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**Same Refreshing Taste, No Empire:**  
Argentinean Advertising, Coca-Cola and the Shortcomings of the Cultural Imperialist  
Framework in Buenos Aires, 1940-1965

Solange Hilfinger-Pardo  
Swarthmore College: Honors History Thesis  
2012

## **Table of Contents**

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: PITCHING PROGRESS</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: A DRINK OF MODERNITY</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: FORGETTING COKE, REJECTING EMPIRE</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>117</b>

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## Introduction

On a sunny day in 1954, 8 year-old Luis Trabb sat on the edge of a soccer field just outside Buenos Aires sipping on his first bottle of Coca-Cola. One of his teammate's fathers had brought a crate of Coke to give the boys as a post-game treat. Luis did not know what it was, but he was tired after the game and just wanted something cold to drink. "I didn't like it very much because it was very sweet, but then I got used to it. And then I drank more Coca-Cola."<sup>1</sup>

Ariel Dorfman, author of *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, might have looked at this story and seen the talons of an American Empire sinking into Trabb's young mind. He would see Trabb's increasing consumption of this foreign good as a sure sign of an American capitalist influence taking hold. In his 1971 work, Dorfman posited that the ideologies behind the work of Disney and other American products inculcated citizens of peripheral nations with capitalist ideology. For Dorfman, The Coca-Cola Company's advertisements necessarily fueled Trabb's consumption of the beverage, as well as his consumption of the values Coca-Cola espoused.

Certainly, in its early days in Buenos Aires, Coca-Cola presented a clear value system through its advertisements. William O'Barr discusses how advertising serves to reflect the social order in which it is based. Yet in the process, advertisers also attempt to shape their social order by projecting what they desire for their society or feel it should be.<sup>2</sup> As advertised in Argentina, Coca-Cola presented an aspirational, rather than actual,

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<sup>1</sup> Luis Trabb, Personal Interview, 13 April 2012. In Spanish: "De hecho, no me gustaba mucho porque era muy dulce, pero después me acostumbré. Y después tomé más Coca-Cola."

<sup>2</sup> William O'Barr, *Culture and the Ad: Exploring Otherness in the World of Advertising* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994) 4-5.

Argentina. Whether or not Coke reshaped Porteño society, bottle by bottle, to fit its aspirations is an entirely different matter.<sup>3</sup>

Coca-Cola overwhelmingly based its Argentinean advertisements between 1940 and 1965 on ideals of American public and private society. The images the company published in its print advertising in Buenos Aires were, more often than not, mere copies of images used in the United States.<sup>4</sup> The advertisements put forth a conception of American modernity that Coca-Cola believed Porteños should attempt to achieve. Certainly, there is also the possibility that the Coca-Cola Company was simply attempting to reflect what they felt Porteños strove to be; however, at the same time, the advertisements demonstrated the limitations of the company's knowledge of Latin America, and especially Argentina. Thus, even if the company attempted to reflect Porteños' hopes for the nation through its advertisements, in the end, the images they displayed were only projections of what the company believed Porteños should want to be.

In advertisements that were more Latin America-specific, Coca-Cola stressed its ability to aid these countries in obtaining economic and societal progress—and in the process encouraged them to become more like Americans. In its depictions of women in the public sphere in Latin America, Coca-Cola demonstrated a faulty understanding of women's place in Argentine culture. Women in these advertisements were significantly less independent than the women depicted in Coke advertisements in the United States.

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<sup>3</sup> "Porteños" is a term for the inhabitants of Buenos Aires, which means, quite literally, "people of the port."

<sup>4</sup> Given the limited availability of audio archives and relevant street photographs from the period 1940-1965, I have chosen to focus on Coca-Cola's print advertising campaign. This is not to imply that its point of sale and radio advertising was not important, but even in focusing on this one medium I have been able to get a clear sense of their advertising methodologies.

For Coca-Cola, this was an example of Latin America's lagging progress: Buenos Aires was not yet like the United States in this respect, therefore it needed to change. The company presented itself as a champion of friendly relations with Latin America through its slogans and the texts of its advertisements. Yet even as the company promoted "universalism," the friendly hand it extended came from a United States centric understanding of what it could offer Latin America. Ideals of what composed a modern society often accompanied these Universalist messages. Thus, Coca-Cola purported to aid Latin America in reaching modernity, but its key to progress was transforming Latin America to be more like the United States.

When the first Coca-Cola bottling plant opened in Buenos Aires in 1942, it did not enter the market in a vacuum. Argentinean advertising had become a well-established aspect of Porteño life decades before Coca-Cola arrived.<sup>5</sup> As the advertising industry expanded, it began using techniques United States advertisers developed. Advertising in Argentina by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century evidenced a significant American bent. The publication of one of the biggest advertising organizations in Buenos Aires, *Síntesis Publicitaria*, demonstrated the fact that Argentinean advertisers not only used methodologies from the United States and often looked to the North as a model, they also went through many of the same struggles as their United States counterparts.

One issue both Argentinean and American advertisers grappled with was the attempt to modernize their respective societies. Their timelines were slightly different; advertisers in the United States began the process of defining themselves as purveyors of modernity in the 1920s, while in Argentina advertisers were still attempting to assert

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<sup>5</sup> Antonio R. Mesa, *La Propaganda y sus Secretos* (Buenos Aires: Monogram S.A.C. y F., 1959) 89-103.

themselves as the quintessentially modern profession well into the 1950s. Both groups stressed their moral obligation to bring modernity to the nation: Argentineans set up systems of morality surrounding the goal of modernization.

When Coca-Cola began advertising in Buenos Aires many of the notions of modernity it brought to the Porteño market were already present in Argentinean advertising. In essence, the moral schema Coca-Cola presented was not substantially different from ones already in existence in Buenos Aires. Nor did Coke's foreignness distinguish it significantly in the Porteño marketplace. Porteños had long been avid consumers of imported goods. In part, because their economy grew rapidly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries from export-led growth, they became accustomed to easy inflows of goods from abroad. Benjamin Orlove and Arnold Bauer, however, argue that Latin American reliance on imports was more than simply the result of economic circumstances; imported goods contained the "allure of the foreign" because of their association with modernity and their potential for establishing a distinct national identity.<sup>6</sup>

While people create their identities in various ways, Judith Butler offers a useful framework for examining identity formation. She argues that identity, above all, is performed:

Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications

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<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Orlove and Arnold J. Bauer, "Giving Importance to Imports," *The Allure of the Foreign: Imported Goods in Postcolonial Latin America*, ed. Benjamin Orlove (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997) 13.



manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.<sup>7</sup>

For Butler, we are the sum of our actions. Our actions, however, include a large swath of possibilities, even the ways in which we voice our identity. In essence, we do not have a core identity that we express, rather, our surface identity is made up of the entirety of our actions. Thus, a Porteño writing an article about how advertising helps modernize the country is as much an act of identity formation as a Porteño buying a bottle of Coca-Cola, or a sweater from England.

The identity that a Porteño consuming Coca-Cola performs, however, is integrally tied to the meaning she bestows upon the beverage. The meaning of a bottle of Coca-Cola for a person in the United States may be entirely different than the meaning an Argentinean attributes to it. David Howes discusses the fact that when people consume a foreign good, we must examine the meanings of this action in the context of local conditions. He labels this phenomenon ‘creolization,’ but notes that the term is synonymous with Jonathan Friedman’s ‘localization.’<sup>8</sup> Friedman conceptualizes localization as falling within the context of identity and consumption. He writes that “the practice of identity encompasses a practice of consumption and even production.” The process of consumption, for Friedman, cannot be separated from the process of identity formation. Examined in conjunction with Butler’s framework, consumption is a performance of identity, in so far as the same object may have different meanings for different people.

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<sup>7</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 173.

<sup>8</sup> David Howes, Introduction, *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities* (London: Routledge, 1996) 5; Jonathan Friedman, “Being in the World: Globalization and Localization,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 (1990): 327.

In the case of Coca-Cola, the product meant one thing in the United States, and something quite different in Buenos Aires. Coca-Cola came to symbolize the American Dream in the United States, but in Buenos Aires, despite Coca-Cola's best advertising efforts, Porteños did not associate the product with modernizing forces.<sup>9</sup> The reasons behind this may have been many, but certainly the advertising campaign's failure to differentiate its message from most Argentine advertising contributed to Porteño's perception of Coke as unremarkable.

Many historians and sociologists have documented Coca-Cola's path to becoming the most recognized brand in the world. Most histories of the company focus on its United States business dealings and strategy. When they address Coca-Cola's overseas markets, it is usually in a cursory manner with a sales figure or amusing anecdote from abroad to remind the reader of this product's far-reaching appeal. Mark Pendergrast's *For God, Country and Coca-Cola: The Definitive History of the Great American Soft Drink and the Company that Makes It* is the company's most famous history. Meant to reach a wide audience, his book is an uncritical look at the company's internal politics and business strategies. In *Secret Formula: How Brilliant Marketing and Relentless Salesmanship Made Coca-Cola the Best-Known Product in the World*, Frederick Allen provides much of the same information as Pendergrast, but occasionally falls into the trap of idealizing the company's great men. Pat Watters, author of *Coca-Cola: An Illustrated History*, offers a traditional business history of the company, while Constance Hays, in *The Real Thing: Truth and Power at the Coca-Cola Company*, focuses mainly on Roberto Goizueta's rise and tenure as CEO (1980-1997). As books written outside

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<sup>9</sup> Howes 3.

academic settings, none of these histories look in depth at local foreign responses to the product.

Several authors have looked at Coca-Cola's arrival in foreign countries as case studies for cultural imperialism, mostly as short pieces or articles. Given its reputation as a symbol of American cultural empire, many historians and sociologists have been eager to debunk this notion. Buenos Aires provides a rich context for examining the framework of cultural imperialism, yet it has largely been neglected within the historiography of Coca-Cola.<sup>10</sup> Argentina's history of consuming imported goods and generally large consumer base make it an interesting place to examine how people create meaning surrounding objects and whether or not a product can influence people's belief systems.

In order to thoroughly address the ways in which Porteños attributed meaning to Coca-Cola, I conducted seventeen interviews with Buenos Aires residents from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Certainly, the experiences and opinions of seventeen Porteños cannot serve as a stand in for those of the entire Argentine population; however, insofar as each interaction can be read as containing as much validity as any historical document, their stories serve as interesting glimpses into how consuming Coca-Cola interacted with Argentine identity formation.<sup>11</sup> There were two overwhelming responses to questions about Porteños' memories of Coca-Cola that split along class lines. The upper-class Porteños tended not to have many memories of Coca-Cola (even as they could list multiple other imported products). The lower-class residents reacted to the

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<sup>10</sup> Constance Classen wrote a piece in 1996 loosely addressing Coca-Cola in Argentina with respect to cultural imperialism, yet she examines the product along with several other cultural phenomena. Constance Classen, "Sugar Cane, Coca-Cola and Hypermarkets: Consumption and Surrealism in the Argentine Northwest," *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities*, ed. David Howes (London: Routledge, 1996) 39-54.

<sup>11</sup> For more on oral history see Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

mention of Coca-Cola with anti-imperialist rhetoric, but most admitted to consuming the beverage. Thus, either by forgetting or by disagreeing with the ideals set forth in Coca-Cola's advertisements, these Porteños made clear that the meaning they associated with Coca-Cola had little to do with its projected meaning.<sup>12</sup>

To get a sense of the advertising culture into which Coca-Cola arrived, Chapter 1 lays out a picture of how advertising evolved in Buenos Aires up until 1942, and the major shifts up until 1965. In Porteño advertisers' extensive use of United States advertising concepts and techniques, they developed an advertising culture very similar to that in the United States, with analogous goals and purported moralities. Chapter 2 argues that, given the preexisting similarities between United States advertising and the Argentinean advertising scene, Coca-Cola's blatantly United States-centric messages did not necessarily stand out to most Porteños because Argentinean ads had already been using them. Porteños paid little attention to Coca-Cola's suggestion that American modernity was a deeply moral position to occupy. Finally, Chapter 3 analyzes the interviews of Porteños who were alive during the early years of Coca-Cola and finds that they did not, in fact, accept Coca-Cola's proposed morality. Rather, they attributed the prestige or disdain of the foreign to other products, but not to Coca-Cola. Consuming Coca-Cola, for these Porteños, was not imbibing empire.

Recalling Trabb as an 8 year-old on the side of a soccer field with a drink he did not quite like, the framework of cultural imperialism is not equipped to deal with the subtleties of how that bottle ended up in Trabb's hands, what he made of this strangely shaped product, or why he began to drink more. Encapsulating the complexities in the

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel James makes the point that forgetting can be as interesting to the oral historian as the process of remembering. Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) 154.

ways in which Trabb and other Porteños consumed Coca-Cola requires taking a deeper look at how they understood this product, where it fit into their perceptions of what it meant to be Argentinean, and where those perceptions overlapped and differed from other Porteños.

## Chapter 1

### Pitching Progress

Pero que el siglo veinte  
es un despliegue  
de maldá insolente,  
ya no hay quien lo niegue.  
[...]  
Lo mismo un burro  
que un gran professor.  
No hay aplazaos ni escalafón,  
los ignorantes nos han igualao.

But that the twentieth century  
is a demonstration  
of insolent evil,  
now there is no one who will deny that.  
[...]  
An ass is the same  
as a great professor.  
No one flunks nor elevated in rank,  
the ignorant ones have equaled us.

-*Cambalache*, Enrique Santos Discépolo<sup>1</sup>

Enrique Santos Discépolo wrote his famous tango, *Cambalache*, in 1934 in the midst of an accelerating process of change on the Buenos Aires landscape. His whirlwind tango encapsulates the feeling of many Porteños as they watched the norms and societal expectations they had always been accustomed to begin to erode. The ‘asses’ and ‘professors’ began to converge in the growing middle class, which, with its emergence, broke down traditional Argentine socioeconomic class distinctions. The disintegration of these identities opened the city to the possibility, and necessity, of creating new class and national identities. Setting moral standards and formulating social norms was essential in this process of creating new identities. The break down of old norms created a vacuum that various socioeconomic groups rushed to fill by asserting their own conceptions of morality.

Porteño advertisers represented one such group. Like any part of the cultural process, Argentinean advertising was intimately involved in this process of identity formation. At the same time, Argentinean advertisers also considered themselves a group that closely followed the changing social mores. In the midst of these changing norms,

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<sup>1</sup> Héctor Ángel Benedetti, *Las Mejores Letras de Tango* (Buenos Aires: Seix Barral, 1998) 162.

they attempted to reflect, and even direct, those changes with their work. One journal in particular, *Sintesis Publicitaria*, provides an interesting look into the ways in which advertisers interacted with the rest of the nation's discourse on identity. As one of the nation's leading journals on advertising, *Sintesis* exemplified much of the industry's preeminent thinking. *Sintesis* took an active role in trying to shape an idea of Argentine identity, and often relied on a sense of moral high ground in doing so.

The media and print culture's involvement in the process of establishing a national identity was not new in Buenos Aires, or Latin America as a whole. By the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, authors across Latin America began producing nationalist literature that drew on European Romanticism in style and form. These authors appointed themselves, and were looked to, as vanguards of nationalism because, in the words of Angel Rama, the "ability to forge a national spirit" of literature made it "an autonomous field of knowledge."<sup>2</sup> By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a nationalist fervor had encompassed the Latin American literary scene.

The process of writing a national identity, an ever-ongoing one, remained as strong as ever in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Buenos Aires. David Foster cites Homi Bhabha to discuss how various cultural forms (i.e., literature, film, dance) were part of a larger process of identity formation in Buenos Aires that Bhabha describes as "writing the nation" and Foster modifies to "writing the city."<sup>3</sup> In this process

the institutions of cultural production are not only reflexes of this writing of the nation and of the city, but [...] they are constructions of meaning, for it is herein that their eloquence and their efficaciousness lie as cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Angel Rama, *The Lettered City*, trans. John Charles Chasteen (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 65.

<sup>3</sup> David Foster, *Buenos Aires: Perspectives on the City and Cultural Production* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998) 9.

constructions—they are forged from the ‘scraps, patches, and rags of daily life.’<sup>4</sup>

All the types of cultural production in Buenos Aires were a part of a larger process—struggle even—for the creation of a city or national identity. Juan Domingo Perón’s presidency, and the lead-up to his taking office, raised the fundamental question of who would govern the country and Buenos Aires, not simply politically, but socioculturally as well. Perón’s election meant an entire new facet of the Argentine population was now invited to participate in the process of creating social norms, in part, by becoming consumers of mass media. Laura Podalsky writes that “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.”<sup>5</sup> The media, as well as the literary scene, was certainly part of the cultural productions and representations integral to the creation and modification of Porteño society.

### *Advertising the Nation*

As advertising became more widespread in Buenos Aires, so too did its ability to take part in the process of writing national identity. Noemí Gibrál-Blacha and María Silvia Ospital discuss how, during the 1930s, advertising became even more immersed in the political process because advertisements began promoting the consumption of local goods as an act of nationalism. At the same time, the images and ideas of ‘*argentinidad*’ these advertisements chose to draw on also set forth a concept of national identity. Yet in

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<sup>4</sup> Foster 10.

<sup>5</sup> Laura Podalsky, *Specular City: Transforming Culture, Consumption and Space in Buenos Aires, 1955-1973* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004) 9.



the way Gibrat-Blacha and Ospital construct their argument, they give little consideration to the fact that advertising, as a field, was more than simply a tool in the process of creating a nationality. Nor do they give much consideration to the fact that advertising had been an active part of this process before 1930 (even if to a lesser extent). The writings in *Síntesis* show how the Argentines in advertising felt they were an integral part of an ongoing process of constructing an Argentinean morality and identity.

Just as turn-of-the-century authors used European stylistic elements in the creation of a nationalist literature, Argentinean advertisers faced a similar paradox in that they relied heavily on United States advertising methodology even while asserting their role in the formation of national identity. The fact that Argentinean advertisers chose to use American advertising techniques created interesting overlaps with United States advertising in the messages their advertisements broadcast. As I will discuss in the next chapter, during Coca-Cola's early years in Argentina, its message was largely indistinguishable from the messages publications like *Síntesis* promoted. While Argentinean advertisers took on the role of moral leaders, the same process had begun a decade earlier in the United States. Otis A. Pease wrote in 1958 that, by the 1920s and 1930s, American advertisers not only attempted to make new products an integral part of consumers' lives, but also began to "traffic in beliefs concerning the Good Life."<sup>6</sup> American advertisers started to sell not just products, but a lifestyle as well.

