argentine and the global soccer imagination. Since then, African teams such as Cameroon and Nigeria—who defeated Argentina in the final match of the 1996 Olympics—have replaced Brazil as the soccer world’s dark Other. The opposition between English “geometry” and Uruguayan “beauty” that Hanot posed in 1924 has remained in effect in subsequent soccer discourse, but it has become increasingly racialized. Argentines, along with Uruguayans, have come to occupy a middle position, between the disciplined European teams and the creative African and Afro-American teams—such as Brazil, Colombia, and Jamaica. As a result, Argentine players are especially valued in the global soccer market. Black players from Brazil, Colombia, and several African countries have been incorporated into European soccer clubs, but they have been incorporated rather sparingly, at least compared to the incorporation of Argentine players. In European soccer, Black players tend to be limited to two or three offensive positions—as strikers or play-makers. Significantly, these positions are said to require the most in terms of “individuality” and “creativity.” The other eight or nine

\textsuperscript{10} Andrade himself was a well-known performer in the carnival of Montevideo, and after the Games, he remained for several months in Paris, where he earned a living as a tango dancer—a combination of performer, instructor, and gigolo (Puppo 1969: 42).
defensive and transitional positions are said to require more in terms of “teamwork” and “discipline” and they are infrequently occupied by Black players.

The racial division of soccer labor in Europe has been reproduced in Colombian soccer. In the 1994 World Cup, Francisco Maturana, then the coach of Colombia’s multi-racial national team, took into account “the regional characteristics of the players” when he decided that

in the midfield the need was for hard workers and well-disciplined players, provided by Alvarez and Gabriel Gómez from the Antioquia region where such qualities are commonplace, while the fantasy was left to Valderrama, Asprilla and Rincón, people from Cali and the coast who were harder to discipline but more creative” (Mason 1995: 140).

Not coincidentally, the players from Cali and the coast—those who are “harder to discipline but more creative”—are Black or mulatto, while those from the Antioquia region—the “hard workers”—are criollo. In sum, Black bodies are highly valued on the global soccer market, but in strictly limited numbers and positions. They are deployed almost exclusively as offensive players—strikers or play-making midfielders. These are the positions in which individual creativity is expected and confined, while players in the defensive and transitional positions are required to work more closely together, as a group.

Unlike African and Afro-American players, the Argentine players who play in Italy and Spain are well distributed among offensive, defensive, and transitional positions. As of August of 1995, eight out of the ten Africans, Brazilians, and Colombians who played in Italy’s First Division were limited to offensive positions, but of the eight Argentines in Italy at the time, only three were offensive players (all strikers), and the other five were
defensive (four backs and one defensive midfielder). As defensive players, the Argentine backs are required to be more thoroughly integrated into the collective body of their Italian clubs than are foreign strikers, who retain more individuality and apartness. Unlike Brazilians and Colombians, Europoid Argentines are not represented as dangerously exotic. The European incorporation of Argentine players is not without anxiety, but the anxiety is expressed regarding each individual player’s capacity to pass as the right sort of European. Maradona is the most famous example. His first European club was Barcelona, where Maradona was rejected, and his next was Naples, where he was embraced. In neither case was Maradona judged as an exotic appendage to a collective soccer body—the way Afro-Brazilians are most likely to be judged. Rather, Maradona was judged as passing or failing a test of belonging integrally to a collective European soccer body. The test is based on a complex intersection of European and South American national, ethnic, and class identities. Barcelona, along with Real Madrid, is one of Spain’s two elite clubs, and it is a standard bearer of Catalonian separatism (Galeano 1995: 39). It seems the Barcelona fans rejected Maradona because they identified him as a low-class sudaca [a derogatory Spanish term for South Americans] (Levinsky 1996: 137). Naples, by contrast, is a lower-class, Southern Italian club, and it is clear that “the Neapolitans loved Maradona because of his surprising resemblance to them or, better said, to the sub-proletarian Neapolitan” (Maurizio Valenzi quoted in Levinsky 1996: 148). In sum, Argentine players have a difficult time gaining admission to European soccer clubs, but when they are admitted, it is more often as a returning paisano than as an exotic. The Argentine player—unlike the Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Colombian, or African—is not
essentially, eternally different from the European. Thus, Argentine bodies are more freely incorporated than are the stably exotic bodies of essentialized Others.

Soccer in Sunshine and Shadow

In his book *Fútbol a Sol y Sombra* [Soccer in Sunshine and Shadow], Galeano addresses the intersection of race and sexuality in global soccer politics in terms of Third World and working-class bodies joyously resisting European impositions of order. Like the same author’s earlier trilogy, *Memorias de Fuego* [Memories of Fire], *Fútbol a Sol y Sombra* is a populist history, containing carefully crafted tales of Latin American resistance in the face of overwhelming force from above. Galeano revels in the play that occurs out of doors, on the field, under the bright sun, and he rails against the shady business that is transacted indoors, behind the scenes. Galeano suggests that throughout this century, the pleasure of soccer-as-play has declined, while the profits of soccer-as-business have increased. He observes that “The goal is soccer’s orgasm” and that “Like the orgasm, the goal is everyday less frequent in modern life” (Galeano 1995: 9).

There are many villains and heroes in Galeano’s history. Foremost among the shady villains is João Havelange, the Belgian-born Brazilian president of FIFA (the Fédération Internationale de Football Associations). Galeano recounts that a reporter from the Times of London asked Havelange,

“What is it that gives you the most pleasure in soccer? The glory? The beauty? Victory? The poetry?” And he [Havelange] answered: “The discipline.” This ancient monarch had changed the geography of soccer and had turned it into one of the most splendid multinational businesses (ibid.: 166-167).
For Galeano, Havelange is prototypical of the dark disciplinary forces that would convert the pleasure of soccer-as-play into the profits of soccer-as-business. The Argentine sociologist Sergio Levinsky provides further support for Galeano’s argument by documenting the dependence of Argentine clubs on the sale of players to European clubs. Levinsky observes that in 1985 the Argentine soccer schedule was adjusted to facilitate the transfer of players to European clubs (Levinsky 1995: 103).

The championship is [now] brought to a head in the season with the worst weather of the year and takes a break in the best in order to be able to conform with the forceful and dynamic European model of play, contrary to the interest of the fans, and with the goal of “displaying” players to the powerful centers and to pay off part of the deficit (ibid.: 122).

Argentine players and coaches are also frequently transferred to European clubs in early July, in time for pre-season training camps in Italy and Spain even though the Argentine league competition does not end until the middle of August (ibid.: 106). In July of 1996 Carlos Bianchi left his job as the coach of Vélez Sarsfield to become the coach of Roma in Italy, and in July of 1997, César Menotti left his job as coach of Independiente to become the coach of Sampdoria, also in Italy. In each case, the coach departed despite the fact that his club was in the thick of the race for the championship in Argentina with only four or five games remaining to play. Similarly, Rácing Club’s star striker Claudio López was transferred in July 1996 from his Argentine club to the Valencia club of Spain. The message—of which Argentine fans are acutely aware—is that the competition among Argentine clubs is of secondary importance to the selling of players to foreign clubs.

The referee might be another villain. Galeano observes that “the only unanimity in soccer [is that] everybody hates him” (Galeano 1995: 10). What they hate is “the
abominable tyranny that his dictatorship exercises without any possible opposition and the
pompous sentence that his absolute power executes with operatic gestures.”

Nevertheless, Galeano ultimately defends the referee for performing a necessary and
thankless task. Though Galeano sympathizes with referees in Rioplatense soccer, I view
them as representatives of law-and-order authoritarianism and colonialism. I observe that
the role of the referee in Argentina was shaped to a great extent by the history of English
neo-colonialism. Beginning in 1937, English referees were brought to Argentina to “set a
standard of performance and provide training for local referees” (Mason 1995: 108). The
number of English referees increased throughout the nineteen-forties so that from 1950 to
1953, all of the first division matches were officiated by Englishmen. I do not dispute that
those referees imposed an order on the game that was both necessary and often lacking.
My point is that in Argentina there is still something English about strict order on the
soccer field.

Javier Castrilli is the most noteworthy example of an Argentine referee who
reproduces the English neo-colonizing discourse of Argentina. Castrilli first came into
public view in March 1991, when he expelled four River Plate players from a game against
Newell’s Old Boys, a small club from Rosario, in the Province of Santa Fe. In June 1996,
Castrilli returned to the spotlight when he expelled three Boca Juniors players—including
Maradona—from a game against the small club Vélez Sarsfield. Fans of bigger clubs—such
as River and Boca—complain that Castrilli is biased against their clubs and their big-name
players. Castrilli responds that if he has expelled many big-name players for arguing his
calls, it is because the big-name players see themselves as above the rules limiting what
can be said to a referee (Castrilli quoted in Borinsky, Beer, and Groshaus 1996: 100). The other charge against Castrilli is that he is not content to remain in the background, where the referee belongs, but that he "wants to be a protagonist," so he expels players, especially if they are famous. Castrilli responds that he does not have a history of expelling players in games played between non-Argentine clubs or national teams, so it must be the fault of Argentine players, not the referee, that he expels so many of them from games between two Argentine clubs. Castrilli explains that "we live in a culture of transgression, where norms, orders, and laws are being violated permanently. And there is always justification for the people that transgress" (Castrilli quoted in Borinsky and Rubio 1995: 78). Elsewhere, Castrilli calls this the "perverse system" in which "we treat all disciplinary action as authoritarian."

What is the message we give to the children who are watching soccer? That we are accomplices with that [system]?... It has to change, all of us must change it. Not by lacking respect, nor by classifying the referee as crazy because he calls a penalty, nor by saying that such fouls are not called. If they are fouls, if the laws says so, they should be called. If we don't like it, we should change the law (ibid.: 99).

Castrilli sees his primary duty as being toward justice. Exercising justice on the soccer field is his way of providing children and other spectators with a model of the sort of justice he believes is lacking in the greater society.

Galeano's heroes are the players who overcome the discipline imposed from above, by Havelange and others, and succeed in making soccer a party for the eyes that watch and a joy for the body that plays. [...] Professional soccer does everything possible to castrate this happy energy, but it survives despite all despites. [...] However much the technocrats program it down to the minutest detail, however much the powerful manipulate it, soccer insists on being
the art of the unforeseen. Where you least expect it the impossible leaps out, the
dwarf teaches the giant a lesson and a skinny and crooked man of color makes an
athlete sculpted in Greece look like a dolt (Galeano 1995: 243).

For Galeano, the history of soccer is a history of Third World dwarves conquering
Firstworld giants, of skinny and crooked South Americans showing up Europeans, despite
all attempts to fix it so that games will be won by the bigger, the stronger, the swifter, and
the more disciplined. Cuba figures prominently in the margins of Galeano’s socce:
history, despite the fact that it is one of the few Latin American countries in which soccer
is not the most important sport. Galeano gives a brief summary of global politics in his
discussion of each quadrennial World Cup. The summaries pertaining to each World Cup
from 1962 to 1994, include the sentence: “Well informed sources in Miami announced the
imminent fall of Fidel Castro, who was going to tumble in a matter of hours” (ibid.: 130,
139, 154, 161, 174, 183, 193, 208, and 223). Castro and the Cuban people thereby
appear alongside Pelé and the Brazilian team and Maradona and the Argentine team as
examples of Latin Americans who defy the odds that are biased in favor of Europe.¹

Body Politics

FIFA, of course, plays a major role in stacking the deck in favor of Western
Europe, but there is another, subtler struggle in soccer. A club struggles not only against
opposing clubs, but also against its own coach. The players resist their coach, much as a
dance company, according to Randy Martin, becomes a social body in “opposition to an

¹ Galeano’s location as an Uruguayan is significant since Uruguay is by far the
smallest country to have won a World Cup.
initial domination of language-based authority in the figure of the choreographer” (Martin 1990: 96). Even though they share an interest in producing a successful performance, there is an oppositional relationship between the dancers who move and the choreographer who speaks. It is typical for theorists of the body to invoke a natural body whose desires are thwarted, contained, and channeled by disciplinary practices such as choreography and soccer-coaching. Martin, however, is careful to avoid appeals to a naturally meaningful body, arguing instead that “the body takes shape and social purpose [only] against the limits of a physical culture, that is, within a social construction of time, space, and motion” (ibid.: 51). The body, according to Martin, becomes meaningful and resistant within the context of a culture that disciplines it.

Martin suggests that “the dance company could be replaced by any collective body, articulated as labor, gender, or race, against a controlling authority” (ibid.: 96), and, indeed, I find Martin’s analysis of dance relevant to my own observations of soccer. Coaching, too, is language-based, mental labor. Coaches demand obedience and respect from their players, and they are quick to take an important portion of the credit for any victory. Indeed, following a major victory, it is standard operating procedure in the Rio de la Plata region for a coach to write (or ghost-write) a book with the title “Así Ganamos” [This is How We Won] (e.g. Bilardo 1986; Núñez 1995). Almost all of the experts who comment on soccer strategy observe that good coaching is necessary to produce a solid defense. The problem for coaches is that a well-coached defense is not threatened by a well-coached offense. To score goals, it is considered necessary to have a “creative” player, who is capable of “thinking with his feet”: one who has mastered “the
art of the unforeseen” or who has “an artistic feel for the game,” in the words of soccer coach Jorge Valdano (Valdano 1996: 9). Fans go to the soccer stadium to see the individual who is able to create goals despite the plans of the opposing coach, the discipline of the opposing defenders, the skills of the opposing goalkeeper, the limits of his own coach’s offense, the offside rule, the rule that denies him the use of his hands, the boundaries of the playing field, the penalty area, and the goal itself.

“Even if it is a golcito,” a little goal, as opposed to a big goal golazo, Galeano observes that “it always comes out gooooooool in the throat of the radio commentators” (Galeano 1995: 9). This cry is comparable to what José Limón, observing mexicanos in South Texas, calls “the gritos, long cries of celebratory approval, coming from the men sitting or standing at the bar, as they watch a particularly artful execution on the [dance] floor” (Limón 1994: 163-164). An important difference is that the Mexican-American men Limón describes celebrate the virtuosity of women and men on the dance floor, while the virtuosity celebrated by Argentine soccer fans is exclusively male.

Nevertheless, there are similar class politics in Argentine soccer and Mexican-American social dance, despite the very different politics of gender and sexuality. Drawing on Martin’s work, Limón explains:

> to hear the sharp, well-formed class-consciousness of the grito, is to realize that, for a moment, some measure of artful control over [the forces of hard, working-class labor, substance use, and sexual desire]—some measure of victory—has been achieved in the never-ending struggle against the choreography of race, class, and, one has to say, gender (ibid.: 165).

Similarly, a soccer goal is certainly a blow against the rival team, but it is also a bodily blow against the mental strategies, rules, and regulations that conspire to make the goal
every day less frequent. As such it is celebrated by the working-class, male fans, who take political pleasure in testifying to the creative capacity of a fellow male, working-class body.
Living and dancing with Marta Savigliano might have inhibited me from writing about tango-dance, since she is the foremost theorist in the field, but in her discussion of tango and masculine sexuality, I found an invitation to step onto the theoretical dance floor.

Machismo is a cult of maleness and, as such, perhaps should be left in the hands of its devotees. This has been the position of most women interested in tango. And I see the point. There has been so much macho pride (and so much macho history) invested in these misogynistic remarks that one is tempted to leave machismo to die on its own (Savigliano 1995: 46).

Savigliano recognizes that left on its own, machismo does not die. She hesitates before delving too deeply into "where it hurts the most: women and homosexuality" (ibid.: 44).

Nevertheless, she does attack, critically and coolly. By contrast, being a man and an outsider—to Argentina, to machismo, to homosexuality—I plod right in. I crassly follow Savigliano onto the tender terrain of women and homosexuality, and into another sore spot, as well: tango’s Black roots. I approach the sexual suspicions surrounding tango in two registers: one verbal, the other choreographic. I draw on texts written by Jorge Luis Borges and on tango-lyrics to address the whispered rumors regarding the sexuality of tango-singer Carlos Gardel. Is Gardel the epitomy of bon vivant, heterosexual masculinity? Or is he the sentimental sap who softened tango, transforming it from the manly culture of ruffians and whores into the feminine culture of romantic love and loss? I also draw on dance reconstructions and my own embodied investigations of tango-dance.
to address the widely-diverging interpretations of the gender roles performed by tango-dancing couples. Is tango a paradigm of heterosexist gender relations? Or is it a fundamentally homosocial dance, even when it is performed by the obligatory heterosexual couple?

Such questions lead me to reflect on the nature of ethnographic evidence and argumentation. Studies of tango alternately focus attention on tango’s hidden homosexual and Black roots, and on tango’s flagrant displays of bourgeois heterosexuality. How do we evaluate an interpretation that purportedly exposes what is hidden, reveals what cannot be seen, or describes what cannot be spoken? How do we read against the grain of “hyperbolic” exhibitions? I address such questions in my conclusion, in which I critically discuss Judith Butler’s psychoanalytic excavations of straight male melancholia (Butler 1995).

