

Preface

THIS BOOK is an interdisciplinary study of Buenos Aires from the mid-1950s through the early 1970s—a period of socio-political turmoil, economic volatility, and burgeoning cultural activity. After the fall of the Peronist government in 1955, Buenos Aires underwent significant architectural and spatial changes, witnessed the emergence of new consumer trends and transportation patterns, and became the subject of many new films, short stories, and novels that dramatized the interaction between middle-class urbanites and the alienating cityscape. In the following pages, I analyze the transformation of Buenos Aires, both its material conditions and its discursive representations, in relation to contemporary class struggles during a key transitional phase of Argentine history.

This project began as a much more modest inquiry into the films of the *Generación del 60*, a group of young filmmakers whose work has largely been ignored by international film scholars in favor of the militant political cinema that emerged in the late 1960s. As I viewed the films and read the contemporary fictions of Julio Cortázar (*Rayuela* [Hopscotch]), Ernesto Sabato (*Sobre héroes y tumbas* [On Heroes and Tombs]), and others, I began to discern a deliberate obsession with the city, which was frequently depicted as an alienating landscape filled with class and intergenerational conflicts that had to be negotiated by the texts' protagonists. Buenos Aires was not a mere backdrop for the peripatetic wanderings of particular characters; it was an active trope for figuring their personal crises and, in some texts, for dramatizing underlying social conflicts. Buenos Aires was also the focal point of formalistic experimentation. Unlike earlier films confined to studio sets, those of the *Generación del 60* or *Nuevo Cine* were shot on location in the streets and parks of Buenos Aires. Similarly concerned with stylistic innovation, some novels and short stories began to test spatial and temporal unities of realist narrative. To some degree, this preoccupation with Buenos Aires as transformative space might be considered a continuation of established urban biases within Argentine cultural traditions or a reaction to contemporaneous European cultural trends (e.g., Italian neo-realism, existentialist literature, and the French New Wave). However, as my research proceeded, I discovered a number of important concurrent changes in the material city (e.g., new architectural designs, transportation patterns, and consumer practices) that suggested that the cinematic and literary preoccupation

with Buenos Aires was, in large part, a response to local, extraliterary, socioeconomic phenomena.

Several very fine studies of the 1960s (among them, Oscar Terán's *Nuestros años 60* and Silvia Sigal's *Intelectuales y poder en la década del 60*) provide subtle, in-depth analysis of the contemporary political, cultural, and intellectual debates that took place after Perón's 1955 ouster, yet they do not address questions of urban transformation. Meanwhile, urban historians have tended to avoid the 1960s in favor of the early twentieth century (James Scobie's *Buenos Aires: Plaza to Suburb, 1870–1910* or Richard Walter's *Politics and Urban Growth in Buenos Aires, 1910–1942*) or to gloss over the 1960s in monographs dealing with longer epochal periods (Luis Alberto Romero and José Luis Romero's *Buenos Aires, historia de cuatro siglos* or Jorge Hardoy and Margarita Gutman's *Buenos Aires: Historia urbana del área metropolitana*). Thus, as I began to see connections between the proliferation of urban literature and film and the physical changes taking place in Buenos Aires, my research took a decisive turn to tease out the links between material and discursive phenomena that had been left underdeveloped by previous scholarship. How, for instance, did this urban renaissance in the 1960s relate to larger social and political transformations occurring after the fall of Perón? How did the construction of new buildings and the emergence of car culture change the urban landscape and people's interactions with each other? What was the significance of the rise of new publishing houses and subsequent changes in the circulation of books? In what ways did the representation of Buenos Aires in literature and film register the emergence of a new urban imaginary? Ultimately, I became convinced that, after 1955, Buenos Aires (conceived as both material reality and discursive formation) became the fulcrum of a new hegemonic project promoted by middle-class sectors as they renegotiated their position in the social order after the fall of Perón.

As a result of this research process, my study expanded significantly (as all dreamy dissertations do) and became a mapping project to sketch out Buenos Aires as a complex conjuncture in which material city, urban cultural production, social relations, and national politics all interact productively, shaping one another. Assuming culture to be productive as well as reflective, I argue that the discursive realm continuously affects material reality by shaping people's perceptions and actions. If the alienating cityscape in Sabato's *Sobre héroes y tumbas* and in films like David Kohon's *Tres veces Ana* reflected middle-class anxieties about the loss of social control, they also helped circulate existentialist paradigms for understanding contemporary urban life and one's interactions with the world. At the same time, the abundant advertisements for domestic

appliances and cars in new magazines like *Primera Plana* promoted consumerism as a means of finding social tranquillity.