Roland Marchand similarly discusses how United States advertisers in the early mid-20<sup>th</sup> century were active participants in the formation of American identity. He writes that "by disseminating certain incessantly repeated and largely uncontradicted

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<sup>6</sup> Otis as quoted in Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 24.

visual clichés and moral parables, the ads were likely to shape or reinforce the same popular attitudes they sought to reflect.”<sup>7</sup> While American advertisers reflected the society around them in their ads, they also strove to mold it. A common trope in advertising during this period showed a person being ridiculed for failing to abide by social standards and how the product, be it disinfectant, shampoo, breakfast cereal or hand cream, could come to the rescue. This tactic, known as “scare copy,” set forth clear dichotomies between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behavior.<sup>8</sup> Advertisers in the United States used their position to advance ideas about the correct ways for Americans to live their lives. Thus, given that Argentinean advertisers created similar dichotomies, even as Argentinean advertising asserted itself into the discourse on nationhood, it looked to the United States.

Argentinean advertisers also entered the discussion at a tumultuous point in the formation of national identity. By the 1930s, Buenos Aires was home to a substantial middle class and a society with high rates of social mobility. This, of course, had not always been the case in a country founded and traditionally run by an entrenched land-owning class. While the oligarchic upper class retained vast influence in the realm of cultural production, the 1930s saw their political clout begin to erode.<sup>9</sup> The city that they had controlled, reconstructed, styled, and (most importantly) governed, slipped from their hands to classes and political leaders they saw as less adept and deserving than themselves. The Obelisk that the upper class constructed in 1936 as part of an urban

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<sup>7</sup> Marchand xx.

<sup>8</sup> Marchand 14. Marchand also discusses the fact that many of the women working in copywriting at this time were employed precisely to avoid making such social faux pas. Because women comprised such an important target group, advertising executives found it necessary to employ at least a few staff members who knew about women’s desires: Marchand 34-35.

<sup>9</sup> Manuel Mora y Araujo, “Viejas y Nuevas Elites,” *Buenos Aires - Historia de Cuatro Siglos Tomo 2*, ed. Jose Luis Romero and Luis Alberto Romero (Buenos Aires: Altamira, 2000) 242.

beautification effort would soon look over a Pink House controlled by a political figure who looked not to the established land-owning class for political support, but looked instead to the lower echelons of society.<sup>10</sup>

In the decades before the watershed presidency of Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1955), the middle class became an increasingly dominant force, politically as well as socioculturally. At the same time, members of the elite immersed themselves more and more in the middle-class culture. Manuel Mora y Araujo describes this integration of the elite as “a mutual contamination of norms, customs, values and expectations so far as to modify Buenos Aires society.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, while the upper class retained considerable influence on matters of art, architecture, and style, this influence was diluted by their inevitable interactions, both cultural and quotidian, with other socioeconomic classes.

Perón’s political presence also contributed to changes in the ways socioeconomic groups viewed themselves. Perón’s contradictory populist leadership style remains an enigma for historians to define.<sup>12</sup> In the most basic sense, Perón garnered support from the working class through his attempts to elevate their standing in Argentine society.<sup>13</sup> Even before taking office in 1946, Perón used the Buenos Aires streets more extensively than politicians had before, through demonstrations and rallies that brought huge numbers

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<sup>10</sup> Jose Luis Romero, “La Ciudad de Masas,” *Buenos Aires - Historia de Cuatro Siglos Tomo 2*, ed. Jose Luis Romero and Luis Alberto Romero (Buenos Aires: Altamira, 2000) 202.

<sup>11</sup> Mora y Araujo 245.

<sup>12</sup> Part of what makes the discussion surrounding Perón so complex is the highly politicized nature of Peronism that is ongoing today.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Karush, “Populism, Melodrama, and the Market,” *The New Cultural History of Peronism: Power and Identity in Mid-Twentieth-Century Argentina*, ed. Matthew Karush and Oscar Chamosa (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 24. For a consumer history of Peronism, see Eduardo Elena’s *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 2011). Laura Podalsky writes extensively about the lasting effect of Personism on the spaces of Buenos Aires in *Specular City: Transforming Culture, Consumption and Space in Buenos Aires, 1955-1973* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

of his working class supporters into new public spaces. During his presidency, he initially had the Catholic Church and considerable middle class support, but by the later part of his time in office, he had largely lost the support of both as his visions for Argentine society clashed more and more with their conceptions of how their society should function. His anti-elite stance had antagonized the traditional upper class from the very beginning of his career.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, by the end of his presidency, real wages for the working class were lower than they had been when he came into office.<sup>15</sup> His support amongst the working class, therefore, was not always a sure thing; however, by not looking to the traditional upper class for political support, Perón facilitated a significant paradigm shift in Argentine politics and class relations.

A variety of cultural forces participated in the process of changing social norms, especially Argentine media. The expansion of Argentinean advertising rode on the back of an ever-growing Argentine media. The educational reforms of the 1870s, which Hipólito Yrigoyen augmented during his presidency (1916-1922, 1928-1930), increased the size of the literate population in Argentina.<sup>16</sup> In 1914, the literacy rate was only 82 percent, but by 1938, it increased to 93 percent.<sup>17</sup> With a higher number of literate Argentineans, coming from a larger swath of the population, there was now a market for

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<sup>14</sup> Joel Horowitz, "Populism and Its Legacies in Argentina," *Populism in Latin America*, ed. Michael L. Conniff (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999) 36; Podalsky 34; Karush 47.

<sup>15</sup> "The Return of Populism," *The Economist* 16 April 2006: 40.

<sup>16</sup> Rosa María Brenca de Rússovich and María Luisa Lacroix, "Los Medios Masivos," *Buenos Aires - Historia de Cuatro Siglos Tomo 2*, ed. Jose Luis Romero and Luis Alberto Romero (Buenos Aires: Altamira, 2000) 390.

<sup>17</sup> Leandro H. Guitiérrez and Luis Alberto Romero, "Barrio Societies, Libraries and Culture in the Popular Sectors of Buenos Aires in the Inter-war Period," *Essays in Argentine Labour History 1870-1930*, ed. Jeremy Adelman (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with St Antony's College, Oxford, 1992) 219. These numbers do not differentiate between literate and semiliterate Argentineans; however, because I focus on advertising, even if these statistics include a substantial number of semiliterates, I assume they were able to read and understand a majority of Argentinean advertisements.

mass publications. At the same time, the newly included sectors of the literate population comprised a large audience for publications specifically geared towards the middle and even lower classes. Many publishers began distributing cheap reading material, such as newspapers, magazines and weekly novelettes. The periodical industry grossed \$87,476 during 1946 in Buenos Aires (which constituted nearly 80% of the nationwide periodical revenue). Print publications, in total, grossed \$125,615 in Buenos Aires in the same year.<sup>18</sup> This process began in the 1930s and expanded well into the 1950s with the founding of publishing firms like the Editorial de la Universidad de Buenos Aires, which produced classic books en masse and sold them at affordable prices.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the number of libraries in Buenos Aires increased substantially between 1920 and 1945. In 1924 there were approximately forty-six libraries in Buenos Aires; by 1945, there were closer to 200.<sup>20</sup>

Argentinean literature had long included an acknowledgement of the lower classes, but it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that publishers began recognizing them as consumers. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, to a certain extent, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, intellectuals reached out to the poor; however, their goal was to increase support for a populist movement that fundamentally maintained power in the hands of elites.<sup>21</sup> The Peronist magazine, *Argentina*, exemplified the shift that occurred in the first half of the

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<sup>18</sup> Secretaría de Asuntos Técnicos, *IV Censo General De La Nacion. Censo Industrial de 1946*. (Buenos Aires, 1952) 129-130. One of the explanations for the increase in publishing in the 1930s was the flood of Spanish intellectuals fleeing Franco's rule that emigrated to Buenos Aires. For more on this issue, see Leandro de Sagastizábal, *La edición de libros en la Argentina: una empresa de cultura* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> Podalsky 149.

<sup>20</sup> Gutiérrez and Romero 218-219. Richard Walter also characterizes Buenos Aires as "the Latin American center" [original emphasis] of publishing. Richard J. Walter, *Politics and Urban Growth in Buenos Aires 1910-1942* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 98.

<sup>21</sup> Rama 105.

20<sup>th</sup> century with the creation of magazines published specifically for the middle and working classes.<sup>22</sup> An advertisement in the 1941 issue of *Síntesis Publicitaria* demonstrated the spread of possible audiences for print media. The advertisement urged advertisers to buy space in a number of the publishing company Editorial Atlántida's magazines. The advertisement depicts a bull's-eye with each ring representing a different socioeconomic class, the bull's-eye itself being the "Rich Aristocratic Class" and moving out to the "Accommodated Class," then "Middle Class" and finally the "Poor-Wage Class" (which this elite-run journal falsely labeled as outside the "field of sales").<sup>23</sup> The ad depicts military personnel (representing the advertisers) hitting the targets on different classes with cannon balls labeled with the various magazine names. It suggests that the different publications can reach a wide variety of socioeconomic groups. At the same time, placing the wealthy aristocratic class as the bull's-eye made little sense in terms of readership numbers, as the established elite was shrinking while the middle class was growing. In 1935, white-collar workers made up 11% of the workforce, whereas in 1946, they constituted 15% of the workforce.<sup>24</sup> Print media, therefore, had become a more apt space for different classes to voice and perform their identities.

Perhaps the large literate population and booming publishing industry were the reasons Antonio R. Mesa pointed to print advertising as the most effective form of ad in his 1958 book, *La Propaganda y Sus Secretos*. Mesa had been in the advertising business

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<sup>22</sup> Eduardo Elena "Peronism in 'Good Taste,'" *The New Cultural History of Peronism: Power and Identity in Mid-Twentieth-Century Argentina*, ed. Matthew Karush and Oscar Chamosa. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 210. It should be noted that, while *Argentina* exemplifies the working class's incorporation into print culture, under Perón, the publishing industry actually became stagnant. Thus, this increase in material geared at the working class is not attributable solely to Perón.

<sup>23</sup> *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1941). See Figure 1 in Appendix.

<sup>24</sup> Secretaría de Asuntos Técnicos 18.

for nearly forty years when he published *La Propaganda y Sus Secretos*. During that time he had taught at The Association of Chiefs of Advertising's (A.J.P) Advertising School, published in *Sintesis Publicitaria*, and gained recognition from the advertising journal *Ímpetu*. He singled out magazines as the best form of advertising, noting that "magazines, because of their large circulation, their good printing and the fact that they are read at home, make them a great vehicle for advertising."<sup>25</sup> He also posited that newspaper advertising was also an advantageous place to advertise, but noted that it was not quite as fruitful as magazine advertisements because people read them more rapidly. Print was an important medium for Argentinean advertising well into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Radio also became an important medium for reaching a mass audience. Radio as a facet of popular culture took hold between 1920 and 1930, but continued to be a dominant force well into the 1940s and early 1950s. Rosa María Brenca de Rússovich and María Luisa Lacroix characterize 1930s Buenos Aires as "above all a radio-listening city."<sup>26</sup> As radio grew, it became another attractive medium for advertising. In 1934, radio advertising made up between 20-25 percent of advertising in Argentina.<sup>27</sup> In 1939, an advertising bulletin credited the owner of Radio Belgrano, Jaime Yankelevich, with "inventing the half hour [consisting] of 24 minutes, the quarter hour of 12 minutes and the five minutes of three" so as to leave sufficient room for advertising.<sup>28</sup> Mesa similarly wrote in 1959 that radio was the second largest forum for advertising after print media in Argentina. He also demonstrated his huge respect for the United States advertising

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<sup>25</sup> Mesa 423. In Spanish: "Es indudable que las revistas por su gran circulación, su buena impresión y su lectura en el hogar, constituyen un excelente vehículo de propaganda."

<sup>26</sup> Brenca de Rússovich 393.

<sup>27</sup> Andrea Matallana, "Locos por la radio" *Una historia social de la radiofonía en la Argentina, 1923-1947* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2006) 103.

<sup>28</sup> Brenca de Rússovich 393.

industry when he reproduced a 1955 overview of the United States advertising distribution and wrote that “from this data, then, you can derive generalizations and conclusions well approximated to reality, even though these concern a public of a different form than that of our country.”<sup>29</sup> The data he presented concluded that in 1955 United States, only 6 percent of investments in advertising went to radio, while 47 percent remained in newspapers and magazines. If those data were, in fact, representative of the Argentinean advertising scene, it would have constituted a significant reduction in radio advertising between the mid 1930s and 1955.

Whether or not the reduction was as drastic as Mesa implied, the radio still represented another important medium for establishing a moral code. For example, in 1940, Julio Korn began a program on Radio Excelsior geared specifically towards women. The show concerned itself nearly exclusively with the domestic sphere, steering clear of the public sphere and topics related to the work force. In its choice of topics, Korn laid out his concept of what should interest good Argentinean women.<sup>30</sup>

In whichever form, advertising was an important component of the ways in which Porteños used the public sphere to define themselves. *Síntesis Publicitaria* certainly demonstrated a particularly self-conscious attempt to delineate the field of advertising and define a national identity. *Síntesis Publicitaria*, published by A.J.P., was a platform for advertisers to discuss their field. That discussion was ripe with an apparent need to authenticate the profession of advertising. There was a clear concern with demonstrating to the world, and even to other advertisers, the profession’s advanced thinking and sophisticated methodologies. This discussion, of course, never openly stated the

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<sup>29</sup> Mesa 167.

<sup>30</sup> Matallana 100.



establishment of their profession as a goal, but *Síntesis*'s need to expound the elements that made their field important indicated an underlying uncertainty about the authority the advertising profession held amongst Argentines.

Within the advertising world, *Síntesis* held considerable clout. The journal was quick to point this out in the front matter from 1939, characterizing itself as “interpreting the sentiments of the advertisers of Argentina” [“interpretando el sentir de los publicitarios de la Argentina”].<sup>31</sup> The 1940 editorial staff included men who worked with Gath & Chavez, Central Argentine Railway (a company owned by the British), Kodak Argentina, General Electric, as well as a variety of Argentine companies. The advertisers writing for *Síntesis* came from some of the largest national and international firms, not just in size, but also in terms of their use of advertising. That so many of these companies were international, especially United States owned, was yet another example of the ways in which Argentine advertising was very much tied to the United States field of advertising. While it was natural for *Síntesis* to promote its own consequence, outsiders acknowledged its position as well. In 1939, The Chamber of Commerce of the United States of America in the Argentine Republic referred to the A.J.P. as a “now vigorous organization.”<sup>32</sup> National, as well as international, advertisers and businessmen recognized *Síntesis* as a leading publication in the field of advertising.

The nature of the medium through which *Síntesis* attempted to produce an advertising and national identity signified a very performative aspect to this process. Certainly, engaging in the political sphere, tacitly or not, meant entering into an

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<sup>31</sup> Front Matter, *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1939). Because I am not trained in translation and because so much of my discussion surrounding *Síntesis* focuses on linguistic choices, I have included the Spanish texts within the main body so that the reader does not have to rely solely on my translations to see the discursive elements to which I point.

<sup>32</sup> “Síntesis Publicitaria,” *Comments on Argentine Trade* 34 (1 Jan 1945): 39.

inherently performative space. Advertising itself is also particularly performative. It is an attempt to present the most attractive aspects of a society to be consumed by those very people.<sup>33</sup> Yet one of the most performative features of *Síntesis*'s work came from the fact that they were defining their profession for people within their own field. That is to say, as employees within their profession they were discussing who they should be and for what they should strive, yet within the framework of reporting the status of their profession.

In the front matter of the 1939 issue of *Síntesis*, it stated that the magazine served by “summarizing the words and work of those who, in one way or another, are connected to this science-art that is termed advertising. Throughout time, its virtues recognized and praised, its power grows in this century and projects towards the future with incalculable importance” [“resumiendo la palabra y la obra, de quienes en una u otra forma, están vinculados a esa ciencia-arte que se nomina propaganda. Reconocidas y ensalzadas sus virtudes, a través de los tiempos, aumenta su poder en este siglo y se proyecta hacia el futuro, con relieves incalculables”].<sup>34</sup> In this statement, *Síntesis* took for granted the importance of advertising in the process of forming identity, but its need to restate the fact demonstrated a slight misgiving that it was, in fact, as important as the journal wanted it to be. At the same time, the fact that *Síntesis* was attempting to create an identity for the profession and the Argentine nation did not signify it was successful in convincing the rest of society of its role in doing so.

Ties between Argentinean advertising and the United States increased with the arrival of American multinational advertising agencies. When the McCann-Erickson

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<sup>33</sup> To examine this idea, J. L. Austin's conception of performativity is more useful than Butler's, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

<sup>34</sup> Front Matter, *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1939).

(1935) and J. Walter Thompson (1928) advertising firms first came to Buenos Aires, they brought American methodologies and information gathering techniques to the Argentine advertising scene.<sup>35</sup> Girbal-Blacha and Ospital note that the “graphic campaign [of The Sugar Institute in the 1930s] proposed by the Argentine businessmen is a near word-for-word copy from the United States.”<sup>36</sup> The fact that Argentinean advertisers were using United States methodologies at all was more important than the exact use of language. As early as 1941, *Síntesis* wrote an “Open Letter to Walt Disney” praising him for being among the great men of the world from a great nation. *Síntesis*’s respect for Disney stemmed from his ability to sell more than just comic books and cartoons:

You knew to reestablish the depths of imagination and give completion to the yearning to erase the border between the possible and the impossible, to penetrate the soul of things, to return to a magic concept of the world, a paradise lost.

[Usted supo restablecer los fueros de la imaginación y dar cumplimiento al anhelo de borrar la frontera entre lo posible y lo imposible, de penetrar en el alma de las cosas, de volvernos a la concepción mágica del mundo, paraíso perdido.]<sup>37</sup>

*Síntesis* admired the fact that Disney was not simply selling a product, but rather, ideas and nostalgic notions: the lost paradise that is childhood. This respect for Disney’s inventions was another example of Argentine advertising looking to U.S. advertising methodology.

*Síntesis* did not limit its participation in the process of nation building to merely defining the field, but rather inserted itself in the project of identity formation by framing advertising as a spearhead of progress. It ran several articles in the 1940s discussing the

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<sup>35</sup> Ricardo Salvatore, “Yankee Advertising in Buenos Aires,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 7.2 (2005): 217-226.

<sup>36</sup> Noemí M. Girbal-Blacha and María Ospital, “‘Vivir con lo nuestro’: Publicidad y política en la Argentina de los años 1930,” *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 78 (Apr 2005): 58.