Tango’s Primal Scenes

I arrived at La Trastienda about 10:00 pm. Marta, Ana, and Marc were already there since they attended the práctica [tango practice session] that immediately preceded the milonga.1 Enrique had not arrived yet since he went to a different práctica a few blocks away. Ana explained that they did not like to attend prácticas together because everyone knew they were a couple, so men were hesitant to ask Ana to dance if Enrique

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1 “Milonga” could be translated as “tango dance club,” but Savigliano explains more precisely that a milonga is “a space and time when and where tango bodies get together to produce tanguidad (tanguity, tango-ness)” (Savigliano 1997). Thus, at 9:00 pm La Trastienda held a práctica but by 11:00 La Trastienda was a milonga. “Milonga” also refers to a category of tango dance and music.
was present. Of course, everyone knew she was in a couple with Enrique even when he was not around, but the inhibition on asking her to dance applied only when he was.

I reported to them about my excursion to the soccer stadium, and they reported to me about the end of the asado. After I left, fresh fruit was served, and then mate. Emilio and Gabriela left soon after I did, apparently because Emilio wanted to get home in time to see a soccer game on TV. After drinking mate, Marc accepted the offer to stay for a nap. Marta went back to our place to rest and change into tango attire before the four of them reunited to share a cab from Palermo to San Telmo.

What was most noteworthy about the práctica at La Trastienda was the abundance of young people. La Trastienda is—or at least was as of March 1996—one of the two or three tango clubs in Buenos Aires that catered to young adults: dancers from about twenty to thirty years old. Accordingly, the práctica and the milonga at La Trastienda was relatively informal. Very few of the men wore sport coats, and many of the women wore pants instead of the skirts and dresses that are all but required at more traditional clubs. Given La Trastienda’s lax dress code, it is likely that Enrique’s decision to go to a different práctica may have also been because “La Trastienda killed the tango.”

In recent years several Broadway-style tango shows—such as “Tango Argentino” and “Forever Tango”—have had successful runs on the stages of Europe, Japan, and the United States. In Buenos Aires, similarly grand-scale shows, directed at Argentine audiences—such as “Tango X 2” and “Gotán”—have had great success in downtown
theaters, while more modest shows aimed at tourists have enjoyed long runs at nightclubs such as El Viejo Almacén and Casa Blanca in the old neighborhood of San Telmo. The shows tend to be quite similar. Dancers, musicians, and singers routinely move from one show to another without significantly altering their performances. For example, the tango-dance couple Carlos and Alicia moved directly from “Forever Tango” in Los Angeles to Casa Blanca in Buenos Aires, and they danced some of the same choreographies in both venues.

It is perhaps de rigueur for all such tango shows to begin with a history lesson, educating audiences about tango’s origins. Two images inevitably dominate these primal tango scenes. One image is of a brothel in Buenos Aires. Extravagantly-dressed men dance tango with barely-dressed women. A fight breaks out over one of the women, leading two of the men to perform a choreographed knife fight. Jorge Luis Borges is probably more responsible than anyone else for this association of tango-dance with knife fighting. In Evaristo Carriego (1930), he writes, “I would say that tango and that milongas directly express something that poets, many times, have wanted to say with words: the conviction that to fight can be a fiesta” (Borges 1989: I:161), and in a poem entitled “El Tango” (1964), Borges writes “[...] Tango creates a disturbed / Unreal past that in some way is certain, / The impossible memory of having died / Fighting, on a suburban corner (Borges 1989: II:267; see also Borges 1989: II:349 and J. Taylor 1976: 281). In each case, the context makes it clear that by “fighting,” Borges means “with a knife.”

The other image that dominates tango’s primal scenes is of a street corner in
Buenos Aires, on which men dance with one another, playfully competing to display the fanciest steps. No women are present. Note that each primal scene features a competitive choreography performed by two men. In both popular and scholarly discourse such same-sex dancing is routinely chalked up to the relative scarcity of women in the early twentieth century Río de la Plata region. It is supposed that if two men danced with one another—or otherwise embraced—it was because there were no woman available (see Figure 13). José Gobello writes that “The compadritos\(^2\) launched masculine couples only when tango’s

\(^2\) I leave “compadrito” untranslated. The diminutive of “compadre,” “compadrito” is a word peculiar to Rioplatense Spanish, indicating a “popular guy” (Real Academia Española 1992) in the sense of “vulgar” or “low-class.” More often than not, the word is used with reference to tango or tangoesque manners. Gobello explains that the compadrito “is a gaucho who enters, because of the nature of his employment, into contact with urban civilization” (Gobello 1995: “El Compadrito”).
rhythm put ants in their pants and they did not find a female companion at hand” (Gobello 1995: “El Compadrito”), and Julie Taylor writes that tango-men’s “defensive attitudes toward woman are recognized to have been fostered by the low percentage of females relative to males in the foreign-born population” (J. Taylor 1976: 274 and 284; see also Chinarro 1965: 27). As the sex ratio was straightened out, this story goes, so was the dance, and the culture.

In Montevideo, Blackness takes the place of brothels and homosocial dancing in tango’s primal scene. The tourist show at La Cumparsita—a Montevideo club—begins with Afro-Uruguayan candombe in place of the knife fighting and same-sex dancing that begin comparable shows in Buenos Aires. Racial transgression, like homoeroticism, is deeply repressed in the tango scenes of Buenos Aires, and it is expressed only in a toned-down way in the European and North American tango scenes. In Europe and North America a thoroughly White public recognizes tango’s Latin tinge, but not its Black roots.

The Blondes of Buenos Aires

_Around 11:00, before the milonga got into full swing, the group Afro-Tango performed. La Trastienda usually staged some sort of low-key show in this time slot. Not precisely an amateur hour, but an opportunity for new acts to gain some valuable exposure. Afro-Tango performed a set of tango standards. What set them apart from other tango orchestras I heard in Buenos Aires was the African-style drumming that supplemented the usual bandoneon, piano, and bass. I could not help but compare their sound to Afro-Uruguayan tango performances I had heard in Montevideo. There, the_
African and candombero elements were central to the sound. By contrast, Afro-Tango struck me as typical of contemporary Argentine tango, spiced up with some Africanisms.

I was a little disappointed to see that none of the musicians appeared to be Black, but none of my companions—least of all Marc—seemed to mind that a group called “Afro-Tango” contained no Afro-Argentines. I reflected on how my location and experiences as a North American colored my response, but my slight disappointment was far outweighed by my appreciation for seeing and hearing attention called in Argentina to tango’s Black roots.

“Mary, Peggy, Betty, Julie.” Those are the Rubias de New York [New York Blondes] about whom Carlos Gardel sang in the nineteen-thirties. I would like to direct attention to Susana, Libertad, Claudia, Zulema: the Rubias de Buenos Aires. I write “rubias,” but what I really want to focus on is the fact that like many of their compatriots—and the Rubias de New York, too—they are dyed blonde. It is not a secret that Susana Giménez, Libertad Leblanc, Claudia Maradona, and Zulema Yoma de Menem, to name just a few, owe their blondeness not to nature but to chic Buenos Aires hair salons, such as those of Roberto Giordano or Miguel Romano. The Buenos Aires newspaper Clarín even observed that one of the key characteristics that made Madonna right for the role of Evita is that she and Evita share having their hair dyed blonde. In Buenos Aires there are, of course, natural blondes, but they are not nearly as numerous as the dyed blondes.

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3 Giménez and Leblanc are well-known actresses. Claudia Maradona is the wife of Diego Maradona, and Zulema Yoma de Menem is the estranged wife of Argentine President Carlos Menem.
Strolling down Cabildo Avenue in the barrio of Belgrano one sees many more blonde women than men, and this is not because there is a sex-related gene for blondness.

What do dyed-blondes have to do with tango? The answer is that in both cases the black roots are hidden. Most tango fans probably hear stories about the origins of tango that concern the Afro-Argentine, Afro-Uruguayan, and even Afro-Cuban populations. Or perhaps they are aware that musicologists recognize a certain connection between the syncopated rhythms of tango and those of habanera. Nevertheless, few tango fans could or would identify African elements in the contemporary tango worlds of Buenos Aires or San Francisco, Tokyo or Amsterdam. In Buenos Aires, there are many signs of black roots, but they are seldom paid any attention. At milongas in San Telmo, Boedo, or Almagro, one often hears people calling one another “negrita” or “negrito.” For example, one of the great tango lyricists was “El Negro” Celedonio Flores. Such references to negritude are common in tango and in the general culture of Argentina, but Blacks themselves are scarce.

George Reid Andrews confirms that throughout the nineteenth century, Argentina had a significant Black population. He recounts the four standard explanations for the subsequent disappearance of Argentina’s Blacks.

[Black men] were wiped out in the wars which wracked nineteenth-century Argentina. [...] Faced with a shortage of black men, and allegedly wishing to produce lighter-skinned children for purposes of upward social mobility, black women turned to white men as sexual partners. [...] Occupying the lowest rungs on the social and economic ladder, the city’s blacks were unable to procure decent housing, nutrition, clothing, and medical care for themselves. They therefore succumbed in greater numbers and at earlier ages than the whites. [...] The abolition of the [slave] trade in 1813 allegedly marked the end of the large-scale importation of Africans into the country. Lacking new arrivals to make up for the
losses described [above], the black community was doomed to gradual extinction (Andrews 1980: 4-5).

Andrews argues that Buenos Aires’ Black population did not decrease, either due to warfare or disease. Rather, he observes that “the disappearance of the black community was a disappearance only in the sense that the Afro-Argentines became almost invisible in the city’s ethnic mix” (Andrews 1980: 178; see also 109). Blacks did and do remain in Buenos Aires, but massive immigration from Europe throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tremendously reduced the ratio of Blacks to Whites. Andrews also observes that over time, Argentines of African descent were increasingly likely to be labeled trigueño [wheat colored] or White (Andrews 1980: 92), but he acknowledges that it is impossible to determine how much of this relabeling is due to “statistical transfers” and how much to “miscegenation.” In either case, the Europeanization of the Afro-Argentine population was intentional. Andrews quotes a 1905 magazine article in which this process is celebrated: “the race is losing its primitive color through mixing. It is turning gray. It is dissolving. It is lightening. The African tree is giving forth white Caucasian flowers” (Juan José Soiza Reilly 1905 quoted in Andrews 1980: 106). Just like the hair of the dyed blondes, many light strands were grown from dark roots: the Afro-Argentine community was whitened.

The disappearance of hundreds of thousands of Afro-Argentines should not be forgotten, and neither should the disappearance of a million or more Argentine Indians. The Venezuelan anthropologist Fernando Coronil argues that one of the reasons it was possible to disappear 30,000 people during the “Dirty War” is that Argentines were
already accustomed to living with the denial of the disappearance of the Black and Native populations. As Savigliano cautions, “Ours is a long history of forgotten Argentinean genocides inherited from abroad, a long succession of denials: dangerous denials that carry a poisonous seed and threaten to outgrow and overtake anti-racist efforts with renewed proofs of racial difference” (Savigliano 1995: 37).

The fact that Blacks are at least relatively less visible in Argentina today than they were one hundred years ago could explain the virtual absence of Blacks in the milongas and tango shows of Buenos Aires, but it does not explain the scarcity of Blacks in the milongas and tango shows in cities such as San Francisco and New York. Tango is popular in many countries, including, for example, in Japan and Turkey, but so far as I know, tango has not attained popularity in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite tango’s Black roots and its international success, the tango scene includes few Blacks.

Blacks are evident participating in the off-stage tango scene in Uruguay. At IASA, a social club in Montevideo also known as Salón Sudamérica, Marta and I attended a Saturday-night milonga. There, we met Francisco Prieto. Sr. Prieto explained to us that he is also known by another name: El Groncho de la IASA. “Groncho” is a lunfardo [Rioplatense slang] word that means Black, since it is a loose reversal of the syllables in “Negro,” the way that the lunfardo word “gotán” is a reversal of the syllables in “tango.” What called my attention about el Groncho’s dance style is that, in addition to dancing well, he dances a tango very different from that I have seen in Buenos Aires. He moves his upper body more than is usually permitted in Argentine tango or European social dances, his embrace is looser than is standard in Buenos Aires, and at times he leads an
*Ocho* [figure-eight step] with his right hand grabbing his partner’s waist (instead of from under her shoulder blades). In Montevideo we also had the privilege of participating in an asado at the Asociación Cultural y Social Uruguaya, an Afro-Uruguayan collective. There we enjoyed classic tangos, such as *La Última Curda*, sung with the accompaniment of a guitar and three drums. Again, this experience was very different from any I have had in the tango scene of Buenos Aires, including the performance of Afro-Tango. The rhythm of these tangos was, as the Uruguayans say, *candombe*. This word comes from *candombe*, and refers to Afro-Uruguayan music, dance, and religion. The singing-style was less operatic and more enunciative than is commonly found in tango porteño. At one point Marta and one of the Afro-Uruguayan musicians danced a tango. Her partner’s embrace was even looser than that of el Groncho, permitting each dancer to throw in his or her own embellishments without having to over worry about leading or following the other.

Back in Buenos Aires, Marta and I had asked several tangueros porteños for advice on where to dance tango in Montevideo. They all told us that the tango scene in Montevideo was practically nonexistent. Note that many Argentines express great admiration for Uruguayan soccer, meat, sweaters, and dulce de leche, so their lack of recognition for Uruguayan tango cannot be attributed to a generalized anti-Uruguayan attitude. Upon discovering that Montevideo is a wonderful place to hear and dance tango, I wondered why Uruguayan tango was so underappreciated in Buenos Aires and the rest of the world. Could it be that Uruguayan tango’s Black roots are too visible, like the roots of a dyed blonde who has waited too long between hair treatments? I suspect that
this is one of the reasons why many tango tourists visit Buenos Aires and not Montevideo, and why so many fall in love with Argentine tango without even knowing of the existence of Uruguayan tango. The tango of Montevideo is too African for the international tango market.

Saying that tango’s Black roots are more visible in Montevideo than in Buenos Aires, I do not mean to suggest in any way that Uruguayan tango is less developed or is more primitive than Argentine tango. As Savigliano warns, “no matter how important black participation is considered to be, positioning it at the ‘beginnings’ of tango reproduces the racist association between blacks and ‘primitiveness’” (Savigliano 1995: 33). A century of history has marked Uruguayan tango as surely as it has Argentine tango. The difference is that during most of this century, Argentine tango has been systematically whitened and Uruguayan tango has not. Argentine tango as it is practiced in Argentina and abroad has suppressed its African (and Indigenous) elements in favor of the European elements with which they used to co-exist. One also sees many fewer dyed blondes on Montevideo’s 18 de Julio Avenue than on Buenos Aires’ 9 de Julio Avenue.

“This is Tango”

After Afro-Tango finished, the milonga began in earnest. Many of the dancers who had attended the práctica left, and others, including Enrique, arrived. In fact, there are many tango dancers in Buenos Aires who dance primarily at prácticas, and who rarely if ever dance at milongas. I counted myself among their number. One of the reasons I hesitated to dance at milongas was navigational. The dance floors at milongas
in Buenos Aires are very often crowded. Dancers have to be aware not only of the music, and of their own steps and those of their partner, they also have to be on the look-out for collisions with other couples. The traffic is somewhat controlled by the rule that all the couples circle the floor in the same, counter-clockwise direction. Nevertheless, collisions do occur and blame is fixed. Experienced milongueros often complain about newcomers to the milonga-scene who do not yet know how to avoid collisions. For example, Enrique mused that he would like to have his own milonga one day, in which newcomers would be confined to a special "corral" to prevent them from interfering with the real milongueros.

Another reason I hesitated to dance at milongas is because the milonga world is intense and competitive. All manner of mistakes are more or less graciously tolerated at a práctica, but not at a milonga. The stakes are higher because someone who is seen dancing badly at a milonga may have a hard time finding other dance partners later in the evening. If a couple dances badly, it is not always clear if one member is more at fault than the other, so both partners may be blamed. I was reluctant to dance at milongas lest my partners wind up temporarily marked as bad dancers because of my relative inexperience.

The recent film Tango Bar includes a typical Argentine tango show, called "This...
is Tango" [Esto es Tango]. The show includes the obligatory dance between the two male protagonists: Ricardo Padín, played by the Puerto Rican actor Raúl Julia, and Antonio Estévez, played by the Argentine tango-singer and bandoneon-player Ruben Juárez. Ricardo is a Puerto Rican who has immigrated to Buenos Aires, where he works as a tango-lyricist and piano player. Antonio is an Argentine tango performer returning from exile following the so-called “Dirty War.” Ricardo and Antonio’s dance itself is quite brief. What is most noteworthy is the dialogue that precedes and follows the dance.

Ricardo: Don’t fool yourselves, señores. The ruffians [malevos] knew how to be friends. Friendship for a tanguero is fundamental. They were capable of dying for a friend, of putting their life on the line. Loyalty toward a friend, señores, this was what had value for a ruffian.

