

**ARGENTINEAN CULTURAL PRODUCTION
DURING THE NEOLIBERAL YEARS
(1989-2001)**

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Chapter One

Introduction

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Overview

The present volume gathers together eleven scholarly articles written by prestigious researchers from North America, Europe, Argentina, Australia and New Zealand who studied Argentine cultural production between 1989 and 2001. These articles analyze the thematic and stylistic features of literary works, films, drama and music produced during the period to determine the impact of neoliberalism (with its emphasis on market forces) on the cultural imagery of Argentine writers, filmmakers, playwrights and musicians. In its wide and interdisciplinary scope, this book is the first study of its kind that examines not only literary production, but other cultural artifacts as well. The authors of the essays included in this collection use a variety of theoretical frameworks to analyze novels, films, drama and music. To conceptualize cultural production in this introduction, we relied on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of postmodernism, a paradigm we explore in detail later in this introduction. We based our title on Néstor García Canclini's assessment of the 1989-2001 period, an era of "national decapitalization, under-consumption by majorities, unemployment, and impoverishment of cultural offerings" (47).

Taking García Canclini's characterization into account, we initiated our inquiry with the following questions: Have the years between 1989 and 2001 meant a loss of the national self/culture? If so, how did new developments in literature, media and film reflect the tensions provoked by neoliberalism? What role did cultural production play in shaping new concepts of national identity?

Therefore, the goal of this volume is not to critically examine as many authors, filmmakers or playwrights as possible in an effort to be comprehensive. Rather, this study was guided by the idea of offering a survey of varied developments in Argentine culture that simultaneously recorded and challenged, accepted and resisted, the phenomena unleashed by globalization.

The Lost Years? The national and transnational

In May 2001, one of the editors of this volume was interviewing an Argentine writer in a coffee shop in Buenos Aires. The conversation about literature flowed as current trends were discussed, but at one point the dialogue stopped due to a nearby commotion. Several customers in the coffee shop asked the owner to turn up the volume on the television. Suddenly, everyone was eagerly awaiting the commentator's words and our attention was captured by a news flash showing former President Carlos Menem being led to prison for alleged mismanagement of national resources. Without taking her eyes from the television screen, the writer being interviewed mused, "This is a historical event." This incident, which left us all speechless, seemed to prefigure other events that would take place three months later, underscoring a much deeper social and economic crisis afflicting Argentina. In December 2001, many Argentines abruptly woke up from a long dream of economic success known as the "Argentine miracle." What led to the crisis of 2001? How could economic policies, which elsewhere had been successful, fail so drastically in Argentina?

From 1989 to 2001, a strong market constituted an indisputable symbol in Argentina's collective imaginary, as national authorities implemented neoliberal policies considered necessary to solve the country's structural problems. According to Martín Hopenhayn, the most distinctive element characterizing these years is "the exaltation of the market, considered as the only social institution that orders without coercion, guaranteeing a diversity of tastes, projects, languages and strategies" (82). Given the fact that Argentina joined other nations in the "pursuit of capitalist

efficiency" and became part of the "global village," its authorities openly accepted the rules of transnational capitalism, without restricting or controlling foreign investors. Thus, these authorities veered away from a nationalistic and protective economic model and adopted a more pragmatic one in the belief that they were advancing the country's international position.

While participating in the global market, Argentines lived through a series of significant events which were by no means unique.¹ However, what was indeed distinctive in Argentina was the intensity with which neo-liberalism – ushered in by President Carlos Saúl Menem (1989-1999) and maintained later during the brief presidency of Fernando de la Rúa (1999-2001) – was launched. Proponents advertised neo-liberalism as a way of immediately eradicating what some people saw as the country's disparate temporalities: pre-modern living conditions in peripheral regions versus modernization in the large urban centers of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Mendoza and Rosario. Consequently, neoliberalism impacted not only the dynamics of Argentine society, but also its cultural production.