<sup>37</sup> Jacobo Samet, “Open Letter to Walt Disney,” *Síntesis Publicitaria*.

beneficial aspects of advertising for society and humanity at large, including “One Must Recognize the Multiple Benefits of Modern Advertising” [“Hay que conocer los multiples beneficios de la propaganda moderna”] (1940).<sup>38</sup> The article listed the multiple ways in which advertising benefited society and increased the Argentine quality of life. It argued, like many other *Sintesis* articles, that advertising promotes human progress by stimulating commerce. By facilitating exchange, advertising “has mobilized savings, teaching the public how to spend. It has made us more clean and healthier” [“ha movilizado los ahorros, enseñado al public a gastar. Nos ha hecho más limpios y más sanos”].<sup>39</sup> *Sintesis* thus took on a traditional modernizing role in not simply encouraging the Argentinean population to spend, but doing so in such a way that would advance the nation’s people in basic, yet deeply personal, ways (health and hygiene). “Advertising in the Service of Human Progress” [“La publicidad al servicio del progreso humano”] (1940) also characterized advertising as a force for competition that led to greater innovation and increased standards of living. Advertising’s influence, therefore, stemmed from “the sage guidelines of those that want to follow the world in its progress, radiating, precisely, that progress” [“las sabias directivas de los que quieren seguir al mundo en su progreso, irradiando, precisamente, ese progreso”].<sup>40</sup> *Sintesis* was not only current on where the nation stood, but embodied the advancements it had made.

A 1946 article demonstrated another attempt on the part of the members of *Sintesis* to place themselves at the forefront of the formation of nationhood by

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<sup>38</sup> “One Must Recognize the Multiple Benefits of Modern Advertising,” *Sintesis Publicitaria*. On a similar vein, *Sintesis* also published “The Creative Power and Social Value of Advertising” [El poder creador y el valor social de la propaganda”], *Sintesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1942).

<sup>39</sup> “One Must Recognize the Multiple Benefits of Modern Advertising,” *Sintesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1940).

<sup>40</sup> “Advertising in the Service of Human Progress,” *Sintesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1940).

demonstrating their profession's ties to modernity. This piece discussed how "The Advertising Man Should Interest Himself with the Changes Occurring in the World" ["El hombre de la propaganda debe interesarse en los cambio que se operan en el mundo"].<sup>41</sup> The article states (with great conviction) that the advertiser is "one who asserts and spreads the new orientations of the foreign economy, society and politics; all the inspiring works that blossom in the breast of the progressive nations" ["el que afirma y difunde las nueavas orientaciones de entraña económica, social y política; de todas las obras de aliento, que brotan en el seno de los pueblos progresistas."].<sup>42</sup> *Síntesis* characterizes advertising as one of the most importance sources of social advancement and promotion of the social good. Once again, *Síntesis* situated itself at the forefront of modernity—the gracious custodians of the Argentine population who, through their connections with the rest of the world, would help bring the country up to the standards of a fully modernized nation.

In a 1947 article, *Síntesis* went so far as to characterize advertising's economically stimulating capacity as "The Civilizing and Progressive Merit of the Promoting Power of Advertising" ["El merito civilizador y progresista del poder propulsor de la propaganda"]. The argument presented in the article brought little new insight into this purported ability, but the fact that *Síntesis* presented advertising not only as a modernizing, but also, civilizing force demonstrated its perception of itself as a moral leader. *Síntesis* defined advertising as a field at the forefront of human progress and modernization and moral uprightness.

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<sup>41</sup> "The Advertising Man Should Interest Himself with the Changes Occurring in the World," *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1946).

<sup>42</sup> "The Advertising Man Should Interest Himself with the Changes Occurring in the World," *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1946).

Argentinean advertisers' concern with modernity did not emerge from nowhere. Elites in Latin American cities had been attempting to achieve 'modernity' since the turn of the century.<sup>43</sup> The advertising industry was particularly concerned with modernity, however, because one of the ways it attempted to establish itself as a legitimate profession was by claiming a modern status. Mesa placed the profession's transition to a more technical one in 1925, writing that before then "chance and hunches entered like primordial elements into the practice."<sup>44</sup> His statement demonstrated a clear notion that before this point, the profession had been pre-modern, as well as a judgment that the lack of modernity had previously made it an inadequate industry. Advertisements as early as the mid 1920s attempted to appeal to women by characterizing products—including clothing, make-up, and appliances—as modern.<sup>45</sup> Mesa also made the point that one of the many benefits of street advertisements was the fact that they made the city seem more modern.<sup>46</sup> Modernity, for the advertising business, was a crucial aspect of what it could offer society.

Argentinean advertisers were not alone in the search for modernity; an emphasis on all things modern provides yet another instance of Argentinean advertisers overlapping with their United States counterparts. American advertisers similarly cited the methodological and technical innovations they felt emblemized the modernity of their profession. At the same time, they promoted the fact that the profession made them "apostles of modernity," working to bring progress to their nation.<sup>47</sup> This was yet another example of how Argentinean advertisers in the 1930s and 1940s made similar arguments

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<sup>43</sup> Romero, *Latin America: Its Cities and Ideas*, 202.

<sup>44</sup> Mesa 123.

<sup>45</sup> Walter 93.

<sup>46</sup> Mesa 428.

<sup>47</sup> Marchand 1-7.

to those made by United States advertisers in the 1920s. Argentinean advertisers also used American advertising methodologies to promote their notions of Argentine nationhood. Their conceptions of morality provided another way to assert their national identity and also demonstrated a significant overlap of views with American advertising.

### *Defining a Moral Code*

*Sintesis* attempted to assert its moral authority by dictating the profession's place in society. Part of defining its profession's societal function involved delineating the characteristics of the professional, himself. In 1940, *Sintesis* ran an article titled "Towards the Formation of the Argentine Advertiser's Character" ["Hacia la formacion de la personalidad del publicitario argentino"].<sup>48</sup> The article applauded The Association of Chiefs of Advertising for "contributing with their enthusiasm to define that personality of which we speak" ["ha contibuido con su entusiasmo a definir esa personalidad de que hablamos"] that, "to our judgment, has exhausted the effort so that that personality acquires a robust spiritual consistency that gives standing to the professional of our country" ["a nuestro juicio, se haya agotado el esfuerzo para que esa personalidad adquiera la robusta consistencia espiritual que ha de dar categoría al profesional de nuestro país"].<sup>49</sup> *Sintesis*'s concern for shaping the advertising profession had a starkly moralistic quality: what distinguished the profession most was its spiritual mien. The article's definition of the profession seemed, at first, surprisingly egalitarian, writing that its conception of professionalism "does not embody a select few, rather all, without

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<sup>48</sup> "Towards the Formation of the Argentine Advertiser's Character," *Sintesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1940).

<sup>49</sup> "Towards the Formation of the Argentine Advertiser's Character," *Sintesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1940).

distinction” [“no encarnan unos cuantos, sino todos, sin distinción”].<sup>50</sup> Yet shortly thereafter, the author reestablished the importance of the elites in this process of defining the field: “I wish for the men who are at the front of the A. J. P. the success they deserve in their difficult task” [“Auguro a los hombres que están al frente de la A. J. P. el éxito que merecen, en su difícil tarea”].<sup>51</sup> Thus while *Síntesis* extended its definition of the profession to include those in all parts of advertising, the article did so not to be equitable, but rather to encapsulate a greater population in its definition, and thereby increase its importance.

Again, *Síntesis* used a trope that had developed in the United States a decade before in order to establish the legitimacy of their profession. Advertisers in the United States equated the services they provided with those of doctors or clergy to declare the importance of their profession. In 1926, President Coolidge validated many American advertisers’ self-perceptions when he addressed the American Association of Advertising Agencies. He spoke of advertisers as carrying “the high responsibility of inspiring and ennobling the commercial world,” as well as contributing to “the great work of the regeneration and redemption of mankind.”<sup>52</sup> Coolidge thus reproduced the notion of advertising’s higher calling in his use of strongly spiritual language. *Síntesis*’s claims to bettering mankind were highly reminiscent of this type of language.

Advertising in Buenos Aires was, of course, part of a greater print and broadcast media discourse on, and setting of, social and class norms. Eduardo Elena discusses the ways in which a Peronist commercial magazine attempted to enumerate the values that

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<sup>50</sup> “Towards the Formation of the Argentine Advertiser’s Character,” *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1940).

<sup>51</sup> “Towards the Formation of the Argentine Advertiser’s Character,” *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1940).

<sup>52</sup> Marchand 8. See also pages 25-29.



were to define the Peronist working and middle class. As a government executing a plan for import-substitution industrialization, anti-consumerism (especially consumption of imported goods) was an important part of Peronist rhetoric. This anti-consumerism mirrored the middle-class value of thriftiness established well before Peron took office. Fernando Rocchi discusses the importance of this value to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century formation of the middle class:

In the creation of an expanding middle class, consumption habits played a crucial role in changing social values that fostered a calculated spending. [...] The middle class could impose their own values by giving new meaning to old ones, such as frugality. The ancient idea of discretion, under recent conditions of prosperity, transformed into the concept of saving. Thrift, then, became just a means for further consumption.<sup>53</sup>

The middle class had already exhibited consumerism, in moderation, as a value. The government established a national savings bank (Caja Nacional de Ahorro Postal) in 1915 for the purpose of making saving easier for the groups that had previously saved less.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Perón promoted a value amongst the working class (thriftiness) that originated with a class he antagonized. This, then, was not an instance of Perón creating a new social norm, but rather, using print culture—that the upper and middle classes had traditionally monopolized to promote their conceptions of Argentinean society— in order to elevate a working class-centric idea of Argentinean morality.

At the same time, a large part of Perón's popularity came from the fact that he incorporated the lower classes into Argentine society and culture, in part by allowing them to partake of the new consumer culture. Thus, extending the class value of thriftiness to the working class, to a certain extent, went against Perón's notions of

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<sup>53</sup> Fernando Rocchi *Chimneys in the Desert: Industrialization in Argentina During the Export Boom Years, 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) 63-64.

<sup>54</sup> Rocchi 64.

working class consumer behavior. The editorial staff of *Argentina*, a magazine geared towards the working class, faced a similar problem given that their product was a consumer good. Eduardo Elena writes: “The approach to consumer moralizing typified by *Argentina* paled alongside other Peronist state campaigns in the field of mass consumption, such as imposing an ethical and partisan order on daily commerce (“anti-speculation”) or encouraging household spending.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, while they towed the party line on this issue, since promoting thriftiness would hurt business, they pursued this cause less doggedly than other government campaigns. In a sense, the contradiction was one more easily avoided when targeting audiences with considerably greater means.

*Sintesis* asserted their authority in defining the morality and dignity of their profession, and in so doing set forth their own vision for an Argentinean moral code. Advertisers’ concern with the ethics of their field began well before the 1940s, but remained a central focus throughout the decade.<sup>56</sup> In 1939, Victor A. Mendía, a published author on advertising and psychology, took on the issue quite blatantly in his article “Ethics and Convenience in Advertising” [“Ética y conveniencia en Publicidad”].<sup>57</sup> The article stressed the responsibility of advertisers in shepherding the public’s view of advertised products. Mendía writes about advertising’s need to find “the formula of conciliation between that private requirement and the permanent demand of the social

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<sup>55</sup> Elena 232.

<sup>56</sup> The moral quality of advertising was emphasized on a regular basis in *Sintesis*. Articles such as “Advertising in the Service of Human Progress” [“La publicidad al servicio del progreso humano”], *Sintesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1940) and “The Civilizing and Progressive Merit of the Promoting Power of Advertising” [“El merito civilizador y progresista del poder propulsor de la propaganda”], *Sintesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1947) restated *Sintesis*’s notion of their vocation’s moral superiority. In the same issue, *Sintesis* ran another article entitled “Dignity in the Advertisement” [“La dignidad en el anuncio”], *Sintesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1947), another clear attempt to command the moral direction of the profession.

<sup>57</sup> Victor A. Mendía, “Ethics and Convenience in Advertising,” *Sintesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1939).

good” [“la fórmula de la conciliación entre ese requerimiento privado y la demanda permanente del bien social”].<sup>58</sup> For *Síntesis*, advertisers were protectors of societal wellbeing. The article also gives an example of advertising that instills bad habits in people, pointing mainly to alcohol advertisements. Advertising had not only the power to shape people’s behavior, it also had the responsibility to shape the public’s behavior correctly and morally. Given that identity is demarcated by the ways in which it is performed, in *Síntesis*’s view, it was an active participant in shaping what it was to be Argentinean. The author’s concern with the ways in which alcoholic beverages were marketed was remarkably paternalistic and went against common advertising techniques. The article faulted advertisers for trying to make alcohol seem like a necessity, rather than a luxury, which is precisely the goal of most advertising campaigns. Thus *Síntesis*’s moral consternations outweighed its business concerns. The fact that Mendía referred to this form of restrained salesmanship as the “moral” of the article demonstrated his concern with protecting the welfare of the general Argentine population. Mendía also wrote about an advertising campaign that convinced people to eat white instead of brown bread and thus “the consumers eat, without knowing it, an inferior product. And in those countries where bread is the principal nutriment, the population degenerates” [“Los consumidores comen, sin saberlo, un proudcto inferior. Y en aquellos países donde el pan es el alimento principal, la población degenera”].<sup>59</sup> Mendía’s suggestion that an advertisement could lead an entire population to degenerate places huge responsibility on advertisers to properly guide their targeted population. *Síntesis*’s involvement in

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<sup>58</sup> Mendía n.p.

<sup>59</sup> Victor A. Mendía, “Ethics and Convenience in Advertising,” *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1939).

Argentine identity formation had a strong moral component in that the journal situated itself as protector of the Argentine population.

*Síntesis* endeavored to shape the identity of its profession by asserting its ethical authority and putting forth the ideals its profession should represent. The 1942 *Síntesis* article, “The Nest of Prejudice” by E. Ibarz Grao, discussed the negative impacts of World War II on the advertising world’s image and its obligation to restore the public’s faith in its profession.<sup>60</sup> This concern with public perception again demonstrated *Síntesis*’s interest in upholding the profession’s uprightness and moral standing. *Síntesis*’s need to maintain a certain image was another reminder of the performative aspect of the publication as a whole.

This, once again, echoed strains from United States advertisers on the moral value of the profession. In describing the potential downsides of American advertisers’ complete confidence in the benefits of their work, Marchand writes that “it was their conviction about the ultimate righteousness and social contributions of advertising that enabled advertisers to build justifications for the devious tactical moves they occasionally needed to make.”<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, whereas American advertisers felt that the morality of their work allowed them to use immoral business practices, it was precisely the morality of the way in which Argentinean advertisers did business that allowed them to feel they could make such claims. In either case, Argentinean advertisers were not alone in extolling the societal benefits of their work.

*Síntesis* attempted to place itself in the center of the changes its writers experienced in the world. The magazine, like advertising writing in the United States,

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<sup>60</sup> “The Nest of Prejudice,” *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1942).

<sup>61</sup> Marchand 47.

voiced great concern with keeping up to date. It demonstrated their interest in staying current by doing broad surveys of humanity, such as its article from 1940, “Man Today” [“El hombre actual”], written by Constancio Vigil.<sup>62</sup> Vigil was more involved in the publishing business than the advertising world and the fact that he wrote for *Síntesis* is a reminder of how inextricably linked the two were. He owned one of the largest publishing firms in Argentina and was a well-known children’s writer. Vigil showed no interest in actually discussing men in society or using any concrete evidence in his article. Instead, the page-long piece propounded the concept that human progress has created such a complex and changing society that the current man did not stop to contemplate more meaningful things than his immediate surroundings. Vigil placed himself as one of the few who continue to rise above the quotidian. The article ended with the dramatic statement: “*Vox clamantis in deserto* [the voice of one crying in the desert] tends to be that of many who trouble themselves with detailing today’s life problems” [“*Vox clamantis in deserto* suele ser la de muchos que se esmeran en ahondar hoy los problemas de la vida”].<sup>63</sup> Thus, Vigil established himself and *Síntesis* as protectors of this endangered form of cultural production and therefore valuable contributors to society as a whole. The idea that he was a better citizen or person because he took more time for self-reflection demonstrates a distinct failure to acknowledge that many Argentines may not have had the luxury of time for deep contemplation in their everyday lives. Thus, while *Síntesis* wanted to be a spokesperson for the lifestyles and tastes of the Argentine population, its own grasp on what those tastes were may have been less than entirely accurate.

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<sup>62</sup> Constancio Vigil, “Man Today,” *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1940).

<sup>63</sup> Vigil n.p.

*Síntesis*'s moral claims extended beyond simply discussing the advertising profession. In *Síntesis*'s discourse on depicting women's bodies, gender became a primary site for contesting morality and restraint in the public sphere. Certainly, using gendered and sexualized imagery was not a new concept in Argentine advertising, but the fact that *Síntesis* felt drawn to discuss the issue once again in an article from 1946 on "The Advertising Resource of 'Sex-Appeal'" ["El Recurso Publicitaria del 'Sex-Appeal'"] reflected its awareness of the changing role of women in Buenos Aires society. By the mid-1940s, women were increasingly entering the public sphere by joining the workforce and becoming active participants in the political system.<sup>64</sup> Advertisers took note of this increased public presence by depicting women outdoors and at parties.<sup>65</sup> In using the word "sex" (albeit in another language, English), *Síntesis* also acknowledged changing sexual mores. An interesting contradiction arises, however, in that the author was willing to use the word "sex" but only within the context of morality and uprightness. Even the way in which the article approached the question of portraying women demonstrated an unwillingness to fully accept the realities of sexuality: "the exhibition of the silhouette of a woman [can] inspire sympathetic sentiments for the elegance of her lines" ["la exhibición de una silueta de mujer cuya figura inspire sentimientos de simpatía por la elegancia de sus líneas"].<sup>66</sup> The notion that the silhouette of a woman would merely raise sympathy in a person completely ignores the "sex" in "sex-appeal." The author's use of the word 'sex' denoted *Síntesis*'s awareness, and, to a

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<sup>64</sup> Mirta Zaida Lobato, María Damilakou, and Lizel Tornay, "Working-Class Beauty Queens Under Peronism," *The New Cultural History of Peronism: Power and Identity in Mid-Twentieth-Century Argentina*, ed. Matthew Karush and Oscar Chamosa (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 178.