To address this complex, dynamic relationship between the discursive and the material appropriately, I employ an eclectic critical approach drawing on the methods of several disciplines. I utilize close textual analysis to discern the specific techniques by which films and literary texts reformulated the representation of Buenos Aires. But I also examine the ways in which books and films circulated through social space as the result of significant changes in the publishing and film industries. During the 1960s, Buenos Aires witnessed the proliferation of a number of new publishing houses with new packaging and promotion strategies that radically reformulated the relationship between commerce and culture. At the same time, the city became the focus of a new, more independent art cinema that broke with the production practices of the decaying Argentine studio system. The analysis of this field of cultural production suggests how the hierarchies of cultural power worked (in this case, to promote new urban sensibilities) and, to some degree, how texts could reinforce wider ideological and discursive formations. At the same time, I incorporate the insights of architectural criticism and sociological studies of everyday life to discuss changes in the material city and their significance. The innovative designs of new buildings signaled shifts not only in the architectural profession but also in how urban denizens would perceive the cityscape and interact with their fellow citizens. New consumption and transportation patterns also registered changing social relations. Who could and “should” occupy particular spaces in the city and particular places in the social order was being renegotiated. And the analysis of changing material conditions in the city combined with the examination of the field of cultural production helps uncover how the transformation of Buenos Aires contributed to the formulation of a new hegemonic project.

This mixed approach seeks to bridge a gap in scholarship on the city written by both social geographers and cultural critics. The excellent studies of David Harvey, Edward Soja, Mike Davis, Derek Gregory, and others have underlined the way urbanization (particularly in the past fifty years in the United States and Western Europe) has served the needs of post-Fordist capitalism and registered the “postmodern condition.” Their work has called attention to the cultural meaningfulness of space and, in an era of increasingly cross-disciplinary fertilization, has opened a door for cultural critics. Yet, while acknowledging, as Harvey often does, the centrality of representation (or discourses) to the constitution of urban sensibilities and subjectivities, social geographers have tended not to utilize the tools of cultural critics to further their analyses of signs and meanings.¹

If social geographers generally favor material phenomena as their ultimate object of study, literary critics working on the representation of the city in novels, poems, and stories have often limited their analyses to the texts themselves or to questions of intertextuality.² Many of these studies offer insightful, persuasive readings of particular works and productively comment on how such texts reflect and respond to contextual factors. However, they also often fail to address sufficiently how those representations interact with lived practices to inform the larger urban culture. Even a study as fascinating as Beatriz Sarlo's *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930* (1988) largely isolates the discussion of the city's material life to an introductory chapter before discussing the work of groups of authors in individual chapters. While adding to our understanding of individual authors (and, in the case of Sarlo, of larger socio-cultural dynamics), such studies of urban literature avoid the question of how culture influences people's apprehension of the material city as well as their actions in that space. To address these issues, the analysis of particular representations must be accompanied by the examination of the field of cultural production and consumption *and* of urban material practices. In sum, cultural analysis must be wed to material history.

Film scholarship has developed along lines similar to those of literary studies. Early theoretical studies like Stephen Heath's "Narrative Space" offered provocative insights about the ideological implications of the construction of cinematic space. More recent studies comment on the image of the city as a register of social anxieties at particular historical conjunctures as in studies of U.S. film noir or Brazilian Cinema Novo's "second stage."³ Yet, despite the fruitfulness of these lines of inquiry, what is needed at this stage are more works linking radical contextualization and theoretical questions about film to the social function of space. As David Clarke notes in his introduction to *The Cinematic City* (1997), film has long been concerned with the city—emerging as it did at a moment of rapid urbanization at the turn of the twentieth century. Both Clarke and, more particularly, James Hay call for "a way of discussing film as a social practice that begins by considering how social relations are spatially organized—through sites of production and consumption—and how film is practiced from and across particular sites and always in relation to other sites."⁴ Film is deeply embedded in spatial practices, as is evident not only by the places appearing on screen but also in the relations between the spectators and the cinematic apparatus as well as in the way film is produced, circulated, and exhibited. Thus, this book sees films as registers of particular socio-spatial relations that they, in turn, help produce.

As a cultural studies project, this study also addresses two overarching issues. First, I hope to demonstrate the importance of what problemat-

