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ARTELETRA: The Sixties in Latin America and the Politics of Going Unnoticed

Jason A. Bartles

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ARTELETRA

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ARTELETRA

The Sixties in Latin America
and the Politics of Going Unnoticed

Jason A. Bartles

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To Matthew John Phillips

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Introduction

ARTELETRA al vesre

Estamos efectivamente sumergidos en una demanda de visibilidad total que parecería dejar fuera de lugar las prácticas críticas que buscan crear opacidades o refracciones, mostrar que no todos los cuerpos del sistema son translúcidos.

Nelly Richard, *La insubordinación de los signos*

ARTELETRA, one of Juan Filloy's many palindromes, can be read from left to right and back again, as well as from the central letter out toward both ends, perfectly replicating itself in every direction (Karcino 199). This palindrome is composed of the Spanish words *arte* and *letra*, meaning "art" and "letter," respectively, or in my interpretation, "the art of writing." ARTELETRA, in this sense, becomes another possible way to say "literature." Yet, to conflate art and literature with the crystalline structure of palindromes at the start of a study on the Sixties in Latin America would be disingenuous. Since the historical avant-gardes, if not earlier, art and literature shatter consecrated forms. They continually break the rules that would constrict, contain, and order their fragmented parts within the space of a palindrome. Simply turning around to read this palindrome in reverse cannot illuminate a different reading of ARTELETRA, of the art and literature that, at best, leave only a trace of themselves and their politics in this invented word. Therefore, a linear reading of ARTELETRA, regardless of its directionality, cannot become a metaphorical heuristic for approaching the Sixties in Latin America or the underappreciated works of Calvert Casey, Juan Filloy, and Armonía Somers.

In order to catch a glimpse of what might be going unnoticed on the palindrome's glossy surface, I prefer to break its crystalline structure and read it *al vesre*. This phrase comes from Lunfardo,

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the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Argentine dialect with Italian roots that developed first among criminals and then gained popularity among the growing lower-middle classes in Buenos Aires. Lunfardo often appears in tango lyrics, and many of the words, including *zafar* (to get away with something, to get out of an obligation) and *trucho* (fake, shoddy) are commonly used today. *Vesre* is the Lunfardo word for a language game in which the syllables of common words are reversed or completely jumbled. For example, the word *tango* becomes *gotán*, but *amigo* turns into *gomía*. The word *vesre* is derived from the word *revés*, so the word that names this game also plays the game it names; it reverses the word *revés*, but it does so improperly. This game refuses the propriety of grammar and allows new words and ideas to be created through a process of disruption and reconstruction.

On the one hand, to read ARTELETRA *al vesre* is to reverse the palindrome imperfectly. It is not to turn around and reveal what was always there to the light of today's knowledge nor to invert entrenched binaries. The past is never so perfectly uncovered, and the exclusive logic of binary thought must be rendered inoperative. Rather, to read and write *al vesre* is to break the palindrome's linear logic and rearrange its fragmented parts to create something different. In this sense, reading *al vesre* establishes a certain affinity with Walter Benjamin's assertion that the task of the historian is "to brush history against the grain" ("Theses" 257). Reading ARTELETRA and the Sixties *al vesre* upends the perfect ordering of each letter in its place and opens new paths through highly structured and regulated spaces. Furthermore, it challenges the framing of biopolitical regimes of visibility and the essentialist narratives that undergird and seek to bring legitimacy to those structures. These new paths, detours, and thresholds through the literatures and politics of the Sixties, as I will demonstrate, unleash the potential to go unnoticed as well as the potential to engage with those who are going unnoticed without revealing them entirely under the pervasive light of knowledge and power.

On the other, to read Latin American literatures of the Sixties *al vesre* is, as this game is also called, to read *al verse*. First, the syllables of *revés* are flipped to form *vesre*, and then this re-organization slips even further through the metathesis of the "s" and the "r." Curiously, *verse* stands as a homophone in Spanish for a reflexive verb, "to see one another." However, to read these

literatures *al verse* is not to illuminate them to one another. As Emmanuel Levinas argues, “To illuminate is to remove from being its resistance, because light opens a horizon and empties space—delivers being out of nothingness” (*Totality* 44). Rather, to read *al verse* is to rearrange different texts and set them in face-to-face encounters with one another that allow new dialogues to take place where partitions once stood. As the unnoticed protagonists I analyze in the works of Casey, Filloy, and Somers disrupt prescribed itineraries and wander off course, they stumble into others who are also going unnoticed. These unexpected encounters do not require each of them to fully reveal the essence of their identity to one another; rather, they enter into the difficult process of establishing dialogues with others who had been isolated behind walls or abandoned in large crowds. During these brief, unexpected encounters, the fictional protagonists I study seek the restoration of the potential to disagree—the defining characteristic of the political—and to find common ground, that is, to engage in what I call “the politics of going unnoticed.”

At first glance, the politics of going unnoticed constitutes an oxymoron: politics is often defined as the struggle to be seen or heard within public spaces and governing institutions—in other words, to make the invisible visible. To go unnoticed would, in theory, necessitate a retreat from the political. However, becoming visible in the public sphere also subjects those bodies and ideas to the biopolitical and capitalist arrangements of space, constituting a potential trap for anything and everything illuminated within those structures. In the present study, politics will be defined not as the process of making visible but rather as the act of engaging in dissensus. In the works of Casey, Filloy, and Somers, going unnoticed becomes a means of evading the trap of visibility in order to restore the potential to disagree with institutional and everyday decisions. Those who go unnoticed encounter tools for dismantling essentialist narratives while moving toward the open, toward a field without norms, dividing walls, or the requirement to fully reveal oneself to the light of knowledge and power.

Throughout this book, I read the literatures and politics of the Sixties in Latin America *al vesre* and *al verse* in order to write different narratives of the era. My readings are not concentrated on the loudest voices and canonical figures of the Sixties nor on the disillusioned narratives that appeared immediately upon

the era's violent closure. Instead, I establish a series of dialogues between these three untimely and underappreciated authors. The protagonists who inhabit their fictional worlds produce openings in the everyday that allow them to wander off course and render inoperative the binary structures of biopolitics (e.g., visible/invisible, pure/filthy, friend/enemy) that constantly divide humans from one another in the service of power and economic inequality. What was ignored in the Sixties for its apparent individualism demonstrates its radical commitment to forming better communities. As Casey, Filloy, and Somers imagine protagonists who go unnoticed, their texts confront and distort well-worn narratives from the nineteenth century to the Sixties, and they challenge the blind spots and limitations of each other, giving rise to new political, aesthetic, and ethical tools for thinking the densely populated crossroads of literatures and politics in the Sixties once more.

The Sixties in Latin America

Images of guerrillas and hippies, of university students and workers in the streets can appear today as relics of a by-gone era. From the perspective of a present characterized by the entrenchment of neoliberal economic policies; cultural and political globalization; the Left Turn, its subsequent recession, and the revitalization of fascist ideologies; the resurgence of indigenous movements; the transitions underway in Cuba after the Castros and in Venezuela after Chávez; and the technological innovations of the digital era, this distance between today and the Sixties can feel insurmountable.