<sup>65</sup> Oscar Traversa, *Cuerpos de papel II: figuraciones del cuerpo y la moda* (Buenos Aires: Santiago Arcos editor, 2007) 42.

<sup>66</sup> "The Advertising Resource of 'Sex-Appeal,'" *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1946): 32.

certain degree, acceptance of women's new place in Buenos Aires society, but this acceptance was qualified by the author's attempts to maintain the moral high ground. Thus, while *Síntesis* pointed to a larger trend of changing social mores for women in Buenos Aires, it tried to temper that change by distancing itself, and instructing others to distance themselves, from the more vulgar—and human—aspects of this change.

*Síntesis* also emphasized advertising's potential usefulness in the service of humanity. In 1940, they ran "Advertising in Works of Social Character" ["La propaganda en una obra de character social"] and "Advertising in Relation to Man's Mission" ["La publicidad en relación a la mision del hombre"].<sup>67</sup> Advertising, according to *Síntesis*, could serve altruistic and charitable purposes apart from and as part of their more commercial functions. Similarly, during the war years, *Síntesis* reiterated several times advertising's possible peacemaking effects in articles such as "Advertising and War" ["La Propaganda y la Guerra"] (1941) which discussed how, in order for advertising to "complete its function as a public good, it must summarize itself in a form that could be none other than: 'war against war'" ["para llenar su función de bien publico, tendría que sintetizarse en una formula que no podría ser distinta de ésta: 'guerra a la guerra'"].<sup>68</sup> Thus, *Síntesis* placed its field—in its usual dictatorial tone—within the realm of a peacekeeping force.

After the war *Síntesis* continued to place the profession at the center of international affairs with the article "Advertising can be the Instrument that Reinforces World Peace" ["La propaganda puede ser el insturmento que respalde la paz en el

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<sup>67</sup> "Advertising in Works of Social Character," *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1940); "Advertising in Relation to Man's Mission," *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1940).

<sup>68</sup> "Advertising and War," *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1941).

mundo”] (1947).<sup>69</sup> Not only did *Síntesis* define itself as a power for good in the world, it characterized itself as being able to aid in managing the world’s largest crises; during World War II it positioned itself as fighting against the war, and then, at the very hot outset of the Cold War, proposed it could maintain the peace. The “World Peace” article also gave advertisers huge power and responsibility by arguing that advertising can be used for bad (war propaganda) or good (promoting peace) purposes. The article emphasized the moral weight on advertisers’ shoulders by discussing advertising’s role in spurring a conflict in which “fifty million souls were sacrificed.”<sup>70</sup> By discussing the equivocal nature of advertising, the article conveyed godlike power to those who shape advertisements, writing that advertising “can serve a person’s intentions with the malleability with which the clay allows itself to be transformed between the craftsman’s creative fingers” [“server sus designios con la ductilidad con que la arcilla se deja transvertir entre los dedos creadores de un artifice”].<sup>71</sup> *Síntesis* endowed advertisers with both enormous power and a moral obligation to move Argentina towards modernity.

In a 1941 article, *Síntesis* narrowed its focus somewhat to look at “The Prayer of the Man of the New World” [“Plegaria del hombre del Nuevo Mundo”].<sup>72</sup> The short article once again had little to do with current events; rather, it was a eulogy about the wonders of a world now full of love (despite the international crisis). Yet the fact that it used the phrase New World in the title indicated its sense of being in a changing world context. The article’s imperative tone—“Forward Americans! Do not be afraid, or change

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<sup>69</sup> “Advertising can be the Instrument that Reinforces World Peace,” *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1947).

<sup>70</sup> “Advertising can be the Instrument that Reinforces World Peace,” *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1947): 9.

<sup>71</sup> “Advertising can be the Instrument that Reinforces World Peace,” *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1947): 11.

<sup>72</sup> “The Prayer of the Man of the New World,” *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1941).



paths.”—once again demonstrated *Síntesis*’s attempts to lead these changes.<sup>73</sup> A 1942 article that asked “Is Argentina Growing?” [“¿Crece la Argentina?”] examined population and export growth in Argentina in an attempt to locate untapped potential for advertising and industry alike. The article concluded that there was still a great internal market to be “conquered” and advertising’s important role in this process.<sup>74</sup> Whether discussing cinema, economics, or the general status of mankind, *Síntesis* was quick to assert the importance of advertising in all these spheres.

In establishing the firm moral underpinnings of its profession, *Síntesis* situated itself as a natural arbiter of norms and protector of societal wellbeing. The journal made a considerable effort to profess the profession’s responsibility in using its power to sculpt social mores for good. *Síntesis* was also quick to remind its readers of the multiple ways in which advertising promoted progress and therefore the social good. In broad ways, it positioned advertising as the propeller of commerce, and more specifically *Síntesis* even posited advertising’s ability to increase the moral standing and uprightness of a population through its ‘civilizing’ properties. This attempt to lay claims on the Argentinean population’s morality was evident in the journal’s approach to changing gender norms and sexual mores. *Síntesis* delineated a concept of the place of women that relied on its notions of morality and its professional propriety. While this struggle to lay moral claims on nationhood was mostly a discursive one, Porteños were simultaneously engaged in a struggle for symbolic control of the physical public sphere.

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<sup>73</sup> “The Prayer of the Man of the New World,” *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1941).

<sup>74</sup> “Is Argentina Growing?” *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1942).

### *Class and Morality in the Physical Public Sphere*

The city, in all its multitudinous spaces (both meta and physical), had become the setting for the Buenos Aires socioeconomic classes' attempts to define, and control, their identity. Whether or not these needs to redefine class lines and culture were entirely a reaction to the class structure Perón proposed, his mere presence on the political stage impelled the upper and middle classes to find new ways of establishing class boundaries. Various groups voiced differing ideas of morality and social values, as well as habits of consumption and gender norms to delineate their understandings and hopes for their class and the nation. In the process, they extensively used the physical public sphere (the streets, their own visibility) to perform these ideals.

Antonio Mesa defined his ideal for public space in saying that street advertising demonstrated the city's modernity. Similarly, "Sex-Appeal" (the 1946 *Síntesis* article mentioned above) was wrought with concerns surrounding the morality and ethics of street advertising and placed moral claims on the physical spaces of Buenos Aires. The author asserted the need for advertisements not to overstep "the moral viewpoint of the society for which they function" ["el punto de vista moral de la sociedad para la cual funciona"] when using sex-appeal in the context of the public sphere.<sup>75</sup> This need for morality stemmed from the fact that these advertisements' "vital drama unfolds in the street, open-faced, in front of a mass audience" ["su drama vital transcurre en la calle, a cara descubierta, ante un espectador multitudinario"].<sup>76</sup> Porteños had used the physical space to define their class identity and place in society before 1946, as well. By the earlier parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, parks, especially Palermo, had become a space for

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<sup>75</sup> "The Advertising Resource of 'Sex-Appeal,'" *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1946) 31.

<sup>76</sup> "The Advertising Resource of 'Sex-Appeal,'" *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1946) 31.

various socioeconomic classes to comingle. The phenomenon was not entirely new: traditionally, the upper class segregated itself by riding in carriages, but, as one dismayed 1910 observer wrote, “Palermo democratizes. On certain days there are as many renting as owning luxurious carriages.”<sup>77</sup> The observer acknowledged that the upper class still had the cultural authority to establish consumer practices, but his concern came from the elite’s need to find new patterns of consumption to distinguish themselves.

Part of what concerned the middle and upper class was not simply that the working class was present in the public sphere, but also the ways in which they used the space. The October 1945 protests are a famous example of the new working class’s unconventional behavior. Thousands of workers poured into the Plaza de Mayo to demand Peron’s release from jail. As the day was hot, some of the men took off their shirts, earning the lower-class Peronists the derogatory title *descamisados* [shirtless ones]. Joel Horowitz writes that “the elite and middle class became uneasy [...] because the city was no longer totally theirs. Only in a society so middle class in mores could this symbolic rejection of bourgeois values appear threatening.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, not just the presence of working class people in spaces that had traditionally been occupied by the upper and middle class, but also their behavior signified a breaking down of the old class system and a rejection of the social norms embodied in it. When the *descamisados* dipped their feet in the Plaza de Mayo fountain, their actions were entirely unprecedented. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the working class participated in the public sphere, but they did so in ways considered acceptable by the middle and upper class: they protested wearing suits and

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<sup>77</sup> As quoted in Rocchi 67.

<sup>78</sup> Horowitz 32.

ties—not shirtless.<sup>79</sup> This new use of symbolic spaces made the middle class and Porteño elites uneasy because it reflected the fact that “the city’s quickly changing cultural milieu no longer guaranteed them a special place in urban society.”<sup>80</sup> If this new working class could so blatantly disregard middle and upper-class public sphere norms, the elites might no longer be the dominant social force. *Síntesis*’s sex-appeal article also insisted on the need for restraint in public spaces, noting that street advertising should spread messages that did “not clash with the justified social modesty” [“no chocar con el justificado pudor social”].<sup>81</sup> *Síntesis*, along with other groups, were interacting with, and placing their own claims on this new struggle to define spatial norms.

Perón, not just his supporters, used the streets to promote his notions of class values, as well. Mirta Zaida Lobato, María Damilakou, and Lizel Tornay examine how Perón reinvented May Day to include a working-class beauty queen competition, and in doing so “May Day became a battle for control of symbolic space.”<sup>82</sup> By publicly displaying women, he not only promoted women in the public sphere (a value which his wife, Eva Peron, rigorously demonstrated as a very public persona), but also used that exposure to define the moral and upright characteristics that made an ideal working-class woman. At the same time, while Lobato, et al. stress Perón’s role in allowing women to occupy a more public place, this was a trend that had begun long before 1946. What was noteworthy about an event such as this, then, was the way in which Perón used the physical public sphere to push his stance on the issue of women in the public sphere.

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<sup>79</sup> Rocchi 63.

<sup>80</sup> Podalsky 5.

<sup>81</sup> “The Advertising Resource of ‘Sex-Appeal,’” *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1946) 32.

<sup>82</sup> Lobato, Damilakou, and Tornay 173.

By the 1950s, after the upper and middle class had solidified their opposition to Perón, the Catholic Church held several demonstrations which occupied the same spaces Perón and his followers had used over the previous decade. The church had become a focal point for upper and middle-class political discontent. César Seveso characterizes the anti-Peronists and the church as the “self-appointed arbiters of a new, post-Peronist morality.”<sup>83</sup> Participants in church-led demonstrations could claim to represent less base concerns than the working class: as Laura Podasky writes, “people could take to the streets for ostensibly spiritual reasons that seemingly transcended the mundane interests of the Peronists.”<sup>84</sup> However, in the 1955 Corpus Christi procession organized by the church, demonstrators vandalized the Congress building, tearing down two plaques dedicated to Eva Perón.<sup>85</sup> While the behavior of the middle and upper-class demonstrators differed little from the Peronist working-class, the alliance with the church allowed them to perform an identity they considered different from that of the working-class Peronists. Because the ideals they displayed in public were not those purported by Peronist demonstrators, the middle and upper class defined a distinct morality, and thereby identity, for themselves.

The middle and upper class’s characterizations of the members of the Peronist movement emphasized their unruly public behavior as a way to prove their unworthiness of political power. Julio Cortazar’s short story, *Casa Tomada*, depicted working-class Peronists as unruly and chaotic. The piece was a classic example of intellectual resistance

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<sup>83</sup> César Seveso, “Political Emotions and the Origins of the Peronist Resistance,” *The New Cultural History of Peronism: Power and Identity in Mid-Twentieth-Century Argentina*, ed. Matthew Karush and Oscar Chamosa (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 243. See also Horowitz 36.

<sup>84</sup> Podalsky 44.

<sup>85</sup> Podalsky 45.

to Peron. The story described an upper class family as they slowly lose their house, and their standing in society, to the undefined masses. Cortazar's piece clearly reflected a fear on the part of the middle and upper classes of losing their traditionally strong place in Argentinean politics and society. Similarly, an article published in the upper-class oriented magazine, *Sur*, characterized the Peronist era as "the years of opprobrium and foolishness, the methods of commercial propaganda and of *littérature pour concierge* were applied to the government of the Republic."<sup>86</sup> Thus not only were the Peronists disruptive and anarchical, their immaturity also precluded them from managing the country.

#### *Moral Claims in the Private Sphere*

While Perón promoted his own form of domesticity, governments after Perón emphasized the value of the domestic sphere as a moral political site to a much greater extent than Perón. The post-1955 military government shied away from any sort of public spectacle and made an effort to end pro-Peronist uprisings as quickly and quietly as possible. In 1956, the military established the Decreto 4146, which banned all Peronist-style mass demonstrations as well as prohibiting the use of the names Peron and Evita.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the new military government, known as the Revolución Libertadora (Liberating Revolution), also pushed consumption of domestic goods because it made people more likely to spend time at home, and less time on the streets.<sup>88</sup> Thus, La

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<sup>86</sup> As cited in Mariano Plotkin, "The Changing Perceptions of Peronism," *Peronism and Argentina*, ed. James P. Brennan (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1998) 31.

<sup>87</sup> Podalsky 51-53.

<sup>88</sup> Podalsky 67.

Revolución Libertadora promoted a shift to the private sphere as a way of disbanding Peronist support.

The shift also happened of its own accord, separate from government intervention. The construction of high-rise apartments removed Porteños from the streets and made them less likely to spend time in doorways or on sidewalks. At the same time, the emergence of *galerías* began to change the ways in which people shopped—Porteños no longer did all of their shopping on the street.<sup>89</sup> These changes certainly did not represent an absolute shift from public to private, but they marked the continuation of a growing trend in Argentine culture that emphasized the private sphere.

The later half of the 1950s also saw the advent and expansion of the television. The movies had been hugely important in Argentine culture well before the 1950s; in 1930, a *La Razón* (one of the largest newspapers in Argentina) article claimed that Argentina was the biggest consumer of United States films, second only to Great Britain.<sup>90</sup> As early as 1923, at the 137 movie houses in Buenos Aires, the movies they screened were 85 percent North American.<sup>91</sup> By the mid-1940s, national production of films began to expand, but demand for foreign films remained high.<sup>92</sup>

Television brought this cinematic cultural force into the home in a way that the movies never could. In 1951, the government released its first broadcast and television took off from there. By 1959, the majority of upper-class households owned a television set and by the mid 1960s, television had become an entrenched part of Porteño life.<sup>93</sup> Not only did this change the greater cultural landscape of Buenos Aires, it strongly affected

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<sup>89</sup> Podalsky 120, 127.

<sup>90</sup> Brenca de Rússovich 393.

<sup>91</sup> Walter 95.

<sup>92</sup> Brenca de Rússovich 395.

<sup>93</sup> Brenca de Rússovich 396.

the Argentine advertising scene. Thus advertisers shifted much of their focus from advertising in the public sphere to the private. Television meant advertisers had an outlet directly into Argentines' homes.

This focus on the private sphere was reflected in print advertising as it also shifted, to some extent, its emphasis from public to private. Argentinean advertisers had been using home polling since the 1930s, but advertising in general began moving to new heights in the 1950s, and grew exponentially in the 1960s. By 1959, investment in advertising had reached \$77 million pesos as opposed to the \$50 million pesos spent in 1947.<sup>94</sup> In 1965, advertising expenditures had reached \$270 million pesos—nearly a \$200 million peso increase in six years. Throughout the 1960s, two United States firms, McCann-Erikson and J. Walter Thompson, remained the top grossing advertising agencies in Argentina—yet another reflection of the trust Argentine advertising put in United States methodologies.<sup>95</sup> Thus, the boom in advertising was concurrent to this transition into the private sphere. As Podalsky writes “after the late 1950s, the home became a privileged site of social identity.”<sup>96</sup> The new center of Argentina's imagined community had shifted, to a certain extent, to the home rather than the street.

As the focus of advertising left the street and entered the home, so too did the battle for identity formation. In an era of turbulently changing social mores, determining who held the moral position was a key part of the discourse. The ways in which Argentines used the public sphere and physical spaces of the city were wrought with undertones of morality that went along with the competing claims on these spaces. From advertising's presence on the street through window ads, to public demonstrations in the

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<sup>94</sup> Podalsky 214; Front Matter, *Sintesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1947).

<sup>95</sup> Podalsky 214-215.

<sup>96</sup> Podalsky 66.



Plaza de Mayo, to new architectural patterns, the various Porteño socioeconomic groups jockeyed for control in setting the standards that would be the basis for Argentina's new imagined community.

The field of advertising, with its claims to modernity, was ever-present in the discourse on identity. Argentina's advertisers, especially those working with *Síntesis*, bestowed upon themselves huge influence in shaping the Argentine population's habits and tastes. They saw themselves as at the forefront in shaping Argentine identity. Their discussions surrounding morality took place on two levels. On the one hand, the advertisements provided their own suggestions of moral social norms. On the other hand, the dialogue about advertising and the mores they presented were discussed in terms of advertisers' moral responsibility. Since they believed they possessed this power to shape the decisions Argentineans made, they had to use that power for good—progress, peace, growth, etc.—or they were failing their moral obligation.

In the midst of this renegotiation of identity, foreign producers and foreign advertisers had a large presence in attempting to shape behavior and ideals. Imported goods had always been a part of the Argentine conscience—especially amongst the upper class. How, then, did these products and advertisements fit into the discussion of Argentine identity? One product, in particular, will serve as an interesting tool to examine this question: the best-known beverage in the world, Coca-Cola.

## Chapter 2

### A Drink of Modernity

In July, 1957, a Coca-Cola advertisement appeared in *Selecciones del Reader's Digest*, stating: "He dominates the rivers for the benefit of mankind."<sup>1</sup> The text came accompanied by the image of a purposeful-looking man standing amidst the heavy industrial equipment of a hydro-power plant. In the lower right-hand corner glowed the ever-present red Coca-Cola bubble. The message was loud and clear: modernity, brought to you by Coca-Cola.

The advertisements Coca-Cola published throughout its early years in Argentina laid out a path for Argentinean development. At the same time, the values Coca-Cola believed would allow Argentineans to become modern were decidedly American. Yet, Coca-Cola was neither the first, nor the only product in Argentina to associate itself with modernity through its advertisements. In this chapter, I will examine the values The Coca-Cola Company felt should shape Argentinean identity and how that morality sometimes overlapped with the notions of Argentineanness already set forth by Argentinean advertisers.