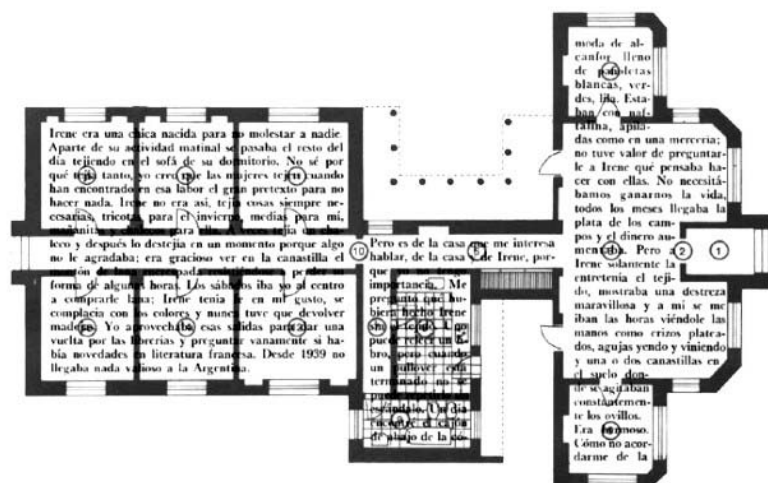
ically might be termed “middle-class culture” in the 1960s. Often seen as the decade of guerrilla warfare and revolutionary ideals, the 1960s also laid the groundwork for the neo-liberal projects that would begin to flourish in the late 1970s. I believe the project of cultural hegemony that surfaced in and through Buenos Aires in the 1960s through the aegis of the middle classes was vital to later developments and must no longer be ignored in favor of discussions of how and why more radical, leftist formulations failed. Second, my study responds to the broad, theoretical overviews of David Harvey, Frederic Jameson, and others about culture, capitalism, and space in the late twentieth century. While finding their discussion of the linkages between socio-cultural phenomena (postmodernism/the postmodern condition) and a particular economic moment (late capitalism) to be immensely persuasive, I am somewhat troubled by the generality of their commentaries—driven as they are primarily by the analysis of U.S. and European urban contexts. In response to these critical tendencies and theoretical proposals, I offer a focused, in-depth study of a particular spatial-historical conjuncture as the best form of critical engagement. It is “here”—in the interdisciplinary microstudy—that I see the necessary pathways to a fuller understanding of culture and society in the region.

Introduction

Urban Formations and Critical Scaffolding

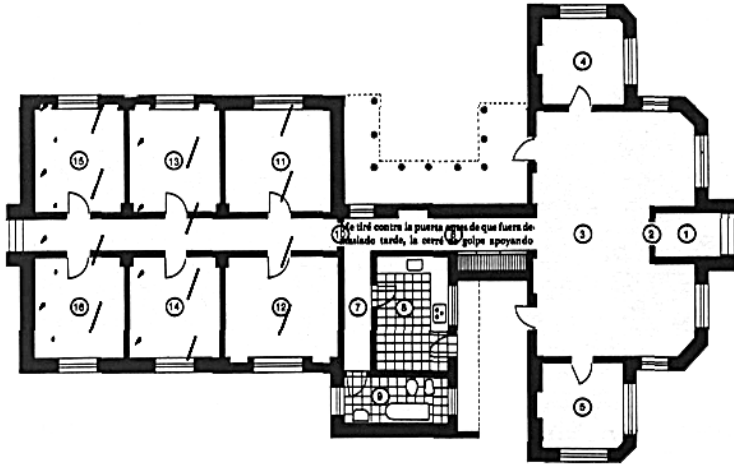
IN JULIO Cortázar's famous short story "Casa tomada" [House Taken Over], a middle-aged brother and sister abruptly leave their large ancestral home in downtown Buenos Aires after a mysterious presence invades their house, taking it over room by room. In Cortázar's "Omnibus," a young woman on her day off boards a bus for the downtown area, where she is confronted by the impertinent stares of her fellow passengers, each of whom, inexplicably, carries a bouquet of flowers. Purposely elliptical, these stories never explain the strange behavior of their antagonists and have been characterized as two of Cortázar's more metaphorical works about the nature of the human psyche.

Yet such readings ignore the stories' detailed and significant spatial markers.¹ In "Casa tomada," the house literally dominates the protagonists' lives. The siblings spend four hours each morning cleaning the two wings of the large house: the dining room, formal living room, library, and three large bedrooms on one end as well as two other bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen, and a family room on the other side where the brother and sister reside (Illustration 1). At lunch each day the siblings express satisfaction over their ability to maintain the house, which had once, presumably, been cleaned by a staff of servants. Their constant attention to the house over the years creates a solitary, somewhat hermetic existence; as the brother notes, "a veces llegamos a creer que era ella la que no nos dejó casarnos" [at times we felt that it was the house itself that had stopped us from marrying] (9). The house seals off the siblings from the outside world which the brother visits only on Saturdays to buy wool for his sister's knitting and French literature for himself, paying for his purchases with earnings sent from the family's other property outside the city. In fact, the house is like a tomb, where the last surviving members of an oligarchic family live out their lives—until the evening they begin to hear strange noises from the unoccupied wing (Illustration 2). Although the brother immediately shuts and locks the oak door separating the two wings, they soon begin to hear sounds from their kitchen and quickly decide to leave the house with nothing more than the clothes they are wearing. The story ends as they leave their home to face the uncertainties of the street.



Ill. 1: The household of the decadent oligarchy. Reproduced by permission of Ediciones Minotauro, from *Casa Tomada*, by Julio Cortázar, photos by Juan Fresán. © 1969 Ediciones Minotauro.