The drastic transformation was due to the centrality of the market, which linked Argentine culture and society to a global community. In effect, the tension between local and global, past and present, reshaped the aesthetics of artistic expression and the role of mass media and other forms of cultural production. Hence, links between cultural production and its socio-historical context – in addition to the mutual influences between the prevailing modes of production and dissemination of cultural artifacts in Argentina – are crucial areas that deserve analysis. This volume deals precisely with the cultural formations produced between two significant moments in contemporary Argentine history: the implementation of neo-liberalism in 1989 and the devastating socioeconomic and political crisis that took place in the last days of 2001. During these years, neoliberal policies were installed so that the country would "catch up" with the rest of the world in the pursuit of an "efficient and

¹ Similar cases can be found in Perú with Fujimori and in Brazil with Fernando Collor de Melo.

global capitalism” or, as Antonio Negri would put it, in an effort to be part of the “empire.”²

Being part of the empire carried two opposing implications: on one hand, it meant aligning Argentina with more developed nations; on the other, this very inclusion in the world economy amounted to fully participating in the capitalist system and the conflicts it generates around the globe.³ Indeed, the timeframe selected for this collection (1989-2001) also coincides with two crucial international developments. The first was the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, an event that signaled the demise of socialism as a viable economic system. With its unchallenged status, capitalism spread from North to South, from West to East, making every citizen a potential consumer of goods.⁴ The second concerns the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which, as Rolland Spiller notes, did much more than destroy the World Trade Center Towers and damage the Pentagon. These attacks marked the end of uncontested capitalist success. In Argentina, discourses that challenged the validity of being an uncritical part of the “empire” circulated well before the year 2001, but it was only in December 2001 that the toll of unchecked liberalism fuelled a revolt

² For Antonio Negri, empire is defined as “un concepto político que va más allá de los Estados-nación. Se está pensando en la construcción de un espacio de comando, en la definición de un fenómeno o de un principio de soberanía que cubre todo el Mercado mundial, el Mercado global, la sociedad global” (“a political concept that goes beyond the nation-states. It is thought of as the construction of a space of leadership, in the definition of a phenomenon or in a principle of sovereignty that extends to the whole global market, to global society”) (45). In a similar vein, Néstor García Canclini states that “the juridico-political coordinates of the nation thus lose force, formed as they were in an age when identity took shape exclusively in relation to the territory of its inhabitants” (29).

³ Negri clarifies one fundamental feature of the concept of empire: “Este imperio no es norteamericano; este imperio es, ante todo, capitalista” (“This empire is not American; this empire is, above all, capitalist”) (47). And he adds, “Y el imperio actual es algo que puede mantener unidas a la gran fuerza militar de los Estados Unidos, y la capacidad de las multinacionales, los gobiernos europeos, el G-8 que forman la aristocracia del mundo” (“And the current empire is something that can maintain together the huge military strength of the United States and the power of multi-national corporations, European governments and the G-8 that compose the world’s aristocracy”) (46).

⁴ “Today, instead, shaped by consumption, identity depends on what one owns or is capable of attaining” (García Canclini 16).

that deeply impacted every aspect of life in Argentina. To help situate the reader, the following section provides a brief historical context of the period 1989-2001.

Historical background

By the time of its 1989 elections, Argentina faced one of the most devastating socioeconomic crises in its history. Skyrocketing inflation, political instability, recession and a growing marginalization of the poorest sectors of the population generated a climate of intense discontent that culminated in mobs of rioters ransacking shops and supermarkets around the country. Discarded were the promises of President Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989), who, with the return of democracy in 1983, had guaranteed an optimistic future for all his fellow citizens. In the midst of the late 1980s political chaos, Carlos Menem, the Peronist candidate and ex-governor of La Rioja, one of the poorest provinces in the country, was elected president.