Antonio: Loyalty toward a friend and tango. All of that was in the heart of the ruffian, but there was also something else. They were consumed by a passion for ... broads [minas].

Ricardo: Broads.
Antonio: Broads. The compadritos liked broads so much that they practiced tango with one another. Ricardo, please ... [They dance together, first touching only foreheads, then fully embracing. The audience laughs. The two pause, cheek to cheek, and turn to the audience and smile. The audience applauds enthusiastically.]

Antonio: [To audience:] As I was saying. [Aside, to Ricardo:] Thank you.
Ricardo: You’re welcome.
Antonio: The compadritos liked broads so much that they practiced tango with one another so that later they would know how to lead dancing with women. How are you going to pick up a broad if you don’t dance tango well?

1st man in audience: What? The men danced tango with one another?
Antonio: Hold it right there, friend, I said they practiced.
2nd man in audience: But, with one another?
Antonio: But what’s wrong with that, brother? What’s wrong with what Ricardo and I were just doing?
1st man in audience: Well, I don’t know, but it seems to me ...
Ricardo: It seems to me that what the gentleman wants to know is if the tangueros were machos.
Antonio: Why don’t you just ask, che? Is it that you want to dance with me? I’m sorry, you’re not my type.
Ricardo: Listen. The broads danced with one another, too. For the taste of the forbidden. Because tango is this: the underworld, the forbidden, the sinful. To sum it up, men danced with one another thinking about broads, and broads thinking about men. The broads, ladies and gentlemen, were always essential for the tangueros. Because without broads, there is no tango. [Enthusiastic applause.]

In actual tango shows, there is very little talking beyond what is necessary to introduce the singers, musicians, and dancers. I do not believe that many Argentines would sit still for a show in which the performers presumed to lecture on the history of tango. Most Argentine men—or at least those who would go to a tango show—present themselves as experts on tango’s history. They are much more comfortable talking about what tango really was or is than listening to others talk about it. It is especially difficult to believe that an audience full of Argentine men would accept listening to a Puerto Rican lecture on the history of tango. The only tango expert more objectionable than a foreigner is a woman. Therefore, the spoken narrative of the “This is Tango” show seems contrived.

Nevertheless, the dialogue surrounding Ricardo and Antonio’s dance is worth exploring because it calls attention to dominant themes in the Argentine discourse of male-male tango dancing.

Roots of Male Desire

Enrique, Marc, and I take seats at a table near the dance floor. Marta and Ana

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5 There are extremely few women who are members of Argentina’s National Academy of Tango. Marta is one of them, and I have witnessed several occasions on which she was presented to an Argentine man as the author of a book about tango. Almost invariably, the man would receive this information as an invitation to lecture Marta about tango history.
are seated at a different table nearby. The purpose of this arrangement is to increase Marta and Ana’s chances of being asked to dance. Most of the milongueros present know that Marta and I are a couple, and all of them know that Ana and Enrique are, but because we are not sitting together as couples, our married states can be partially overlooked.

Marc rarely misses a dance, so as soon as a set of tangos begins, he is up and dancing with a woman he spotted across the dance floor. Ana and Marta, as often happens, are caught up in a conversation with one another, which prevents any men from catching their attention. Enrique and I begin to chat, but instead of looking me in the eye, he is staring intently just over my left shoulder even as we engage in a fairly intense discussion of how the casually-dressed crowd at La Trastienda are killing the tango. I know that Enrique is trying to catch a woman’s eye, so that he can cabecear her. Cabeceo [nodding the head] is how milongueros agree to dance with one another. A man rarely walks up to a woman’s table to ask her with words to dance. Instead, the two nod to one another and then meet on the dance floor.

Enrique’s first nod is barely perceptible. It is up to the woman to whom he is barely nodding to decide whether or not to notice it. She can simply turn her gaze in another direction, or she can return his slight nod with one of her own. Ordinarily, Enrique will then deepen his nod and begin to rise from his chair, and she will respond in kind, nodding fully to him and rising from her chair. Tonight the cabeceo is not working as it should. Enrique is nodding repeatedly, and is half in and half out of his chair, so I turn to see who it is he is asking to dance. She is a young Japanese woman, part of a
delegation of about a dozen tango tourists from Japan. She is smiling at Enrique, but she is not nodding, nor is she rising from her chair. Perhaps she thinks Enrique is bowing. I tell Enrique I don’t think she is familiar with the cabeceo. He replies, “She came here to learn tango milonguero. This is how we milongueros do it.” Enrique finally stands up fully and makes signals with his hands to indicate “me” and “you,” all the while nodding his head up and down. She nods her “yes” in return, but she makes no move to rise from her chair and meet him on the dance floor. By now Enrique has moved to the edge of the dance floor, and he is motioning to her with his hands to join him there. She, too, points to the dance floor and she continues nodding “yes,” but she is clearly waiting for him to come to escort her to the dance floor before she will rise from her seat. Enrique has gone as far as he will go. At last, an older Japanese man at her table notices the miscommunication. He says something to her and she finally gets up and walks over to where Enrique is waiting. By now there is less than one full song left in the set. Later Enrique would explain that she danced well and he would have liked to have had the full set to dance with her, but it was more important to teach her the rudiments of the cabeceo.

Did tango begin as a predominantly male-male dance? Borges is one of many to argue that in tango’s early years, “on street corners, pairs of men danced it, because the neighborhood women did not want to participate in a brothel dance” (Borges 1989 I: 160). The question, then, is whether tango was primarily danced by men on street corners, or if, as Antonio in Tango Bar says, “The compadritos liked broads so much that
they practiced tango with one another so that later they would know how to lead dancing with women”? What if a man practiced tango with other men one hour for every five minutes he danced with a woman? Is it a question of how much time he spent practicing tango with other men and how much time dancing with women, or is it a question of his motives for dancing with men? Or, as Ricardo in Tango Bar asserts, is it a question of whether or not while dancing with other men, a man is “thinking about broads”?

José Gobello is one of the most adamant defenders of tango’s heterosexual stability, arguing that “from its earliest days, tango was danced by women.” Gobello interprets the Bates brothers’ comment that a certain club in San Telmo “was one of the first places where tango was danced among just men” (Bates and Bates 1936: 36, emphasis in the original) to mean that male-male dancing—at least in clubs—was a secondary development, and that tango was originally danced by heterosexual couples (Gobello 1995: “El Compadrito”). Gobello adds that “In any case, we are dealing with an exception, because if there was one thing the compadrito did not have even a hint of it was misogyny.” Horacio Salas makes the same argument (Salas 1986: 38), but Savigliano observes that he thereby “equates misogyny with the lack of interest in women and not with the shape and nature of that interest” (Savigliano 1995: 244-245, n. 5). The absence of misogyny obviously does not confirm a man as straight any more than the presence of misogyny confirms him as gay. Archetti follows Gobello in asserting that “it has been erroneously assumed that originally the tango was [...] mostly danced by male couples,” adding that “the importance of the ‘dancing academies’ as meeting places for men and ‘waitresses’ or for couples cannot be overlooked” (Archetti 1994d: 100). As Ricardo in
Tango Bar asserts, “without broads, there is no tango.”

Jorge Salessi presents the strongest version of the argument that tango was originally a predominantly homoerotic, male-male dance. He observes that some of the prostitutes on whom Gobello and others rely to constitute early tango-dance as heterosexual were men in drag, and that even those prostitutes who were women were categorized by contemporary hygienists as “masculine” (Salessi 1997: 161). I would argue that dancing tango itself made any woman seem masculine, since the tango couple is composed of two masculine subjects, even if one—or both—of them happens to be a woman. Felix Weingartner wrote in the nineteen-twenties, “The majority of women who dance tango do so quite badly, while the men are almost all excellent dancers” (quoted by Tomás de Lara 1961 quoted in J. Taylor 1976: 289), and Julie Taylor reports being told by an informant in the nineteen-sixties that “It was difficult to find women who danced well. I practiced with my sisters and my cousins but the girls did it badly” (J. Taylor 1976: 289). I believe women are thought to dance tango badly because tango-dance retains something of the men-only sparring evident in its primal scenes: men trading fancy figures or dancerly swipes of the blade. Salessi—drawing on statements by Salas and others—argues that “in its stage of being prohibited music, tango has a choreography in general executed by pairs of men” (Salessi 1991: 47). Salessi merges this argument with Gobello’s observation that “tango is a lascivious dance [...] and the total representation is an erotic simulacrum” (Gobello quoted in Salessi 1991: 47) to conclude that tango is homoerotic. According to Martínez Estrada, also, tango “is the sexual act itself, ‘devoid of fiction, no innocence, without neurosis’” (Martínez Estrada quoted in Savigliano 1995:
43). Note that Gobello denies that tango was ever much danced by men with men, and that when he and Martínez Estrada assert that tango-dance simulates the sexual act, it is clear that they mean the heterosexual act. Salessi’s argument, though, is that repressed or forbidden homoeroticism at least adds to the titillation that even straight couples find in the tango-dance.

I venture that the original tango, repeatedly described by the historians of Argentine music as a simulation or a choreographic representation of sexual intercourse, is a cultural expression with significant homoerotic and homosexual connotations that today are deeply embedded in the imagined national identity of the large Argentine middle class (Salessi 1997: 140).

As Ricardo in *Tango Bar* observes, “The broads danced with one another, too. For the taste of the forbidden. Because tango is this: the underworld, the forbidden, the sinful.”

Contemporary tango-dance continues to be marked by forbidden homoeroticism. The contemporary tango couple dances its way back and forth, over the fortified and leaky border separating the straight and the gay. After decades of traveling across marital, class, and national boundaries, it is possibly tango’s nightly trip across this sexual boundary that continues to be tango’s dangerous and forbidden passion.

Why is This Man Smiling?

*Throughout the evening there are alternating sets of tango, milonga [fast-paced tango], tango-vals [tango-waltz], and, occasionally, non-tango music. The non-tango sets include “tropical music”—cumbia, salsa, and marcha—and yanqui-style swing and rock’n’roll. The club is still too crowded for me to dance tango, milonga, or tango-vals, so I take advantage of the tropical and yanqui sets to get in some dancing. Marta and I*
are dancing to a rock 'n' roll set when Julio arrives, following his show at the nearby Casa Blanca. I notice Julio and try to catch his eye, but he is focused on Ricardo, a professional rival. With the critical and popular success of his new show, Ricardo has become one of the most successful of the new generation of tango-dance professionals, so Julio is not alone in centering his attention on him.

Ricardo is dancing with a young, vaguely butch woman, who is not his professional tango-dance partner. The rumor of a few weeks ago has been confirmed: Ricardo and his partner have separated as a romantic couple, though they continue to perform together on stage. In the meantime, Ricardo has been seen at several milongas with the woman with whom he is now dancing. She and Ricardo do not dance tango together, but they dance all of the tropical sets with one another. During the tango sets she sits at Ricardo's table along with Ricardo's friend Juancho. Juancho is retired as a professional soccer player and now apparently works for Ricardo. The rumors regarding the duties he performs for Ricardo range from body guard to drug-procurer to sex-partner.

Julio walks directly onto the dance floor and joins Ricardo and the butch-looking woman. The three dance together, but it seems clear that Julio and Ricardo are dancing more with one another than either is dancing with her. For much of the dance, each man uses his right hand to hold one of her hands. The men's left hands are raised at the same angle and the two execute steps in unison. The effect is heightened by the fact that they are wearing identical outfits: baggy off-white linen pants and white shirts, with black belts and shoes. I have the suspicion the outfits are not a coincidence. Though they have
been dancing together, they still have not formally greeted one another, so as the set ends, Julio and Ricardo embrace briefly and kiss one another on the cheek. The two walk back to Ricardo’s table side by side, with the woman following behind.

Carlos Gardel is far and away the most important tango figure. Writing in 1976, Taylor observed, “Gardel’s smiling face is an integral part of the Argentine scene, beaming down at the public from the place of honor in the front of buses and taxis given to decals of his portrait” (J. Taylor 1976: 285; see Figure 14). Despite recent claims that Maradona’s image has displaced Gardel’s from at least some Buenos Aires buses
(Libertad Berkoweiz in Moreno Chá 1995: 64), Gardel remains on the center stage of the Argentine popular imagination, even if nowadays he has to share that stage with Eva Perón and Diego Maradona. As the popular expression goes, “cada día canta mejor” [he sings better every day], which among other things means that his fame and importance have not diminished since his death in 1935, but grow with time.

Gardel and his smile are almost invariably described as enigmatic. Gobello argues that Gardel’s famous smile was a mask that hid more than it revealed.

[S]urely the smiling and superior Gardel, bon vivant and somewhat cynical, was nothing but the mask of an artist, the mask of a pain, of an anguish that came from far away, that came from his own social condition, or from something deeper still, from the social solidarity that from his subconscious put that choke in his throat that even a yanqui could see, when here [in Argentina], they saw only, perhaps, his toothpaste smile (Gobello 1995: “Otra Visión de Gardel”).

Gobello suggests that despite the ubiquity of Gardel’s smiling image, Argentines do not usually see beyond the superficial grin. In fact, scholars in Argentina—and Uruguay—endlessly debate the date and place of Gardel’s birth, his popularity and his politics, and the circumstances of his death. Was he born in Toulouse, France or in Tacuarembó, Uruguay? On 10 or 11 December 1890? Or was it 1887? Was his popularity in Argentina declining at the time of his death? Did he join the oligarchy in celebrating the fall of Hipólito Yrigoyen in 1930? Was his death really an accident? These are just some of the well-known debates that I will not enter. Norberto Chab mentions some other Gardelian themes that are debated not so openly: “His loves, his relation with his mother, his virility, his presumed juvenile delinquency, his heritage, his fortune, his descendants, they are the recurring themes that are raised to darken his career” (Chab 1995: 37).
Taylor tactfully alludes to some of the same rumors, writing, "Nor could any account, imaginary or real, of his talent, generosity, machismo, or filial devotion ever be effectively disproven" (J. Taylor 1976: 286). Chab with his mention of "virility" and Taylor with her mention of "machismo" are each hinting at a forbidden but ubiquitous debate. As Ricardo in *Tango Bar* observes, "It seems to me that what the gentleman wants to know is if the tangueros were machos," or, in this case, if the tanguero par excellence was straight.

That the debate about Gardel’s sexuality is forbidden is evidenced by the fact that Argentina’s National Academy of Tango expelled a member for speaking about Gardel’s rumored homosexuality in public. Conducting fieldwork in the tango scenes in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, I found that such rumors were easy to come by in casual, not-for-attribution conversations. A professional tango dancer in Montevideo acknowledged that the rumors were rather common and that he could see the merit of the argument that Gardel was gay. His own thoughtful theory was that Gardel’s apparent lack of interest in women was a sign not of homosexuality, but of asexuality. A more irreverent tango-dance teacher in Buenos Aires jokingly suggested that Gardel was a natural-born castrato. (The film *Farinelli* was showing in Buenos Aires theaters at the time). For evidence he called attention to Gardel’s chubbiness and his ability to hit high notes.

The debate about Gardel’s sexuality is complicated by the fact that many clues that can be read to mark a man as manly can also be read to mark him as a *marica* [fag]. Gardel’s suspect sexuality can be attributed to his apparent non-interest in women, or that same apparent non-interest can mark Gardel as a man’s man, who did not waste time on feminine "things." As Savigliano observes, "Any interest in either love or sex (with a
woman) would corrupt the macho picture” (Savigliano 1995: 43). It may appear paradoxical that Gardel’s rumored homosexuality can be attributed to his role as the first hero of romantic tango: the man most responsible for introducing interest in heterosexual love into tango. By contrast, the ruffianesque tango that preceded romantic tango was robust and manly. Gardel’s romantic role also marks him as a lady’s man, who proved his manliness by turning tango into a tool of seduction.

Borges explores such paradoxes of Argentine masculinity in his story “La Intrusa” [The (Female) Intruder]. Commenting on the story, Borges observes that “Really there are only two characters—the two brothers,” Cristián and Eduardo (Borges 1970: 278). Juliana—the intrusa of the title—is, significantly, a non-character, “a thing” (Borges 1989: II:404). Cristián brings Juliana to the home Eduardo and he share. When Eduardo also falls in love with her, the neighbors happily anticipate the fight to come. Instead, Cristián arranges to leave Juliana and Eduardo at home together, and before departing, he says to his brother, “There you have Juliana: if you want her, use her” (ibid.: 404). For a while the brothers share Juliana, but they find that they cannot contain their latent rivalry. “In the hard suburb, a man did not say, nor was it said, that a woman could matter to him, beyond desire and possession, but the two were in love. This, in some way, humiliated them” (ibid.: 404). The obvious reading is that “the two were in love with Juliana,” but it is quite possible to read the line as “the two were in love with each other.” What each brother objects to may be that Juliana has another lover, or it may be that his brother has another lover. It is also possible to attribute their humiliation to being in love with a woman or to being in love with each other. There is evidence that what bothers the
brothers is sharing each other, not sharing Juliana. At one point in the story, they sell her
to a far-off brothel, so that they can return to “their old life of men among men” (ibid.: 405), but that plan fails when Cristián finds Eduardo at the brothel, “waiting his turn” to be with Juliana. Neither brother minds sharing Juliana with other clients at the brothel, but each is upset to find his brother among those clients.