In “Omnibus,” a mundane trip into downtown Buenos Aires from the city’s periphery becomes a terrifying lesson in social conformity as Clara, the story’s protagonist, learns the unspoken rules for transversing public spaces. Soon after boarding the bus in Villa del Parque, Clara becomes aware that she is the only one on board without a bundle of flowers after the intense stares of her fellow passengers make her extremely self-conscious. She stands out even more after all the others—except for one young man who, like Clara, boarded the bus without any flowers—disembark in front of the Chacarita cemetery. When the two remind the driver and guard of their tickets for Retiro in downtown Buenos Aires, Clara and the young man are met with barely controlled physical aggression before the driver returns to his seat and takes them on a hair-raising ride through the inner district of Palermo and into the downtown area. As soon as the bus brakes in front of Retiro station, Clara and the young man jump from the back door, chased by the raging bus driver whose outstretched hand becomes stuck in the door as it closes. Having withstood this strange antagonism through their shared sense of social isolation, the two walk through the plaza arm in arm only to stop in front of a flower vendor where they buy bouquets before walking their separate ways—as



Ill. 2: "I threw myself against the door before it was too late . . ." Reproduced by permission of Ediciones Minotauro, from *Casa Tomada*, by Julio Cortázar, photos by Juan Fresán. © 1969 Ediciones Minotauro.

if their traumatic journey through the public streets had taught them the price of nonconformity.²

Both "Casa tomada" and "Omnibus" depict unsettling encounters between self and other in the city space. Written in the late 1940s and published in Cortázar's 1951 anthology *Bestiario* [Bestiary],³ these stories map out the social anxieties of Buenos Aires's middle- and upper-class sectors who felt themselves marginalized by the nine-year Peronist administration (1946–55). Unable or unwilling to understand the sudden militancy of working-class sectors and the increasing presence of rural immigrants in the capital city, elite groups (like the protagonists in the stories) felt that the world they knew had quickly become unfamiliar; Buenos Aires was still there, but somehow different. "Casa tomada" chronicles the final decay of an oligarchic family displaced from its mansion by intransigent invaders, symbols of the rural immigrants who began to set up residence in the city, while "Omnibus" references the Peronist domination of public spaces and, more particularly, the city's public transportation system, which the administration had used to mobilize its supporters for mass demonstrations in downtown areas. The stories brilliantly capture the sense of estrangement felt by the middle and upper classes during this period by limiting the realm of the knowable not only for their

protagonists but also for their readers through their first-person narration (“Casa tomada”) or restricted third-person narration (“Omnibus”). In these stories, the city becomes the space of the unknowable, threatening “other” and the locus of an epistemological crisis.

The urban anxieties captured in these two Cortázar stories written in the late 1940s remained unresolved in the following decades and actually permeate texts written after Perón’s ouster in 1955. Commenting on the rise of Peronism many years later in 1969, Argentine historian Félix Luna could still vividly recall the reactions of young anti-Peronist radicals like himself as they witnessed thousands of workers marching through the city streets on their way to the Plaza de Mayo on October 17, 1945, to show their support for the imprisoned Perón (who, at the time, was secretary of labor and minister of war):

Well, there they were. As if they wanted to show all their power, so that nobody could doubt that they really existed. There they were all over the city, shouting in groups which seemed to be the same group multiplied by hundreds. We looked at them from the side walk, with a feeling akin to compassion. From where did they come? So they really existed? So many of them? So different from us? Had they really come on foot from those suburbs whose names made up a vague unknown geography, a *terra incognita* through which we had never wandered . . . during all those days we had made the rounds of the places where they spoke of preoccupations like ours. We had moved through a known map, familiar: the faculty, Recoleta for the burial of Salmon Feijoo, the Plaza San Martín, the Casa Radical. Everything up till then was coherent and logical; everything seemed to support our own beliefs. But that day when the voices began to ring out and the columns of anonymous earth-coloured faces began to pass by we felt something tremble which until that day had seemed unmoveable. (Cited in James, 1988: 33)

This passage is noteworthy less for what it says about working-class activism than for what it says about middle-class anxieties. Like the protagonists of Cortázar’s stories, Luna’s remembered self stands mystified before the unmistakable signs of an other who must, at last, be recognized. Less troubling than the marchers’ mere existence was their presence in downtown Buenos Aires. Transgressing the boundary between periphery and the center, the “anonymous earth-coloured faces” disoriented Luna and his friends by challenging the way they had mapped urban society—through the familiar neighborhoods and landmarks in the heart of the city—and confronted them with the limitations of their own hermetic existence. As described by Luna, the event shook the foundations of what had been, up to that point, an epistemological certainty: the “unmoveable” face of the city was the sign of an established social order privileging the middle and upper classes.