As soon as Menem took office in 1989, he gave up his own party’s statist traditions and embraced a free-market economic model aimed at stabilizing the economy. This measure gave birth to a new symbolic order which promoted the obsolescence of the idea of the state as the force of development. Reducing the intervention of the state in the economy and leaving the market as the most adequate means for resolving all the problems were mantras repeated by numerous politicians, economists and journalists from this period on.⁵ At the same time, greater personal success was promised in exchange for prioritizing the imperatives of productivity and competitiveness. To achieve economic efficiency, Economy Minister Domingo Cavallo accelerated market deregulation and demanded the privatization of the country’s major assets and primary services (transportation, gas, electricity, fuel, telecommunications and water utilities). This opened the way for foreign investors to take control of these companies. Many of these economic policies generated

⁵ See, for instance, the address by Michel Camdessus, Managing Director of the *International Monetary Fund* at the 1997 National Banks Convention in Buenos Aires (May 21).

resistance among the different national stakeholders – trade union members, public employees, laid-off workers – , who believed the government was also surrendering its political autonomy and economic independence.⁶ Despite this shared resistance, the opposition parties were fragmented and in disarray. Moreover, during the first years of Menem’s presidency, Argentina enjoyed economic stability; inflation rapidly declined and the economy achieved impressive rates of growth (8.9 percent in 1991, 8.7 percent in 1992, 6 percent in 1993 and 7 percent in 1994).⁷ Confidence in the Argentine economy began to grow as the GDP numbers jumped to 35 percent. With President Menem’s reelection in 1995 – with 49.8 percent of the vote – neo-liberalism became consolidated as the only option for national and individual success. The president declared that Argentina was on par with the First World nations of Europe and North America (“*un país del primer mundo*” [“*a first-world country*”]), even though several signs of exclusion and social fragmentation were evident.

These problems – which showed the darker side of neo-liberalism – intensified with the Asian market crisis in 1997 and the Russian default in 1998. In 1998, the Argentine economy plunged deeper into a recession. The national debt ballooned and unemployment increased.⁸ The fragile state of the economy reverberated in the political realm: in the legislative elections of October 1997, the Menem administration experienced its first nationwide defeat. This electoral defeat

⁶ Guido Di Tella, Minister of Foreign Relations, described bilateral ties between Argentina and the United States as “carnal relations.”

⁷ “That is what is being called the Argentine Miracle. Under President Carlos Menem and his Economy Minister, Domingo Cavallo, Argentina is experiencing a spectacular revival. [...] Argentina – mired during ‘the lost decade’ of the 1980s in inflation, stagnation, debt and deficits – is becoming something of a showcase of Latin America’s free-market revolution” (*Wall Street Journal* 1992). Not only did the media praise Argentina as an example to be followed by the rest of the continent, but so did the IMF, the World Bank, the US Treasury and a group of financial analysts related to the US and Argentinian establishment (see Manzetti 323).

⁸ In *La Argentina fragmentada*, Alicia Iriarte mentions that in spite of the Brady Plan, Argentine’s foreign debt had sharply increased by 1998 “from sixty thousand million to ninety five thousand million Argentine pesos [sixty billion to ninety five billion US dollars]” (23) and that this year heralded the beginning of a recessive economic cycle (23).

was read as an unequivocal sign of the increasing disenchantment of the electorate with the president’s policies. The administration’s loss of political support increased due to the economic model it continued to follow: in the 1999 presidential election, the Peronist candidate Eduardo Duhalde lost to the *Alianza* candidate Fernando de la Rúa. By this time, 13 million Argentinians (out of 34 million) were considered poor by the government’s own standards, and opinion polls showed an escalating public dislike for President Menem’s free-market policies as well as his continual “transgressions” and frivolities.

People anticipated the de la Rúa administration with hope and enthusiasm. However, as soon as he took office, the new president instructed his finance minister to reduce the state budget and raise taxes; in other words, to follow the same neoliberal policies initiated by his predecessor which by then had become vastly unpopular due to their high social and economic cost. The socioeconomic situation of the country quickly deteriorated: in 2001, the unemployment rate in Argentina jumped to 18-20 percent. In addition, the country’s failure to meet its fiscal targets resulted in the suspension of its international credit. This led the de la Rúa administration to impose severe limits on cash withdrawals (soon known as “*el corralito*”) which, in turn, ignited numerous social protests (*los cacerolazos*), pickets, sit-ins and marches rejecting these policies. President de la Rúa attempted to control the erupting violence by calling for a state of siege. It was too late, however: on December 20, 2001, amidst a social chaos of unprecedented dimensions, President de la Rúa resigned.