As discussed in the previous chapter, foreign advertising techniques and an emphasis on foreign goods were far from new even decades before that 1957 advertisement. Nor was Coca-Cola's attempt to associate itself with modernity particularly innovative. In the postcolonial era, people across Latin America, from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, consumed imported goods as a way to associate themselves more closely with European modernity. Latin Americans used their

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<sup>1</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, July 1957. See Figure 2 in Appendix.

consumption of foreign goods to perform their sense of modernity and (despite the contradiction) nationalism.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, around mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the emphasis on European goods subsided, only to be replaced with United States products. Porteño author Jorge Luis Borges's story "El Zahir" (1949) provides a glimpse of the importance Porteños placed on imported goods. He describes the life and death of the once famous fictional character, Teodelina Villar, and her habits: "Like the Confucian adept or the Talmudist, she sought irreproachable perfection in each act, but her zeal was more admirable and more difficult, because the rules of her creed were not eternal, but rather, yielded to the fates of Paris or Hollywood."<sup>3</sup> Teodelina Villar typifies the way in which Porteños consumed imported goods as an act of identity formation.

Coca-Cola was yet another foreign product when Guillermo (Bill) Marino Bekker opened the first bottling plant in Buenos Aires in 1942. Imported goods and products produced by foreign companies were ever-present in the Argentine conscience. Foreign companies owned and operated such basic things as the railroad system—the Great Central Argentine Railroad was a British-owned company.<sup>4</sup> Goodyear and General Electric had large presences in their respective markets, and American cars (many of which were assembled in Argentina) were a common sight on the streets of Buenos Aires. High-end clothing was also often imported from abroad. Mariche Beloni, a life-

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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Orlove and Arnold J. Bauer, "Giving Importance to Imports," *The Allure of the Foreign: Imported Goods in Postcolonial Latin America*, ed. Benjamin Orlove (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 8-13.

<sup>3</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "El Zahir," *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), 158.

<sup>4</sup> Ricardo Salvatore, "Yankee Advertising in Buenos Aires," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 7.2 (2005): 231.

long Buenos Aires resident, remembers getting imported dresses from Great Britain as a girl.<sup>5</sup> Foreign products were commonplace in 1940s Buenos Aires.

Coca-Cola came to Argentina in the 1940s making little attempts to hide its foreign origins. The Coca-Cola Company's advertisements in Argentina presented itself not simply as the key to modernity, but also provided a clear value system that, in the eyes of Coke, came with being a modern society. Yet, Argentines were accustomed to self-consciously consuming foreign goods and seeing advertisements that applied foreign methodologies. Thus, even while Coca-Cola projected an unabashedly United States cultural and moral outlook, it was not substantially different than the majority of advertising campaigns already taking place in Buenos Aires.

There was no lack of soft-drinks in Argentina at that point. Crush, an orange soda drink, had a well-established presence. Bidú, a local Argentinean cola-like soda, was a direct competitor to Coca-Cola when it arrived, along with Refrescola and Bilz.<sup>6</sup> Coca-Cola also had to compete with an entrenched café culture surrounding the afternoon coffee.<sup>7</sup> Even chocolate milk proved a competitor; Nestlé had a strong advertising presence in many publications similar to those in which Coca-Cola advertised. In Buenos Aires, Coca-Cola certainly had not stepped into an empty market.

Bekker opened his bottling plant on 3162 Córdoba Avenue, central Buenos Aires, in 1942 along with a larger push by the Coca-Cola Company to expand during World

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<sup>5</sup> Mariche Beloni, Personal Interview, 2 August 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Several interviewees mentioned Bidú as a popular precursor to Coca-Cola. In the end, Coca-Cola won out; Bidú is no longer produced.

<sup>7</sup> Richard J. Walter, *Politics and Urban Growth in Buenos Aires, 1910-1942* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 94.

War II.<sup>8</sup> Coca-Cola was already established in the United States and had begun exporting well before World War II. In 1886, the pharmacist John Pemberton first concocted Coca-Cola syrup to improve the taste of medicines. He and his associates quickly discovered that it could be sold on its own as a beverage consumed for pleasure.<sup>9</sup> Asa Candler purchased the company from Pemberton in 1888 and quickly began a fierce advertising campaign, with great success. The company grew explosively: in 1889, Candler sold 2,171 gallons of syrup—by 1894, that number was over 64,000 gallons. In 1895, Candler could say without exaggerating that Coca-Cola was sold in every state.<sup>10</sup>

International expansion was soon to follow. In 1900, The Coca-Cola Company began setting up bottling plants outside the United States. Bottling operations began first in Canada (1900) and eventually Germany, France, England and several Caribbean locations. Pat Watters characterizes this growth as making Coca-Cola one of the first international companies: “By 1929, there were sixty-four bottling plants in twenty-eight countries, so The Coca-Cola Company could count itself, along with Ford Motor Company and the makers of Singer Sewing Machines, among the very first American firms doing a multinational business.”<sup>11</sup> Coca-Cola had begun expanding into international markets well before World War II, but the global conflict provided an invaluable opportunity for further growth.

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<sup>8</sup> Coca-Cola operates on a contractual basis with its bottling plants. The Coca-Cola Company sells the bottlers the syrup under certain stipulations about how the drink is bottled and sold; however, the company does not directly run any of the bottling operations. Bill Bekker therefore worked closely with The Coca-Cola Export Company, but was not their employee.

<sup>9</sup> Pat Watters, *Coca-Cola: An Illustrated History* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1978) 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> Constance Hays, *Real Thing: Truth and Power at the Coca-Cola Company* (New York: Random House, 2004) 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> Watters 179-181.

At the outset of World War II, Robert (Bob) Woodruff, Coca-Cola's president from 1923-1954, made one of the most clever business decisions a man can make in wartime: he took a patriotic stance. In 1942, Woodruff began implementing a policy of "Anywhere for a Nickel": the Coca-Cola Company would provide six-ounce bottles to anyone in the armed forces, wherever they were.<sup>12</sup> On a purely economic level, the decision was shrewd because it allowed Coca-Cola to circumvent many of the restrictions the United States government placed on sugar during wartime: the restrictions stipulated that sugar would not be rationed when it came to products sold to the military. Thus, by expanding the amount of Coke the company sold to the armed forces, Coca-Cola did not face such harsh sugar rations.

Coca-Cola was already supplying troops at the behest of the War Department as early as 1941. This fact was apparent in that four Coca-Cola coolers appeared in the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor.<sup>13</sup> Providing Coke to the troops did more than cement Coca-Cola's place in American society, although they easily managed to do so. In the words of one Coca-Cola executive, Coke became "a part and symbol of a way of life for which a war is being waged."<sup>14</sup> The simple availability of Coke completed that task quite well; a survey conducted by the magazine *American Legion* showed that in 1945, GIs chose Coca-Cola over Pepsi by an 8 to 1 margin. During the war the armed forces had consumed more than a billion servings of Coke.<sup>15</sup> Eleven million veterans now viewed Coca-Cola as a representation of the quintessential elements of the life they had risked their lives to defend. Its patriotic stance in serving to boost the moral of America's

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<sup>12</sup> Watters 162.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick Allen, *Secret Formula: How Brilliant Marketing and Relentless Salesmanship Made Coca-Cola the Best-Known Product in the World* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994) 250.

<sup>14</sup> Allen 251.

<sup>15</sup> Allen 265.

men at arms certainly helped give it a favorable image with the American population and more firmly entrench its position in United States quotidian lifestyle.

Perhaps more importantly, though, was the exposure the soft drink gained by following troops to all parts of the globe. Woodruff once stated that by 1975, foreign sales of Coca-Cola would be far greater than domestic sales because, at the end of the day, “it was a simple matter [...] of 2 billion mouths versus 130 million.”<sup>16</sup> As American troops passed through various theaters around the world drinking Coca-Cola, the local populations were then exposed to the “pause that refreshes.” In June 1943, Dwight D. Eisenhower sent a message from Allied Headquarters in North Africa requesting a convoy of three million bottles of Coca-Cola and the equipment to make more as a tool to keep up morale. Later that year, Coca-Cola opened bottling plants in Algeria and Morocco to provide Coke for the North African theater. By 1944, Coca-Cola was supplying soda to men in active combat through a bottling plan constructed in Naples.<sup>17</sup> Only a month after D-Day, Eisenhower gave permission for a Coca-Cola representative to travel the newly freed areas of Europe finding old bottling plants and scouting supplies to repair them or open new plants.<sup>18</sup> A 1950 *TIME Magazine* article about Coke noted that “the Coke bottling plants which moved along with the invading U.S. Armies and brought the sight and taste of Coke to millions of people who had never heard of it before were actually the biggest impetus of Coca-Cola’s present international boom.”<sup>19</sup> Coca-Cola had expanded its bottling and export presences around the world by the end of World War II.

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<sup>16</sup> Allen 267.

<sup>17</sup> Watters 162; Allen 256-7.

<sup>18</sup> Watters 164; Allen 261.

<sup>19</sup> “The Sun Never Sets on Cacoola,” *TIME Magazine* 15 May 1950: 32.

By 1950, Coca-Cola was not just known in disparate parts of the world, but many locals created regional drinks mixed with Coca-Cola. Perhaps most famously, the mix of Coca-Cola and rum, called *Cuba Libre*, became a popular Caribbean drink. Some Brits combined beer with Coca-Cola, while Italians drank wine and Coke and Bolivians made a drink called the *Poncho Negro* from Coca-Cola and a spirit known as *aguardiente*.<sup>20</sup> Coca-Cola also prompted new local traditions and events. Peruvians could conveniently order Coca-Cola for home delivery. To the east, Brazilian waiters raced while carrying open bottles of Coca-Cola. By the early 1950s, consumers outside the United States had begun integrating Coca-Cola into their local cultures.

Granted, the bottling plant Bekker opened in Buenos Aires was not directly part of the World War II expansion (Argentina did not involve itself in the conflict), but Bekker certainly took pains to make Coca-Cola's presence felt in Argentina as soon as possible. He opened the bottling plant on December 1, 1942, but began his marketing campaign as early as August 3, 1942. From the first, the campaign was heavily focused on distributing the product to rapidly create a presence for Coca-Cola in Porteño thinking. Part of Bekker's campaign included integrating Coca-Cola into the public sphere. Throughout the 1940s, Coca-Cola venders took their stands to parks, festivals, football stadiums, and the beach during summer months. They gave free samples and gained the brand exposure.<sup>21</sup> Elvina Rodriguez, long-time resident of Boedo, a lower-middle class neighborhood in the center of the city, remembers Coca-Cola trucks stopping on street

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola: The Definitive History of the Great American Drink and the Company That Makes It* (New York: Basic Books, 1993) 241; Howes 6.

<sup>21</sup> Coca-Cola Company, *Coca-Cola, los primeros 50 años en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Akian Gráfica, 1992) 39-42, 47.



corners to hand out free samples of Coca-Cola.<sup>22</sup> Coca-Cola did not limit its campaign to certain sectors of the city, but instead, reached out to Porteños from a variety of backgrounds.

Characterizations of Guillermo Bekker differ greatly depending on the source. The Coca-Cola Company's commemorative book called *Coca-Cola, los primeros 50 años en Argentina* paints Bekker as a benevolent, but driven, businessman and employer. They provide an anecdote from August 3, 1942, the first day Bekker sent Coke representatives to make sales, citing no references or sources for the information. According to *Coca-Cola, los primeros 50 años en Argentina*, Bekker surprised his representatives after a long and disappointing day's work with a pizza party in the factory, giving them "congratulations on a job well done" in order to "bring their spirits back to their bodies and souls. The following day they went out with renewed strength."<sup>23</sup> They portray him as a kind and supportive father figure: the altruistic provider of Coca-Cola to the Southern Cone. Mark Pendergrast provides a very different vision of Bekker. His Bekker is not the same cheery, paternalistic employer as the Coca-Cola Company's: "he ruled with the same iron will exercised by Max Keith in Germany. [...] All who worked for Bekker lived in fear of his tread."<sup>24</sup> Pendergrast goes on to note that Coca-Cola in Argentina operated under a very thin profit margin for the first several years because of government restrictions and price controls, as well as a strong and expensive trucking union.<sup>25</sup> In his relations with Argentine labor unions, Bekker experienced some of the

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<sup>22</sup> Elvina Rodriguez, Personal Interview, 5 Aug 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Coca-Cola Company 40.

<sup>24</sup> Pendergrast 242.

<sup>25</sup> Pendergrast 242.

tensions between Argentinean workers and employers prevalent at the time. Eventually he found a way around working with the union.

Whatever Bekker's executive style, his company used an array of tactics advertisers had inaugurated elsewhere to sell Coca-Cola. For example, in the 1940s and 1950s, Coke ran some radio jingles; however, Coca-Cola had never been an avid user of radio advertising.<sup>26</sup> In the United States, as late as 1939, Woodruff claimed he did not find the idea of radio advertising immensely appealing. As Allen writes in *Secret Formula* "the underlying difficulty was that Coca-Cola, whose glory lay in the allure created by its visual art, had no message that could be easily communicated in words or lyrics alone."<sup>27</sup> While rivaling Pepsi could market the fact that it sold double the amount for the same price as one Coca-Cola bottle, Coke was selling more than just a six-ounce bottle; the ads presented by Coke had a distinctive, yet consistent style and tone that came to symbolize more than simply a drink—rather, they represented a way of life. Archie Lee, the man who managed the Coca-Cola account for D'Arcy (a United States advertising firm) until just before his death in 1950, saw Coke's ads as selling something greater than a bottle of pop. He wrote in a proposal to Woodruff in 1949 "you are dealing with something almost as broad and subtle as promoting an idea like free enterprise or democracy."<sup>28</sup> For Coca-Cola's advertising team, buying a coke was not simply buying a drink; it was buying a lifestyle.

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<sup>26</sup> A few of the people I interviewed mentioned radio jingles they remembered; however, in my research, I was unable to find a radio archive that held audio recordings of Coca-Cola advertisements played in Argentina. Allen also discusses how Coca-Cola never relied heavily on radio advertising (297).

<sup>27</sup> Allen 241.

<sup>28</sup> As quoted in Allen 168.

Coca-Cola's advertising was unwaveringly centralized. While Coke went through a few local advertising agencies in Argentina, including Eureka Ltda., in the early years, the company largely relied on the internationally based McCann-Erickson to promote the product. In the United States, Woodruff went through D'Arcy, and only in 1955, switched over to McCann-Erickson for their domestic advertising.<sup>29</sup> Transferring the account in part reflected Coca-Cola's new emphasis on the global market, since McCann-Erickson was based mainly out of New York and London, though had offices worldwide (as evidenced by their Buenos Aires locale, which opened in 1935). A *TIME* magazine article on the topic noted that "Coca-Cola said that it hoped to 'integrate international and domestic advertising,' [and] pointed out that McCann-Erickson has worked for Coca-Cola Export Corp., and has offices all over the world."<sup>30</sup> While Coke's shift to McCann-Erickson may have signified an attempt to meld the domestic with the foreign campaigns, it certainly did not indicate the need for the foreign advertisements to become more like the domestic—they were already well on their way there. Just as Argentinean advertisers so closely followed United States methodologies, Coca-Cola maintained an "America knows best" attitude in using an American firm.

As early as the immediate post-war period, Coke's foreign advertisements rarely differed from their domestic ones. As Pendergrast discusses, Coca-Cola took a "pattern advertising" approach to its advertisements around the world.<sup>31</sup> Advertisements in the Philippines depicted the same, white, American middle-class archetypes as the billboards standing in the streets of Buenos Aires. This was true for particular regions, as well. In

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<sup>29</sup> Pendergrast 259.

<sup>30</sup> "Change for Coke," *TIME Magazine*, 24 October 1955, Web, 6 March 2012, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,891631,00.html>>.

<sup>31</sup> Pendergrast 241.

the case of South America, up until the very end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Coca-Cola did not create ads targeted at specific countries; rather, it made ads for the entire continent (which is different than saying they were appropriately targeted). The foreign, then, was essentially the domestic. The ads that Coca-Cola presented to the rest of the world differed very slightly, if at all, from its domestic ones. The question (which I will continue to address in Chapter 3) is how much the American influence stood out to Argentinean consumers who had already been inundated with American advertising tactics for years.

Nothing demonstrated Coca-Cola's adherence to the notion of "America knows best" more than its extensive use of *Selecciones del Reader's Digest* for advertising space.<sup>32</sup> *Selecciones*, the *Reader's Digest's* Latin American edition of the magazine, was a blatantly American publication. It actively sought to spread goodwill for the United States in Latin America through its morally and politically charged content.<sup>33</sup> The *Digest* launched its Latin American edition in 1938. In the early days, the company printed *Selecciones* in Havana, Cuba, but eventually began a regional operation in Buenos Aires.<sup>34</sup> DeWitt Wallace, owner of the *Reader's Digest*, began *Selecciones* with support from the United States government's Division of Cultural Relations as a tactic to extend Good Neighbor Politics. *Selecciones* demonstrated a similar sense of moral obligation to

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<sup>32</sup> Coca-Cola also advertised in magazines such as *7 Días*, *Atlántida*, *El Golfer Argentino*, *El Gráfico*, *Para Ti* and *Vea y Lea*; however, the company ran ads most frequently in *Selecciones* during this period. When Coke published ads in other magazines, they were almost always replicas of the ads in *Selecciones*. I cite only the ads in *Selecciones* because they provide the clearest overview of the progression of Coke's ads.

<sup>33</sup> Lisa Ubelaker Andrade, "A Good Neighbor, In Print: Politics Propaganda, and the Consumption of *Selecciones del Reader's Digest* in Buenos Aires (1940-1960)," Honors Thesis, Swarthmore College, 2006, 6, 33-34.

<sup>34</sup> For the first few years, *Selecciones* still had publication information listing it as printing in New York.

its readers as the *Reader's Digest* in the United States. One of DeWitt Wallace goals in publishing the *Digest* was to increase the availability of easily graspable knowledge in order to maintain an informed electorate. The *Digest* did so by producing 'condensed' versions of articles and books. The compact size of the magazine made it easily portable for United States citizens and Porteños alike.<sup>35</sup> *Selecciones*'s espousal of United States cultural and political values made it a perfect vehicle for Coca-Cola to inject its own conceptions of morality into Argentine society.