After 1945, the middle and upper classes were forced to recognize not only new features in the cityscape (e.g., the presence of new people, new buildings) and new urban practices (e.g., changes in the ways people moved about the city and used the urban sphere), but also shifts in the city's cultural sphere. In a 1970 article published in *Sur*, the prestigious literary journal she started in 1930, Victoria Ocampo revealed her disgust and astonishment at the new pocketbook literature circulating on the city streets: "es un hecho insólito, el vulgo compra las obras de Cortázar (tan luego Cortázar) y se pasea con sus libros en Torino o el subte o el colectivo" [What an odd thing! The common man buys works by Cortázar (Cortázar no less) and roams about with them in a Torino or on the subway or a bus]. Ocampo expressed surprise not only at who was buying particular books but also at where and how they were being used. Produced by a set of new publishing houses established in the 1960s but bearing the mark of the type of cultural leveling promoted by the Peronist administration, the cheap pocketbook editions were evidence of the decline of older patterns of cultural production and consumption from the first half of the twentieth century favored by Ocampo and her colleagues. In the 1960s, literature was in the hands of many different people and out on the streets, where the divisions between high art and popular culture became blurred. While Ocampo's comment was in no way representative of the feelings of all middle- and upper-class cultural elites (many of whom promoted the changes denounced by Ocampo), it did indicate the type of anxiety and fear some felt over their loss of cultural capital. The city's quickly changing cultural milieu no longer guaranteed them a special place in urban society.

As evident from the above examples, the city was a key site of social struggle and the object of significant cultural debate in the 1950s and 1960s. If the Peronist movement had placed an indelible stamp on Buenos Aires, middle- and upper-class *porteños* attempted to renegotiate their position in Argentine society through and upon the city in the years following Perón's ouster. The work of new groups of writers, filmmakers, intellectuals, and architects began to reconceptualize the urban environment just as new publishing houses and magazines promoted new patterns of cultural consumption. In fact, this redefined Buenos Aires formed the basis of a new hegemonic project generated in the cultural realm—the means of pulling together a nation sharply fractured by political divisions.

The Revolución Libertadora (1955–58), the military government that ousted Perón, was followed by a series of relatively short-lived administrations (the presidency of Arturo Frondizi, 1958–62; a puppet regime led by José María Guido, 1962–63; the presidency of Arturo Illía, 1963–66)

before a coup installed another military junta led initially by General Juan Carlos Onganía (1966–73). When that military dictatorship ended, the Peronists once again took power through the election of Héctor Campora, a party loyalist who held office for less than two months. After spending almost twenty years in exile, Perón returned to Argentina in June 1973 and assumed the presidency in October of that year after Campora resigned. While related to recurrent economic crises and the consequent social unrest, the frequent administrative changes were also the result of the destabilizing capacity of the Peronists throughout the 1960s and the inability of other political parties, particularly the Radicals, to garner sufficient popular backing.⁴ Although banned from participation in the political process and experiencing great internal divisions, the Peronists still formed a powerful sector whose support could help sway an election—as it did in the case of Arturo Frondizi, the leader of the Unión Cívica Radical Intransigente (UCRI) faction of the Radical party. Winning the 1958 election with pro-union, nationalist rhetoric, Frondizi initially retained his Peronist backing by sponsoring pro-worker policies (including a wage boost and a price freeze) (Rock, 1985: 337–38) but then lost it when he liberalized the economy after borrowing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).⁵ These same oscillations between instituting policies favorable to labor and thereby winning the Peronist vote and liberalizing the economy to deal with inflation also plagued the subsequent government of Arturo Illía.⁶ And even the military government from 1966 to 1973 (initially led by General Juan Carlos Onganía and later by General Alejandro Lanusse), which had committed itself to “modernizing . . . from above, with or without popular backing” (Rock, 1985: 346–47), had to deal with organized labor in the early 1970s.⁷ The worsening economic situation and increased presence of radical guerrilla groups in the early 1970s led General Lanusse to try to gain political capital by portraying himself as a populist and lifting the eighteen-year ban on Peronism, which led to a Peronist victory in the March 1973 elections.

This compressed and obviously simplified political history suggests how difficult it was to forge any lasting political consensus in the 1960s. Even Frondizi, the single civilian who proposed a new economic platform (*desarrollismo*) and seemed to offer a bridge between Peronists and non-Peronists and between working- and middle-class sectors, failed to forge effective, long-lasting political alliances. The anti-Peronist forces in the military and Argentina’s continual economic woes (which had begun under Perón) prevented any sustained rapprochement with the Peronists. At the same time, while fissures within the Peronist movement increased, the political repression it experienced was the glue that held it together. Moreover, the dream of Perón’s return allowed certain sectors within the movement to disavow any significant reformulation of its goals. Thus, the

late 1950s and 1960s can be seen as a period of political stalemate that offered no new paradigms for social cohesion.

The failure to forge consensus in the political realm during the late 1950s and 1960s (and through the 1970s) was countered by the emergence of new urban culture in Buenos Aires that challenged the remnants of Peronist society by offering a new model for social integration. Arising both through changes in material conditions and symbolic representations, a new urban sensibility fostered the notion of Buenos Aires as modern(izing) metropolis—a vision resonant with the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA)—inspired developmentalist discourses emerging at the time in a number of Latin American countries. While efforts to implement *desarrollismo* through economic policy making quickly ran into trouble, discourses of modernization continued to circulate on a cultural level. The notion of Buenos Aires as modern(izing) metropolis appealed to those sectors that wanted to cast off the recent Peronist past and had the added advantage of being reminiscent of what were often seen as Argentina's glory days at the beginning of the century when Buenos Aires was "the Paris of South America." Despite its evident appeal to those elite sectors wishing to recuperate a lost utopia, the vision of Buenos Aires being promoted in the 1960s was firmly aligned with the middle class. Buenos Aires would be defined—in new films, novels, and magazines—in terms of middle-class desires and anxieties, hopes and fears. At the same time, by linking the renewal of the urban environment to the process of democratization, certain new cultural institutions seemingly promoted a less elite, more integrated vision of Argentine society.