Closely related to these political developments were several important and culturally-defining phenomena. The installation of neo-liberal policies after 1989 divided Argentine society into “haves” and “have-nots” (Swampa 57). On one hand, the period was characterized by a democratic continuity not seen since the beginning of the century; on the other, the benefits of this democratic stability were unmatched in the socioeconomic realm. High unemployment and the decreasing value of salaries, along with budgetary cuts in key areas such as health, education and public

services, brought about a widening gap among the social classes. Argentine sociologist Marta Mancebo notes that the middle and lower classes were the most affected by the declining standard of living (184). For the Argentine middle classes, who have traditionally striven for and benefited from upward social mobility, the loss of their class status and privileges translated into a pervasive feeling of insecurity. This explains the rapid growth of gated communities and the relocation of previously communal activities to the private realm. Meanwhile, as the lower classes became more impoverished, they experienced higher marginality and exclusion from public and cultural life.

Other features of this period include the deregulation and privatization of culture and the disintegration of social relations as people turned inward and lost confidence in governmental and political safety nets. For Hopenhayn, this cultural deregulation was a direct result of the crisis of paradigms and utopias that Latin American intellectuals faced after the defeat of not only socialism, but also the Planning State. The Planning State, advocated by economic experts, was in charge of modernizing the countries in the region and delivering better economic prospects and broader opportunities for the exercise of citizenship (103). Hopenhayn maintains that without the promises of utopia, “minimalism has been converted into a well-regarded value for daily action. All big projects are dismissed as pretentious or unrealistic” (8). As utopian social change was discredited, individuals and social classes were left to survive on their own, without protection from the State or solidarity from other social actors. In characterizing Chilean society of the 1990s (an insight that also pertains to Argentina), essayist Tomás Moulian asserts that the citizens’ energies were directed towards consumption, thereby fostering a loss of interest in associative forms of participation (103).

Market culture?

The emphasis placed on consumption and enjoyment of market products during 1989-2001 radically altered not only social relations, but also and more importantly, cultural production.⁹ Indeed, every cultural field – narrative, music, film – was influenced by the prioritization of market forces and rules. In Argentina, the dissemination of neo-liberal tenets that privileged the free dynamic of the market relied primarily on newly-deregulated telecommunications. Television channels and radio stations that up to the late 1980s were still largely under the aegis of the State – a legacy of the military years – were transferred to private hands in the early 1990s. This allowed the formation of powerful conglomerates that advertised and championed the benefits of being part of the world through consumption.

As a result of the media’s promotion of neoliberalism, cultural manifestations were also greatly impacted. Aníbal Ford and Jorge Elbaum, who assess the state of culture under the Menem administration, point to its dislocation. Indeed, the effects of privileging the market – with its regulations and push for profit – affected which cultural products were created and circulated. The implicit rule of this period was, then, the demand that cultural creations be successful market products with either large audiences or record sales.

The examination of recent publications on the cultural production of the period under study suggests the supremacy of the market in impacting the different fields of culture. Before addressing this issue, it is worth clarifying that up to this moment, the study of Argentine culture has been predominantly done through an examination of its literature. This volume attempts to respond to this shortcoming by bringing together new work on narrative, film and music. Due to these disciplinary divisions, we begin the review of literature by first focusing on literary developments

⁹ As García Canclini states, “[C]ultural expressions are subordinated to the values that ‘dynamize’ markets and fashion: inexhaustible consumption, surprise, and entertainment” (18).

and then proceeding to examine developments in visual production, music and drama.