At the same time, the literatures and politics of the Sixties opened spaces that continue to be inhabited throughout the Americas, and those archives have yet to be exhausted. The Sixties—written here with a capital “S”—serves as a shorthand for an era that exceeds the temporal limits of a decade. To begin in 1960 would already be too late, and to stop in 1969 would artificially truncate too many events and discourses. Óscar Terán underscores the flexibility needed to study this era that he names with the ungrammatical Spanish phrase, *los sesentas*, with an extra “s” on *sesenta* (*Nuestros* 11). Though Terán’s study is of Argentina, tracing Peronism from the 1940s through the presidency of Arturo

Fronidzi, it is possible to extend this notion of *los sesentas* as a temporal block throughout Latin America.

My own study establishes a dialogue among texts from this era while moving *al vesre* and *al verse* across various national and international contexts. This lapse of time begins, quite imprecisely, in the 1950s, with the military coup against Perón in 1955 and the successful overthrow of Batista in 1959. The Sixties was an era in which radical change in the world appeared as a historical necessity on the verge of materializing; therefore, according to a certain logic of the era, it was worth the armed struggle necessary to achieve it. Despite the big dreams of the Sixties, the reality was far from ideal. The rural and urban guerrillas fighting in Cuba to break free from neocolonial chains, for example, began to establish a Soviet-style regime under which they persecuted not only political dissidents but all those who were considered to be against the Revolution's values, whether they be critical artists, foreigners, or queer individuals.

Broadly speaking, the Sixties comes to a close at those moments when the potential for carrying out utopian projects appears to be lost. The Padilla Affair of 1971, for example, marked a moment when Castro's intellectual supporters from around the globe publicly declared their break with his regime. Another foreclosure took place when Juan María Bordaberry suspended the Uruguayan constitution in 1973 and enacted a regime of terror and violence that annihilated the Tupamaros and sought to suppress any remaining revolutionary sympathy among the general public. Of course, this is a hasty outline of the Sixties that is meant only as a point of departure for my particular reading of this era today. By reading the works of Casey, Filloy, and Somers, I follow their unnoticed protagonists as they wander off these most well-known paths and chart new itineraries throughout this era that provide a framework for different forms of utopian thinking outside of the violent, binary logic of success and failure.

Casey, Filloy, and Somers

Born to a Cuban-American family in Baltimore, Maryland, Calvert Casey (1924–69) lived in Havana between 1958 and 1965. He worked for *Lunes de Revolución* and *Casa de las Américas* before going into exile in Poland and Italy, and he published

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collections of his short texts at Ediciones R and Seix Barral: *El regreso* (1962), *Memorias de una isla* (1964), *El regreso y otros relatos* (1967), and *Notas de un simulador* (1969). He chose to live in the center of the revolutionary city and to publish in the centers of the cultural markets of the 1960s, documenting volunteers who labored in the Cuban countryside and discussing ways to improve Cuba's national arts, while crafting his own literature. Yet, he never occupied the center stage of the Revolution alongside Ernesto "Che" Guevara or Guillermo Cabrera Infante. After the founding of the UMAPs and the institutionalization of homophobia inside the Revolution, Casey fled Cuba, fearing future imprisonment for being gay. He continued writing for a few years but tragically committed suicide in Rome in 1969. Since his death, a number of his friends and colleagues, as well as more recent critics, have attempted revivals of his works. He has been the subject of special issues of the journals *Quimera* (1982) and *Gaceta de Cuba* (2009), many of his stories have been translated into English, and Jamila Medina Ríos has published two recent editions of his collected short stories in Cuba and in Argentina, respectively.¹ But during the Sixties, he received very little popular or critical attention.

From Río Cuarto, Argentina, Juan Filloy (1894–2000) is known as the "writer of three centuries" and the author of thousands of palindromes for which, according to him, he holds the world record. During his life, he wrote more than fifty novels, almost half of which remain unpublished today. His first novel, *Periplo*, appeared in 1930, and the last, *Decio 8A*, in 1997. Between the 1939 publication of *Finesse* and the 1967 re-edition of *Op Oloop* (1934), he worked as a judge in Río Cuarto and wrote numerous books that he refused to publish. Once he retired in the 1960s, he published consistently until his death. Among all of these short-story collections and novels with seven-letter titles, I focus on three texts published before the 1976 dictatorship, *Yo, yo y yo (Monodialogos paranoicos)* (1971), *Los Ochoa* (1972) and *Vil & Vil (La gata parida)* (1975), as well as his lifetime collection of palindromes and essays on the art of writing them, eventually published in *Karcino: Tratado de palindromía* (1988). Most recently, his books are appearing in new editions in Argentina, but existing research has focused on his association with the historical avant-garde in the 1930s.

Armonía Somers (1914–94) is the pseudonym for the Uruguayan writer Armonía Etchepare. In 1933, she became a school teacher in Montevideo, gaining a solid reputation for her research in pedagogy. Her first novel, *La mujer desnuda* (1950), provoked an enormous scandal among the lettered elite of the Río de la Plata; they dismissed it as a poorly written pornographic text—based more on hearsay than on having read the novel that barely circulated at the time—and assumed the pseudonym was hiding a gay male writer. She continued writing and publishing short stories and novels with the prestigious Editorial Arca, including *Todos los cuentos. 1953–1967* (1967), *De miedo en miedo (Los manuscritos del río)* (1967), and *Un retrato para Dickens* (1969), among a number of other works over the following decades, yet her name never figures among the male-only list of Boom writers. In the 1960s, Ángel Rama began a revision of her critical reception, and since the 1970s, various waves of feminist criticism and studies on fantastic literature have set about to recover and study her dark and complex writings, particularly focusing on *Sólo los elefantes encuentran mandrágora* (written between 1972 and 1975, but not published until 1986). Currently, her archives are being organized by Cristina Dalmagro at the Université de Poitiers in France, and she is finally being translated into English.²

When one thinks of the Sixties in Latin America, these writers rarely come to mind. The literary-political arena became overcrowded with the manifestos and weapons of those who struggled to be seen and heard above all others; as a result, those who upheld threshold positions not wholly in line with more visible, powerful projects were all too easily cast aside as counterrevolutionaries and ivory-tower intellectuals, if they were paid any attention at all. Moreover, Casey, Filloy, and Somers are authors whose works do not even “belong together” in a traditional, canonical, or proper sense. These authors are from different generations. They were born in, lived in, and wrote about very different regions of the Americas, traversing North America, the Caribbean, and the Southern Cone. An identity-based approach to the authors would further divide them as queer, rural, and female writers, respectively, despite the expansive scope of their works that cannot be reduced to these categories alone. Their ideological positions do not cohere around a specific political party or movement. Even

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their aesthetic sensibilities vary drastically from one another: Casey's texts are brief and fragmented; Filloy's are perfectly and rigidly structured; and Somers's meander enigmatically across genres that range from the realist novel to horror and the fantastic. Thematically, they address a wide range of topics, from gauchos and rare diseases to the contents of sewage systems. I know of no record of conversations taking place between any of them, nor have I found evidence that they read one another's works.