Homoerotic allusions mount as Borges explains that “the woman attended to the
two with bestial submission” (ibid.: 405). Bestiality is not sodomy, but as Suárez-Orozco observes, the two are sometimes mingled in the discourse of Argentine sexual insults (Suárez-Orozco 1982: 22-23). Eventually, Cristián kills her, explaining to Eduardo, “She will no longer do any damage” (Borges 1989: II:406). The story ends with the brothers embracing, “almost crying. Now another link bound them: the woman sadly sacrificed and the obligation to forget her” (ibid.: 406). Daniel Balderston concludes that “as the story makes clear, woman here is the token that allows the functioning of homosexual desire, even though—in the perverse world of the story—that desire requires the death of the woman” (Balderston 1995: 35). Borges, commenting on the story, explains it came out of a conversation in the late nineteen-twenties with his friend Nicolás Paredes.

Commenting on the decadence of tango lyrics, which even then went in for “loud self-pity” among sentimental compadritos betrayed by their wenches, Paredes remarked dryly, “Any man who thinks five minutes straight about a woman is no man—he’s a queer [marica].” Love among such people was obviously ruled out; I knew that their real passion would be friendship (Borges 1970: 278; see also Borges 1989 II:414-415 and Savigliano 1995: 45).

Borges does not need to specify that Gardel was one of the foremost “sentimental compadritos,” who sang tango lyrics that went in for “loud self-pity.” The song that in
1917 launched both the romantic tango-canción genre and Gardel’s career was *Mi Noche Triste* [My Sad Night], with lyrics by Pascual Contursi and music by Samuel Castriota

(Romano 1990: 53-54).

_Percanta que me amuraste_  
en lo mejor de mi vida  
dejándome el alma herida  
y espina en el corazón.  
[...]
_Para mi ya no hay consuelo_  
y por eso me encurdelo  
pa' olvidarme de tu amor._

Broad, you who abandoned me  
at the height of my life  
leaving my soul wounded  
and a thorn in my heart.  
[...]
_For me there is no longer comfort_  
and so I get drunk  
in order to forget your love

In 1928, just at the time of Borges’ conversation with Paredes, Gardel recorded _Malevaje_ [Gang of Ruffians], with lyrics by Enrique Discépolo and music by Juan de D. Filiberto

(Romano 1990: 151-152).

_No me has dejao ni el pucho en_  
la oreja  
de aquel pasao malevo y feroz.  
_Ya no me falta pa’ completar_  
mas que ir a misa e hincarme a  
rezar ...  
_Ayer, de miedo a matar_  
en vez de pelear  
me puse a correr ...  
_Me vi a la sombra o finao,_  
pensé en no verte y temlé._

_You have not left me even the cigarette_  
behind my ear  
from that ruffian and ferocious past.  
Now I don’t lack anything to complete  
the picture  
but to go to church and get down on my  
knees to pray ...  
_Yesterday, afraid to kill_  
instead of fighting  
I ran away ...  
_I saw myself imprisoned or dead,_  
_I thought of not seeing you and I_  
trembled.  
_If I who never went soft_  
anguished at night  
I shut myself in to cry._

The character Gardel performs in _Malevaje_ confirms that the sentimental compadrito cannot coexist with the malevo of yore. The sentimental obsession with a woman has made the compadrito, like the tango, lose his “malevo and ferocious past.” Now he flees
from the fight that epitomized the earlier tango culture, because he is afraid to kill the 
other man. The price to recover the malevo past he has lost is to give up seeing the 
woman, but neither he nor his new tango can pay it. They have gone soft, turned inward, 
and taken to crying.

The malevo, who shuns all things female, and the sentimental compadrito, who 
suffers women obsessively, are both sexual suspects. Gardel, the transitional figure, never 
quite lost his malevo edge despite his status as a romantic icon. In films and songs he 
performed the role of the sentimental compadrito but he was never caught off-stage pining 
away for any woman. Is his sexuality suspect because he remained immersed in the all-
male malevo world? Or is it suspect because he left that world for the softer, more 
feminine world that succeeded it? Are Argentines fascinated by Gardel because his life 
affords subversive readings, or despite such readings, or because his life affords different 
readings by different audiences? Does the almost obligatory speculation about the 
homosexuality of any “sex symbol” indicate that being queer makes one seem sexy? Or, 
does it indicate that being sexy makes one seem queer? Or, is there pleasure to be derived 
from the delicately maintained ambiguity regarding a sex symbol’s true desire?

Phallic Displays

Following the tropical set, Enrique, Marc, and I are back at our table. Enrique is 
explaining to us foreigners how Gardel killed tango. I knew the story in another version 
from Marta’s book, but I had never before heard it directly from a milonguero.

Enrique’s version is that before Gardel the attention had been on the dancers, not the
singers. Most tangos did not even have lyrics, and if they did, that did not stop people from dancing. In fact, in homes, like that of Enrique and Ana, milongueros still dance to tangos that are sung. They do not let lyrics interfere with their dancerly designs. The repertoire of tangos that are played at milongas, however, includes only two or three sung-tangos. Enrique draws on his Trotskyite background to argue that pre-Gardel, tango was a true populist activity: the people danced. Gardel and the cult of the singer turned tango into a bourgeois non-activity, in which the masses sat passively listening, instead of doing.

Enrique's discourse is interrupted when one of the club's organizers takes the floor and announces that there is going to be an exhibition of "five authentic milongueros." It seems the club has invited the older men to demonstrate salon-style tango to the mostly youthful crowd. In fact ten dancers, not five, take the floor: five men in their sixties or seventies with their partners, who are women ranging from about eighteen to twenty-five years of age. As the couples dance. Enrique and other milongueros in the audience shout out words of encouragement and praise to the men on the dance floor.

As the dancers return to their tables, one of the men passes by where we are sitting; his partner has gone off in another direction. Enrique knows the man and compliments him on his dancing. Instead of accepting the compliment, the dancer responds, "Did you see the nena [chick] I was dancing with? Did you see her?" We did see the nena in question and she did not strike any of us as a particularly good dancer, but she was pretty and young—only about twenty years old—and she was wearing a short
skirt and blouse that left her belly-button exposed. Clearly, the man was more proud of having danced with her than he was of having danced well.

The primary relation in tango is not between the heterosexual dance partners, but is between the man who dances with a woman and the other men who watch. I read the milonguero’s “Did you see the nena I was dancing with?” as evidence of a homosocial relationship between the two men. Here, I follow Sedgwick in using “homosocial” to mark a heterosexual formation (Sedgwick 1985). In tango, however, I find that homosocial desire is not expressed through the exchange of women—as Sedgwick theorizes in her reading of English literature—but that it is expressed through the display of women. As Savigliano argues, “Tangos are male because their intimate confessions are mediated through the exposure of female bodies” (Savigliano 1995: 61, my emphasis). It is commonly asserted that “the man’s role in dancing tango is to make the woman look good.” In 1931 Waldo Frank wrote that “Man is the creator of the tango dance because he conceives it on the woman’s body” (Frank 1969: 350). In the contemporary Buenos Aires milonga circuit especially—more than in European or North American tango—there is a minimalist style of leading. The man’s goal is apparently to lead the woman to perform very flashy figures while he himself moves as little as possible. Many men explain that it is an effeminate vanity in a man to put too much effort into his own steps. His job is to shuffle along inconspicuously, moving only as much as is necessary to stay in the proper position relative to the woman.

Here, I find Susan Foster’s reading of gender relations in classical European ballet
useful. Like the male and female dancers in tango, the male and female dancers in ballet, according to Foster, “do not enjoy equal visibility.”

She, like a divining rod, trembling, erect, responsive, which he handles, also channels the energy of all the eyes focused upon her, yet even as she commands the audience’s gaze, she achieves no tangible or enduring identity. Her personhood is eclipsed by the attention she receives, by the need for her to dance in front of everyone. Just as he conveys her, she conveys desire. She exists as a demonstration of that which is desired but is not real. Her body flames the charged wantings of so many eyes, yet like a flame it has no substance. She is, in a word, the phallus, and he embodies the forces that pursue, guide, and manipulate it” (Foster 1996: 2-3).

Similarly, in tango-dance, the woman is the focus of visual attention. Hers, not the man’s, is the body that is exposed and displayed. In the discourse about the dance, however, “women are, so to speak, the exhibited signifiers” (Savigliano 1995: 46). The milonga public watches the woman in order to talk about man. In Lacanian terms, the man who leads in tango has the phallus while the female who follows is the phallus. He is a subject of desire and she, an object. This is why five milongueros were announced, even though there were ten dancers. It is customary in Buenos Aires to give a man most, if not all, the credit for a tango performance. The tango-dancing woman—again, in Lacanian terms—does not exist, except as a symptom of the tango-dancing man. She is not herself a desiring subject, but is the phallic display of his desire (Lacan 1985: 84 and 48).

When Dancing is Not

As the general dancing resumes, Enrique continues to direct my attention to dancers—both male and female—whom he admires. I venture to suggest that a certain woman dances well. I know her from her classes, in which she teaches both men and
women to lead. It turns out that Enrique is well aware of her teaching and is not happy about it. He explains to me that she used to be a very good dancer, back when she had a stable partner. Now, he continues, she teaches and dances the man’s part and as a result she is ruined as a follower. Enrique gestures toward her and her partner and says, "You can see, she’s too heavy. She’s distracted thinking about what she would lead instead of concentrating on what he is leading." I tried in vain to see what Enrique could see in her dancing, including her thoughts, but I could not help but read his thoughts instead. I presumed to assume that he resented that she danced the man’s part and, what’s worse, that she taught other women—and men—how to do so, too.

I took several classes with Enrique and Ana, so I know that as a rule Enrique teaches the man’s part while Ana teaches the woman’s. If Ana is busy teaching a step to a woman, Enrique does "dance" the woman’s part, but with a bare minimum of showmanship. Most of the other male tango teachers with whom I took classes put more effort into their performances of the woman’s role than did Enrique.

Fieldwork in the contemporary Buenos Aires tango scene reveals that many men continue to spend much of their time on the dance floor in the arms of other men despite the availability of female partners. Taylor reports that “in 1966 a porteño told me that he as a boy in the 1940s had learned tango when he and a group of boys became interested in the subject together. They all learned by practicing with each other” (J. Taylor 1976: 289). Savigliano reports hearing similar stories thirty years later. Older milongueros, in particular, recount that they began by learning the woman’s part exclusively for a couple
of years, typically with an older relative or neighbor dancing the part of the man
(Savigliano, personal communication, 1996). To this day, most tango-dance instructors
are men, and they routinely give private classes to other men. In one extreme case, Carlos
Copello, a professional male dancer, reported giving private classes to a male student from
Japan four hours a day, seven days a week, for a month. Copello would demonstrate a
new step by performing the man’s role with the student performing the woman’s. Then
the student would practice the new step performing the man’s role with Copello
performing the woman’s. In the evenings, the two went to the teacher’s stage show and
then to dance clubs, where Copello danced with women, but the student only watched.
The student returned to Japan having danced over a hundred hours with his male
instructor, and not once with an Argentine woman. Copello during that month spent more
time dancing with the Japanese man and other male students than he spent dancing with
women, including his stage-tango partner.

Several teachers reported that Argentine, Japanese, and European men readily
learn by dancing with their male teachers, but that it is necessary to provide a female
partner when teaching a North American male student. My own experience was mixed.
An older (sixty-ish) male tango instructor—Pedro Monteleone—had his daughter perform
the woman’s role in his classes with me. He did not have her present for classes with male
Argentine students. In private lessons I took with two younger (forty-ish) male tango
instructors—Carlos Rivarola and Carlos Copello—there was no woman present. Copello,
however, was one of those who told me he usually did hire a female assistant for teaching
North Americans. He explained that he saw me as an exception since I was a Boca fan
and we had gone to the cancha [soccer stadium] together. I noticed that Rivarola danced
the woman’s role with great flare and, apparently, gusto, but when I complimented him, or
asked how he learned to dance the woman’s role so well, he responded with false
modesty, denying that he in fact danced the woman’s role, or that he had actually ever
learned how to do so. Similarly, Copello, despite executing particularly flashy figure
eights, claimed, “I don’t really dance the woman’s part; it is just for teaching.” Like other
men, he simultaneously showed off with his feet and downplayed with words his ability to
dance the woman’s part.

As a rule, Argentine men do not refer to what they do with other men as
“dancing.” Just like Antonio in Tango Bar, they insist on the word “practicing” to label
spins around the dance floor in the arms of another man.

1st man in audience: What? The men danced tango with one another?
Antonio: Hold it right there, friend, I said they practiced.

I put this observation to the test in a group class taught by Monteleone. Since there were
many more men than women in class that day, Monteleone assigned me and an Argentine
man to practice the tango-walk with one another. The man, who is a physician, told me
that he was uncomfortable dancing with another man. I do not know if my being a North
American contributed to his discomfort, or if his discomfort meant that he was
“americanized”—a trait not unusual among thirty-something doctors in Buenos Aires.

Falling back on what I had heard from other Argentines, I assured him that we were not
“dancing,” we were “practicing.” He appeared to accept this distinction with genuine
relief.
Argentine men routinely teach one another how to dance in tango dance classes, and they often practice and even show-off dancing together in tango prácticas, but in the milongas of Buenos Aires and Montevideo men never dance together. A few women, too, practice with one another in tango prácticas, but they are often met with disapproval. The common explanation is that a man must learn the woman’s part in order to lead a woman, but that a woman does not have to learn the man’s part to follow a man. Many men even warn that once a woman has learned to lead, she is ruined as a follower. In any case, her chances to dance as a follower are diminished. If a woman in a práctica dances the man’s role with another woman her chances of being asked to dance by any of the men who are present decreases. The stigma of having danced the man’s part may even follow her from the práctica to the milonga, where she is still less likely to be asked to dance, and if she does dance, her dancing of the woman’s role is likely to be judged harshly and to be held up as an example of the damage done by dancing the man’s role. Conversely, a man who dances the woman’s part at a práctica is not stigmatized in any way. Occasionally, at prácticas or very informal milongas, or near the end of the evening, a couple will play at inverting their roles—the woman leading the man—but this arrangement rarely lasts for an entire song, and it is always accompanied by joking on the part of the man who is dancing or on the part of other men who are witnessing the spectacle. In sum, it has been commonplace for men to dance with one another in tango’s primal scenes and in its contemporary practice, but in one way or another, this same-sex dancing is dismissed as incidental to the heterosexual dance. Men are said to dance with other men only because no women are available, in order to learn how to dance with women, or as a “passing”
Choreographies of Gender

Early in the evening I had been asked to dance by Rosita, whom I knew because she is an anthropologist who went to school with Marta. I had bowed out on navigational grounds, but she vowed to ask me again when the dance floor cleared. Some time after one in the morning, the crowd on the dance floor began to thin out and Rosita returned to where I was then sitting with Marta and Ana, since Enrique and Marc where already on the floor. I tried to explain to Rosita that beyond my navigational problems, I was simply not a very good tango-dancer and that I did not want to be responsible for making her look bad, but she was persistent. She asked me if I was there only to observe, or if George Marcus taught me that it was important to participate, too?

The first dance in the set did not go as badly as I had feared, but it was far from smooth. In particular, I felt a lack of energy in the dance. There is a pause in the dancing that comes as one song ends and another begins. Couples stand chatting with one another for up to half a minute into the new song, familiarizing themselves with its rhythms before resuming their dance. I used this break to apologize to Rosita for not being a better dancer. She told me not to apologize, but to lead more firmly. I tried to follow her advice when we resumed dancing and it went much better. Comparing dancing with her to dancing with Marta, I noticed that I had to lead Rosita much more than Marta. With Marta, I had learned to mark the beginning of an ocho, but after that, she was on her own. She decided how quickly or slowly to execute the step. With Rosita I
learned that it was up to me to both initiate and mark the pace of her step.

During subsequent breaks in the dancing I asked Rosita where she learned to
dance, and she said she was most influenced by Carmona, who taught tango at a place
on Calle Moreno. Later, I would meet other students of Carmona at prácticas around
the city, and I discovered that Rosita’s style was consistent with theirs. I never became a
forceful leader, but I did learn to recognize some of the signs that I should be less
tentative in my marks, so I was able to adjust—within my limits—to dancing with other
women who danced the same style as Rosita.

The continuing ambiguity of tanguero sexuality is evident in the tango dance.