The effects of the market logic on Argentine literature have been analyzed in a number of studies. For instance, *Lo que sobra y lo que falta (en los últimos veinte años de la literatura argentina)* (2004) is a collection of essays which were first a part of panels organized by the *Rojas Cultural Center* in March 2003. The essayists in this collection reflect on the tensions found in literary works during the neoliberal years. While many of these contributions are more opinion and intuition than the result of academic research, they address some of the vicissitudes of literature during these years. This is the case of Silvia Saftta's contribution to the collection – perhaps the most detailed one – which stresses that there has been a breakdown in the relationship between writers and readers, and thus, literature has lost its centrality and vantage point to depict and represent the whole cultural spectrum. Marcos Mayer agrees with this assessment by noting that “lo que viene sucediendo desde hace tiempo es el desplazamiento de la literatura a un lugar marginal dentro de lo que se llama cultura general” (“what has been happening for some time now is the displacement of literature to a marginal place within what is called general culture”) (107). Consequently, for these critics, Argentine literary production of the last two decades appears to be unable to respond to the specific demands of a given historical time.

Geneviève Fabry and Ilse Logie carry out a broad examination of the different literary genres in *Literatura argentina de los años 90* (2003). In the opening chapter, Daniel Link provocatively critiques the narrative production of the period. Link discusses the effects of applying the logic of the market to literature and raises the following question: “¿Quién puede sostener la ficción de ochenta novelas buenas por año?” (“Who can sustain the fiction of eighty good novels per year?”) (20). Link also makes reference to the distribution systems of the prestigious publishing houses (Planeta, Mondadori, Norma) that, by operating in specific countries, allow for a restricted circulation of titles. Also taking into consideration the profit motive that

guides publishing houses in the selection of the titles to be published, Link calls attention to the difficult relationship between art and the cultural industry (27).

Pampa Arán also compiled and edited a collection of essays about Argentine literature entitled *Umbrales y catástrofes: literatura argentina de los 90* (2003). As its editor states, the collection is guided by the goal of “indagar cómo ciertas escrituras de los últimos 90 establecen sus lazos con la tradición en un horizonte de catástrofe” (“researching how some texts of the 1990s establish links with tradition in a horizon of catastrophe”) (9). In general, the essays that compose this collection stress the dichotomy between tradition and innovation in literary magazines, poetry and narrative. A similar concern is found in Nilda Flawia de Fernández's *Polémicas por la patria: literatura y crisis* (2004), in which the author, after examining a wide variety of texts including prose and poetry, underscores that it is possible to note the “compromiso del discurso literario argentino con su época” (“the commitment of Argentine literary discourse to its time”) (33).

Besides these literary trends, other numerous and diverse phenomena impacted Argentine literature during the neoliberal years. First, this field suffered from the shrinking of its reading public due to the concomitant reduction of the middle classes, who lost purchasing power in these years. Second, as demand for published materials decreased, so did production, and this factor, in turn, led to the weakening of a previously robust publishing market (María Saenz Quesada 145). In addition, the new primacy of image-centered products helped give print culture a less prominent cultural role. Audiovisual products, most easily accessible through the popularization of VCRs, replaced word-centered cultural expressions.

The importance of the visual in Argentine cultural production of the 1989-2001 period follows both a global and local logic. Globally, it is linked to the postmodern culture of late capitalism, as Fredric Jameson might say (70). Jameson's general observations are corroborated in the Argentine case by Argentine intellectuals. For example, Beatriz Sarlo calls this phenomenon “postmodern or post-political” to refer to the emergence of television as a political medium. Similarly,

Ford and Elbaum, in their study of Argentine culture, also note the frivolization of political culture as a response to the global rise of corporate media monopolies. Locally, the liberalization of the media and the expansion of investments in different media outlets were fundamental steps in the formation of television-film partnerships (Falicov 331). These partnerships teamed up with television networks, radio stations and advertising companies to promote movies made by these conglomerates. These conglomerates were the result of the deregulation of television channels in the 1990s, which Menem spearheaded. Unsurprisingly, the newly privatized companies that took over the audiovisual space were favorable to the transformations brought about by neoliberalism.