Nevertheless, such disciplinary conventions are not the only possible means of constituting an object of study. By reading the literary-political arena of the Sixties in Latin America *al vesre* and *al verse*, the works of Casey, Filloy, and Somers can engage one another in dialogue. The encounters that take place in *ARTELETRA* refuse any critical narrative that essentializes an origin or identity, and they reject a singular, linear arrangement of texts, discourses, and ideas. Instead, borrowing from Raúl Antelo, each new arrangement becomes subjected to "contaminaciones, desplazamientos, accidentes, reinterpretaciones y recontextualizaciones incesantes" (37). There never will be one totalizing narrative of the Sixties in Latin America that reveals everything to the light of knowledge. There can be only glimpses into the multitude of varying arrangements and rearrangements of materials and ideas, each time offering contingent, yet rigorous, narratives of the literatures and politics of the era that others in the future will disassemble and reassemble.

In my reading of the Sixties in Latin America, the fragmented, jumbled parts I study are the stories of unnoticed people and protagonists who turn away from the bright lights of literary and political institutions. Turning away is not a rejection of institutions, *tout court*, but a response to failing institutions that make no effort to engage with the unnoticed or their demands. Therefore, they seek positions within the heated polemics that raged throughout Latin America about the role of art and literature in the Sixties, but they are either hesitant to accept or openly disagree with widespread assumptions and normative values. Casey, Filloy, and Somers all imagine protagonists characterized by a quiet rebelliousness, by the desire to shy away from the spotlight, from overt political propaganda, and from choosing sides in the most visible political, aesthetic, and ethical debates of the era. By going unnoticed, their protagonists dissent without relying on the

ancient binary between visibility and invisibility, or transparency and opacity, that continues to structure and define the political today.

Going Unnoticed

The anonymous narrator of Somers's *De miedo en miedo* (*Los manuscritos del río*) wants little more than to go unnoticed. At his job in a bookstore, for example, his boss remains silently perched on the second floor, a “lugar estratégico” that allows him to watch over everyone in the shop (12). The narrator feels trapped under the perception of other people who notice and scrutinize his every action. In one instance, he explains the extreme anxiety he feels even in the privacy of his own home when he and his wife decide to make love:

Hay que hacerse el amor con cuidado a fin de no despertar a los de abajo, pues rechina el piso [...]. Y también cuidarse de los contiguos porque se escucha todo a través de estas paredes de mentira, que dejan traspasar los suspiros finales, el ruido del bidet, y si se tiene mala suerte hasta la vibración de los espermatozoides asediando al óvulo—añadí desde los puestos más altos de la exageración y la rabia contenida—. (40)

This combination of humorous exaggeration and rage underscores the fragility of the barriers that only appear to create distance and privacy in the modern world. The narrator lives isolated with his family in an old apartment building, making few connections with his neighbors who, nevertheless, can hear his every move. Given his rampant fear of germs, this partitioning into a clearly demarcated space is not the point of his critique, as it will be for some of the other protagonists I study; moreover, these floors and walls, he says, are built of lies. Every creak and vibration, even those sounds and movements otherwise imperceptible to the human senses, become amplified in this space. These partitions trap each of them in a particular place, while revealing their most intimate moments to the constant surveillance of everyone else. Going unnoticed for this narrator is not a matter of seeking isolation per se, nor does it require total concealment or stasis; more accurately, it is the process by which he seeks to evade the incessant surveillance of his neighbors, his boss, and the other anonymous people who

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scrutinize him in the crowded city. By going unnoticed, he seeks to reframe and even tear down these walls built on lies and to enter into dialogues with some of those kept on the other side, albeit imperfectly and for only a brief time.

As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have commented, “To go unnoticed is by no means easy. To be a stranger, even to one’s doorman or neighbors” is a difficult task (279). In their analysis, going unnoticed takes the form of a becoming that moves between perception and imperception, or what they refer to as “zones of indiscernibility” (280). The protagonists I study, as in the case of Somers’s narrator, do not hide behind masks or personas that would veil their true identities. Rather, they create temporary zones of indiscernibility, forms of movement along unexpected itineraries, wherein they will not be paid much attention by others. Though “Armonía Somers” is a pseudonym for Armonía Etchepare, her fictional characters are those who I consider to be going unnoticed. What goes unnoticed is the act, the subject, or the event itself presented or represented as itself, even though no one pays attention to its taking place or to its existence. Finally, the bodies of those who go unnoticed are visible in the sense that they are capable of being seen, yet they manage to create a temporary state during which little public light is shone on their bodies. When they pass by others, no one pays attention. When they speak out, everyone happens to ignore their voice. Still, they continue to move about and stumble into others with whom they can engage in dialogue along the way.

Going unnoticed involves an intentional desire to stay out of the public spotlight. These often-anonymous protagonists actively seek out shelters and refuges or attempt to hide and write in plain sight and to pass for something unworthy of further attention. Casey’s many protagonists are closeted or secretive, both in terms of their sexuality and their general attempts to remain anonymous in public spaces. Filloy imagines, among others, a cave-dwelling writer and a quietly insubordinate military conscript. Somers’s Rebeca Linke in *La mujer desnuda* and the anonymous man in *De miedo en miedo* seek quiet spaces where they encounter unexpected confidants in the countryside and in the city. Paradoxical as it may appear, this active gesture of going unnoticed is what allows me to form a dialogue among these three authors and their protagonists.

Going Unnoticed in Cultural Markets

According to a market logic, going unnoticed would be a failure within the publishing world, not an avant-garde gesture with political and ethical implications. Many of those who aspire to greatness, power, or prestige inadvertently go unnoticed, failing to succeed from the start. Even for those who do publish their works with a major press, there will be no guarantee of public or critical success. In my analysis, however, it should be noted that going unnoticed is primarily a status of fictional protagonists, not of the texts themselves, and that going unnoticed by writing in plain sight to perceive and be perceived by others is what allows Casey, Filloy, and Somers to exceed the reifying, but never totalizing, grasp of the cultural markets in which their texts and ideas circulate.

All three authors inadvertently went unnoticed despite being published in the heart of the Latin American and Spanish cultural markets that were responsible for the Boom and the circulation of more explicitly committed writers. Even though he was praised by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Italo Calvino, and María Zambrano, Casey's works never enjoyed much renown in the Sixties, neither inside nor outside Cuba.³ Filloy returned from his thirty-year editorial silence in the mid-1960s, publishing both with small presses in Río Cuarto and with Losada, a major press in Buenos Aires. Yet, he never rose to the status of someone like Macedonio Fernández whose works were recovered and celebrated during the era.⁴ In Montevideo, Somers was published by Editorial Arca, a press that played "un papel fundamental en la legitimación de criterios estéticos nuevos e instancias de consagración en la literatura de las décadas del 50, 60 y comienzos del 70" (Dalmagro, *Desde los umbrales* 79). However, the current revival of her works is indebted primarily to the subsequent waves of prominent feminist critics from the late 1970s onward. There is no reason to believe that any of the authors under consideration here desired to have their works go unnoticed by reading publics, even as all three eschewed the public spotlight and wrote stories about those who go or desire to go unnoticed.