Dance reconstructions indicate that the embrace in early, homosocial tango was very loose
and that the relationship between “leading” and “following” was not fixed. The dancers
only nominally “led” and “followed” one another. In European social dance, the embrace
was and is more rigid than in early tango, and the couple is more consistently sexually
dimorphic, composed of a man who leads and a woman who follows. Savigliano
documents the disciplinization of tango by social dance masters in England and France
(Savigliano 1995: 95-100). European dance masters endeavored to take a couple-dance
that was neither bourgeois nor heterosexual and to make it conform to the established
mechanics of European, bourgeois, heterosexist social dance, in which a dominant man
leads and a docile woman follows. The English dance masters were both more and less
successful in this endeavor than their continental counterparts. They were more successful
because they created a dance that conforms completely to heterosexist, European social
dance conventions. They were less successful because the dance they created is hardly recognizable as tango. Outside of the highly-disciplined, enclosed world of “Ballroom Dancing,” the tango created by English dance masters is not considered tango. As Savigliano observes, in Japan and the United States, Ballroom Tango and Tango Argentino are two distinct dances, practiced by two nearly distinct communities. In the meantime, tango Argentino is itself increasingly divided among stage-oriented and salon-oriented dance masters (Marta Savigliano, personal communication, 1996).

Salon-oriented tango-dance in Argentina displays elements of both its homosocial roots and its European disciplinization. A common saying in the Buenos Aires tango-scene expresses the relationship of leader and follower as “el hombre propone y la mujer dispone” [the man proposes and the woman decides]. Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, an early critic of tango, chose to attack tango-dance precisely because the man’s role is so weak.

It is a humiliating dance for women, having given themselves to a man who does not lead them, who does not require them to keep alert to his whims nor to give up her will. It is humiliating in that the man is as passive as she is (Martínez Estrada 1933 quoted in Savigliano 1995: 44).

This view of tango-dance is a long way from the practice Taylor found in her excursions in the Buenos Aires tango-scene. She argues:

the overwhelming choreographic statement of the central theme of the dance [is] the relationship of man and woman seen as an encounter between the active, powerful, and completely dominant male and the passive, docile, and completely submissive female (J. Taylor 1976: 281; see also J. Taylor 1992: 381).

I can confirm that there are men and women in Buenos Aires who dance tango as Taylor describes it, but theirs is by no means the only tango-dance style. In my estimation, many if not most couples in Buenos Aires continue to dance a tango in which neither male
dominance nor female submission is complete.

There is, in fact a great deal of variation within the Buenos Aires dance scene. Some of the most obvious differences include whether the dancers dance with their heads facing the same direction or in opposite directions, and whether a woman places her left hand lightly on her partner’s right forearm or drapes her left arm over his right shoulder. Older milongueros report that those differences and many more used to correspond with particular neighborhoods. They claim that they could easily tell what neighborhood a partner was from by the way he or she danced. Nowadays, milongueros report, tango-dance styles are not associated with neighborhoods so much as with teachers. They claim that now they can often tell what teacher a partner has studied with by the way he or she embraces and dances. My own impression—from taking classes and attending prácticas with several tango instructors around Buenos Aires, and from dancing with women who learned with instructors I never met—is that the heterosexualized dance style corresponds with the tango-dance taught by Zoraida at La Ideal and by Carmona on Calle Moreno. The tango dance taught by Bocha at the Commercial Workers’ Unión, by Juan Carlos at an Unidad Básica near Medrano and Córdoba, or by Gustavo Naveira at Cochabamba in San Telmo is quite different. One difference is that a woman taught by Zoraida or Carmona will not perform dancing embellishments unless her partner specifically calls for her to do so, while a woman taught by Bocha or Juan Carlos will decide for herself, when the opportunity arises, whether or not to impose her improvisations on the dance. In the first case, the man decides what his partner will and will not do. In this tango-dance style, a good male dancer marks his decisions clearly and somewhat forcefully, while a good
female dancer understands and performs her partner’s marks. In the second case, the man proposes, but the woman decides what she will and will not do. In this tango-dance style a good male dancer adjusts his marks in response to his partner’s decisions, while a good female dancer improvises her steps in a responsible and productive way.

Differences between the two broad styles I have been describing may also have much to do with a dancer’s experience. A woman generally learns how to follow submissively a man’s mark before she learns how to improvise within and around that mark, and a man generally learns how to mark a step for his partner before he learns how to respond to her improvisations. Savigliano catalogues many of the non-submissive tactics available to experienced female tango-dancers.

Milonguitas could challenge their male partners with the thrust and energy invested in the walks; manipulate their axis of balance by changing the distance between the bodies, the points of contact, and the strength of the embrace; play with diverse qualities of groundness in their steps; modify the “front” given to their partners, choosing to “face” them in misaligned angles of torso and hips; disrupt the cadence sought by their partners by not converting their trampling cortes at the proper musical time (thus imposing a need for skillful syncopation in order to keep up with the music); and add unexpectedly fancy ornamenti ons (adornos) of their own to the figures “marked” by their partners (modifying the height to which a leg should be raised in order to complete a certain figure, adding small stomplings in between each step, lacing one leg around the back or front of the other before engaging in a conversion), complicating the timing of the conversions, creating anxiety, and even causing their male partners to modify their plans for upcoming steps (Savigliano 1995: 60).

Clearly, few if any of these tactics are available to the beginning dancer—at least not intentionally—nor are they available to students of the modern, more heterosexist style of tango-dance. The tactics Savigliano catalogues are, however, common in both older and more expert forms of tango-dance, which is not marked by complete dominance and
submission. In these forms of tango-dance the couple remains composed of two subjects who evoke tango's primal scenes of men competing with steps or knives.

Playing Whorehouse

Almost all of the few dancers who remain on the floor at 3:00am are actual or aspiring tango professionals. They are the ones who either do not have to be at work early tomorrow or who value dancing tango above being alert Monday morning. A woman dressed like Madonna in "Desperately Seeking Susan" is desperately seeking Julio for a dance. A couple of times during the evening Julio has sought to escape her by coming to sit with me and talk about the game. Each time, she followed him from the dance floor—where he just finished dancing with someone else—to my table. She dispensed with the subtleties of the cabeceo and came right out and urged Julio to dance. He explained that he could not dance just then because he was being interviewed by a North American and then he would proceed to answer a question about tango that I had not asked him. She stayed around for a few minutes, caressing the back of his neck, perhaps in an attempt to woo him away from our fake interview or, more likely, to prevent him from asking someone else to dance until too much of the set was over.

The second time, as soon as she left, and before he turned the conversation back to the game, Julio let me know that she wanted to be a professional dancer and that she was trying to steal him away from Paloma, his on- and off-stage partner. He suggested that it was one of the hazards of his job as a world-class tango-dancer to have to suffer sexy young women throwing themselves at him night after night.
On the third try, the woman finally succeeds in getting Julio onto the dance floor. She had to bully and plead with him through three complete songs before he gave in, so by the time they begin to dance there is only one song left in the set. There is plenty of room on the floor, and the couples expand their movements to fill it. Ganchos, giros, and other stage-tango moves that would have been unthinkable three hours earlier are commonplace at this late hour. Julio leads her through a demanding dance, but given my navigational deficiency, what most impresses me is that, as the song's final note sounds, the two arrive directly in front of my table. In fact, Julio has choreographed the ending so that he is already halfway sitting down, back in the same chair he was sitting in before the dance began. Before she can even ask him how he liked the dance, he says to me, "Did you see the replay of the goal that son of a whore annulled? They say there was no way Cani was offside. That Castrilli is a damn gallina." The woman gets the message and is gone before Julio gets around to expressing his opinion of the linesman who signaled the offside to Castrilli.

Fans and devotees seldom if ever attribute tango's famous scandalousness to same-sex dancing or homosociality. The scandal of tango is supposed to come from the dance's early association with brothels. There, male johns and female prostitutes transgressed marital, class, and racial boundaries to the rhythm of tango. Salessi and Savigliano both argue that the prototypical tango pimp and prostitute are gender transgressive: he is a feminine man, overly concerned with his dandiesque appearance and financially dependent on his woman, while she is a masculine woman, who earns her living in the public sphere
and is capable of defending herself with a dagger (Salessi 1991; Savigliano 1995).

Savigliano also observes that tango is class transgressive. In *El Día Que Me Quieras*, Carlos Gardel’s upperclass character woos a lower-class, professional dancer; and in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, Rudolfo Valentino plays an upperclass Argentine who learns to dance slumming it in the barrio of La Boca, and later earns a living as a gigolo in Paris, dancing tango with the wives of wealthy men. It is said that through tango the aristocratic, the bourgeois, and the lumpen came together in brothels, as did the European, the African, and the Creole. Even after tango moved up into respectable, European society, it retained the taint, and the glint, of the brothel. The real and imagined world of the Buenos Aires brothel was mythologized in the lyrics and lore of tango’s Golden Age so that to this day, the international tango scene is populated by dancers posing as *muñecas bravas* and *cafíshios milongueros* [wild dolls and tango-dancing pimps].

In North America, it is heterosexual transgression that dominates the tango scene. Here, tango is almost synonymous with extramarital sex. Woody Allen draws on a long-standing Hollywood tradition in his film *Alice* when he uses “La Cumparsita” to accompany Alice’s thoughts musically as she first contemplates infidelity. Dancing tango gives apparently monogamous, heterosexual couples a venue for playing at being promiscuous. In December 1995, Marta and I attended a dance in San Francisco for which “tango attire” was requested. Most of the men and women were dressed according to their ideas of how early tango pimps and prostitutes dressed. To me, the dancers looked like the cast of “Guys and Dolls”—gangsters and chorus girls—tangoized by the addition of a silk scarf here or a slitted skirt there. This being the nineteen-nineties and
San Francisco, some of the women were crossdressed in gangster attire, but none of the men were dolled up. A few geographically-challenged women were dressed as “Carmens”: Spanish señoritas, complete with peinetas [combs] in their pulled-back hair and mantillas [shawls] draped over their shoulders. These women were examples of what Savigliano, following Edward Said, calls “Hispanolism” (Savigliano 1995: 96): a stereotypical, colonizing representation in which the near-Other Spanish female stands in for extended Latin American hordes, much as in Orientalism, the near-Other Arab female stands in for extended Asiatic hordes (Said 1979). In Buenos Aires, there is a stricter division between tango de espectáculo and tango de salón [stage-tango and salon-tango]. When the Argentine cast of “Forever Tango” arrived at the dance in San Francisco, they had changed out of the old-fashioned, pimp-and-prostitute costumes they had worn on stage—which would have fit in perfectly—and into outfits typical of the Buenos Aires milonga circuit.

The Buenos Aires tango scene is not as stylized in terms of clothing as the corresponding scene in San Francisco. Milonguero men do not wear much that is peculiarly tangoesque except for their dance shoes and an occasional silk scarf, tied à la Gardel, but they do engage in their fair share of tango posturing. Recall the tango-dance teacher who explained to me that “dancing tango is like knife-fighting” even though he, no more than I, has ever been in a knife fight (Chapter Two). Perhaps he was repeating what another non-knife-wielding teacher had told him, or perhaps he had read Borges. He was inviting me to join him in performing the role of a compadrito, an underclass, tango ruffian from the suburbios of turn-of-the-century Buenos Aires. As discussed in Chapter Two,
compadrito performativity is facilitated by the milonga custom of never talking about such mundane matters as the existence of wives, children, and day-time jobs. So long as a milonguero does not mention (and is never asked) if he earns his daily bread working as an usher or a jeweler, it is possible to maintain the fragile illusion that he is a compadrito who derives his income from intimidating other men with a knife or from seducing women with a _firulete_ [a tango-dance embellishment].

Many of the younger milonguera women in Buenos Aires do wear special tango attire, apparently aimed at attracting the attention of professional male dancers. Ironically, in early 1996, when Madonna was in town dressing like one particular, famous Argentine woman of the nineteen-forties, many Argentine women were dressing like Madonna of the nineteen-eighties. Typically, one of these women wore a see-through blouse that stopped above the navel and a skirt that began below, a black brassiere and fishnet stockings, high heels, and a belt of leather, chain, or silk hanging on the hips. This fashion may or may not have come directly from Madonna videos, but it certainly owed something to the “whore look” that Madonna was instrumental in popularizing (Schulze, White, and Brown 1993). In sum, all of these dramatis personæ—the throw-back Guys and Dolls (and Carmens) of San Francisco and the updated pimps and prostitutes of Buenos Aires—evoke transgression, but it is a transgression that is kept safely straight—and white.

A Sad Thought

_The dancing has ended. As always, the last song played was "La Cumparsita."

_Enrique returns to the table where Julio and I are sitting, still discussing today’s game._
Marc is standing on the other side of the dance floor, talking intensely with the woman with whom he danced the last several sets. Marta and Ana are at their own table, where Rosita has joined the conversation.

Julio and Enrique eye one another suspiciously. I realize that though I know each of them quite well, I have never seen them together, so I begin to perform introductions, asking Julio if he knows Enrique? Enrique says, “Yes, of course,” while Julio just shrugs his shoulders. As bad luck would have it, Enrique is perhaps the only working-class Argentine man I know who is not interested in soccer, so I decide to change the topic of conversation in order to include Enrique. Enrique helps me out by trying to engage Julio in a conversation.

“Are you still at Casa Blanca?” Enrique asks.

“I was in Yanquilandia for three months,” Julio responds evasively.

“Yes. Last week I went to see Julio and Paloma dance at Casa Blanca,” I say.

“It’s a great show.”

“I already know that,” Enrique adds. “My friend Fernando is performing there.” Enrique looks at Julio pointedly, trying to drive home that he is friends with one of Julio’s fellow stage-tango professionals. Julio looks back at Enrique somewhat skeptically, as if he does not believe that Enrique could be friends with Fernando.

By this time the lights in the club have been turned up and we all start heading for the exit. I begin to understand that Julio is snubbing Enrique, so I try to give Enrique a chance to show-off. Enrique and Ana recently branched out from the classes they teach at home by renting space in a studio near the Congreso a couple of evenings a week.
“How is your práctica at the Congreso going?” I ask Enrique.

“Fantastic. I had more than twenty students on Thursday,” he answers. “There was almost no room to dance.” Meanwhile, Julio is looking off in another direction—perhaps not even hearing Enrique’s exaggerated report—in any case not appearing to hear. By this time we are at the door. Julio gives me a quick kiss on the cheek, and gives another to Marta, but he pointedly ignores the rest of our group.

Most tango-practitioners and tango-scholars are more or less open to reading tango as transgressive in terms of gender, class, race or morals, but the costuming and posturing practices of the international tango scene usually remain safely heterosexual. Meanwhile, homosocial tango-dancing—common at tango’s primal scenes and in its contemporary practice—is studiously disassociated from the famous eroticism of tango. Salessi, however, suggests that tango’s homosocial roots continue to inform tango’s paradoxical passion.

Considered from the present moment, in the context of this history of the tango, is not this sense of loss, this yearning for a “legendary skill,” this “mournful cry for that which is lost and gone” a nostalgia for homosexual desire lost in the sanitization of a forbidden dance? (Salessi 1997: 168).

Much as Salessi recognizes in tango a “mournful cry for that which is lost and gone,” Savigliano recognizes that “Machismo is a cult of ‘authentic virility’ fed by a sense of loss” (Savigliano 1995: 43). Judith Butler argues that a sense of loss is endemic to heterosexuality, which is marked by “a mourning for unlived possibilities” (Butler 1995: 27). Butler is referring to the heterosexual’s unlived possibilities of homosexual love. It
would be possible to interpret Borges’ reference to “a disturbed / Unreal past that in some way is certain, / The impossible memory of having died / Fighting,” as the expression of a related feeling: the feeling of losing what one could never have had. For Butler, Borges’ “impossible memory” might be symptomatic of heterosexuality, since it is always “haunted by the love it cannot grieve” (ibid.: 26). The straight man cannot grieve the forfeiture of homosexual love because he cannot acknowledge ever having desired homosexual love.

Developing Freud’s reflections on mourning and melancholia, Butler coins the term “gender melancholy” to refer to the straight man’s incomplete mourning for the gay man he might have been.

When the prohibition against homosexuality is culturally pervasive, then the “loss” of homosexual love is precipitated through a prohibition which is repeated and ritualized throughout the culture. What ensues is a culture of gender melancholy in which masculinity and femininity emerge as the traces of an ungrieved and ungrievable love (ibid.: 28).

In other words, “The straight man becomes (mimes, cites, appropriates, assumes the status of) the man he ‘never’ loved and ‘never’ grieved” (ibid.: 34, emphasis in the original).