THE QUESTION OF HEGEMONY

My argument about how the reconceptualization of Buenos Aires formed the basis of a new hegemonic project goes against common understandings of hegemony as a form of social consensus possible during civilian governments and antithetical to the repression characteristic of military ones. Consequently, I would like to digress momentarily to discuss how I am using the term and to argue for its applicability to the tumultuous Argentine landscape in the 1960s, which witnessed frequent fluctuations between civilian and military governments. Hegemony's grand theorist, Antonio Gramsci, developed the concept (present in the work of early Russian political theorists) to understand the way in which ruling classes establish and maintain their rule. Although keenly focused on political phenomena, Gramsci nonetheless underscored the importance of the work of intellectuals (and other cultural workers) to the establishment of hegemonic formations as they disseminate the worldview of the ruling classes to such an extent that it becomes "the 'common sense' of

the whole of society.”⁸ Such efforts foster social consensus though they do not eliminate the subordinate classes’ ability to perceive contradictions or to contest the dominant order.

Many decades later, political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe argued for the usefulness of the term to understanding the limitations of populism, a frequent political phenomenon in Latin America. As an Argentine who had been politically active in the 1960s, Laclau clearly carved out his reformulation of hegemony in relation to the Peronist administration and its aftermath.⁹ More recently, Laclau and Mouffe have melded their political theories with poststructuralism to move away from the Gramscian conceptualization of hegemony as a class-based strategy—a shift that I find persuasive. While the late 1950s and 1960s can be seen as a period in which the middle class emerges as a vibrant actor in Argentine society (perhaps for the first time), I believe the concept of a “middle-class hegemony” is problematic. Rejecting the type of homogeneity and coherent social agency presumed by the term *middle-class hegemony*, Laclau and Mouffe have placed increased emphasis on the discursive means—what they call “points of articulation” through which a hegemonic project becomes constituted and consolidated. Signaling the articulatory nodes that bridge ongoing socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, and other differences to bring diverse sectors into alignment, this conceptualization more adequately accounts for the difficulty of constructing or dismantling hegemonic structures. Whereas more traditional models saw a particular hegemonic order as the result of conscious interventions by a particular social group, Laclau and Mouffe’s paradigm highlights the more diffuse and sometimes unconscious ways in which subjects and institutions contribute to the construction of a hegemonic order.

If Laclau and Mouffe have employed their evolving model of hegemony to political phenomena, British cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams, historian T. J. Jackson Lears, and Latin American cultural critic Neil Larsen have recently underlined the importance of the cultural register in consolidating or undermining political and social structures.¹⁰ As discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 1, Williams understands hegemony as the result of a dynamic process wherein residual and emergent discourses become channeled into a dominant one. His conceptualization will serve as my principal theoretical model for analyzing the cultural reorganization of the urban sphere in the mid to late 1950s.

The work of Lears and Larsen further develops how the constitution of a given hegemonic order is an ongoing process deeply shaped by cultural processes. Both see hegemony and domination as nonoppositional states that often coexist although one predominates at any given moment.

Larsen, more than Lears, suggests that political domination does not eliminate the need to promote social and cultural consensus. In "Sport as Civil Society," Larsen persuasively argues that the 1976 coup that installed the *Proceso para la Reorganización Nacional* (the military government that called itself the Process of National Reorganization) signaled a political victory but was only the beginning of a "struggle to establish a stabilized social consensus." Larsen adds that such governments remain "incomplete unless and until they are able to represent their power as if arising out of a 'natural' condition of society itself, as a power that is *legitimate*" (82–83). Here Larsen points to the way in which culture, perceived of as free from ideological constraints, can be effectively employed by the military to mask power relations and legitimize their rule (83). The Proceso spent 10 percent of the national budget for 1978 to back the World Cup Championship in Argentina, hoping the event would catalyze popular support not only for the national team, but also for the government.¹¹ While unable to ever completely control the cultural field, the military government at the same time depended on "[culture's] proven ability to establish a recognized form of social authority arising supposedly from within the non-coercive practices that define the limits of the 'cultural' " (83). In other words, even repressive military regimes that impose their political rule by force rely on the presumably apolitical realm of culture to promote a level of social consensus vital to their ongoing legitimacy.