Though the leftist politics of the Sixties frequently make capitalism a major target, twentieth-century Latin American art and literature could hardly be characterized as independent of

the market. However, it does not follow that what circulates in the market is fully co-opted by it. Brett Levinson demonstrates that the Boom was the most visible example of how literary culture navigated the rise and expansion of the global, mass marketplace (10–30). Further belying the notion that one totalitarian economic structure dominates global cycles of supply and demand while churning out nothing but propaganda for the masses, Luis E. Cárcamo-Huechante, Álvaro Fernández Bravo, and Alejandra Laera propose the term *mercado cultural* in order to study that which exceeds the horizon of consumption when considering the financing and circulation of art and literature. They recognize that cultural markets in Latin America are ubiquitous, but they also underscore the precarity of these markets, given their potential to fail at any moment due to global imbalances (11–13).

Furthermore, the cultural circuits of capitalist markets in the Sixties were not exclusively dedicated to distributing the commercially viable goods of mass production. Ángel Rama had previously developed the term *editoriales culturales* in order to emphasize this excess to profit-driven models for capitalist marketplaces. He references Spanish-language publishing houses in which the expanding networks of capitalist markets developed the means to finance less commercially viable works, generate publicity for them, and create greater access to them and other texts, including educational textbooks and bestsellers.⁵ These *editoriales culturales* formed new, intellectually rigorous, and popular reading publics in Latin America, thus solidifying the necessary conditions for the success of the Boom (Rama, “El Boom” 66–70). To enter into circulation, cultural products inevitably pass through the markets tied to the culture industries, which leave their mark. Yet, cultural markets are incapable of reducing symbolic value merely to its use or exchange values. In sum, the influence between literature and cultural markets does not have to be read as a unidirectional, hegemonic force flowing from the markets to the texts, since texts can always be read *al vesre* and *al verse*, exceeding their sociopolitical or economic use value.

The works under consideration here were never invisible or hidden from public view in the Sixties. Casey, Filloy, and Somers published in the centers of the cultural markets, but their texts were often left unnoticed in the shadows of the bestselling Boom authors and other more explicitly committed writers. It might

be tempting to explain their marginalized status as symptoms of homophobia, the cosmopolitan rejection of the provinces, or misogyny, respectively. That may factor to some degree into the equation. However, Casey was not closeted while working for *Lunes de Revolución* and *Casa de las Américas*. Filloy was praised by Cortázar in *Rayuela*. Somers was celebrated publicly by Ángel Rama, and eventually Mario Benedetti recanted his earlier criticism of her writing.⁶ Studying these texts today does not grant them some sort of retrospective visibility in the Sixties, and the extent to which these texts have circulated or might become more commercially or critically popular in the future is of little importance to my analysis of the politics of going unnoticed. My primary object of study concerns the narratives about fictional protagonists who go or attempt to go unnoticed and the series of political, aesthetic, and ethical tools they develop along the way.⁷

Going Unnoticed and Avant-Garde Aesthetics

According to Julio Premat, the ideas that most resonate today, the ones that continue to generate “teorías, pensamientos y textos,” are those related to “la vanguardia de los sesenta”: “Al evocar el periodo se convoca, también, toda una efervescencia contestataria y se valoriza un *revival* posible de posiciones rebeldes multiformes” (60–61). At first glance, the concept of going unnoticed would appear to be at odds with an avant-garde aesthetics; this quiet rebelliousness that seeks out zones of indiscernibility could be interpreted as antithetical to the effervescence described by Premat. Nevertheless, going unnoticed is the process that restores the potential for the protagonists I study to engage in the avant-garde practices of dismantling and reconfiguring institutional and everyday norms.

In Latin America, the historical avant-gardes both critiqued the institutions of literature and the fine arts and created new forms for literature and art.⁸ These new artistic practices were celebrated and financed by national institutions as part of their pursuit of modernization throughout the twentieth century.⁹ For this reason, these destructions did not bring about the end of literary and artistic establishments—as Peter Bürger proposes in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*—but rather they provoked radical changes within, when not actually creating the first, national institutions, thus

shattering the idea that the work of art could be isolated from political and economic influences.¹⁰ Avant-garde aesthetics in Latin America cannot be defined primarily as anti-institutional or nihilistic; rather, they engage a deconstructive mode that both dismantles and renders inoperative long-standing barriers in densely populated spaces while building new institutions and tracing alternate itineraries through those same spaces. In the Sixties, Casey, Filloy, and Somers redeploy these avant-garde practices in order to dismantle reified binary constructs.

Many early critics—most notably, those of the Frankfurt School—sought to isolate avant-garde, or modernist, aesthetics in an autonomous realm. However, the vast bibliography on this topic proves that avant-garde gestures, popular cultures, and mass technologies all critically engaged with and transformed one another within capitalist markets. The works of Casey, Filloy, and Somers will be no exception to this. The historical avant-garde did not always make a clean break with preceding cultural forms. Benjamin explains that the historical avant-garde authorized a plethora of new techniques and possibilities for literature and art in general, many of which were derived from the formal innovations of photography, film, and radio—the technologies of mass reproduction and the culture industry (*The Work of Art* 19–55). In fact, Beatriz Sarlo argues that the sentimental narratives circulating in Latin American periodicals between 1917 and 1927—contemporaries of the historical avant-garde—kept alive supposedly outdated aesthetic forms borrowed from *modernismo* and late Romanticism; these provided habitual resources for marginal areas of high culture (*El imperio* 19–30). Furthermore, as Ana María Amar Sánchez demonstrates, Latin American writers throughout the entire twentieth century cited themes, styles, and entire works of popular or mass culture to attract larger reading publics before betraying those popular forms with innovative literary forms (11–37).

When considering literatures in the Sixties, the cult of novelty and originality associated with avant-garde aesthetics enters into conflict with what can be comprehended as an avant-garde tradition that plays out over the entire twentieth century and continues today. In this sense, the works of Casey, Filloy, and Somers cannot be interpreted as simple repetitions or copies of previous avant-garde gestures. Hal Foster insists that neo-avant-garde

artworks be studied not for their novelty or repetition, but as demonstrative of the “deferred temporality of artistic signification” (8). He argues that the transformations and ruptures enacted and made possible by the historical avant-garde were not immediately understood or appreciated; only in retrospect was their impact felt, and it was not until the neo-avant-gardes that the historical avant-garde was first comprehended. In sum, Foster underscores a paradigm shift enacted by avant-garde works in which they overturn “any simple scheme of before and after, cause and effect, origin and repetition” (29). Neo-avant-garde works are those which comprehend, give artistic significance to, and act on the failures of chronologically earlier avant-garde gestures; they reconfigure other projects at their point of failure, but without the promise of emancipation or happiness inscribed in modernist aesthetic theories. There is no requirement that they make anything or anyone visible; rather, their creative deconstruction is what allows avant-garde gestures to recoup their political potential.