Straight gender identities, according to Butler, are attempts to compensate for the forfeiture of homosexual desire. Butler theorizes identification and desire as two sides of the same coin. Her argument is that a straight man’s masculine identification is a compensation for not being able to desire other men. The identification is melancholic because the lost attraction is not acknowledged, and therefore cannot be properly mourned. According to Butler, straight people’s hyperbolic gender displays—such as the pimps and whores performed by tangueros in San Francisco—result from the denial of same-sex desire. Following Butler, it could be argued that tango’s repressed
homoeroticism is a driving force behind tango’s hyperbolic displays of masculinity and femininity. The tip-off that the straight gender identities are built on forbidden homoerotic desires would be the pervasive melancholy of the tango scene. Anyone wishing to make this argument would, no doubt, call attention to the most widely quoted description of tango: “El tango es un sentimiento triste que se puede bailar” [Tango is a sad thought that can be danced]” (commonly attributed to Enrique Santos Discépolo). Tango’s unnamed sad thought, the argument would go, is the homosexual desire that is forbidden and, what is more, per force forgotten.

I admire the logic of Butler’s argument about the “culture of heterosexual melancholy,” and I see how the argument could be deployed to make sense of tango’s paradoxical sexual formations. There is something similar about Borges’ riddle that “Any many who thinks five minutes straight about a woman is a marica” and Butler’s that “the ‘truest’ gay male melancholic is the strictly straight man” (ibid.: 33). I also recognize and share some of the political motives for producing a queer reading of tango in general and of tango-dance in particular. Nevertheless, I am reluctant to apply Butler’s argument wholeheartedly, in part because it reminds me of an observation from the introduction to Søren Kierkegaard’s dissertation.

If we say that the substantial aspect of Socrates’ existence was irony (this is indeed a contradiction, but also meant as one), and, if we postulate further, that irony is a negative concept, then one easily sees how difficult it becomes to secure an image of him, yes, that it seems impossible, or at least as baffling as trying to depict an elf wearing a hat that makes him invisible (Kierkegaard 1968: 50).

I find Butler’s reading of “the strictly straight man” similarly baffling. Like Kierkegaard’s elf, he wears a hat—in this case one that makes his homosexuality invisible. Butler
proceeds to depict for us what his invisible desire would look like if it were not invisible. I recognize that Butler’s discourse is thereby reminiscent of Freud’s descriptions of what the unconscious contains, but Butler’s discourse is, in fact, a mirror image of Freud’s—an inversion. She deploys Freudian rhetoric to stand Freud on his head. I have no objection to upsetting Freud. Indeed, I find de Lauretis’ similarly inverted reading of Freud’s theorization of the phallus and the fetish compelling (de Lauretis 1994: 228 et passim). De Lauretis, however, draws on accounts of lesbian experience to correct Freudian theory. Her argument, like Freud’s, partakes of the authority of case studies, such as the passage by Joan Nestle she offers in support of her retheorization of the fetish. Butler, by contrast, is going on pure logic. Much as Vincent Crapanzano (1986: 75) observes that there is not a Balinese cockfight in Geertz’ analysis of the Balinese cockfight, I observe that there is no straight man in Butler’s analysis of “the strictly straight man.”

Freud was also at his least compelling when he set his considerable logical faculties loose from the analytic situation. We anthropologists must be especially aware of the brilliant but utterly ungrounded argument he put forth in Totem and Taboo—which Kroeber did well to call a “just-so story,” as in, “the elf is dressed just-so.” As an ethnographer I look for indications that the ungrievable loss of homosexual desire is buried beneath my informants’ masculine displays. I try out reading tango’s sad thought as heterosexual melancholia, but the elf’s clothes don’t fit. I find no indications that the most strictly straight men are more melancholic than less strictly straight men. I find that strictly straight Argentine men are more playful and less melancholic regarding their hyperbolic displays of their masculinity than North American men are about our relatively
subdued displays of our masculinity. Perhaps Butler's "just-so story" fits middle-class, White, North American culture better than it does the working- and middle-class cultures I have studied in Buenos Aires. The one great limit I find in her analysis is that it does not admit even the possibility of such cultural and class differences. So far as I know, Butler has nowhere addressed differences associated with culture, class, or race, except in the most perfunctory manner (e.g., Butler 1993a: 226-230). Lacking openness to cultural and class differences, Butler, like Freud, unwittingly universalizes insights gained from the study of an unmarked--un-remarked-upon--bourgeois Western society. If I single out Butler, it is not to suggest that her brand of queer theory is worse than others. Indeed, I have found her work extremely valuable and provocative. Moreover, Butler's work is no more insensitive to cultural and class difference than, for example, that of Sedgwick. I would also observe that, in general, queer theorists are not any less aware of cross-cultural theories than anthropologists are of queer theories. What is lacking is a theorization of sexualities that partakes of the sophistication of queer theories and the cross-cultural awareness of ethnographic research.

Enrique suggests going back to his place to drink mate and eat leftover asado.

Marc lets us down again, passing on the chance to eat more asado. He and the woman he has been dancing and talking with bid the rest of us good night and set off together on foot. Enrique, Ana, Marta, and I get in a cab that is waiting in front of La Trastienda. (Apparently there are cab drivers who know exactly when each milonga ends on each night of the week.) It's 4:30 in the morning when we arrive in Palermo. We settle in
back at Ana and Enrique's kitchen table, listening to a tape of Gardel—one of the many
wanted for killing tango. Ana prepares mate and offers it to each of us in turn. We
gossip about the dancers at La Trastienda, and we eat leftover chorizo, tira de asado,
and potato salad until the sun comes up.
CHAPTER SEVEN

FROM FIELDWORK (BACK) TO TEXT

I take (back) the title from Marc Manganaro, who explains that he took the subtitle of his edited volume *Modernist Anthropology: From Fieldwork to Text* from Roland Barthes’ 1971 essay “From Work to Text.”

Now anthropological texts have never been viewed solely as collections of facts, yet the subtitle of this work borrows from Barthes to exemplify a recent qualitative shift in perspective—toward anthropology as textual form in which facts culled from the field are not only inextricably bound up within the discursive process we call text-making, but are themselves at times seriously put into question. At the least, the subtitle asserts that the pressing reality of anthropological fact should never simply be isolated from, and privileged above, the formal and ideological features of anthropological writing (Manganaro 1990: vii).

By placing “fieldwork” in the place of Barthes’ “work,” Manganaro calls attention to the fact that both are thought of as “concrete,” “material,” and “empirical” in opposition to texts, which are thought of as “eminently interpretive” in the sense of both expressing and being open to interpretations. The move from fieldwork to text is a move away from the supposed certainty and immediacy of the ethnographic work, and toward an awareness of “ethnographies as texts” (Marcus and Cushman 1983), and from conceiving of anthropology as a culture of fieldwork to conceiving of it as a “writing culture” (Clifford and Marcus 1986).¹ The parenthetical “(Back)” that I have added to Manganaro’s subtitle marks the backward direction of the movement from fieldwork to text, as opposed to the

¹ Manganaro also explains generously (if parenthetically) that he is grateful “[...] to Jeff Tobin, for help with the title)” (Manganaro 1990: ix). (I am also grateful to Manganaro for expressing his gratitude to me, and I observe that I helped only with the subtitle and not with the title per se.)

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forward direction of the movement to text from Barthes' work and from Manganaro's fieldwork. My argument is that in the literate culture of Buenos Aires, fieldwork often involves identifying texts that preceded members' speech. In interviews and conversations with middle-class porteños, my task was rarely to unearth oral traditions and turn them into written ethnography. More often than not, my task was to track down the citations of written texts imbedded in my informants' everyday speech—such as lines from and comments on gauchesco poetry, tango lyrics, critical essays, and short stories. As a result, analyses of written sources play a prominent part in my ethnography of Buenos Aires, as they do in the ethnographies of Buenos Aires written by Eduardo Archetti and Marta Savigliano. Such ethnographic deployments of written material are, in part, a consequence of conducting fieldwork in Buenos Aires, a site that is highly urban and urbane, literate and literary. I argue that deploying written material ethnographically is also a first step in deconstructing the ethnographic oppositions between speaking and writing, between science and literature, and between native-informant and outsider-anthropologist.

"What Matter Who's Speaking, Someone Said"

According to Barthes, the transition from work to text has been taking place throughout this century. The pre-twentieth-century work was a product that "can be seen (in bookshops, in catalogues, in exam syllabuses)" while the contemporary "text is a process of demonstration" (1977: 157). If "the work is held in the hand, the text is held in language" (ibid.) or in the "intertextual" (ibid. 160). A work is "readerly" while a text is
"writerly." A work is readerly because it has a meaning that awaits reading, while a text is writerly because its meaning requires (re)writing by the reader. "The writerly text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore," whereas readerly works "make up the enormous mass of our literature" (Barthes 1974: 5). The move from a readerly work to a writerly text corresponds with what Barthes calls the "death of the Author" and the "birth of the reader" (Barthes 1977: 148). The work produced by an "Author" (with a capital "A") is "Literature" (with a capital "L") and is consumed passively by a reader, who is "thereby plunged into a kind of idleness" (Barthes 1974: 4). By contrast, "a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (Barthes 1977: 148).

A text’s reader both consumes and produces, reads and writes a text. Barthes finds that distinctions between passive and active are undone by writerly texts, as are distinctions between what is and is not Literature.

The Text does not stop at (good) Literature; it cannot be contained in a hierarchy, even in a simple division of genres. What constitutes the Text is, on the contrary (or precisely), its subversive force in respect of the old classifications" (ibid. 157).

The writerly text subverts genres by being "novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation" (Barthes 1974: 5) and, I would add, by being ethnographic without the ethnography (or the ethnographic monograph).

This work you hold in your hands being a dissertation, I, its author, am compelled to follow up my brief commentary on Barthes’ 1968 "Death of an Author" with a brief commentary on Michel Foucault’s 1969 essay “What is an Author?” (Foucault 1977: 113-138). The two essays are unavoidably linked, at least in scholarly works such as this. So I dutifully observe that Foucault, like Barthes, argues that the Author is a temporary effect
of discourse, but whereas Barthes focuses on the twentieth-century, “epistemological slide” (Barthes 1977: 155) from the Author’s Literary work to the reader’s writerly text, Foucault focuses on the late eighteenth-century “epistemic shift” (Foucault 1972: 166-177) from authorless Literature about heroes, to the Literary Author as hero (i.e., when “stories of heroes gave way to an author’s biography”) (Foucault 1977: 115). In contrast to Barthes, Foucault observes the birth, not the death, of the literary author. Foucault locates this shift at “the moment when a system of ownership and strict copyright rules were established (toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century)” (Foucault 1977: 125), that is to say, at the same moment as the “rupture” between the Classical order and History that he identifies in The Order of Things (Foucault 1973: 217 et passim).

At roughly the same time the literary author was born (or a little earlier), Foucault finds that the scientific author died. What we now call “scientific” texts “were only considered truthful during the Middle Ages if the name of the author was indicated” (Foucault 1977: 125-126), but “in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a totally new conception was developed.”

The role of the author disappeared as an index of truthfulness and, where it remained as an inventor’s name, it was merely to denote a specific theorem or proposition, a strange effect, a property, a body, a group of elements, or pathological syndrome (Foucault 1977: 126).

Foucault perceives the demise of the scientific author, but unlike Barthes, Foucault can only “imagine a culture where [literary] discourse would circulate without any need for an author” or a future era when “new questions will be heard” (Foucault 1977: 138).
Foucault makes it clear that he does not recognize the rise of écriture argued by Barthes—and Derrida—as the end of Literary Authorship. Rather, Foucault argues that the new emphasis on writing as such “has merely transposed the empirical characteristics of an author to a transcendental anonymity” (Foucault 1977: 120). That is to say, Writing, according to Foucault, is another Author, which like a human Author is “subjected to forgetfulness and repression” (ibid.). Even if Writing now fulfills what Foucault calls the “author-function” (Foucault 1977: 125), I would argue that in doing so, it constructs a subject that is quite different from the subject constructed by a human Author. Even if Foucault is right that the birth of Writing does not mark the death of the Author, it could nevertheless mark the death of the individualized human subject.

Clifford Geertz considers the relevance of Barthes’ and Foucault’s arguments for the study of anthropological discourse. He finds that in Foucault’s terms, it would appear that “anthropology is pretty much entirely on the side of ‘literary’ discourses rather than ‘scientific’ ones” since anthropologists’ names tend to be attached to books and articles and not to systems of thought or to findings (Geertz 1988: 8). Malinowski and Mead are known as authors of literary ethnographies and not as creators of systems of thought. Similarly, Geertz’ “Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight” is regularly praised (or critiqued) for its literary devices, and is rarely read for its findings regarding deep play. Geertz argues, however, that Foucault’s distinctions between “pure and absolute types” (ibid. 20) do not, in fact, apply to anthropological discourse.

The signature issue, as the ethnographer confronts it, or as it confronts the ethnographer, demands both the Olympianism of the unauthorial physicist and the sovereign consciousness of the hyperauthorial novelist, while not in fact permitting
either (Geertz 1988: 10).

Ethnographers are presented as objective, scientific observers, and we present ourselves as subjective, compelling narrators. Accordingly, Geertz rejects Foucault’s distinction between the literary author and the scientific writer in favor of Barthes’ emphasis on “a bastard type, the ‘author-writer’,” who is “caught between wanting to create a bewitching verbal structure [...] and wanting to communicate facts and ideas” (Geertz 1988: 20). Geertz names Lévi-Strauss as a prototypical “Barthesian ‘author-writer’” (ibid. 27). On the one hand, Geertz (1988: 26) recognizes that Susan Sontag’s insightful reading of Lévi-Strauss as “the anthropologist as hero” (Sontag 1977) locates Lévi-Strauss in Foucault’s category of the modern, literary author whose biography matters. On the other hand, “Lévi-Straussian Structuralism” (Geertz 1988: 8)) is about as close as anthropology gets to Foucault’s category of authorless science, in which “an inventor’s name [remains] merely to denote a specific theorem or proposition, a strange effect, a property, a body, a group of elements, or pathological syndrome” (Foucault 1977: 126 quoted in Geertz 1988: 8). Even if few other anthropologists achieve Lévi-Strauss’ stature as either a literary author or a scientific writer, Lévi-Strauss typifies our hybrid position between literature and science, between the Humanities and the Social Sciences, and between authorship and textuality.

James Clifford also draws on Foucault and Barthes to address the authorship--and authority--of ethnographic works. Noting the inevitable influence of informants on every ethnography, Clifford argues that “any continuous ethnographic exposition routinely folds into itself a diversity of descriptions, transcriptions, and interpretations by a variety of
indigenous ‘authors’” (Clifford 1988: 46). By placing “authors” in quotes, Clifford calls attention to informants’ failure to achieve true authorial status despite their contributions to ethnographic works. These non-authorial ethnographic informants share non-authorship with certain other writers identified by Foucault.

[A] private letter may have a signatory, but it does not have an author; a contract may have an underwriter, but not an author, and similarly, an anonymous poster attached to a wall may have a writer, but he cannot be an author. In this sense, the function of the author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society (Foucault 1977: 124).

Similarly, a life history, a myth, or an oral tradition has an informant who tells it, but the informant is not an author. Paraphrasing Foucault, the function of the ethnographic author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of informants’ discourses. The role of natives in anthropology is thereby analogous to that of patients in psychoanalysis: “the network of institutions established to permit doctors and psychoanalysts to listen to the mad” and “the systems by which we decipher this speech” (Foucault 1971: 9). Anthropology, including ethnographic fieldwork, permits anthropologists to listen to the native and to decipher native speech. Natives’ life histories, myths, and oral traditions enter European discourse under the authorship of anthropologists, much as a dream about wolves entered European discourse under the authorship of Freud. Even when The Wolf-Man sat down to write his recollections of his childhood, he identified himself as “one of Freud’s early psychoanalytic patients, known as ‘The Wolf-Man’,” and he is identified as such on the title page of the book in which his text appears (Gardiner 1971). In both ethnography and psychoanalysis, the use of pseudonyms—e.g., The Wolf-Man, Tuhami, Enrique—corresponds with non-authorship.
As in a novel, a distinction is made between the really-named author and his fictitiously-named characters. Neither the use of noms de plume on the one hand nor the appearance of real people in historical novels on the other unsettles this distinction. Noms de plume belong to authors, not characters, and between the covers of an historical novel, the real people who appear are fictionalized.

The Library of Babel

In March 1996, I was discussing the ideas discussed in the previous section with a group of Argentine artists, activists, and intellectuals gathered in the apartment of Sarita Torres in the Buenos Aires neighborhood of San Telmo. Ricardo—a friend of Sarita and a high school teacher—recalled reading something relevant to our conversation in a review of a book about the French reception of Jorge Luis Borges. He was sure the review appeared in the magazine *Sudaca*, but he did not remember when. Sarita has a remarkable library, including books and magazines pertaining to feminist, gay, and union politics, so it came as no surprise to find that Sarita has every single issue of *Sudaca*. As Ricardo searched, unsuccessfully, through back issues of *Sudaca*, he told me and the others what he remembered of the review. The title—of the book? of the review?—was something like “Borges y el Colonialismo Intelectual Francés” [Borges and French Intellectual Colonialism], and it dealt with how profoundly Borges influenced the generation of ’68 in France and how little that influence was acknowledged. Adriana—another friend of Sarita and a feminist anthropologist—observed that Foucault, de Certeau, and Eco, to name just three, made frequent reference to Borges, so she did not see how it could be argued that
they did not acknowledge Borges' influence. As others discussed Borges and his influence, Ricardo continued to search in vain for the review. Soon the conversation moved on, to gossip about who edited *Sudaca* and other leftist magazines. Ricardo completed his search of every issue without finding the review. Cristina suggested that Ricardo might be confusing *Sudaca* with *Obris Tertius* or another counter-culture magazine, but Ricardo said he was sure he had read the review in *Sudaca*, and he proceeded to go back through the issues that were still spread out on the floor before him, again with much frustration and no success.