With this influx of capital and investments, Argentine cinema also became an important player in the cultural field. In *Cine argentino. Entre lo posible y lo deseable* (1998), Octavio Getino traces the development of cinematography in Argentina from the beginning of the twentieth century. As director of *Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA)* in the 1990s, Getino divides audiovisual production into two periods (before and after 1994) according to the laws that protected filmmaking during the first Menem administration (108-142). The period between 1989 and 1994 were years of adaptation in the film industry vis-à-vis the enormous impact of the 1989 economic crisis: vast sectors of the audience stopped attending movie theaters, and decreasing profits helped curtail the number of cinematic undertakings that received production loans and subsidies. After 1994, with the passing of a law that taxed video rentals, *INCAA* saw record revenues that, in turn, allowed for more subsidies for local productions. Some of these productions successfully recaptured local audiences who had previously favored and consumed foreign films.

Parallel to this commercial success, a new generation of young filmmakers and documentarists who had received formal training in filmmaking emerged. They produced and directed award-winning films introducing formal and thematic

experimentation. In *Civilización y barbarie en el cine argentino y latinoamericano* (2005), Silvina Díaz states that

[e]l nuevo cine argentino intenta reconstruir, desde diferentes posturas ideológicas y estéticas, un espacio experimental de indagación social y de resistencia frente a las pautas homogeneizadoras, pero también frente al cine de la industria y su afán mercantilista (118).¹⁰

Moreover, as Viviana Rangil shows in *Otro punto de vista: mujer y cine en la Argentina* (2005), the work of a new generation of female filmmakers has been well-received by critics and audiences alike.

So far, we have provided a survey of critical works on Argentine cultural production during the neoliberal years. However, there remains a question which demands attention: in the context of late capitalism (or empire), transnationalism, postmodern culture and hybrid forms, is it valid to focus on the cultural production of a nation at a time when the very concept of the nation-state was questioned, given the homogenization brought about by globalization?¹¹ Indeed, we do not pretend to argue that Argentina stands as an exception to these developments, nor that Argentine cultural production is fully separated from world culture.¹² Rather, this volume attempts to scrutinize how writers, filmmakers, musicians and performers from the same geographical area have responded to the challenges posed by the opposition

¹⁰ (“The new Argentine cinema attempts to recreate, from different ideological and aesthetic positions, an experimental space of social interrogation and resistance vis-à-vis homogenizing tendencies as well as industry cinema with its market-oriented goals”).

¹¹ Antonio Negri in *Diálogo sobre la globalización, la multitud y la experiencia argentina* states that “[e]l espacio del estado-nación es un espacio que, no importa de qué manera se lo mire, está considerado superado” (“the space of the nation-state is a space that, no matter how it is looked at, is considered obsolete”) (35).

¹² David Foster has argued that “it must be impossible to separate ‘Argentinian’ culture from global culture, or from the universal cultural principle. Certain cultural icons and clusters of icons may be specifically Argentine, but it is questionable whether they constitute an ‘Argentine’ culture in any systematic way” (Foster quoted in Bueno and Ceasar 11).

between the local and the global, the national and the post-national,¹³ or, to put it in Santiago Colás' words, how they "retain[ed] a tension between the homogenizing experience of globalization and the heterogeneous and local forms that resist or consent to them" (17).¹⁴ In exploring how Argentine cultural producers negotiated the global versus the local and the push for profitability versus culture, it is helpful to turn to Pierre Bourdieu's concepts concerning the field of cultural production.