In studying the Sixties from today’s point of view, it no longer matters which avant-garde project came first and which second, third, and so on. Establishing a chronology of ruptures in constant succession holds little meaning for the analysis of twentieth-century literature and culture. Writing on Cuban avant-garde aesthetics, including writers like Casey who went into exile and thus had to engage with national traditions from afar, Rafael Rojas argues that a major avant-garde undertaking after the Revolution required “una revisión del canon colonial y poscolonial” (18). In fact, Casey, Filloy, and Somers take up various failed projects and institutions of the past from a wide range of popular and literary styles and genres; in Chapter 3, for example, I analyze their engagement with nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century traditions, including the Romantic novel, the gaucho genre, and the family romance. These writers critique, dismantle, and repurpose past traditions that linger and reappear in the Sixties. In this sense, their texts engage in avant-garde aesthetics even though their protagonists seek these creative deconstructions through a quiet rebelliousness—an innovation in its own right considering the conspicuousness of many avant-garde gestures—well after the shocking disruptions of the historical avant-garde and alongside the roaring success of the Boom and the public demands of committed writers.

Toward the Politics of Going Unnoticed

The crossroads of literatures and politics in the Sixties is a saturated space in which heated polemics threatened to consume every aspect of public life. Cold War politics situated Latin America at the heart of some of its most intense stand-offs as the United States and the Soviet Union sought to guarantee the supremacy of their respective regimes in the Western hemisphere. In addition, women and queer individuals, students and workers, all took to the streets in capital cities and in the provinces to demand radical transformations of their societies, governing institutions, and working conditions. However, Claudia Gilman contests this perception that everything was political and proposes a subtler description of the era, concluding that “más adecuado sería afirmar que la gramática característica de los discursos [políticos] fue antes excluyente que acumulativa” (32). Instead of reading the Sixties as an era in which everything was political, as if everything were included in this all-encompassing politicization, she recalls that such totalizing narratives are always the result of multiple exclusions. The internal debates between the Boom authors and other highly visible actors have become canonical anecdotes that structure our understanding of the Sixties in Latin America, but they do not always deactivate the binaries and multiple exclusions that relegated so many others to unnoticed thresholds during the era.¹¹

In 1960, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir visited Cuba like so many other committed intellectuals of the time. They had their photo taken with Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, where they appear slumped in the background behind the looming revolutionary figures. Based on this trip, Sartre published a series of essays that have been translated into English as *Sartre on Cuba*. Within the text, he rehearses the *mea culpa* that becomes typical of intellectuals on the revolutionary island. “I had misunderstood everything,” he declares. “What I took to be signs of wealth were, in fact, signs of dependence and poverty” (12). Referring to a speech given by Oscar Pinos Santos on July 1, 1959, Sartre explains how the Cuban case taught him to reevaluate his prejudices:

There is, said Pinos Santos, a sort of disease of the eyes called *retinosis pigmentaria* which manifests itself by the loss of lateral vision. All those who have carried away an optimistic view of

Cuba are quite sick. They see directly in front, never from the corner of the eye. [...] “Retinosis.” The word escaped me. But for several days already I have misunderstood my profound error. I felt my prejudices vacillating. To discover the truth of this capital, I would have to see things upside down. (11; italics in original)

Sartre immediately narrates his experience as one in which everything he thought he knew would have to be reevaluated under the light of the Cuban Revolution. He quickly acquires what he understands to be a new, morally appropriate, and historically correct position regarding the Revolution. Juan Carlos Quintero-Herencia explains Sartre’s proposition: “Al mirar ‘correctamente’ la Revolución, esta se presentará a sí misma translúcida ante su observador” (“‘El regreso’ de Calvert Casey” 387). Sartre claims to have overcome his ailment, inverted his point of view, and as a result, comprehended fully the political and economic reality of Cuba.

Yet, in my analysis, Sartre’s Caribbean vacation is self-serving. His *mea culpa* and new way of looking—which was not actually new but rather the first time he looked at Latin America without a Eurocentric gaze—allow him to maintain his role as a leading intellectual of the global Left. The light of total knowledge has returned to Sartre’s eyes through the good graces of the Revolution, thus shoring up his proper place in the center of the global intellectual scene. All he had to do was read upside-down, but never *al vesre* or *al verse*.

To Casey’s anonymous protagonists, in contrast, the all-pervading lights of the Cuban Revolution do not simply reveal centuries of colonialism and dependency. In “Polacca brillante,” they also facilitate discipline and persecution by subjecting any person and every thought to their totalizing gaze. At the start of the short story, the narrator finds the glowing remains of a cigar in his hotel room, and he suspects a secret officer is tracking his every move. Desperate to escape, he steps onto a deserted street on a freezing May night, possibly in Krakow, as he waits for his friends who will never arrive. Meanwhile, the narrator transforms from an observant subject into the scrutinized object of a local barber’s eyes: “Inclinándome un poco, veo a través del cristal el montón de pelos rubios, castaños, blancos, que la escoba empuja lentamente. Cuando alzo los ojos, me doy cuenta de que el peluquero me

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observa por un gran espejo” (95–96). At first, he appears to be the one observing the actions of the barber through the window, but quickly this gaze is inverted in the large mirror. Now, even other locals are surveilling his actions and whereabouts. Whereas for Sartre the inverted gaze restores his power and prestige, for Casey’s narrator this inversion subjects him to a surveillance apparatus supported by secret agents and collaborating locals.

“Polacca brillante” is one of the five stories collected in Casey’s final book, *Notas de un simulador* (1969), that he published from exile. According to Ilan Stavans, the story deals “tacitly—and tactfully—with gays under repressive political systems” (xvii). This autobiographical interpretation is possible given that Casey’s exile was almost certainly motivated by fear of incarceration for his sexuality. Many of his writings can be interpreted as queer critiques of the increasingly repressive Cuban state under Fidel Castro in the 1960s. However, such interpretations insert Casey’s sexuality as the cause of the protagonist’s exile, thus conflating the author with the protagonist. The text itself does not guarantee such a reading; details about the narrator’s sexuality and the motives for his flight are never revealed on the surface of this text. In this sense, “Polacca brillante” makes a queer critique possible, but importantly, it exceeds that specific interpretation. In my reading, the revolutionary gaze threatens an anonymous person whose background information is never revealed; thus, the narrator could be just about anyone. Only an elite minority can occupy Sartre’s position. The vast majority—queer individuals, yes, and also, the masses of the Revolution—will find itself subjected to this surveillance apparatus.

For a brief moment, Casey’s narrator tries to dismiss his fears as simple paranoia, but he looks at the salon once more: “Detrás de la vidriera sudada, el peluquero me observa fijamente. Los ojos le brillan en la oscuridad. Embriagados por el perfume de las acacias los mirlos cantan en el parque inundado de luz. Atravieso las sombras espesas” (“Polacca brillante” 98). The barber is confirmed as a sinister figure, and the narrator recognizes he is on the brink of losing the potential to make decisions or to act in any manner other than submitting his body to their demands. “Seguiré caminando,” he says, as his only option at the end of the story (99). He must attempt to go unnoticed within these dense shadows and flee along a path of his own invention if any potential for dissensus is

to remain or be recovered. This is the start of the politics of going unnoticed.