The next afternoon Ricardo called me to say that he found the review in his own library and that he was right, it appeared in the April 1991 issue of *Sudaca*. He suggested that Sarita must have been missing that issue despite her claims to have a complete set. Ricardo lives in the neighborhood of Liniers, a long way from where I lived, so I decided to go back to Sarita's more conveniently located apartment to look for the review. Now that I knew in which issue to look. I found Sarita's copy of the April 1991 issue of *Sudaca*, but it did not contain the review. Holding the issue in my hand, I telephoned Ricardo, who holding the same issue in his hand, told me to turn to the back of the magazine, to pages forty-five and forty-six. The problem was, the magazine I was holding ended on page forty-four. The next evening, I took the bus out to Liniers, where I made a photocopy of the review that appeared on the last two pages of Ricardo's, but not Sarita's, copy.

The title of the review is "Borges y el Imperialismo Intelectual" [Borges and Intellectual Imperialism], and the byline of the review is "J. L." The initials do not
correspond with the names of any of the people on the magazine’s editorial board. The title of the book that J. L. reviews is *El Borges Postmoderno* [The Postmodern Borges]. It is edited by Javier Binto and published in Buenos Aires in 1991 by Editorial Biblioteca de Babel.\(^2\) The following is the complete text of the review.

The essays in this book revolve around the role of Jorge Luis Borges in recent French works that the editor, Javier Binto, loosely (and incorrectly) labels “postmodern” in his introduction to the compilation. In fact, the focus of the essays is the generation of ’68 in France: Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze, Barthes, Derrida, Lyotard, de Certeau, and other intellectuals who were compelled by the events of May 1968 to reexamine their commitments to Marxist theory and to political praxis. For this reason it would be more accurate to title the book “The Post-Marxist Borges,” but I have no doubt that in Post-Marxist Argentina, in which everything is for sale and everything “posmo” [slang for “postmodern”] sells, everything is labeled “posmo,” including the fiercely modernist Borges.

David Bioy-Simpson is the only contributor who directly addresses Borges’ well-known political abdication and its utility for certain French philosophers. In the chapter entitled “Como Hablar de la Transgresión Sin Transgredir” [How to Talk about Transgression without Transgressing], the distinguished professor of Arts and Letters [Bioy-Simpson] recounts the well-known story of how our late Poet Laureate [Borges] retreated from every occasion to which a more valiant man would have used his mind and his global fame to rise. Bioy-Simpson suggests that what the generation of ’68 found so enticing in our Borges was his example of how to use textual transgression as a substitute for sociopolitical transgression. In this way, transgression became an intellectual fashion instead of a political practice.

In his essay “La Invocación de Borges” [Invoking Borges], Umberto Quintana demonstrates that it became a standard scholarly practice among intellectuals in France in the nineteen-sixties and -seventies to cite Borges casually. Quintana includes more than enough examples of Borges’ name being dropped in passing, especially in the epigraphs and prefaces to fundamental post-Marxist French texts. Quintana argues that when French scholars invoke the Argentine Borges, they tend to do so with less scholarly precision and respect than when they cite works by European authors and that this distinction between invocation and citation is a sign of the French appropriation of an Argentine resource.

The fate of Borges in the works of Foucault is the focus of Pedro Menardín’s contribution, “Ficciones Imperialistas: la Borradura de Borges en la Escritura de Foucault” [Imperialist Fictions: The Erasure of Borges in the Writing

\(^2\) The review also contains the information that the book has 237 pages and sells—or sold—for $21.00.
of Foucault. Menard argues that “reading Borges had a profound influence on Foucault’s work” and that Foucault “frequently failed to make his debt to Borges explicit.” In addition to Foucault’s prominent invocations of Borges—for example, in Foucault’s inaugural lecture at the College de France [Foucault 1971], in the preface to The Order of Things [Foucault 1972], and in “Language to Infinity” [Foucault 1977: 53-67]—Menard calls attention to numerous cases in which it seems undoubtable that Foucault borrowed from Borges without mentioning the librarian’s name. Menard argues that Foucault’s bibliographic and unbibliographic citations of Borges’ texts have the effect of erasing those texts because, as Foucault observes, “commentary’s only role is to say finally, what has silently been articulated deep down” (Foucault [1971: 13 quoted in Menard]). Foucault’s commentaries take the place of the books by Borges on which Foucault comments.

Binto’s own contribution to the compilation draws heavily on Menard’s. But Binto confines himself to proving parallels between Foucault’s well-known essay “What is an Author?” and passages from “Borges y yo” and Ficciones [Borges 1989: II: 186 and I: 427-532]. Binto places “What is an Author?” in opposition to its author, asking polemically, “Is Borges an author for Foucault, in the way that Marx, Freud, and Canguilhem are authors? Or is he an exotic name attached to a Chinese encyclopedia or a Babylonian library?” Binto re-writes Foucault’s reference to depth analyses (such as psychoanalysis and structuralism) in terms of North-South geopolitical relations, asserting that Foucault’s commentaries overwrite Borges’ texts by saying “finally what was said silently because it was said in Spanish (not French or English or German) deep down in the South of the South” [the Southern Cone of South America].

There are other essays in the ample volume, contributed by Cristian Latana, Alain A. Couchmain, Alejandro Martini, and Ricardo Noye-Castro. But I have already exceeded the five hundred words rationed to me to review this ten thousand word book. It is enough to confirm that the others are intelligent essays by respectable scholars, and that they are not ill-represented by what I have already written. In sum, El Borges Postmoderno is a well-executed study of an important (but mismarked) topic that should interest many Argentines who are weary of reading our ideas over others’ signatures (J. L. 1991: 45-46).

After reading J. L.’s review I was determined to find Binto’s book. Over the next month, I showed the review to booksellers in all of the big bookstores on Avenida Corrientes. None of the stores had the book, and only three of the booksellers had even heard of the publisher Editorial Biblioteca de Babel. One of those said he thought the press had gone out of business in the late nineteen-seventies, though the other two
believed the press still occasionally released books pertaining to Borges. Only one of the booksellers—a short, elderly man who went by the name El Duende [The Elf]—even vaguely recalled hearing of the El Borges Postmoderno. He remembered a Spanish woman asking for the book two or three years earlier, but he did not recall whether or not he found it for her. Reading the review, El Duende became convinced that it was a hoax. After all, El Duende observed, Borges published several fictional book reviews, such as “Examen de la Obra de Herbert Quain” [Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain] in Ficciones. Indeed, in one of the texts cited in the review, Foucault refers to Borges’ “play of a work of criticism talking endlessly about a work that does not exist” (Foucault 1971: 13). Perhaps El Borges Postmoderno does not exist. El Duende also observed that “Editorial Biblioteca de Babel” was a tip-off, since “La Biblioteca de Babel” [The Library of Babel] was the title of another story in Borges’ Ficciones. I considered El Duende’s theory and noted that it was not without merit. I even added that Borges’ initials were J. L. B., so the “J. L.” that appeared on the byline of the review could be in homage to Borges.

Perhaps I should have left it at that, but I craved certainty. I wanted either to hold the book in my hands or to prove that it existed only in J. L.’s review. I went to the Biblioteca Nacional, where I was thrilled to find a card for El Borges Postmoderno in the card catalogue. I hurriedly transcribed the information on the card and presented it to a librarian. The librarian disappeared in the library’s closed stacks for a good half hour and emerged without the book. He said it appeared the book was missing and implied that theft was not unheard of at the Biblioteca Nacional. I asked if I could look for myself? I
explained that I needed the book for my doctoral research and I displayed a letter of introduction written by George E. Marcus, asking whomever it might concern to provide me with assistance. Either my advisor’s fame or my desperation convinced the librarian to admit me to the stacks, since “books do sometimes get mis-shelved.” Over the next four hours I came across many fascinating books on Borges that I am sure do not appear in the Biblioteca Nacional’s card catalogue, but I did not find *El Borges Postmoderno.*

Because of the card in the catalogue, I was now inclined to believe that the book existed, but I also considered the possibility that the card was part of J. L.’s hoax. Borges had been the director of the Biblioteca Nacional, so it was exactly the right place to plant a phony cataloguing card. I finally resigned myself to the impossibility of settling the issue one way or another and over the following months I turned my attention away from books and back to my ethnographic research. Nevertheless, one day in August 1996, shortly before my return to the United States, I was browsing in a bookstore near the Congreso that happens to be named “El Aleph,” after another book and story by Borges. I flipped through a book titled *Cuando el Silencio Habla: Teorías Psicoanalíticas y Políticas de la Resistencia* [*When Silence Speaks: Psychoanalytic and Political Theories of Resistance*] by Jacobo Tiboni (1991), and as I placed it back on the shelf, I noticed an advertisement on its back cover for *El Borges Postmoderno.* Turning back to the title page, I confirmed what I already suspected, that the book I held in my hands was published by Editorial Biblioteca de Babel. The “Presentation” of Tiboni’s book was written by Javier Binto.
From Anxiety to Method

As an ethnographer conducting fieldwork in what Menardín calls "the South of the South," I find that his critique presents me with a challenge: How do I quote, paraphrase, and comment on informants' speech without erasing that speech and relegating the informants to "name[s] attached to a Chinese encyclopedia or a Babylonian library" or other exotic textual locations? In citing the real speech of real people, is it possible to avoid ficcionalizing them (in the sense of Borges' Ficciones)? Is there a way to overcome the differential power relations between "here" and "there," between English and Spanish, and between anthropologist and informant? Is it possible to write an ethnography that does not appropriate their voices to mine?

I recognize that such ethnographic hand-wringing is out of fashion, if in fact it ever was fashionable. I suspect that even in its heyday, it was marginal. Victor Turner's response to the "crisis of representation" is probably typical of cultural anthropology's mainstream.

Armchair Marxists have accused those of us who lived close to the "people" in the 1950s in African, Malaysian, and Oceanian villages, often for several years, of "using" structural functionalism to provide the "scientific" objectification of an unquestioned ideology (colonialism in prewar anthropology, neoimperialism now). These dour modern "Roundheads"—an infra-red band on the world's spectrum of Moral Majorities—have become so obsessed with power that they fail to sense the many-leveled complexity (hence irony and forgivability) of human lives experienced at first hand (Turner 1982: 8-9).

Turner's analysis of fieldwork is no doubt informed by his analysis of rituals. Armchair Marxists, according to Turner, see only the structural "relationships between statuses, roles, and offices" and not the "relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic
individuals" that constitutes communitas (Turner 1969: 131). Turner defines the
communitas relationship as individuals confronting "one another [...] in the manner of
Martin Buber’s ‘I-Thou’" and as "this direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human
identities" (ibid.: 132). In this formulation, ethnographic fieldwork is—at least at
moments—a liminal state, in which an ethnographer and an informant leave behind their
structural differences (class, status, nationality, etc.) and meet directly as "concrete human
individuals" (Turner 1974: 237). Turner is by no means alone among cultural
anthropologists in invoking the humanism that transcends unequal power relations. Ruth
Behar similarly invokes feminism—or perhaps it is more accurate to say female humanism—
to explain the ethnographic possibility of Esperanza and her appreciating "our mutual
multistrandedness as women, as one translated woman encountering another" (Behar
1993: 302). What such invocations have in common is a trust in the moments in which the
ethnographic encounter bridges the structural differences that separate the ethnographer
and his or her informant.

As Cultural Anthropology dis-integrates and confronts its demise in the rise of
Cultural Studies, we Cultural Anthropologists, more often than not, express our difference
in ethnographic terms. George Devereux argued that studying human behavior is bound
to arouse researchers’ anxiety.

It is legitimate for the scientist dealing with anxiety-arousing material to cast about
for means capable of reducing his anxiety to the point where he can perform his
work effectively and it so happens that the most effective and most durable anxiety
reducing device is good methodology (Devereux 1967: 97).

My focus is on the disciplinary anxiety aroused by the demise of Cultural Anthropology, as
opposed to the anxiety aroused, for example, by observing Sedang castration practices (ibid.: 86). Nevertheless, I find that anthropologists are just as likely to turn to methodology to reduce their disciplinary anxiety as they are to reduce the anxieties identified by Devereux. Richard Handler spoke for legions of cultural anthropologists when he wrote in his review of Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler’s *Cultural Studies* anthology that “ethnography is the anthropologist’s trump card.” Confronted with the rise of Cultural Studies, Handler invoked our good methodology.

> Ethnographic research at least has the chance to engage human beings in a range of settings much more vast than those encompassed within the elite, textualized circuits to which most humanistic scholarship (including cultural studies) confines itself (Handler 1993: 993).

I would argue that what most sets Cultural Studies apart from English Language and Literature is precisely the attention that the former pays to non-elite texts, such as the *Hustler* magazines analyzed by Laura Kipnis in the *Cultural Studies* anthology Handler reviewed (Kipnis 1992). Anthropological fieldwork among elites demonstrates that ethnography is no more tied to low culture than textual analysis is to high culture (e.g., Marcus 1983, Marcus and Hall 1992). Consider Handler’s own excursion, along with Daniel Segal, into Jane Austin’s novels. Their study is indeed firmly entrenched in Austin’s “elite, textualized circuits” (Handler and Segal 1990), while studies by scholars trained in Literature are more apt to locate Austin’s novels in the lowly context of contemporaneous agricultural manuals (e.g., B. Tobin 1993: 50-73). In sum, Handler mistakenly identifies textual analysis with Literature (with a capital “L”) and ethnography with popular culture.
Handler's reference to "textualized circuits" calls attention to another argument that cultural anthropologists launch against Cultural Studies. Faced with the MLA-ization of culture as an object of study (see Domínguez 1996), most cultural anthropologists cling to the immediacy of ethnographic fieldwork to justify their continuing existence. They argue that Cultural Studies scholars write texts about texts and are thus cut off from real, everyday life in the village or on the street. We ethnographers bypass textualized circuits and go right to the source. As Clifford argues, "whatever else an ethnography does, it translates experience into text" (Clifford 1986: 115). My ethnography does translate experience into text in the common sense of translating my face-to-face oral communication with porteños into written text. In addition to the italicized narrative of the events of 24 March 1996, there are also quotations and observations pertaining to fieldwork in the roman body of each chapter. Clifford observes, however, that what was once conceived of as a one-way flow from experience to text is now multi-directional.

Suddenly cultural data cease to move smoothly from oral performance into descriptive writing. Now data also move from text to text, inscription becomes transcription. Both informant and researcher are readers and re-writers of a cultural invention (Clifford 1986: 116).

Conducting fieldwork in Buenos Aires, I was repeatedly reminded that my informants were readers and writers of texts. I frequently heard the same—or similar—stories in interviews that I read on the printed page. Archetti recounts having soccer fans tell him a story that he read in a novel by Ernesto Sábato (Archetti n.d. and Archetti personal communication, August 1996). The point is not that the fans must have read the novel, but that it is impossible to separate written texts from oral traditions (or bibliographic
citations from personal communications). Clifford recounts the story of an anthropologist conducting an interview with an informant who consults an ethnographic text. Similarly, F. Allan Hanson argues that Maoris’ version of their own history is derived from ethnographic texts (Hanson 1989). In those cases, ethnographers and their informants are both shown to be producers and consumers of anthropological knowledge. An earlier generation of anthropologists produced texts that “natives” now read and recite to a later generation of anthropologists.

Hanson uses such stories of textualized ethnographic short circuits to conclude that “natives” are no longer purely oral, and he implies that early anthropologists really did have the opportunity to turn the oral into the written. Clifford’s point—and mine—is different from Handler’s. Clifford argues that “all human groups write—if they articulate, classify, possess an ‘oral-literature,’ or inscribe their world in ritual acts” (Clifford 1986: 117). Culture is always already graphemic, whether or not it draws on actually written documents. The claim that face-to-face ethnographic encounters are more immediate than written texts coincides with what Derrida calls “the metaphysics of presence” (Derrida 1974). According to the metaphysics of ethnographic presence, the path from an informant’s mouth to an ethnographer’s ear is straight and true, and is qualitatively different from the path from hand to page to eye. Face-to-face communication is supposed not to be plagued by the problems of interpretation that plague textual analysis. Miscommunications are supposed to be avoided either by the humanism invoked by Turner or the dialogism invoked by Crapanzano (1980).