Bourdieu notes that a traditional characteristic of artists and writers is their rejection or indifference towards economic gain.¹⁵ Because artists and writers privilege their symbolic prestige (consecrations or honors) and cultural capital (knowledge or dispositions, to use Bourdieu's terminology), they often do not pay attention to the need to create profit. Thus, Bourdieu considers the field of cultural production as opposed to mass commercialization. Nonetheless, Bourdieu calls attention to the fact that despite cultural practitioners' alleged disinterest in economic gain, the field of cultural production is divided by two contesting groups: the dominant and the dominated. The former align themselves with the economic and political elite and conform their cultural products to the elite's needs and orientations. By contrast, the dominated are characterized by their independence from the economic and political elites: they produce art for art's sake and interpret their failure to generate economic profit as a sign of their symbolic and cultural superiority (40).

¹³ García Canclini addresses the importance of national cultures: "National cultures seemed to be reasonably apt systems for persevering, with the homogeneity imposed by industrialization, certain differences and a territorial rootedness that coincided, more or less, with the spaces of production and circulation of commodities" (17).

¹⁴ Colás calls for acknowledging the differences found in postmodern cultures: "The fact that global structures of domination survive on differentiation requires us to grasp the various, local post-modernities as related, but not therefore homogeneous or identical. As critics, we must retain, not pretend to resolve, a tension between what will remain an unsatisfactorily homogenizing term: postmodernism, and the heterogeneous local forms produced within and sometimes against its logic" (17).

¹⁵ Bourdieu holds that "[t]he literary and artistic world is so ordered that those who enter it have an interest in disinterestedness" (40).

This division between the dominants and the dominated is, for Bourdieu, particularly noticeable in the field of literary production.

Bourdieu argues that the literary field struggles with the issue of the "monopoly of literary legitimacy," which is "the monopoly of power to say with authority who are authorized to call themselves writers" or "to consecrate producers or products" (42). He further states that the roles noticeable in the sphere of literary production between dominants and dominated parallel the functions of the different agents in the realm of consumption and in social classes. Simply put, the dominants, due to their rapport with political and economic elites, consume more and are thus integrated into the higher classes, while those dominated in the literary production field spend less and identify with the lower classes (45). Because of the links between those in the literary field and society, Bourdieu believes that in times of crisis, those who are dominated in the field of literary production can voice the concerns of those dominated in society, and by leading the latter, "subvert the order prevailing in the field of power" (44). At this point, we should ask to what extent Bourdieu's statements about the dominant and the dominated apply to Argentine cultural production during the 1989-2001 period. The purpose of the essays gathered in this collection aims at answering this question.

The first set of chapters in this book examines literature. María Teresa Medeiros-Lichem looks at Luisa Valenzuela's *Realidad nacional desde la cama* (*Bedtime Manners*) (1990) as a narrative that chronicles the transition from the first post-dictatorial president, Raúl Alfonsín, to the second, Carlos Menem. Medeiros-Lichem perceptively identifies in Valenzuela's novel both a concern for the role of the armed forces in a democratic society and the enduring effect of the human rights violations that took place during the most recent dictatorship (1979-1983). Carolina Rocha analyzes how a contemporary emphasis on memory informs a reflexive type of narrative that emerged in the 1990s and has been employed by Mempo Giardinelli and Tununa Mercado in *Santo oficio de la memoria* (*Sacred Office of Memory*) (1991) and *La madriguera* (*The Burrow*) (1997), respectively. Rocha argues that

these writers use memory to deconstruct master-narratives and present versions of history that lie outside of official narrations of the nation. Also addressing the topic of memory, Hólmfrídur Gardarsdóttir chooses Cristina Feijóo's *Memorias del río inmóvil (Memoirs of the Immobile River)* (2001) as an example of a self-historical novel to scrutinize the traumas of the most recent dictatorship. Gardarsdóttir argues that Feijóo alludes to the firm grip of the past, despite the pleasures and forgetfulness brought about by consumerism. By analyzing the power of memory in the face of defeat, Ana María Amar Sánchez provocatively argues that two types of characters – losers and winners – emerged in 1990s Argentine narratives. Basing her distinction on the overlapping of literature, politics and ethics, Amar Sánchez reads the losers as figures who embody resistance to widespread discourses that emphasize economic success without moral values.