Coca-Cola's disinclination to use ads specific to Argentina (or any Latin American country, for that matter) was part of a larger trend of global capitalism. Coca-Cola even strove to put forth a consistent image as part of its branding strategy.<sup>36</sup> They marketed its universality in part to demonstrate that people all over the world drank the product, so Porteños should as well. Yet this universalism had other implications in that it demonstrated various deep-seated notions about the lands below the U.S. border. On the one hand, the advertisers at Coca-Cola felt that the differences between Latin America and the United States were not so great if the ideas and images that appealed to Americans would also appeal to Argentineans or Guatemalans. On the other hand, it also showed that they believed the differences that did exist were insignificant and not worth accommodating. It indicated—given that advertisers produce the images they believe people want to see, but also the images they believe people *should* desire to see—that these images of Americans living their daily lives should be Latin Americans' ultimate

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<sup>35</sup> Joanne P. Sharp, *Condensing the Cold War: Reader's Digest and American Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 15, 20-21; Ubelaker Andrade 27-29.

<sup>36</sup> David Howes, Introduction, *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities* (London: Routledge, 1996) 3.

goal. Whether or not Coca-Cola believed these United States images were representative of Latin Americans, it was what they felt Latin Americans should be.

Some of the first advertisements Coca-Cola published in Buenos Aires were near copies of advertisements it showed in the United States. An ad that appeared in *Selecciones* in May 1943, used the exact image of Coca-Cola's "Sprite Boy" with a coke bottle. Coca-Cola had introduced Sprite Boy in 1942 in the United States to legitimize the already colloquially used "Coke" as a nickname for Coca-Cola. D'Arcy Agency artist, Haddon Sundblom created Sprite Boy (the same artist who also created the famous bubbly, Coca-Cola-drinking Santa Claus). Sprite Boy, a little elf-like character with a bow tie and Coca-Cola bottle cap as a hat, had the same rosy-cheeked jolly look as the unforgettable Coca-Cola Santa. Sprite Boy was so quintessentially American, Coca-Cola used him in an ad promoting War Bonds in 1943, under the caption "I'm saying this for Uncle Sam!"<sup>37</sup> The fact that Coca-Cola would use the same image to promote something as nationalistic as War Bonds in a foreign advertisement demonstrated its complete willingness in these early years to identify the product as fundamentally American. The 1942 Sprite Boy ad depicted him peaking out from behind an open Coke bottle making a thumbs-up gesture, with a text that began "Hello/ I'm 'Coca-Cola' known, too, as 'Coke.'"<sup>38</sup> The 1943 Sprite Boy ad in Argentina used the same template. The advertisements had the same mint green backgrounds intentionally used to give the ads a cool, refreshing look that would counteract the hot look of the red Coca-Cola logo.<sup>39</sup> These advertisements in Argentina were essentially reprints of American ads. This was

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<sup>37</sup> "Display Ad 20 -- No Title, " *New York Times (1923-Current file)* 15 Apr 1943 ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2008), ProQuest, Web, 12 Feb 2012.

<sup>38</sup> "Coke Lore," *Coca-Cola Company Heritage*, The Coca-Cola Company, Web, 12 Feb 2012, <[http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/cokelore\\_spriteboy.html](http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/cokelore_spriteboy.html)>.

<sup>39</sup> Allen 167.

not just a case of transferred methodologies, but a transplantation of the American to the foreign.

In the Argentinean version of this advertisement, however, the purpose was to introduce Coca-Cola as a product, not change its name. The text uses the same conversational opening: “How’s it going! Do you know who I am? / I’m the symbol that represents the qualities of ‘Coca-Cola’ ... its incomparable purity, its delicious and refreshing taste!”<sup>40</sup> In the Argentinean text, the dialogue uses the formal second person to address a person older or of higher status, which indicates that it is geared more towards adults than children, despite the Sprite Boy’s childish air. Yet just as Coca-Cola in the United States had used Sprite Boy to usher in a new label, here he was used to establish a new product. In fact, in the next month’s ad Coca-Cola published in *Selecciones*, the text next to Sprite Boy read “Welcome...the moment that refreshes”<sup>41</sup> Sprite Boy’s purpose, both domestically and in the foreign context, was the same.

“El momento que refresca” was, of course, a close translation of the Coca-Cola catchphrase “The Pause That Refreshes.” Coca-Cola started using “the pause that refreshes” in 1929 just before the stock market crash. Archie Lee, the leading executive on the Coca-Cola advertising account, coined the phrase early in his career. The South American advertisements quickly switched to the phrase “la pausa que refresca” (by 1944, the word “momento” had been replaced by “pausa”). “Pausa” is a more literal translation than the word “momento;” in general, ‘pausa’ would not be used exactly as the word pause in English. The Royal Academy of Spanish Dictionary defines “pausa” as

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<sup>40</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, May 1943. In Spanish: “Que tal...! ¿Sabe quién soy? Soy el símbolo que representa las cualidades de ‘Coca-Cola’...su pureza incomparable, su sabor delicioso y refrescante!”

<sup>41</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Jun 1943. In Spanish: “Bienvenido...el momento que refresca.”

“a brief interruption of movement, action or exercise,” whereas the Oxford English Dictionary defines “pause” as “an act of stopping or ceasing for a short time in a course of action; a short interval of silence or inaction.”<sup>42</sup> Even though ‘momento’ may have been linguistically more appropriate, Coca-Cola chose to use the term ‘pausa,’ which more closely resembled the phrase that was so successful in the United States. Even in the language the Coca-Cola Company used in its South American ads, it remained faithful to United States advertising techniques.<sup>43</sup>

Early Argentine Coke ads also stressed the theme of quality, which had always been a common trope in the U.S. ads. Especially once Pepsi became a real competitor in the mid 1930s, Coca-Cola relied on its supposed superiority to keep up sales. In 1933, Charles Guth, then-owner of Pepsi, began selling Pepsi in 12-ounce bottles in the U.S. for the same amount as the 6-ounce bottles of Coca-Cola, 5¢.<sup>44</sup> In the midst of the Great Depression, the cheaper price of Pepsi proved extremely effective in winning over customers. Once that began to occur, the only argument in favor of Coke was its brand recognition and the notion of quality that went with it. Woodruff firmly believed that his product surpassed Pepsi and all other sodas in every respect. As Allen notes, for Woodruff “the point wasn’t to compete with other soft drinks or to insist that Coca-Cola was ‘better,’ but to hold tight to the precious illusion that Coca-Cola was something

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<sup>42</sup> In Spanish, the definition of pausa is “Breve interrupción del movimiento, acción o ejercicio.” “Pausa,” *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, 22<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2001; “Pause,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1989.

<sup>43</sup> I use the name Coca-Cola Company and D’Arcy and McCann-Erickson interchangeably because Coke maintained very tight control over the advertisements that were sent into the ether. While the creative impetus may have originated with the ad agencies, Coca-Cola had the last say. This was especially true under Woodruff who once demanded a radio advertisement be taken off air because he found it unpatriotic: Allen 251.

<sup>44</sup> Allen 216.



completely different, above and apart.”<sup>45</sup> A 1925 U.S. ad campaign played on this notion, depicting a bellhop in a fine uniform holding a Coca-Cola bottle out on a tray. The perspective on the drawing made it seem as though the bellhop was reaching out directly to the viewer. The ad thus portrayed a bottle of Coca-Cola as an object consumed by people of circumstance.<sup>46</sup> Coca-Cola, and the lifestyle that came with it, was readily available to consumers everywhere.

Coca-Cola ads in Buenos Aires during the early 1940s persistently mentioned Coke’s superior quality. In 1943, all the Coke ads published in *Selecciones* contained the phrase “Quality worthy of confidence”.<sup>47</sup> In 1944 and early 1945, over half the ads alluded to the quality of the beverage with such phrases as “Its quality distinguishes it.”<sup>48</sup> In an entirely different commercial environment where Coke had not one, but several competitors, the company used exactly the same motifs to sell their product abroad as on the domestic market. The purity of Coca-Cola was another theme that alternated with Coke’s notion of quality. A 1947 ad showed a Coca-Cola bottle towering over a backdrop of mountain peaks with the caption “Pinnacle of purity.”<sup>49</sup> For Coca-Cola, purity was, if not synonymous with, as important as quality. The notion that purity and caliber are one and the same was an interesting moral framework in Coke’s ad campaigns.

### *Uncapping Goodwill*

Coca-Cola attempted to extend American goodwill through its advertising. Many of the ads Coca-Cola distributed in Argentina during the early 1940s, especially those in

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<sup>45</sup> Allen 237.

<sup>46</sup> Allen 168.

<sup>47</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, 1943. In Spanish: “Calidad digna de confianza.”

<sup>48</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Feb 1945. In Spanish: “Su calidad la distingue.”

<sup>49</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Jun 1947.

*Selecciones*, contained messages of universalism. While Coca-Cola spread these messages throughout the world in their various campaigns, in Latin America they served to reinforce the relatively new United States Good Neighbor Policy. In leaving behind the Big Stick Policy, the United States shifted from attempting to exert its influence through military force to using economic muscle and cultural outreach, instead. The United States government opened its doors to trade with cooperative Latin American countries in the hopes of building more diplomatic ties.<sup>50</sup> As previously mentioned, *Selecciones* took it upon itself to foster good relations between the United States and South America. The editorial staff took pains to portray the United States solely in the most positive of lights, and publish only content they believed would be agreeable to a Latin audience.<sup>51</sup>

Coca-Cola ads repeatedly depicted images of continental and global interconnectedness. The 1943 ads all had a line at the bottom that read “United Today/ United Forever” with an outline of North and South America between the phrases.<sup>52</sup> By 1944, Coke was using the same phrase, but now the silhouette of the Americas was inside the Coca-Cola insignia; Coca-Cola’s red orb encompassed not just the Americas, rather the globe. Showing North and South America as one interconnected landmass also played into the Latin American view that The Americas are one continent, not two divided by Northern and Southern regions. The 1944 ads also began with the tag-line “The Universal Invitation... ‘Let’s drink a Coca-Cola!’”<sup>53</sup> Coke presented itself as a tying factor between cultures and countries. By portraying itself as ‘the universal invitation,’ Coca-Cola made

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<sup>50</sup> Bryce Wood, “The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy,” *Neighborly Adversaries: Readings in U.S.-Latin American Relations*, ed. Michael LaRosa and Frank O. Mora (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007) 101-107.

<sup>51</sup> Ubelaker Andrade 50-67.

<sup>52</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, 1943.

<sup>53</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, 1944. In Spanish: “La Invitación Universal... ‘¡Tomemos una Coca-Cola!’”

itself out to be its own form of language. Once again, Coca-Cola depicted itself as more than simply a drink.

At the same time, the 1944 ads were geared towards a Latin American audience, with varying degrees of success. The people depicted in these advertisements are mostly brown and black-haired—an indication that the ads are supposed to represent people from Latin American countries; however, other than the hair and eye color, these people look like stereotypical Americans. Their facial features and types of dress look like something you would see in Chicago, Illinois, not Caracas, Venezuela. Their Caucasian appearance was somewhat more fitting for a Porteño audience because the Buenos Aires phenotype was so reflective of the massive 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century European immigration, but there is an inauthenticity to the images that makes it seem as though the models' hair had simply been tinted in the printing process. In some of the advertisements, a strange juxtaposition occurs when the advertisements attempt to authenticate the scenes they depict by adding in 'native' elements.

One 1944 advertisement was actually set in Argentina, in what Coca-Cola must have presumed was the quintessential local setting: the polo ring.<sup>54</sup> Whereas other ads from this series consist of images of couples enjoying accessible activities, time on the beach in Havana or Panama, picnicking in Guatemala, watching a bull race in Mexico, this ad centers around a sport denied to all except the very wealthiest of society. It is also one of very few Coca-Cola ads published in Latin America at the time that had an automobile in the scene. Certainly, the ad fits the stereotype of the wealthy, well-educated, modern Argentine upper class, but it is just that: a stereotype. The people portrayed in the ad once again bear very little resemblance to the kind of person you

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<sup>54</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Nov 1944.

would see walking the streets of Buenos Aires at the time, just as you would be hard-pressed to find a large group of Porteños that played polo. The ad, while set in Argentina, did little to connect with the majority of Argentines. Rather, it showed Argentines the economic and modern status they should strive for.

Throughout the late 1950s, Coke began using images from the United States once again (although this time, somewhat interspersed with images from Latin America); however, by this point, Coca-Cola used photographs, rather than paintings. In the United States, they began using photographs at the same time—yet another example of the ways Argentine advertising was intertwined with United States techniques. The images Coca-Cola presented, while they were still fabricated and posed, were actual images from the United States. Now, more than ever, Latin Americans were supposed to want and supposed to be attracted to the same things as their North American counterparts. The figures in these advertisements were no longer ideals or amalgamations of the characteristics that might make up the perfect woman, man, or environment; they were actual people in physical spaces holding real bottles. The scenes that these ads depicted were not largely different than previous advertisements as they were mostly images of couples enjoying leisure activities (on the beach, by the pool, spending time with friends). In these, however, there is no doubt that the lifestyles for which the viewers should strive are American ones.

The first of these American photograph ads began appearing in Argentina interspersed with the images of societal progress. The overlap gave off an interesting message of how Coca-Cola was improving society and where society should strive to be. Coca-Cola's attempts to align itself with progress in Latin America were evident in

advertisements showing investment in physical and human capital. By alternating those images with ones of happy Americans, the company made the point that with the progress they provided in Latin America, the continent could reach the apogee that was the United States. An ad that read “Serve Coca-Cola...And enjoy!” in 1956 was sandwiched between an ad the month before revering the benefits of education and one the next month encouraging young people to take up engineering to help progress in their fatherlands.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, even the ads depicting Americans at leisure had texts that encouraged consumers to drink Coca-Cola as an after-work pick-me-up. Hard work towards national progress merited drinking Coca-Cola and all the signs of modernity that came with it.

#### *Modernizing Argentina, One Bottle at a Time*

A December 1944 ad shows a middle-upper-class man and woman picnicking on a grassy hill in outfits that would be perfectly normal on the streets of New York City.<sup>56</sup> In the background there are three figures dressed in the artist’s idea of traditional Guatemalan garb. A man wearing what could easily be a Spanish matador outfit stands in the middle of two women with flowery blouses and pots of water on their heads. The caption reads “Guatemalan Archaic Monolith.” The three figures in the background happily look at the couple as they walk past. These two groups look like they are from different worlds. They create a sharp divide between the modern and the archaic. The ones with the Coca-Cola bottles, of course, are the characters in modern clothing. That is, those holding an American product are modern. Coca-Cola aligned itself with modernity,

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<sup>55</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, May 1956; Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Jun 1956; Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Jul 1956. In Spanish, text from the June 1956 ad: “Sirva Coca-Cola...¡Y a gozar!”

<sup>56</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Dec 1944. See Figure 3 in Appendix.

but in order to do so created a stark contrast that had little to do with any Latin American reality, and certainly not the Porteño life.

An early 1944 ad similarly created a class and modernized distinction between people who drank Coca-Cola and those who did not. The ad depicted a well-dressed couple on horses conversing with a calla lily farmer and his assistant. The farmers are carrying bundles of flowers on their backs, while the couple rides single-handed (the other being occupied with Coca-Cola). The two pairs of people are most obviously differentiated by the fact that one is laboring and one is enjoying leisure time. At the same time, though, this difference is pronounced by the fact that the leisure couple is physically higher, as they are on horseback. The higher-class couple is positioned such that they are looking down on the farmers. The caption (“The Universal Invitation”) does not seem to indicate that the horseback riders share their Coca-Cola with the farmers, rather that Coca-Cola, whether or not a person is drinking it, brings people together.<sup>57</sup> Just as the three figures in the December 1944 ad were smiling at the couple drinking Coke, this ad indicates that the two couples are interacting somehow because of Coca-Cola. This image served essentially the same purpose as the Bellhop boy in American billboards; Coca-Cola wanted people to believe that it was a product consumed by people of high socioeconomic status and therefore consuming Coca-Cola brought with it a touch of the elite.

By the mid-1950s, the ads Coca-Cola printed in Buenos Aires shifted significantly towards an emphasis on Coke’s local production. The advertisements suddenly started espousing the number of local jobs involved in bottling Coca-Cola. They pointed to the ways in which Coca-Cola helped stimulate the local economies and led to development.

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<sup>57</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, May 1944.

Coke ads also began to emphasize its international production. Starting in 1954, Coca-Cola ads in Argentina began highlighting the fact that Coca-Cola was produced in over 80 countries at that time. These ads took the stress off Coca-Cola's U.S. roots and placed it more firmly in its international presence.

This shift coincided with increased tensions between the U.S. and Latin America. By the mid-1950s, the role the United States occupied in Latin American affairs was moving away from a purely economic stance and back towards a military one. As Cold War tensions increased, the United States became evermore concerned with securing the outcomes of elections in its own back yard. Needless to say, the reaction in Latin America to these policies was less than overjoyed. The United States was once again reverting back to policies founded with the Monroe Doctrine. Latin America became decidedly less pro-American by the mid-1950s.<sup>58</sup> Thus, Coca-Cola's shift towards emphasizing the international base of Coke and putting less stress on its American origins came at an appropriate time for its Latin American audience. Yet even as the advertisements temporarily moved away from a United States emphasis, they did not drop the message of Coca-Cola's potential to bring modernity to Argentina.

Beginning in 1954, Coca-Cola's ads became centered around its job creating capacities. A March, 1954 ad consisted of a lumber yard manager pointing to a Coca-Cola truck in the background with the line "There goes one of my best clients" written

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<sup>58</sup> The most widely known incident of U.S. encroachment occurred in Guatemala in 1954 when United States-backed military men overthrew the newly elected socialist president, Jacobo Arbenz. As Tulio Halperín Donghi writes in *The Contemporary History of Latin America*, "for the millions of Latin Americans, and not simply those who sympathized with the Soviet Union, the Guatemalan episode represented the continuation of a long history of rapacious aggression." Tulio Halperín Donghi, *The Contemporary History of Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) 257.

below. Underneath the image are “Interesting facts about the Coca-Cola industry.”<sup>59</sup> Coca-Cola was attempting to demonstrate how its ‘industry’ brought business to local economies, not simply profits to Atlanta, Georgia. The fact that the Coca-Cola truck is leaving a lumberyard also gives the impression that the company is somehow contributing to the creation of local infrastructure. The advertisement implies that not only is Coca-Cola selling drinks to this manager, the company is also buying Argentinean lumber for a construction project that will stimulate the local economy. That is precisely the notion of a May 1954 ad that showed a man in a tuxedo pointing to a pristine, newly constructed factory with the Coca-Cola label prominently displayed on its façade behind him. The caption reads simply “There you have it,” as though this factory were the be-all-end-all of progress.<sup>60</sup> In the Coca-Cola Company’s self-produced history of its arrival in Argentina, *Coca-Cola, Los primeros 50 años en Argentina*, the authors point to these advertisements as signs of progress: “since its arrival in Argentina the Coca-Cola system fostered the development of important sectors of local economies and of different industrial fields [sic].”<sup>61</sup> Thus, Coke believed it was bringing economic stimulation to Argentina.