Turner’s drawing on Buber’s “I and Thou” suggests that the humanistic and the
dialogic are related. It has been believed at least since Plato that meanings are negotiated and confirmed in the countryside in ways that they are not in the library.

Writing, Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is very like painting; for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing (Plato, Phaedrus 275D).

Following Plato’s Socrates, it is argued that we ethnographers question our sources and receive answers in a way that literary analysts cannot. It is obvious, though, that there are bad listeners and that there are good readers. The fact that a face-to-face dialogue occurred does not guarantee that anyone spoke or listened with intelligence.

Nevertheless, dialogism is extolled not only as our method for collecting data but also as a strategy for presenting it. M. M. Bakhtin (1981) is often cited in support of producing dialogic ethnographies. Note, however, that his argument is that the novel—and we can add the ethnography—is as a genre dialogic. Bakhtin’s contribution concerns how to read a novel—or an ethnography—not how to write one. In terms of Bakhtin’s contribution, the ethnographer’s decision to produce a dialogic ethnography is either irrelevant or insidious.

As Stephen Tyler observes, “the informant’s appearances in the dialogue are at best mediated through the ethnographer’s dominant authorial role” (Tyler 1987: 66). The dialogic approach, as outlined by Bakhtin, is to read against the dominant authorial role, not to write away an author’s dominance behind quoted speech. Reading dialogically is like listening with intelligence. Each is preferable to its alternatives (stylistic analysis or not listening), but neither solves the problems of interpretation.

The real or imagined response of an informant might introduce a check and
balance into the ethnographer’s writing. “Perhaps the informant will read what I have written, so I better be careful to represent him or her accurately.” Even if the informant will not read or even hear about the ethnography there is the memory of a real person that may serve to hold the ethnographer accountable. “I have a responsibility to my friend (and informant) to get it right.” I would not minimize the value of either real or imagined responses to ethnographic writing, but I observe that they are not unique to fieldwork-derived texts. Literary critics do not write only about dead people (though there are Literature Departments that have had a rule against writing a dissertation on a living author). It is not unheard of for a living author to read and even respond to a literary analysis of his or her work, but whether the author is dead or alive, he or she can haunt the critic. There are literary critics who feel just as responsible to their friend William Shakespeare to get it right as Behar feels responsible to her friend Esperanza. In writing this ethnography I have felt a responsibility to Enrique to represent him in a way of which he would approve. Given Enrique’s values (and mine), I experience this feeling not necessarily as a mandate to get it right but as a mandate to make it mischievous. However, I feel no less accountable to my written sources. I am aware that these pages will be (or already have been) read by Savigliano, Taylor, and Archetti, and that they are more likely to hold me accountable for misrepresenting their written words than any of my informants are likely to hold me accountable for misrepresenting their spoken words. Moreover, I believe that as scholars (if not as Turner’s “concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals”), Savigliano, Taylor, and Archetti would probably insist on accuracy over the mischief that would please Enrique.
I doubt that Galeano or Sebrelli will read these pages, but it is more likely that someone will check my representation of Galeano and Sebrelli’s written texts than that anyone will check my representation of Enrique’s spoken utterances. Derek Freeman’s critique of Margaret Mead notwithstanding, analyses of written texts are much more frequently checked and balanced than are analyses of spoken utterances. You could go to Buenos Aires and find and speak with Enrique (his real name figures prominently in the acknowledgments), but it is much easier for readers in Houston or in Buenos Aires to find a copy of Fútbol a Sol y Sombra or Fútbol y Masas than it is to track down Enrique and get him to confirm or contradict what I have written about him. Whether or not authors participate in discussions of their work, there is more of a dialogue among literary critics than among ethnographers. Plato may preserve a solemn silence, but his Phaedrus does not need “its father to help it” (Phaedrus 275E). There are scores of Plato scholars ready to answer for Plato’s written words. It could be argued that their participation, for all its erudition, is not Plato’s. Then again, even if Plato the “concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individual” were to reappear, his reapparition’s participation in the dialogue would not be authoritative. Drawing on Barthes (1977), Foucault (1977), or Derrida (1976 and 1982), we can affirm that the author is dead and no paternity test can restore him.

Cultural Studies and Cultural Anthropology

I follow Taylor, Archetti, and Savigliano in putting written texts and other cultural artifacts to ethnographic use. All three of them integrate tango lyrics in their ethnographies. Taylor establishes the ethnographic value of tango lyrics by observing that
they "are so well known that all Argentines quote them as proverbs relevant to daily situations" (Taylor 1992: 380). Archetti cites tango lyrics as utterances that contain clues about models of Argentine masculinity. He explains, "in this paper, the fictional work of tango serves as ethnographic raw material, not as authoritative statements about, or closed interpretations, of Argentinian society" (Archetti 1994d: 108). Savigliano situates tango lyrics according to when they were composed and according to the gender identity of their composer (Savigliano 1995: 53-61). She also narrates hearing specific tango lyrics played on a family phonograph as her grandfather taught her to do dance tango (ibid.: 207-211).

Taylor and Savigliano focus ethnographic attention on tango movies. Taylor quotes tango lyrics sung in the movie El Exilio de Gardel as paradigmatic of letters shared among Argentines living in exile (Taylor 1992), while Savigliano integrates readings of the movies The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and El Día Que Me Quieras into her ethnographic history of tango (Savigliano 1995). In this dissertation, the movie Tango Bar plays a prominent part, containing a staged condensation of "naturally occurring speech" and scholarly publications regarding same-sex dancing. Archetti conducted ethnographic research specifically on the porteño sports magazine El Gráfico—a magazine that I also quote frequently in these pages (Archetti 1995a).

Archetti observes that "most anthropologists work, or have worked, in literate societies where reading and writing is still marginal" (Archetti 1994b: 22). In Buenos Aires, however, "we are confronted with the fact that our informants consume different types of written products. In other words, they not only speak, tell stories, dance, pray or sing, they also read" (Archetti 1994b: 23). For Archetti, Taylor, Savigliano, and me, to
focus on written sources is not, as Handler would have it, to focus on elite or even bourgeois culture. Literacy in Buenos Aires and in much of the world is no longer the exclusive property of a priestly caste or a privileged class, and has not been so for a very long time. Archetti argues that the ethnographic approach to texts is distinguished from the Cultural Studies approach to texts by the attention we ethnographers pay to social practice. "Social anthropology, however, is more than cultural studies. Anthropologists focus their analysis on writing as a social practice and place special emphasis on the interrelatedness between texts and practice" (Archetti 1994b: 12). Archetti may be correct that ethnographers tend to focus on the street-level context in which texts are produced, consumed, and reproduced (quoted), but I am not certain of that. As recently as 1975, Richard Bauman's call to approach verbal art as situated performance merited publication in the American Anthropologist (Bauman 1975). Bauman was writing against the dominant paradigm in which oral literature was removed from the immediate circumstances of its production. I am not at all confident that "the rise of performance" proclaimed by Conquergood (1991) has yet eclipsed Lévi-Straussian Structuralism or Geertzian Textualism as an ethnographic model. If many anthropologists continue to conceive of practices as texts, I doubt they conceive of texts as practices. A Balinese cockfight remains a text to be read over the shoulder of a native, and not a social practice to be located in a particular context.

Cultural Studies in the United States is often located in Literature departments, which may privilege the textual over the practical. It merits noting, however, that Raymond Williams was a professor of Drama, not Literature, and that he explicitly
cautioned against conceiving of texts as objects to be merely read.

There is no *Hamlet*, no *Brothers Karamazov*, no *Wuthering Heights*, in the sense that there is a particular great painting. There is no *Fifth Symphony*, there is no work in the whole area of music and dance and performance, which is an object in any way comparable to those in the visual arts which have survived. [...] The relationship between the making of a work of art and its reception is always active, and subject to conventions, which in themselves are forms of (changing) social organization and relationship, and this is radically different from the production and consumption of an object (Williams [1973] 1980: 47).

Williams borrowed the musical term “notation” to refer to novels as well as to scores, plays, and choreographies. In this way he made it clear that texts per se make feeble objects of analysis, and that Cultural Studies scholars should do just what ethnographers, according to Archetti, do: Focus on writing and reading and quoting as cultural practices.

There are signs that Williams’ advice has been heeded in the world of U.S. literary Cultural Studies. Eve Sedgwick’s use of speech act theory to read Henry James’s *Prefaces* is indicative of many and an increasing number of literary scholars’ attention to “the interrelatedness between texts and practice.”

It seems to me that this dissertation straddles the border that would separate Cultural Anthropology from Cultural Studies. On the one hand, there is much that is ethnographic, including my narrative of attending an asado, a soccer game, and a milonga, as well as intermittent references to what a particular informant said to me. On the other hand, I have made extensive use of literary texts. Ana María Shua’s novel *El Marido Argentino Promedio* figures prominently in my reading of asado in Chapter Two, and Esteban Echeverría’s short story “El Matadero” (along with his story “La Cautiva”) is at the center of my reading of the sexual politics of torture in Chapter Three. I give
Fernando Niembro and Julio Llinás’ novel *Inocente* an extensive reading in Chapter Four, in order to introduce Jameson’s theory of conspiracy theories. In Chapter Five, I draw on Adolfo Carlo’s short story “A Toda Pelota” and on a poem by Luis Amaya to explore the refusal of homosexual identity. And Jorge Luis Borges’ short story “La Intrusa” plays a key role in my discussion of homosociality in Chapter Six. Non-literary cultural artifacts also figure prominently in these pages. Paintings by Jorge Azar, several cookbooks, and soccer magazines also appear in the pages of this ethnography. I would like to say that—this being an ethnography— I consistently focus on texts and paintings as cultural practices, but I do not. My treatment of these texts does not serve to assuage our disciplinary identity crisis. The only comfort I can offer to anthropologists who worry about MLA-ization is John Borneman’s finding that the problem is departmental and not disciplinary.

In recent years, anthropologists [...] have taken an interest in texts and literary criticism, and even in high-culture literary products, but that interest has not been oriented toward the reincorporation of language and high-culture literary products (except perhaps at Rice University) (Borneman 1995: 663).

Is the Rice Anthropology Department North American anthropology’s Other, the margin that helps members of other anthropology departments maintain the illusion that they all still fit (did they ever?) inside a single discipline? If so, then perhaps this dissertation can be read as my modest contribution to anthropological preservation.

Final Reckonings

The dizzyingly complex relationship between ethnography and literature in Argentina is put on display in Savigliano’s “Nocturnal Ethnographies: Following Cortázar
in the Milongas of Buenos Aires” (Savigliano 1997). Savigliano begins by presenting herself with the challenge of writing “an ethnography and a critique of the ethnographic predicament at the same time.” One of her tactics for accomplishing this double goal is to include parenthetical notes that expose the seams of her ethnography: “(From an underlined note on the margin: Check with ‘informants’ if they would liked to be mentioned by their real names or if they would rather choose pseudonyms)” (ibid.: 32). The hypermarked mention of “(‘informants’)” and their pseudonyms is compounded by Savigliano’s own choice of the pseudonym “Elvira Díaz.” Though Savigliano’s name appears under the title of the piece, Elvira’s name appears throughout the text as its author. In using a pseudonymous narrator, Savigliano follows Julio Cortázar whose story “Las Puertas del Cielo” is narrated by one Dr. Marcelo Hardoy. At the same time that Savigliano follows Cortázar in using this literary device, Savigliano’s Elvira follows Cortázar’s Hardoy into the milongas of Buenos Aires. Savigliano uses “follows” in at least three senses: (1) as a woman follows—and resists following—a man in dancing tango, (2) as one writer follows another writer in deploying a trope or making an argument, and (3) as one event follows another chronologically. It is impossible to pin down when Savigliano—that is Elvira—uses “to follow” in one sense and not another, just as it is impossible to pin down the relationship between Savigliano’s text, Elvira’s fieldwork, Cortázar’s story, and Hardoy’s narrative. As Savigliano observes,

Elvira flipped through her fieldnotes (vol. 1), trying to elucidate if these remarks were based on milongueros’ actual, verbal statements, on tango literary sources, on her own experiences at the milonga, or on her interpretive imagination (ibid.: 47).
Ultimately there is no ultimately. Savigliano--or is it Marta?--describes the actions of Elvira—the alter-ego ethnographer, endeavoring in vain to distinguish between oral utterances, literary texts, participant-observations, and interpretations.

I have arrived at a related undecidability in my relation with my informants, those Argentines who were kind enough to “inform” me. I place the word between quotes to call attention to its multiplicity of meanings and to two of its meanings in particular. There is the meaning that probably comes quickest to most anthropologists: “to report” or “to impart knowledge of a fact.” This definition coincides, for example, with Shakespeare’s use of the word in writing “... inform yourselves / We need no more of your advice ...” (The Winter’s Tale II. ii. 167-168) and “Is not thy master with him, who were’t so / Would have informed for preparation?” (Macbeth I. v. 33-34). According to this sense of the word “inform,” informants report to us, providing us with data that we ultimately interpret or explain. There is, however, another meaning, closer to the word’s etymological roots: “to give form to” or “to stamp with some specific effect.” Shakespeare also used the word thus in writing, “The god of soldiers, / With the consent of supreme Jove, inform / Thy thoughts with nobleness ...” (Coriolanus V.iii.71-72). According to this sense of the word “inform,” informants could be said to shape our thinking and writing.

My informants have informed me in both of these senses. I interviewed informants in the traditional anthropological style, asking questions such as “Why do you salt the meat before placing it on the grill?”, “What is the difference between a práctica and a milonga?”, and “How did you become a fan of Boca Juniors?” I duly noted the answers
and endeavored to give shape to resulting data. I have, however, also been shaped by informants. Many Argentines have “informed” my work theoretically. I tried, like most ethnographers, to develop a short summation of my project, to explain who I was and what I was doing to someone I was about to interview. My short summation was, as is routine, simplified for popular consumption. In giving our informants popular renditions of our research we ethnographers reproduce a distinction between the scholarly world in which we write and the everyday world in which we conduct research. I recall my first conversation, in a tango club, with Ana, who was to become a key informant in both senses. Ana is a psychoanalyst and an avid tango dancer. I explained that I would like to ask her some questions about tango for a study I was conducting on men’s and women’s roles in dancing tango, and she asked me if by “men’s and women’s roles” I did not mean “gender” [género sexual]? Ana also asked what my hypothesis was that I was testing on her? I began, haltingly, to explain that I suspected that tango’s early history as a dance performed by two men marked subsequent tango choreography, so that nowadays, even when a man and woman dance together, both are performing parts that are somehow masculine. This time, Ana said, “Oh, you mean the subjectivity of the tango dancer is masculine, even if the dancer is ‘a woman’?” I could hear the quotation marks Ana placed around “a woman.” Over the following eight months, I took some tango classes with Ana and her partner, and I continued to ask her questions about tango, but I also gave Ana English lessons in exchange for lessons she gave me on Lacan and Oscar Masotta (a prominent Argentine Lacanian).

My experience with Ana the informed informant is doubled in my focus on texts by
Argentine intellectuals, including Masotta. If there is something that makes my
ethnography of Buenos Aires especially unusual, I believe it is not so much its use of
literary texts, as its extensive use of "native" scholarship. There have been several
ethnographies of intellectuals, and it is notable that many of those ethnographies were
produced by anthropologists associated with the Rice Anthropology Department (e.g., by
Mehdi Abedi, Michael Fischer, James Faubion, and Sharon Traweek). This dissertation,
however, is not an ethnography of intellectuals as such. It is a cross-cultural engagement
with intellectuals. Throughout these pages, I, the yanqui ethnographer, repeatedly refer to
ethnographies of Buenos Aires written by the Argentine anthropologists Eduardo Archetti,
Marta Savigliano, and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco. I also engage with the work of other
Argentine social scientists, such as Pablo Alabarces, Ercilia Moreno Chá, Norberto Chab,
Sergio Levinsky, and María Graciela Rodríguez. The Argentine literary critic Jorge
Salessi is also cited repeatedly, and the debate between the Uruguayan intellectual
Eduardo Galeano and the Argentine intellectual Juan José Sebreli dominates both
Chapters Four and Five.

Quoting and commenting on works written by Argentine intellectuals, I have been
especially concerned with Said's critique of the "native point of view." "The 'native point
of view' is inevitably constituted as an interesting object for study rather than as a
legitimate voice to be reckoned with" (Said 1989: 219; see also Tobin 1994: 124). I do
not presume to will my way clear of the structural compulsions to constitute the "native
point of view" as a more or less interesting object for study, but I appreciate that I work in
an unusual ethnographic field. Buenos Aires is a site in which there are many more
"native" ethnographers at work than there are non-native ethnographers. As a result of their presence in the academy (and my daily proximity to one of them), I am in the unusual position—for an ethnographer—of writing with a native audience in mind. Perhaps, as Said argues, I cannot really "reckon with" them, but I reckon they will reckon with me.
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