The demand that all artists and intellectuals become committed reduces politics to a politics of visibility, but becoming visible does not have to be the defining characteristic of politics. Contemporary political philosophy, notably in the work of Chantal Mouffe, better defines politics as dissensus or disagreement between different individuals or communities. Without dissensus, Mouffe argues, “there is always the danger that this democratic confrontation will be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values or essentialist forms of identification” (*Agonistics* 7). Therefore, the elimination of dissensus brings about the foreclosure of the radically democratic process. The pressing question is not how to eliminate the disagreements that allow democracy to prosper but rather how to engage in dialogue with an adversary without constructing them as an enemy to be vanquished. Strategies for achieving this ethical component of politics will be evaluated in the final chapter. For now, my point is that making someone or something visible is not the only means of engaging in politics. Dissensus can be achieved by any number of means, and the one under consideration here is by going unnoticed. In this sense, the politics of going unnoticed is not the oxymoron it first appeared to be.

In the following chapters, I study unnoticed protagonists who trace itineraries within saturated, politicized spaces wherein they stumble and bump into others who also refuse the demand to become visible. For this reason, the politics of going unnoticed is neither an *a priori* plan for revolutionary action nor does it align well with a politics premised on group identity. Instead of a frontal attack on institutions in order to secure a seat at the table, those who go unnoticed take a step back; they turn away from the institutions that have excluded them, even if they never manage to escape those institutions. The politics of going unnoticed begins at something like the everyday level, not necessarily before or below, but certainly in excess of politicized spaces, institutions, and everyday actions that seek to maintain a hold on these bodies. While going unnoticed, these protagonists register their dissent in order to reconfigure the foundational narratives that uphold those structures. As a result, they establish new forms of engaging in dialogues with those who have been abandoned in the shadows,

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with those who have been subjected to these totalizing lights, and even with those other people who have been aiding such totalizing regimes in their daily habits.

The politics of going unnoticed registers an uneasiness with identity politics, with the idea that one must first identify with a particular group in order to have one's demand for basic human rights and economic equality made visible in the public sphere. Identity politics has a direct tie to the various movements that gained traction in the Sixties, especially those related to questions of gender, sexuality, and race, and it has been successful in securing a place at the table for the disenfranchised in some instances. In no way is this book an attempt to deny that success; however, I put at stake here another option, another tool or tactic that can be deployed by those who never felt the burning glow of the public spotlight on their skin, by those who do not even desire to inhabit that place, by those who suspect that their institutions will never truly capitulate to their demands. Still, those who go unnoticed make political demands during their fleeting, everyday encounters with others, while wandering around where the light begins to fade and where voices are not so easily recorded.

From this particular position, those who go unnoticed recover the potential to deactivate the long-standing and unchallenged tradition in the Western canon that links politics, visibility, and knowledge, a tradition that unites diverse thinkers from Greek philosophy to contemporary political theory. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates establishes the analogy that will relate the visible realm to the intelligible realm: the sun enables sight just as goodness enables intelligence. From this, he creates the metaphor of making truth visible: "Well, here's how you can think about the mind as well. When its object is something which is lit up by truth and reality, then it has—and obviously has—intelligent awareness and knowledge. However, when its object is permeated with darkness [...] then it has beliefs and is less effective" (235–36). Plato ties light to knowledge within Western thought, superimposing the binaries of visibility/darkness, knowledge/ignorance, and morality/immorality.

For modern philosophy, both Descartes and Kant continue to explain the production of knowledge and its relationship to the public sphere through this metaphor. In the Third Meditation of *A Discourse on Method*, Descartes argues for the existence of

God by concentrating his attention on “the natural light” that is too easily obscured when “the vision of his mind” is “blinded by the images of sensible objects” (98). Descartes’s skepticism allows him to return from these deceptive objects to perceive “the beauty of this light so unspeakably great,” that of certainty, knowledge, and God (102). Concerned more with the public use of this knowledge, Kant expands the relationship between light and knowledge to the political in “An Answer to the Question: What is the Enlightenment?” He calls his moment an Age of Enlightenment—not yet enlightened—because men are just beginning to have the courage to make free use of their own understanding. As the light grows, Kant cautions that reason should be restricted to the public realm: “The *public* use of one’s reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among human beings; the *private* use of one’s reason may, however, often be very narrowly restricted without this particularly hindering the progress of enlightenment” (n.p.). An example he offers of this paradox is that of the soldier who must obey orders without questioning them, but who must also be free as a scholar to publicly critique the mistakes made by the military. Public debate, but not private insubordination, is the hallmark of the Enlightenment for Kant. This new light must be allowed to grow, as long as it is directed and kept within certain bounds.

Recently, Jacques Rancière’s work has become a touchstone for contemporary cultural criticism interested in the politics of art and literature, but at its core remains this long-standing tradition of making visible that which is currently in the dark. Rancière defines aesthetic practices as those that question “the distribution of the sensible” (12). Their politics involve an intervention “in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility” (13). Art and literature become political not by espousing the view of a particular party or movement, but rather by shining a light on the ways the sensible world is divided and shared, by making visible or heard the ideas and peoples whose appearance questions the current distribution of spaces and resources. This is another way of linking art and literature to identity politics. Despite their differences, these figures of Western thought uphold visibility as a goal to pursue and a necessary step for the production of knowledge and participation in politics.

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“Visibility,” however, “is a trap,” writes Foucault, although this sentence was not exactly a warning in the original context of the essay on Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon (*Discipline* 200). It functions as a description of how architecture eliminates blind spots from the cells used to partition and order either madmen, the condemned, students, or workers. Nonetheless, something ominous here spreads across the notion of making everything and everyone visible within the state, because perpetually visible bodies can be controlled through the techniques of discipline deployed within biopolitical regimes. At the end of his lectures from 1975 to 1976, Foucault sketches a transition from the theory of sovereignty—“the right to take life or to let live”—to that of biopolitics—“the right to make live and let die” (*Society* 241). The sovereign employs techniques of discipline “to ensure the spatial distribution of individual bodies (their separation, their alignment, their serialization, and their surveillance) and the organization, around those individuals, of a whole field of visibility” (242). The biopolitical regime embeds new technologies of regularization within those of discipline, including “the development of a medicine whose main function will now be public hygiene” in addition to “institutions to coordinate medical care, centralize power, and normalize knowledge” (244). Ultimately, biopolitics is an expansion of the technologies of power employed by the sovereign; instead of focusing on how to punish those who challenge the sovereign’s authority, the primary goal of biopolitics becomes the perpetuation of life at the collective or species level. As a result, the individual bodies always visible under surveillance become little more than the bare, biological material that may be excluded, incarcerated, or killed, because their so-called impurity, degeneracy, or abnormality threatens the survival of the species as a whole. Therein lies the trap of visibility that the unnoticed protagonists I study do their best to evade.