Two chapters focus on the tension between the local and the global: Kathryn Lehman examines the representation of Eva Perón in two novels: *Santa Evita* by Tomás Eloy Martínez and *La pasión según Eva* by Abel Posse, and two films released in the 1990s: *Eva Perón* by Juan Carlos Desanzo and *Evita* by Alan Parker. Lehman bases her analysis on Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics to investigate the extent to which a national myth is reinvented in order to adapt it not only to changes in Argentine politics, but also to the demands of a global audience. Similarly, Guillermo Anad maps out the transformation that tango, as a musical form, underwent during the 1990s. For Anad, this popular and traditional Argentine cultural product was modified by incorporating allusions to the predominant social issues of the decade.

The third section addresses developments in the media. Hugo Hortiguera's chapter traces the journalistic coverage of Alfredo Yabrán's suicide as presented in the three most important newspapers of Argentina in the late 1990s. In the news generated after this event, Hortiguera reads a unique phenomenon in which the media adopted some of the formulas of fiction to depict and capitalize on the climate of social corruption during those years. In her essay, Nora Mazziotti provides an

overview of the transformations of Argentine television after 1989 regarding ownership, production and style. Mazziotti focuses her attention on the development of fictional programs during the 1990s.

The following chapters are, for the most part, devoted to cinema. Wi Castro applies Néstor García Canclini's concept of multicontextuality in global communications to analyze Elizeo Subiela's *No te mueras sin decirme adónde (Don't Die without Telling Me Where You are Going)* (1995) and the reinscription of the national in a post-national era. For his part, Fernando Reati's analysis of film *Mala época (Bad Times)* (1998) and the novel *Vivir afuera (Living Out)* (1998) by Rodolfo Fogwill highlights the emergence of a new aesthetic in the 1990s, one based on depicting the interconnected, yet separated lives of Argentine citizens within an environment of fear and insecurity. In the third chapter in this section, Laura Martins examines Lucrecia Martel's opera prima *La ciénaga (Swamp)* (2001), relying on Giorgio Agamben's concept of state of exception. Martins argues that the bodies in Martel's film bear the imprint of a past violence that is suppressed in daily life.

Finally, from the perspective of a practitioner, Faye Bendrup's local selected media and theater projects produced in Buenos Aires in 2001. Bendrup's chronicle traces the relationship of cultural production to sociopolitical practices and values amidst a generalized climate of impending crisis.

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Chapter Two

"The museums of memory": Explorations on the soc psyche in *Realidad nacional desde la cama* by Luisa Valenzuela

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Por fortuna puedo decir que, en medio de la terrible crisis económica que estamos viviendo [2003], experimentamos una forma de salud mental al estar poco a poco recuperando la memoria. Es decir que habiendo tocado el principio de realidad, del que nos distanció e sueño de opio menemista, se empiezan a tomar acciones muy sólidas: con respecto a eso de ir destapando ollas. Los cacerolazos lograrán ese fenómeno por, digamos, magia simpatía. Y se están armando *museos de la memoria...* (Luisa Valenzuela in Bilbija 183)¹⁶

The historical events that afflicted Argentina in the last decade twentieth century have brought about profound transformations in the psyche of the people. Argentineans were disheartened by the traumatic experiences of violence which resulted not only in the physical grief of thousands, but that to an atmosphere of emotional dislocation. This dislocation was reflected in an attitude of bewilderment towards that dark episode of their recent history.

Through her writings, Luisa Valenzuela, known for her subtle depiction of power abuse and her imprint of the human distress suffered under the dict

¹⁶ "Fortunately I may say that, in the midst of the terrible economic crisis we are living now we experimented with a mode of mental health as we are little by little recovering memory. In other words, having touched the principle of reality from which the menemist dream had distanced us, very solid actions are starting to take place regarding that matter of uncovering pots. The pots [cacerolazos] attained that phenomenon by, let's say, magic. And *museums of memory* are being created." (My translation and emphasis).