It is not sufficient, then, to argue that hegemony is either *there* or *not there* depending on the presence of civilian or military governments. The promotion of social consensus through the cultural field is an ongoing project, ever present, if seldom realized, regardless of the type of government. Thus the political and economic instability of Argentina during the 1960s and the frequent shifts between military and civilian governments never eliminated the need to promote social consensus by military regimes (particularly the Revolución Libertadora, 1955–58, to be discussed in Chapter 1) and by various civilian sectors. In fact, I will be arguing throughout this book that the reformulation of Buenos Aires (as material reality, lived practices, and representation) between the two Peronist governments functioned precisely as a point of articulation, as a means through which to interpellate a variety of sectors in a new vision of the social order. In other words, Buenos Aires became a site through which to alter shared social values and subjectivity itself. If the ultimate success of that project in crafting a new consensus is highly questionable, there is little doubt that urban culture had been radically and irrevocably transformed in a way that later facilitated the neo-liberal/pro-capitalist policies of the late 1970s and 1980s (even when the Proceso viciously intervened in urban space).¹²

THEORIZING SPACE AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

In order to explore the complex ways in which Buenos Aires (as both physical terrain and representational iconography) played a pivotal role in the formulation of a new cultural hegemony, it is necessary to briefly visit recent theoretical observations about space. Social geographers David Harvey and Edward Soja and cultural critic Frederic Jameson, among others, have argued for the importance of theorizing space as a critical axis of social transformation left underdeveloped in Marx's own writings (which privileged temporal relations). This project took off in the late 1970s and early 1980s when a critical mass of Marxist geographers began to argue "that the organization of space was not only a social product but simultaneously rebounded back to shape social relations" (Soja, 1989: 57). In so doing, they challenged "the prevailing materialist formulation which regard[ed] the organization of spatial relations only as a cultural expression confined to the superstructural realm" (81).

The seeds of this argument about the centrality of space to social (and economic) transformation can, of course, be traced to Henri Lefebvre, who affirmed that "capitalism has found itself able to attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions [since the mid-1800s] *by occupying space, by producing a space*" (*The Survival of Capitalism*, as cited in Soja, 1989: 91). If space was the key to capitalism's successful evolution in the twentieth century according to Lefebvre, his conceptualization of space was complex. In his 1974 *Production of Space*, Lefebvre proposed the following tripartite model: (1) "spatial *practice*," which embraces production and reproduction as well as the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation; (2) "representations of space" or "conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers, and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent—all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived"; and (3) "representational spaces: space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users,' but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do more than describe" (33, 38–39). Lefebvre's categories are quite suggestive in marking out the relationship between space and social power. Specifically, Lefebvre argues for the difference between a sense of ideal space as conceptualized by urban bureaucrats (category 2) and space as perceived through its utilization by the common person and reflected in the work of certain artists and intellectuals (category 3).¹³ For Lefebvre, space is produced by a particular mode of production which it, in turn, helps constitute. The ideal space of urban bureaucrats facilitates spatial transformations that serve the interests of the dominant classes

while “lived space” suggests the ways in which inhabitants reappropriate physical space.

Lefebvre’s model has been extremely useful in teasing out how space, in all its manifestations, is central to socioeconomic processes and hegemonic structures (10, 11). However, despite his complex model linking material phenomena and symbolic representation, he ultimately subsumes the latter to the former by arguing that, in the last instance, it is not ideologies but rather the “forces of production and the relations of production that produce social space” (210). Lefebvre’s theorization of space has been taken up quite productively by social geographers like Harvey, Soja, and Mike Davis, who analyze the production of “post-modern” space during late capitalism. On the whole, they too tend to privilege materiality. However, Harvey, in particular, underlines the importance of symbolic practices by arguing that “we need to understand not merely how places acquire material qualities [since the] evaluative and hierarchical ranking of places occurs, for example, largely through activities of representation” (Harvey, 1993: 22). Harvey’s comment underscores the primacy of discourse to the constitution and mapping out of power relations. He reminds us that “materiality, representation, and imagination” form the interlocking dynamic that produces space. While the three are distinct registers, they are mutually influential. As Harvey notes, “representations of places have material consequences in so far as fantasies, desires, fears, and longings are expressed in actual behavior” (22, 23).

Specular City takes up Harvey’s challenge to understand this complex dynamic. After all, to examine the transformation of Buenos Aires without addressing both its discursive representation and its materiality is to ignore vital aspects of this social conflict. As Harvey himself notes, “struggles over representation are . . . as fiercely fought and as fundamental to the activities of place construction as bricks and mortar” (23). Throughout the book, I employ a conceptual triad for analyzing space that modifies the one put forth by Lefebvre. Unlike Lefebvre, I do not believe that the lived practices of “users” stand in opposition to the dominant social space. After all, people follow street signs more than they defy them. I also disagree with Lefebvre’s assumption that the discursive spatial register can be neatly broken down into dominant representations produced by bureaucrats and scientists and “complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life” produced by “users” and certain artists and intellectuals (33). Some architects create urban designs that are useless, if not antithetical, to the dominant mode of production and, consequently, are never built. Thus, in contrast to Lefebvre, I believe that discursive representations are highly complex and can function in a contradictory

fashion—both supporting and undermining dominant beliefs somewhat independently of the intentions of those who produced them.