The fact that the ads classify Coca-Cola as an “industry” also contributes to this notion that Coke was an economic force for progress. Coca-Cola did not just represent a small, price-taking firm in the economy, but rather, as an industry, an entire sector of the economy. Not only did Coca-Cola produce a drink, its industry created forward and backward linkages. One bottle of Coca-Cola necessitated the construction of a factory, the jobs of the workers in the factory, and the trucking systems to deliver that bottle.

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<sup>59</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Mar 1954.

<sup>60</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, May 1954.

<sup>61</sup> Coca-Cola Company 44.



Coca-Cola was now emphasizing the existence of all these employment and economic advancement opportunities.

These advertisements appeared at the end of Perón's import substitution industrialization policies. Previous governments had already begun promoting industrial growth. Between 1930 and 1939 the manufacturing sector increased production by 35 percent and by 1940, the percentage of nationally produced goods consumed in Argentina had reached 80 percent—up from 50 percent in the 1920s.<sup>62</sup> While Perón's economic policies continued to protect infant industries with tariffs and exchange controls, he also shifted resources from the agricultural sector to manufacturing. He subsidized the costs of basic needs for the urban working class in order to maintain a steady base of political support. Perón eventually opened the economy to restore a more favorable balance of trade, but it was not until 1955, when a military coup overthrew the populist politician, that trade reopened significantly.<sup>63</sup>

Employment was the topic of one 1954 advertisement. The image was of a well-dressed family taking a walk on a sunny afternoon. The son, no older than ten years old, points to a building in the background and says "Look! ...that's where Daddy works..."<sup>64</sup> The factory has a large Coca-Cola sign perched on the roof with the words "Lopez & Company" ["Lopez Y Cia."] written above. Thus, the advertisement is clearly set in a Latin American country.<sup>65</sup> By portraying the family as undeniably middle class, Coca-Cola showed that not only were they providing jobs, but they were also providing quality

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<sup>62</sup> Eduardo Elena, *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011) 24-25.

<sup>63</sup> Halperin Donghi 252-254, 262-265.

<sup>64</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Nov 1954.

<sup>65</sup> Precisely which Latin American country Coca-Cola set this ad hard to determine based on the last name Lopez because it is such a common surname.

jobs that could support an entire middle-class family. Outside the factory are parked multiple delivery trucks, which helps present the Coca-Cola company as a major economic presence. Another 1954 advertisement firmly centered Coca-Cola's employment potential in Latin America. A stereotypical Latin American factory worker stands in a factory holding up a Coca-Cola bottle. Underneath, the caption reads: "The most famous bottle we make."<sup>66</sup> Behind him is a line of heavy machinery and several factory workers. By being the most famous bottle, they presumably meant the most produced bottle, as well. Thus Coca-Cola, out of all the sodas produced in this factory, was the largest job creator.

Coca-Cola also began promoting the notion that they were bringing prosperity to Argentina.<sup>67</sup> Yet another 1954 ad depicted a grocer receiving a shipment of Coca-Cola as the Coke deliverer asks, "business is going well...right, Manuel?"<sup>68</sup> Coca-Cola wanted to show Latin Americans that not only did they create jobs, but they also helped other businesses (such as grocery stores) by stimulating economic activity. All the people portrayed in this ad also have a distinctly Latin American look. The protagonist has darker coloring (i.e., skin tone and hair color), even a different facial structure, than the obviously Anglo-Saxon people depicted in previous advertisements. Coca-Cola was emphasizing its positive economic influence, specifically in Latin America.

A series of 1955-56 advertisements also highlighted the amount of work that went into every bottle of Coca-Cola, though with a less obvious Latin American emphasis. They were cartoon-like storyboards of the various stages Coca-Cola production went

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<sup>66</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Jul 1954. In Spanish: "La botella más que fabricamos..."

<sup>67</sup> Of course, the advertisements were not specified to Argentina as they were intended for a general Latin American audience; however, I am looking at the advertisements from the perspective of an Argentinean.

<sup>68</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Sept 1954. In Spanish: "Los negocios van bien...verdad, Manuel?"

through, entitled “Every time you enjoy drinking Coca-Cola.” The text then proceeded through the fabrication:

Remember—many people around you work producing the distinctive Coca-Cola bottles. Many more manufacture the tops that seal the unique flavor of Coca-Cola in the bottle until it reaches your lips. Many other individuals construct the boxes in which they transport the delicious Coca-Cola. Other people have very good jobs in your local Coca-Cola bottling plants. A great number are employed distributing Coca-Cola to the remotest corners of the country...To the thousands and thousands of distributors in whose establishments of all kinds they sell Coca-Cola...To the many people like you that enjoy once and once again the true pleasure of this unrivaled drink.<sup>69</sup>

Coca-Cola framed their production not as a business, but as a service. These people were not going to all this trouble because they profited from it, but rather, because they wanted to please the consumers of Coca-Cola. In the process, though, Coke made sure to bring to light all of the employment opportunities and “very good jobs” they brought to Latin Americans.

Coca-Cola also began to promise that its presence brought progress to Latin American countries. In July 1956, Coca-Cola published an ad showing a man surveying construction whilst holding a large blue print. Underneath it says: “He transforms dreams into great highways” and continues, “by forging into virgin territories the roads of tomorrow, the engineer feels a great part of the emotion that tended to fill the conquistadors of yesteryear.”<sup>70</sup> The language Coca-Cola uses in this ad is highly patriotic. Bringing in the notion of the conquistadors adds the nostalgia and romance of nationalistic sentiments. At the same time, the message this ad transmits has nothing to do with Coca-Cola; rather, it is simply a public service announcement brought forth by

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<sup>69</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Jan 1955.

<sup>70</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Jul 1956. In Spanish: “Al forjar en tierras vírgenes los caminos del mañana, el ingeniero experimenta gran parte de la emoción que solía embargar a los conquistadores de antaño.”

the association of Coca-Cola bottlers. Other similar ads included a teacher with two students [“She feeds hungry minds”] while another showed a man concentrating at the controls of a factory [“his discoveries create a better life”].<sup>71</sup> Coca-Cola attempted to demonstrate through these advertisements that they were more than simply a business; they supported, through public service announcements and through keeping these hard-working men and women up-to-date and refreshed, the betterment of society.

The shift, then, was one from advertisements that focused on how the individual could benefit from drinking Coca-Cola, to how society benefited from its presence. Whereas previous Coca-Cola ads had stressed how Coke would make you more attractive and romantically successful while ushering you into modernity, these ads now focused on how consuming Coca-Cola was a boon for society. By drinking Coca-Cola a person contributed not only to her own happiness, but also to the advancement of her society. The Coke consumer was automatically a job provider, someone who helped increase the social welfare of their entire society, from lumberyard worker to store managers. A 1959 ad made this abundantly clear by saying:

Those that work in the local Coca-Cola bottling plant become a part of an entity that links large and small industries: sugar, glass, textiles, cork, wood, machines...All so important for constant progress! A well-chilled bottle of Coca-Cola is a global symbol of pleasure and progress.<sup>72</sup>

The ad leaves little room for interpretation: Coca-Cola brings progress to the countries in which it is bottled.

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<sup>71</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, May 1956; Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Nov 1956.

<sup>72</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Dec 1959. In Spanish: “Quienes trabajan en la planta local de Coca-Cola se unen a una entidad que liga a industrias grandes y chicas: azúcar, vidrio, textiles, corcho, madera, máquinas...¡Todas tan importantes para un progreso constante! Una botella de Coca-Cola bien fría es símbolo mundial de placer y progreso.”

An element of class is present in these advertisements, but the focus again is a different one. Now, instead of Coke being portrayed as the drink of the elite upper classes, it is consumed by, and to the benefit of, the middle class. The people portrayed in these 1950s ads are staunchly middle class; they are factory managers, shop owners and deliverymen. Certainly, this emphasis on the middle class paralleled a shift in the United States as well. The 1950s was the decade of the middle class—a time of the expansion of suburbia, the automobile and television. These luxury goods were suddenly available to whole populations that previously had been unable to afford them. Coca-Cola was now among those goods. Thus, these advertisements are firmly aspirational: the advertisement shows Argentineans (or similar ads in the United States showing Americans) that buying Coca-Cola or a variety of consumer goods would place them in the middle-class—the socioeconomic status they should be attempting to achieve. These advertisements' publication in *Selecciones*, a magazine predominantly marketed to the middle class, simply reinforced this message. The ads are as specific to Latin America as any Coca-Cola ad ever was, but they shared a commonality with American Coca-Cola ads of that time: their middle class focus.

At the same time, the question of modernity was clearly in the spotlight. These ads depict people that, while they look Latin American, dress and act the same as Americans of that time. Emphasizing the fact that there were Coca-Cola factories all over Latin America indicated that Coca-Cola saw Latin America as a part of the modern, industrialized world. Gone were the images of Coca-Colaless peasants in traditional garb; now Latin Americans were all well-dressed business people who all had access to Coca-Cola. In a sense, more than ever, Coca-Cola was promoting a way of life, rather than a

product. These ads do not demonstrate people enjoying the beverage; rather, they promote a state of societal progress. Living in a state of modernity was a way of life, not just a consumer practice.

### *Coca-Cola as a Gendered Drink*

At the same time, Coca-Cola advertisements offered something more than a modern lifestyle: romantic fulfillment. All of the images with the caption “The Universal Invitation” c. 1944 show happy couples of men and women. While Coke had the benefit of crossing social barriers, the most important invitation it extended was a heterosexual one. The phenomenon of selling more romance and popularity than the product itself was well established in the United States. As early as the 1930s, Archie Lee was producing advertisements demonstrating the ways in which Coca-Cola could bring men and women together. As Allen writes “for the first time, ads not only showed boy-meeting-girl, but suggested pointedly that boy and girl some-how were meeting *because* of Coca-Cola” [original emphasis].<sup>73</sup> Coca-Cola developed the concept of a “brand image,” where advertisements associate their product with benefits other than the functional ones, long before 1944, but it was only then that they used it in the Latin American context. Interestingly, the images do not show the action of extending the invitation—the viewer does not know who proffered the Coca-Cola to whom. Since, given the time period, one assumes the man was buying the drinks, these advertisements conveniently leave out the opportunity for the woman to refuse an invitation. In many ads, Coca-Cola seems not only to bring people together, but also guarantee romantic success.

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<sup>73</sup> Allen 169.

There is one advertisement that does make clear who is inviting whom to consume Coca-Cola. An October 1946 advertisement shows a bustling University quad with a Coca-Cola man distributing bottles from a portable cooler. Two couples stand out from the rest of the figures, one in the foreground, one in the background. In the background, a man is receiving a bottle of Coke from the distributor, presumably with the intention of handing it off to the woman next to him. The advertisement's caption, "I'll invite you..." ["Invito Yo..."], easily fits this interaction—the man procures a cool beverage for the woman.<sup>74</sup> However, framing that interaction is the more curious couple. In the bottom left corner of the image a woman sips on a Coca-Cola bottle, while slightly farther back, a young man watches her, smiling. The slight smile perceptible on the sipping woman's lips creates the impression that, despite the fact that she is not looking at the man, she is very aware of his gaze on her. The configuration sets up a somewhat uncomfortable performer/audience dynamic between the woman and the man, which adds another layer to the caption's meaning. The woman appears to be inviting the man to observe her as she drinks the soda he very well may have bought her. The sexually charged undertones of this ad implied the more illicit ways in which Coke could bring people together. (See Figure 4 in Appendix)

Throughout the 1940s, Coca-Cola ran ads with captions that could be interpreted multiple ways given the images they accompanied. Most of the captions revolved around the desirability of Coke, but featured beautiful women, as well as the delicious drink. Most of these ads played off of the fact that Spanish has a gendered language structure, and Coca-Cola is a feminine noun. Thus, many of the captions refer to a feminine object,

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<sup>74</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Oct 1946. "I'll invite you" is a literal translation of "Invito Yo." The actual meaning is closer to "My treat" or "It's on me."

but it is unclear if that is the beverage or the woman. For example, a billboard shown in Argentina by 1942 showed a beautiful woman in a bathing suit holding a Coke bottle, with the word “Exquisite” next to her.<sup>75</sup> The viewer is left to decide whether it is she or the beverage that deserves such acclaim. Similarly, a June 1946 ad depicted a man and a woman drinking Coca-Cola at a dance. The caption reads “The preferred companion” [“La compañera preferida”].<sup>76</sup> The grammatical structure leaves open what (or who) constitutes that preferred partner. In another 1946 ad, a couple sits on a porch swing while their son reaches from behind to steal the bottle of Coke placed next to them. The caption simply says: “Irresistible.”<sup>77</sup> The main sense of the phrase revolves around the boy’s inability to stay away from the Coca-Cola. On the other hand, it is also true of the beautiful woman placed in the center forefront of the image. In 1947 an ad depicted a woman in an exotic headscarf coquettishly holding a Coca-Cola bottle up next to her face. The text reads “Nothing more exquisite!” while another similarly designed ad from 1947 of a woman with flowers in her hair reads “To your taste!”<sup>78</sup> The implication, then, is that not only the product, but the woman, too, is crafted specifically for the viewer, precisely to please him or her. Coca-Cola’s use of women was yet another tactic in creating their brand image.

The Coca-Cola girl was neither a new, nor a Latin America-specific phenomenon. Within the first few years of production, Coca-Cola began using images of women sipping daintily on its drink to sell the product. In 1891, the Company produced its first calendar containing the picture of a beautiful woman. Coca-Cola continued to use

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<sup>75</sup> As reproduced in *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1942).

<sup>76</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Jun 1946.

<sup>77</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Sept 1946.

<sup>78</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Jul 1947. In Spanish: “¡Nada más exquisito!” Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Nov 1947. In Spanish: “¡A su gusto!”



images of women drinking its product throughout the first half of the twentieth century, producing trays, calendars, billboards, cardboard cut-outs and prints for soda fountains all featuring Coca-Cola girls.<sup>79</sup>

While Coca-Cola's use of women did not differ between continents, the activities that they portrayed those women engaging in did. In both the U.S. and Latin American ads, women appeared in the public sphere, but under different pretexts. The 1940s U.S. ads showed middle-class women engaging in the everyday activities and tasks of their caste. In 1947, an ad in the United States showed three women on a lunch break with the words below "Office lunch...Have a Coke."<sup>80</sup> The ad openly acknowledged women's place in the work force. Other ads showed women shopping or buying groceries. Some ads showed women meeting in public spaces to share a Coke. In contrast, the women in the Latin American ads were engaged almost entirely in leisure activities. The 1945 Latin American campaign consisted of women taking breaks from relatively economically restrictive activities such as sailing, horseback riding, polo, tennis, and golf to drink a Coke. Even while the implication is that they are, in fact, taking advantage of the pause that refreshes, none of the images actually show these women engaging in these activities. They are shown holding a tool related to that sport, for example a club or racket, but they are depicted in the foreground looking at the viewer, while the activity goes on behind them. These ads contain an extremely superficial air.

Another major difference between the women in the Latin American and U.S. ads in the 1940s is the presence of men. Women in the U.S. ads are often shown interacting

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<sup>79</sup> Chris Beyer, *Coca-Cola Girls: An Advertising Art History* (Portland: Collectors Press, 2000) 14, 79.

<sup>80</sup> Philipp Lenssen, "Coke/ Coca-Cola Advertisements of the 1940s," *Vintage Ad Browser*, 2010, Web, 12 Feb 2012 <<http://www.vintageadbrowser.com/coke-ads-1940s>>.

in the public sphere without the company of a man, while women in the public sphere in the Latin American ads are, almost without fail, accompanied by a man. Whether at a sporting event, a party, or simply sitting outdoors, and in whatever part of Latin America they are located, these women are shown along with men. This hesitancy to show women in the workforce and interacting in the public sphere on their own had little to do with the Argentine reality at the time. By the mid-1940s, women joining the workforce accounted for the majority of the growth in the middle class.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, the notion that Porteño women were not as independent as their American counterparts held little reality. Given that women's rights and freedoms are often used as a metric for the modernity and progressiveness of a society, the fact that Coca-Cola saw Latin American women as less independent demonstrates their understanding of Latin America as still maintaining backwards customs and once again revealed that their grasp on the Argentinean lifestyle was tenuous, at best. More fundamentally, however, was the notion that Latin America still needed to be brought into the modern world. If Latin American women were still dependent on men, then Coca-Cola was still needed to bring modernity to these nations.

#### *Coca-Cola in the Private Sphere*

By the mid-1950s, Coca-Cola began pushing the necessity for Coke in the home. Whereas before the emphasis was simply on how Coca-Cola enhanced every experience and refreshed like none other, 1956 advertisements contained text that equated Coca-Cola with hospitality. One advertisement assured that “when you buy Coca-Cola to serve at home, you can be sure to please the whole family,” while another advised “make sure

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<sup>81</sup> Manuel Mora y Araujo, “Viejas y Nuevas Elites,” *Buenos Aires - Historia de Cuatro Siglos Tomo 2*, ed. Jose Luis Romero and Luis Alberto Romero (Buenos Aires: Altamira, 2000) 248.

you always have enough Coca-Cola in your house to enjoy with your friends.”<sup>82</sup> Coca-Cola was starting to enter the private sphere. Certainly, the company did not leave behind the notion of Coca-Cola as a good to be enjoyed in the public sphere—they continued to publish plenty of ads set in outdoor or public settings. Yet the company began to acknowledge that private consumption was yet another area in which they could increase sales in Argentina (and Latin America, as a whole). In the United States, as early as the mid-1940s, more than half of the consumption of Coca-Cola took place in the home. In part because of internal politics, the company did not immediately use this fact as a major theme for its advertisements, but in Latin America, the lag was even longer.<sup>83</sup>

In Buenos Aires this advertising shift came at a particularly apt time. The textual references to consuming Coca-Cola in the home coincided with an ongoing switch in Argentinean identity formation from the public to the private sphere. As discussed in the previous chapter, by the mid 1950s, as part of changing performances of class identity, consumer practices and cultural production shifted the space for Argentinean identity formation from its 1940s and early-1950s prominence in the public sphere to the private. More than just Coca-Cola’s ads reflected this shift, though. In 1957, The Coca-Cola Company released the “Family Size” bottle in Argentina, thereby encouraging Porteños to consume Coca-Cola in the home accompanying meals.<sup>84</sup> The overlap between the start of Coca-Cola’s private sphere push and this changing cultural phenomenon may have been coincidence, but it was also effective. A few interviewees agreed that the late 1950s

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<sup>82</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Jun 1956. In Spanish: “Cuando usted compra Coca-Cola para servirla en el hogar, usted puede estar seguro de complacer a toda la familia.” Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Jan 1956. In Spanish: “Cerciórese de tener siempre suficiente Coca-Cola en su casa para disfrutarla con sus amistades.”