As biopolitical regimes encourage the practice of making visible for the purpose of extending surveillance to the darkest corners of both public and private spaces, contemporary societies ordered by neoliberal policies and technologies demand and even celebrate total transparency, at least among the general public. Byung-Chul Han analyzes the current role of the public sphere, which does not function as Kant had imagined in the Age of Enlightenment. Han argues that politicians are no longer judged on their actions,

but on how well they stage their performance, and as a result, the public sphere has become disconnected from civic duty:

The loss of the public sphere leaves behind a void; intimate details and private matters pour into it. Publicizing a persona takes the place of the public sphere. In the process, the public sphere becomes an exhibition space. It grows more and more distant from the space of communal action. (35)

As it becomes easier to publicize even the minutiae of everyday life, only personas that mask identity actually come to light in the public sphere. Thus, Han argues, “Only depoliticized space proves wholly transparent” (7). Though identity politics allows newly visible constituencies to make political demands, the call for total visibility and transparency also can serve to co-opt all bodies within the state and the market, to prevent collective action that challenges the partitioning of spaces and the distribution of resources. In this sense, both visibility and the demand for total transparency are traps, especially for the already disenfranchised.

Nelly Richard critiques the incessant calls for total visibility and transparency: “Estamos efectivamente sumergidos en una demanda de visibilidad total que parecería dejar fuera de lugar las prácticas críticas que buscan crear opacidades o refracciones, mostrar que no todos los cuerpos del sistema son translúcidos” (*La insubordinación* 102). It is as if our dictionaries have become bloated with duplicity, and the only remedy is to trim the fat, to create a one-to-one correspondence between language and the real so that no complex body or idea can elude the structural and the everyday demands for normativity. The call to make visible the invisible has its place, but in this broader context, it becomes a too-narrow demand that requires literatures and politics to maintain a state- or market-centered focus, whereas both politics and literatures, both bodies and their representations, can and do exceed the state, the market, the nation, and even the identity group.

Similarly, Michel de Certeau refers to this demand as a “cancerous growth of vision” (xxi). He criticizes Foucault’s structural analysis as incapable of taking into account how even consumers make errant paths through highly ordered spaces and institutions: “the trajectories trace out the ruses of other interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the

systems in which they develop” (xviii). Bodies and language that refuse such transparency, that seek to create a place in the darkness, that accidentally or intentionally go unnoticed, will always exist even in the most rigidly structured societies. For my analysis, the difficulty now lies in locating the itineraries and discussing the politics of those who go unnoticed—those who seek complexity and errant trajectories in the everyday, those who leave a trace of themselves, but no clear or totalizing record in their wake—without revealing them to these disciplinary lights.

In order to analyze the works of Casey, Filloy, and Somers, I find it necessary to consider the critical language of scholarship that derives from this long-standing tradition. Otherwise, my own work could be subsumed under the idea of simply making those who go unnoticed visible, whereas I continually refuse to reveal fully the identities, motives, and ideologies of those who go unnoticed to the light of knowledge and power. In fact, I do not claim to have complete and unmediated access to such information; rather, I frequently signal the limits of what can be known about these unnoticed protagonists and construct my arguments accordingly. Part of this methodology requires me to avoid the critical vocabulary that relies on the metaphor of making something visible to refer to the production of knowledge. Unknown or complicated ideas and objects are often described with the following adjectives: in Spanish, *borroso*, *difuso*, *opaco*, *oscuro*, and *turbio*; and in English, blurred, faint, hazy, nebulous, obscure, opaque, and unclear. As a remedy, light serves as the metaphorical substance that allows one to produce knowledge in those dark places with the following verbal phrases: in Spanish, *aclarar*, *clarificar*, *echar luz sobre*, *elucidar*, *esclarecer*, *iluminar*, and *poner en claro*; and in English, to bring to light, to clarify, to clear up, to elucidate, to illuminate, to reveal, and to shed light on. Even when postmodern sensibilities praise the ambiguous, that work can be narrated as the process of making ambiguity itself visible. This critical vocabulary and the appeal of visibility is almost unavoidable in scholarship today, but it is not impossible.

The practice of going unnoticed begins to map out routes within these saturated spaces under constant surveillance in order to render inoperative the binary structures of biopolitics. Giorgio Agamben describes those who feel least comfortable with the standard practices of their community as being contemporary. To

be contemporary is to divert one's attention away from dominant trends and to peer into the darkness of a given era. It is to look past that which is readily visible both to surveillance technologies and the everyday gaze. Unlike what Plato believed, Agamben explains that the eyes do not cease to act when light fades or disappears altogether. When light is absent, the off-cells in the retina become active: "When activated, these cells produce the particular kind of vision that we call darkness. Darkness is not, therefore, a privative notion (the simple absence of light, or something like nonvision) but rather the result of the activity of the 'off-cells,' a product of our own retina" (*Nudities* 13). Light is not necessary for vision and, by extension, the production of knowledge is possible well before something has been fully illuminated or revealed. For this reason, Agamben defines the contemporary as "the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his own time" (14). Contemporaries, therefore, do not get blinded or dazzled by the bright lights, but rather turn toward the shadows that swirl around them in order to seek out the darkness that others struggle to perceive or simply let pass unattended.

In my analysis, those who go unnoticed actively stumble *al vesre* and *al verse* through the darkness, and they will bump into others doing the same. Rather than making one another's bodies visible or translucent or banding together in a new identity group, those who go unnoticed produce an opening from which they can render inoperative the binary structures of biopolitics that constantly divide humans from one another. In *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben names the machines that continually erect these barriers as "the bipolar *zoè / bios* apparatus" (225). Such an apparatus makes recourse to scientific pseudo-concepts to create a form of political control over bare life in a generalized state of emergency by constantly pushing down, dividing, and excluding bare life. Moreover, he argues:

If thought, the arts, poetry, and human practices generally have any interest, it is because they bring about the idling of the machine and the works of life, language, economy, and society, in order to carry them back to the anthropogenetic event, in order that in them the becoming human of the human being will never be achieved once and for all, will never cease to happen. Politics names the place of this event, in whatever sphere it is produced. (208)

Introduction

In the following chapters, those who go unnoticed seek to slow and eventually render inoperative the machines that incessantly produce binary thought, machines that serve only to erect barriers, prevent dialogues and disagreements, and legitimize violence. By going unnoticed and then becoming perceived, even if only temporarily, by others who also inhabit zones of indiscernibility, the characters I study restore the potential for disagreeing with the institutional and everyday demands for normativity without having to wait for a structural overhaul or a profound awakening of the people, since it is possible that neither will ever occur. Ultimately, these protagonists open new modes of interacting with others at the individual, everyday level of fleeting, chance encounters whether it be from a cabin in the woods or a dark, urban alley where such dialogues had been prohibited. Though they will not always be successful, they continually work to render inoperative these divisions that appear and reappear throughout ever-changing Latin American political landscapes without erecting new barriers in their wake.

