

MODERNITY IN ARGENTINA

Modernity for the Masses: Antonio Bonet's Dreams for Buenos Aires. By Ana María León.
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In this fascinating study, architectural historian Ana María León extracts surprisingly revelatory insights from what initially appears to be unpromising material. The book's central chapters explore three massive housing projects designed in Buenos Aires by the Catalan architect Antonio Bonet, none of which were built. Yet, even if the projects existed only on paper (and occasionally on film), León's analysis illuminates both the transnational history of modernist architecture and the twists and turns of Argentine politics in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

León begins by exploring the architect's intellectual formation in Europe. She reveals the profound influence of surrealism on Catalan modernism and analyzes Bonet's early work under the direction of José Luis Sert, who sought to bridge revolutionary art with commerce. After describing an intriguing collaboration with Chilean artist Roberto Matta in Le Corbusier's Paris atelier, León traces the architect's effort to use his avant-garde, modernist credentials to secure commissions in Buenos Aires. In partnership with the Argentine architects Jorge Ferrari and Juan Kurchan, Bonet worked to transplant European modernism to Argentina. Analyzing the Artists' Ateliers, a building designed by Bonet and built in 1939, León appreciates the architect's efforts to reconcile his imported ideas with the spatial realities of a very different city. Nevertheless, she concludes that his attempt to build an architectural practice by attracting support from local businessmen and industrialists undermined his revolutionary surrealism.

In subsequent years, Bonet's efforts to transform the architecture of Buenos Aires would focus on a series of ambitious housing projects. These three projects, designed between 1943 and 1956, forced the architect to engage the Argentine state during a particularly tumultuous and consequential period. The first was designed to appeal to the military government that took power following the nationalist coup of 1943; the second was proposed during the height of the first Perón regime; and the third was created during the Revolución Libertadora, the dictatorship that overthrew Perón. Bonet's struggle to appeal to these three very different regimes offers a privileged view of the shifting meanings of modernism, public space, and population growth in Argentina.

Beginning in the 1930s, industrialization precipitated a massive process of internal migration. Bonet's three housing projects each represented a distinct response to the challenge of managing this influx of people. The first, Casa Amarilla, was a group of towers inspired by Le Corbusier, except that instead of tidy European lawns Bonet imagined a wild natural landscape inspired by the *pampas*, long viewed by Argentine

liberals as the site of savage barbarism. According to León, the project “reflected the controlling characteristics of the regime it was designed under” (128). Bonet’s second project, a working-class housing development in Bajo Belgrano, offered the Perón regime a nostalgic “pastoral modernity,” a happy city meant to be in synch with official propaganda. In 1956, Bonet tried to appeal to the anti-Peronist imaginary of the new military government with Barrio Sur, a project to demolish a large section of the quaint old neighborhood of San Telmo and replace it with a development featuring modern towers and large plazas filled with retail establishments. The implicit goal was to replace the neighborhood’s largely Peronist working-class residents with middle-class consumers.

Unable to visit these unbuilt projects, León draws on a wide range of sources, including architectural drawings as well as promotional brochures and films. She provides extensive analysis of architectural journals to capture the evolving professional discourses that shaped Bonet’s work. Likewise, she reconstructs the larger intellectual milieu in Buenos Aires, focusing particular attention on the liberal intelligentsia of the 1930s and the extensive influence of psychoanalysis in the 1940s and 1950s. León is also careful to explore how Bonet’s projects interact with the built environment of the city, transformed in these years by the construction of Nueve de Julio Avenue and the housing projects that were actually built by the Perón regime. The book raises provocative new questions about the role of transnational modernism in Argentina and about the efforts of governments and architects to house—and to control—the masses.

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THE CUBAN REVOLUTION AND MEDIA COVERAGE

¡Hay un barbudo en mi portada! La etapa insurreccional cubana a través de los medios de comunicación y la propaganda 1952–1958. By Patricia Calvo González. Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 2021. Pp. 295. \$33.00 paper.
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In the introduction to her new book, Patricia Calvo González cites Che Guevara’s assertion, uttered during the guerrilla struggle against the Batista dictatorship (1956–59), “Los periodistas serán los historiadores de esta Revolución” (22). This study largely succeeds in substantiating Guevara’s prediction, making the convincing case that journalists, both domestic and international, played a fundamental role in securing the rebels’ victory, if not as historians as such, then certainly as influential storytellers and image-makers. Even though much existing scholarship explores the strategic use of the media to consolidate the Cuban Revolution’s hold on power post-1959, Calvo González adds a new perspective by investigating the rebel leaders’ relationship with the press from the uprising’s nascent stages. In so doing, she argues persuasively that