My own analytical model allows for those complexities by mapping out the relationship between three somewhat independent, but clearly related spatial registers: built environment, lived practices, and discursive representations. While the first and second refer to physical phenomena, they delineate different modalities of materiality; built environment refers to relatively stable material structures whereas lived practices refer to more dynamic activities and processes. This book places considerable emphasis on urban discourse without suggesting that such analysis alone can adequately account for larger socio-spatial processes. Rather, I continually shuttle back and forth between discussions of the material (in terms of both structures and practices) and the discursive (in terms of both individual texts and more overarching urban narratives) because the transformation of Buenos Aires occurred through and on all these realms and through their connections.

Buenos Aires as Urban Weave: Built Environment, Lived Practices, and Representations, 1955–1973

As a prelude to discussions in later chapters, I here want to introduce the type and scale of the changes taking place in Buenos Aires after 1955. In contrast to the Peronist era, the built environment changed more according to the initiative of private groups than the state, and lighter modern designs (like skyscrapers) were favored over heavy neo-imperial ones. As Marina Waisman notes, in the mid-1960s “han hecho irrupción en Buenos Aires las torres metálicas de derivación miesiana, agregando así una nueva tipología al vocabulario de preferente filiación corbusierana vigente hasta el momento” [there was an eruption of Miesian-influenced metallic towers adding a new typology to the favored Corbuserian vocabulary that had been dominant up to that moment] (1980: 9). The Fiat and Olivetti buildings appeared in the downtown area (Illustration 3). And, starting in the 1960s, plans were laid to develop Catalinas Norte, a plot of land east of Leandro Alem near the Plaza San Martín.¹⁴ Four skyscrapers eventually dominated that area: Edificio Conurban (designed by Estanislao Kocourek, Ernesto Katzenstein, and Carlos L. Llorens and completed in 1973);¹⁵ the Madero (1975); Edificio UIA (Unión Industrial Argentina, 1977); and the IBM (designed by Mario Roberto Alvarez, 1980) (Gutman and Hardoy, 1992: 228). Many of these skyscrapers shared an architectural affinity to the tall, boxlike structures draped in curtain walls of metal and glass that emerged in U.S. cities in the mid 1950s. Foreign influence was also evident in many of the companies that backed their construc-



Ill. 3: The Olivetti building.

tion. As I will analyze further in later chapters, the appearance of these buildings dominating the city's skyline served as a visual reminder of the growing importance of foreign capital to the Argentine economy.

Several buildings constructed in the 1960s stood out less for their height than for their innovative design. The Banco de Londres y América del Sud (now known as Lloyd's) on the corner of Reconquista and Bartolomé Mitre, one block from the Plaza de Mayo, was an amazingly fresh design created by Clorindo Testa and the SEPRA studio in 1961 and completed in 1966 (Illustration 4). Built to mimic a covered plaza uniting interior and exterior spaces, the bank broke with the neo-classical grandeur of the adjacent Banco de la Nación as well as with the impersonalism of the new skyscrapers. Another Testa building, the Biblioteca Nacional (designed in conjunction with Francisco Bullrich and Alicia Cazzaniga), made an even more startling statement. It sat relatively isolated on a slight incline off Avenida del Libertador (Illustration 5). Inverting traditional library design, Testa placed the books underground and the reading rooms on the uppermost floors to take advantage of the view of the parks and river to the east (Glusberg, 1979: 94). These buildings as well as the Centro Cultural Recoleta (where he renovated the old Recoleta monastery to form an art museum) (Illustrations 32 and 33) gave



Ill. 4: The Banco de Londres.

Testa an international reputation. Other important architects of the time included Claudio Caveri and Eduardo Ellis who designed the church of Nuestra Señora de Fátima (1957) in the suburb of Martínez, ignoring newer construction techniques in favor of old-fashioned masonry. The structure generated a debate about the appropriateness of costly high-tech designs for Argentina's limited economic resources (Bullrich, 1983: 472–



Ill. 5: The Biblioteca Nacional.

73). Mario Roberto Alvarez gained recognition for the Centro Cultural San Martín (1953–69) on Corrientes between Paraná and Montevideo and for Edificio SOMISA (1966–74) on the corner of Belgrano and Diagonal Sur as well as for the Banco Popular Argentino (1966–68) on the corner of Florida and Cangallo. The latter was one of many banks designed during this period by prestigious architectural firms like Mantola, Sánchez Gómez, Santos, Solsona, Viñoly, and SEPR (Gutman and Hardoy, 1992: 227–28).

The changes to Buenos Aires's built environment during the 1960s may not compare to its radical transformation in the early part of the century when, under Intendente Torcuato de Alvear, major streets were widened, the Plaza de Mayo was created from two separate plazas, public parks