Organization of the Book

In Part One, “The Itinerary of Errant Palindromes,” I define “going unnoticed” as a challenge to totalizing narratives and hegemonic practices. Central to the totalizing discourses of the Sixties are the tropes of forming a univocal Latin American family and of constructing a revolutionary house, as in the Cuban journal *Casa de las Américas*. In contrast, I attend to the moments when language and bodies err from the preformed itineraries of the era. I begin with Filloy’s essays on palindromes, in which these seemingly perfect constructions erupt from their crystalline confines. These errant palindromes serve as a metaphorical heuristic for approaching the improper paths of the characters in Casey’s and Somers’s narratives who go unnoticed around urban apartments and provincial manors and then stumble into abandoned individuals. Crossing the boundaries and thresholds considered appropriate in the Sixties will pose real dangers to these protagonists. In doing so, they begin the arduous task of opening paths toward a politics without violent bids for hegemony and moralizing demands.

In Part Two, “The Politics of Going Unnoticed,” I advance a theory of engaging in the political without seeking visibility

at the institutional level. In Casey's ignored essays from *Lunes de Revolución*—the journal that would be closed after the 1961 debate on *P.M.*—I demonstrate that he appears to follow the party line, while openly lamenting the limitations placed on Cuban intellectuals. Then, I analyze Filloy's "Yo y los intrusos" as an ironic retelling of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" set in the "deserts" of Córdoba Province that challenges the notion of the ivory-tower intellectual. In *La mujer desnuda*, Somers's nude woman flees to the countryside on her thirtieth birthday—the age at which unmarried women in Uruguay were legally allowed to live alone. These real and imagined protagonists, or bare lives who can be cast out or killed with impunity, create spaces wherein dissensus—the defining characteristic of politics—becomes possible again, albeit briefly and at risk of danger.

In Part Three, "The Aesthetics of Writing in Plain Sight," I attend to what has always been apparent on the surface of hegemonic politics. I study Filloy's intervention into the gaucho genre, Somers's appropriation of the European family romance in novels by Charles Dickens and Enrique Pérez Escrich, and Casey's exploration of Havana's sewers and nightlife. Despite the differences in content, each author divests politicized traditions of their burdensome symbolic weight. Each chapter begins with a palindrome from Filloy's *Karcino*. The errant paths of these three palindromes connect Filloy to Somers and Casey by charting their movements from explicit toward subtler rewritings of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts. Along the way, the gauchos will be stripped of their heroic attire, the body politic will be exposed to infectious disease, and the people will revel in the filthy and the impure. Overall, essentialist myths that serve the interests of a ruling elite are rewritten by looking at the visible, yet unnoticed surface of political discourse in order to puncture and sully it.

In Part Four, "The Ethics of Being Perceived," those who go unnoticed must eventually be perceived by others; otherwise, going unnoticed would be a solitary, self-interested act. I contend that this exposure takes the form of an ethical encounter between radically different subjects with competing demands whose dialogue had been blocked by normative boundaries (e.g., good/evil, hero/villain, friend/enemy). I analyze the errant dialogues in Somers's *De miedo en miedo*, the "monologues" and "pandemonium" in Filloy's *Vil & Vil*, and the futility of playing by the

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rules in Casey's "La ejecución," a rewriting of Kafka's *The Trial*. In these texts, going unnoticed opens a space for dialogue and strives toward the construction of a coming community among subjects who now perceive one another as adversaries to be engaged, rather than as political enemies to be annihilated.

In the conclusion, "Re-ves la ARTELETRA," I address the notion of failure that led to the widespread disenchantment of revolutionary politics and point toward the potential for utopian thought today. In the ethical encounter, it can be argued that those who go unnoticed fail to consolidate their politics into a power grab within existing institutions or to create new ones. However, the politics of going unnoticed is an attempt to prevent closures within the public arena; it locates and renders inoperative divisive, political paradigms by prying open thresholds between binary poles. What is left is the open. By reversing the title of the introduction, I end with a new type of commitment without dogma: to leave open even my own project so that it may be re-seen (*re-ves* means "you see again") or revised by others. Thus, going unnoticed provides a non-exclusive series of tools for opening paths toward a politics without hegemony and toward new forms of narrating and living in a community.

About the Book

ARTELETRA analyzes the Sixties in Latin America in order to revisit the core claim of literary and cultural studies to political relevancy in the contemporary world: the task of making visible the invisible. Though visibility can secure rights for the disenfranchised, it also risks subjecting them to the biopolitical and capitalist arrangements of space. What is at stake in this book is a series of aesthetic and ethical tools for engaging in politics—defined here as the potential to disagree—without first passing through visibility. These tools cohere around a practice Bartles calls “the politics of going unnoticed,” which he derives from an archive of three noteworthy, though under-appreciated, authors who wrote during the Sixties: Calvert Casey (1924–69), Juan Filloy (1894–2000), and Armonía Somers (1914–94). For the first time ever, Casey, Filloy, and Somers are put in dialogue with one another to further demonstrate the unique contributions of Latin American writers to contemporary debates about the cross-roads of literatures and politics. What unites them is their shared investment in stories about those who go unnoticed. As a practice, going unnoticed creates space and opportunities for queer, rural, and female subjects, among others, to step back from unjust institutions. As a political discourse, going unnoticed deactivates the binary structures of biopolitics (e.g., visible/invisible, pure/filthy, friend/enemy) that divide humans from one another in the service of power and economic inequality. Though the politics of going unnoticed was ignored during the Sixties for its apparent individualism, these three writers work through alternatives to the politics of visibility that has animated political discourse on the left for the last half-century. More than a self-interested critique, going unnoticed opens new possibilities for engaging in the messy business of politics while imagining and creating better communities.

About the Author

Jason A. Bartles is an associate professor at West Chester University. He received his BA from Gettysburg College and his MA and PhD in Latin American Literatures and Cultures from the University of Maryland, College Park. His research explores the political, aesthetic, and ethical discourses that restore the possibilities for utopian thinking in the fiction and essays of twentieth and twenty-first century Latin American and Latinx writers. He has published articles in *Aztlán*, *Revista Iberoamericana*, *Variaciones Borges*, *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, and *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*. His fiction has appeared in *Punchnet's*, *Here Comes Everyone*, *Boned*, *The Metaworker*, and in the collection, *My Utopia*, at Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Jason Bartles's *ARTELETRA* offers a unique, innovative framework for reading an era in Latin American cultural history that seemed foreclosed to further literary or political readings. By providing a heuristic for reading against the currents of the cultural maps of the 1960s, Bartles not only helps us revisit this decade by attending to works and writers other than the ones we commonly associate with the period, but he also opens up a much-needed space today for alternative forms of utopian thinking. Creating a dialogue between works by Calvert Casey (Cuba, 1924–69), Juan Filloy (Argentina, 1894–2000), and Armonía Somers (Uruguay, 1914–94) proves the value of comparative analysis when examining a time in the production of Latin American literatures and politics that makes sense only transnationally. The politics of going unnoticed enacted by the various characters analyzed by Bartles compels us to see this crucial period in Latin American politics outside the logic of success and failure. Instead, *ARTELETRA* unsettles and interrogates this binary, as it does those between visibility and invisibility, transparency and opacity, that structure the political up until today.

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