<sup>83</sup> Allen 274.

<sup>84</sup> Coca-Cola Company 70.

and early 1960s was the point at which they began to consume Coca-Cola in the home.<sup>85</sup>

Perhaps because of the shift from public to private, Coca-Cola's ads were particularly effective in encouraging people to consume its product at home.

By 1960, Coca-Cola was using the concept of private consumption more than ever. They began running a series of advertisements which simply showed a home-cooked meal with a bottle of Coke open on the table, ready for consumption. In Buenos Aires, the caption was "with a meal...Coca-Cola refreshes better!" The parallel campaign in the United States proclaimed "Be really refreshed" and later "Things go better with Coke."<sup>86</sup> The intimacy of the dinner table symbolized Coca-Cola's complete entry into the private sphere. In the winter of 1963, they ran a particularly intense print advertising campaign, alternating tabletop images and pictures of social gatherings in private homes. Coca-Cola's decision to publish this campaign in the winter months indicated its attempts to lessen the association between the drink and outdoor activities it had promoted in the past. There was also an interesting gender component in this campaign. In women's magazines, such as *Atlántida* and *Para Ti*, Coke published the ads depicting social gatherings, whereas magazines for men like *El Golfer Argentino*, *El Gráfico* and *Vea y Lea* showed mealtime images. The implication of the advertisements for women was that Coca-Cola would aid her in being a good hostess and a social success. For men, the advertisements simply emphasized the enjoyable nature of eating good food accompanied by Coke. Men did not have to worry about social obligations because women were already doing so. Thus, the campaign showed Coca-Cola's intention to make clear that

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<sup>85</sup> Mario Mariscoti, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011; Berta Sanchis, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011.

<sup>86</sup> Coca-Cola, *Selecciones*, Oct 1960; Philipp Lenssen, "Coke/ Coca-Cola Advertisements of the 1960s," *Vintage Ad Browser*, 2010, Web, 14 Feb 2012 <<http://www.vintageadbrowser.com/coke-ads-1960s>>.

even while it was entering the domestic sphere, it was a product appropriate for both men and women. By the early 1960s, then, Argentines had incorporated this foreign product in a most fundamental way; it was now commonplace in the home.

While Coca-Cola's use of pattern advertising never faded in Buenos Aires, its Latin American versus North American specificity did shift multiple times between 1942 and 1965. In its initial days in Buenos Aires, the advertisements Coca-Cola published were near replicas of ads published in the United States that made little attempt to hide their United States origins. Not only were the images United States centric, but the texts that accompanied those ads also distinctly attempted to extend a metaphoric hand to Latin America from the United States.

Even as the ads shifted towards more Latin America specific scenes, they maintained an undeniably U.S. perspective. The 1940s ads set in Latin America portrayed the continent as largely backwards. Coca-Cola offered to bring Latin America into the modern world by associating its consumers with the industrialized world. These ads also contained a class element; Coca-Cola was at times a drink of the elite, leisurely upper class and at others, one for the prosperous middle class. The activities depicted in these ads were often activities available only to the highest echelons of society. Their initial emphasis on the quality of the drink also attempted to distinguish the product as one for those who valued excellence over price.

At the same time the ideas and texts that accompanied these ads often remained equivalent to their U.S. counterparts. The Latin American ads utilized the Coca-Cola girl just as much as in the United States. They claimed that drinking Coca-Cola would provide success in romantic endeavors and had no qualms about using the sex appeal of

women. The occupations women were portrayed engaging in constituted the main difference in the depiction of women in these early advertisements. Women in U.S. Coke ads were shown in the workplace, driving, and alone in the public sphere much earlier than in the Latin American ads. The notion that women in Latin America, and especially Buenos Aires, were less independent than women in the United States once again betrayed these Coca-Cola advertisements' U.S. bias and reinforced the idea that Latin American society was still antiquated.

By the mid-1950s, Coca-Cola aligned itself even more firmly with the forces of modernity and progress. The company began publishing ads that had more to do with benefiting Latin American society than selling a beverage. They emphasized Coca-Cola's strong ability to provide employment and promote industrialization. The clearly American ads interspersed with Coca-Cola's proclamations of its capacity to foster social and economic progress gave the message that American society embodied the state of modernity towards which Argentineans should strive. The question remains, however, whether or not the product held the same meanings for Argentineans as it did for the Coca-Cola Company.

### Chapter 3

## Forgetting Coke, Rejecting Empire

If Chapter 2 left any doubt as to The Coca-Cola Company's value system, the company's commemorative text, *Coca-Cola, Los primeros 50 años en Argentina*, makes its position abundantly clear. The book shows how The Coca-Cola Company felt Argentineans should appreciate the message of Americanization it brought. For example, in describing innovations in Argentina during the 1950s, the authors write, "kitchen furniture coated with 'fórmica,' [Formica] gave a touch of modernity and 'American' comfort to local kitchens."<sup>1</sup> Just as Coca-Cola's advertisements associated Americanness with modernity, so too did its corporate beliefs. Coca-Cola understood its place in Porteño society as part of a greater force for progress by aiding in bringing 'American comfort' to Argentineans. Porteños, on the other hand, did not share that understanding of the beverage. This chapter will focus on the meanings Porteños attributed to Coca-Cola and how those conceptions of Coke fit (or rather, came into conflict) with the framework of cultural imperialism.

To address the question of how Porteños viewed their consumption of Coca-Cola, I interviewed seventeen Buenos Aires residents who were alive during the period of Coca-Cola's arrival. My informants were split evenly, men and women, and came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> The information that they provided demonstrated a phenomenon quite counter to the notion of cultural imperialism. Many of my upper-class informants had very distinct memories of certain imported goods, while nearly none

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<sup>1</sup> Coca-Cola Company 72.

<sup>2</sup> I found my subjects through a network of friends and family. The Porteños I know put me in touch with other Porteños, which allowed me to conduct interviews with people that had a variety of experiences.

of the arrival of Coca-Cola. Inversely, middle and lower-class Porteños I interviewed tended to have very strong opinions about the ideology Coca-Cola symbolized, yet acknowledged that they consumed the product anyway. Thus, both in the ways in which these Porteños either had no recollections of the foreign ideology it promoted, or had precise understandings of Coke's morality, but ignored it, they demonstrated that the consumption of the product did not indicate acceptance of the ideology.

The Porteños with whom I spoke exhibited the same attraction to foreign goods noted in the previous chapters. In discussing imported goods with upper-class Porteños, they showed the prestige foreign goods held for them. Berta Sanchis, longtime resident of La Recoleta was quick to state this fact: "The prestige of the imported is always superior to that of the national, of course."<sup>3</sup> Sanchis acknowledged the draw to foreign goods in part as a chance to perform socioeconomic status. Amalia Mariscotti also made the prestige of the foreign abundantly evident in her interview. Her excitement in simply recalling the imported goods she owned, or wished to own, indicated the intensity of her past enthusiasm for foreign goods. As she remembered a particular brand of sweater she described how "all of a sudden businesses that had imported products began appearing. And we would die to buy one [sweater]. [...] We loved that."<sup>4</sup> The urgency surrounding this product had little to do with Amalia Mariscotti's need for a sweater, and everything to do with implications of owning an imported good. These upper-class Porteños were quite aware of their interest in imported goods as symbols of status. Their understanding

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<sup>3</sup> Berta Sanchis, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: "Siempre el prestigio de lo importado es superior a lo nacional, desde luego." La Recoleta is one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Buenos Aires.

<sup>4</sup> Amalia Mariscotti, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: "Entonces, de repente empezaron a aparecer los negocios que tenían productos importados. Y moríamos por comprarnos un color amarillo pantinto o celeste...Nos encantabamos eso."



of imported goods as helping fulfill a performance of status did not simply come through in the subtext of the discussions, but was clearly stated by several interviewees, other than Berta Sanchis. Her statement reproduced above regarding the prestige of imported goods showed exactly how she was aware that imported goods carried a meaning with them that nationally produced goods did not. Nora Lucia Dodero recalled the significance of cinema in influencing Porteños to buy foreign goods. She noted explicitly how American movies set trends in “fashion, clothes, hairstyles.”<sup>5</sup> Amalia Mariscotti put it more simply: “the movies had an enormous influence.”<sup>6</sup> These women’s acknowledgements of the fact that American cinema had the power to shape their behavior indicated that they were aware of the process even as they participated in it.

Upper-class Porteños reinforced the importance they placed on foreign goods with the fact that they could recall a wide variety of imported products. Women could often list imported brands of clothes and specify which articles of clothing they bought from those brands. Mariche Beloni, lifetime resident of Buenos Aires currently living in La Recoleta, remembered her mother buying her clothes imported from England as a child. As an adolescent, she also recalled the arrival of jeans from the United States.<sup>7</sup> Amalia Mariscotti, also born and raised in Buenos Aires, recounted when she and her husband were to be married, it was the craze to have a Barbizon nightgown.<sup>8</sup> This American brand, then, brought with it not simply a nightdress, but also a status. Berta Sanchis when asked about imported goods in the postwar period remarked: “We had lots of imported

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<sup>5</sup> Nora Lucia Dodero, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: “La moda, la ropa el peinado.”

<sup>6</sup> Amalia Mariscotti, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: “El cine tenía una influencia enorme.”

<sup>7</sup> Mariche Beloni, Personal Interview, 2 Aug 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Amalia Mariscotti, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. Barbizon was an American intimate apparel company in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

things. I remember, for example, all cloths, in general, were imported.”<sup>9</sup> Porteño women in particular, easily recalled how certain brands and items of clothing were noteworthy in their foreignness.<sup>10</sup>

Several interviewees made the distinction between foreign goods in general and American products. They addressed the fact, however tangentially, that for a period, Americanization and European influence existed simultaneously. Berta Sanchis brought up nylon stockings, but could not recall if they were American or English, while she also specified, for herself it seemed, that Quaker oats were American, not English. American cinema seemed to be a turning point in several of my informants’ minds. Dodero and Amalia Mariscotti’s recollections of the cinema both addressed how the arrival of Hollywood to Porteño movie theaters brought with it the hugely important influence of American goods and styles. Dodero noted that in the 1950s, imported goods came largely from England, but “later, American things began entering and it started because of the cinema’s impetus that made us see American things as dependable.”<sup>11</sup> Whether or not the movies were the entire reason for the United States’ growing influence in Buenos Aires (beyond the political arena), these women’s memories focused on a particular historical moment.

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<sup>9</sup> Berta Sanchis, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: “De importado teníamos muchísimo. Yo me acuerdo, por ejemplo, todos los generos, en general eran importados.”

<sup>10</sup> I conducted the interviews in such a way as to make my interest in imported goods apparent, but not specifically Coca-Cola. I began each interview by asking the interviewee to tell me about the post-war period and his or her childhood. This gave me an understanding of their backgrounds, as well as set them in the mental space of that era. I asked specific questions about products or Coca-Cola only in attempting to clarify statements they had made, or after they had exhausted their readily available memories of imported goods.

<sup>11</sup> Nora Lucia Dodero, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: “Después, empezaron a entrar cosas Americanas y empezó por el estímulo del cine que nos hacía ver como una cosa confiable todo lo que era Americano.”

The upper-class and a few middle-class Porteños also had little trouble recalling imported quotidian goods. Alberto Avila described in detail his memories of Palmolive representatives arriving at his childhood home to perform soap demonstrations.<sup>12</sup> He noted in the interview the novelty of the approach, attributing this new form of advertising to the United States. Mario Mariscotti discussed an uncle that ran an imported-goods ‘kiosk’ in the Galería Pacífica, one of the middle-class centric shopping centers that began proliferating around Buenos Aires in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>13</sup> He noted that the things they sold were not necessarily rare goods: “[They had] a very small store. They were dedicated to importing American goods. [...] Tons of toys, tons of plastic things. And they became rich.”<sup>14</sup> Mariscotti stressed the fact that the locale was small, but they could do enough business to become wealthy, even with a little store, indicating his notion that demand for insignificant imported goods amongst the middle and upper classes was quite high. Amalia Mariscotti remembered the excitement associated with bubble gum from the United States. She described how occasionally one of her peer’s parents would bring back gum from a trip to the United States and that “we would die when someone would show up at school blowing bubbles. We would almost ask them for a little piece because we would die to have bubble gum. Bazooka and Bubblegum.”<sup>15</sup> The delight in her voice was palpable in this statement. Her excitement of encountering this foreign good as a child shone through even in the mere memory of the product.

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<sup>12</sup> Alberto Avila, Personal Interview, 5 Aug 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Mario Mariscotti, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011; Podalsky 128. Galería Pacífica was constructed in 1945.

<sup>14</sup> Mario Mariscotti, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: “Un localsito muy pequeño. Pero se dedicaron a importar cosas Americanas. [...] Montonazo de juguetes, montonazo de cosas de plástico. Y se hicieron ricos.”

<sup>15</sup> Amalia Mariscotti, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish “Moría por ahí aparecía uno en la escuela haciendo globos. Casi le pedíamos un pedacito porque moríamos por tener chicle de globos. Los Bazooka y los Bubblegum.”

Upper-class Porteños' desire for, and awareness of the prestige of foreign goods was also apparent in their discussions of the import substitution industrialization (ISI) policies of Perón. Berta Sanchis frowned upon import substitution industrialization because she felt it simply kept people from obtaining the objects they wanted: "what changed [under ISI] was not the desire to have imported things, rather, the possibility to have them."<sup>16</sup> For Sanchis, ISI did nothing to diminish the prestige of foreign products; it simply restricted their freedom to purchase the goods that served as status symbols. Mario Mariscotti similarly disapproved of Perón's protectionist policies in the late 1940s, but his concerns were more concentrated on the failures the policies produced. He claimed that under ISI "the thing happened that tends to happen when one exaggerates, I mean, that Argentine industry developed and a huge number of factories appeared, in the zone of San Martín, the capital of Argentine industry and Argentine metallurgy. But, but the quality was bad, it was very bad, because so much protection removes the impetus from people to be competitive."<sup>17</sup> He was obviously frustrated with the protectionist policies, so much so that he used the word "exaggerates" to describe the economic approach. For Mariscotti, they were a futile attempt to develop the country's industries that only succeeded producing poor quality products.

The interviewees critical of protectionism—entirely from the upper class—often complained that the quality of goods dropped during import substitution because they believed nationally produced goods were not as well made. Alberto Beloni similarly

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<sup>16</sup> Berta Sanchis, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: "Lo que cambió no fue el deseo de tener cosas importada, sino, la posibilidad de tenerlos."

<sup>17</sup> Mario Mariscotti, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: "Pasó lo que suele pasar cuando uno exagera, digamos, que la industria argentina se desarrolló y apareció un montón de talleres, en la zona tuya, de San Martín, la capital de la industria argentina y de metalurgia argentina. Pero, pero la calidad era mala, era muy mala, porque tanta protección le quitaba el estímulo a la gente de ser competitiva."

complained of the inferior quality of the goods produced under import substitution during the late 1940s. These Porteños did not purport to be against development; rather, their criticisms focus on the way these policies attempted to achieve development. Thus, the argument against ISI allowed Porteños who supported the development of their country to maintain that they still wanted development, but not through policies of the Peronist government. The problem with ISI was ostensibly that the quality of the goods decreased, but in reality the policy also infringed on upper-class Porteños' abilities to lead the lifestyle they desired.

One product whose consumption did not languish under ISI was imported cars. In several interviews, Porteños were quick to bring up American cars as examples of imported goods. Ricardo Andrada, within the first minute of his interview stated “What I remember of imported goods from that moment: cars. My father bought a Ford—it was parked in the driveway of my house for a while because there weren’t tires.”<sup>18</sup> The functionality of the car was clearly not of great concern for Andrada (or his father), but the car itself remained strongly tied to the foreign. Amalia Mariscotti also discussed American cars, positing that Ford and Chevrolet “were the two powerful brands. Above all, Ford.”<sup>19</sup> Berta Sanchis’s memory of American cars was more pervasive: “That was what it was like when I was a girl. Yes, they [cars] were all American. We had a Dodge and a Jeep. [...] They were all imported, the cars.”<sup>20</sup> Sanchis was correct in remembering the strong presence of imported cars, however, not all of them were American. Ford and

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<sup>18</sup> Ricardo Andrada, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: “Yo me acuerdo de las cosas importadas en este momento: los autos. Mi padre compró un Ford—estaba parada en la entrada de mi casa, unos, no se cuanto, porque no había gomas.”

<sup>19</sup> Amalia Mariscotti, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: “Eran las dos marcas fuertes. Sobre todo, Ford.”

<sup>20</sup> Berta Sanchis, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: “Así era cuando yo era chica. Si, eran todos Americanos. Teníamos un dodge y un jeep. [...] Eran todo importados, los autos.”

General Motors certainly made up a large portion of imported cars, but so too did French car companies such as Renault and Peugeot, as well as the Italian Fiat.<sup>21</sup> Here, Sanchis extended her personal experience to characterize the entire Buenos Aires population and in doing so made herself part of a larger, more important imagined community that owned American cars.

These Porteños' memories of imported cars in the 1950s coincide with the rise of the automobile as a status symbol. One magazine, *Primera Plana*, noted that by 1960 "in Argentina, the automobile is becoming a symbol of its owner's place in society."<sup>22</sup> While *Primera Plana* was one of the most widely circulated magazines in Buenos Aires—reaching 100,000 readers at its peak—it was geared heavily to an educated middle class; however, despite the fact that it was addressing a particular class, this was precisely the group out of which the growing influence of cars emerged.<sup>23</sup> Even while a different class consumed publications like *Primera Plana* than my group of informants that most easily recalled automobiles, both sources corroborate the influence of automobiles at that time. The notability of cars in this era likely made them particularly memorable. However, these American brands, especially Ford and General Motors, retained their foreignness and clear association with the United States.

Ford and GM provide interesting contrasts to Coca-Cola because their advertising campaigns in Argentina similarly went through periods of attempting to integrate themselves into the national lifestyle. These campaigns were brought to bear earlier than Coke's 1940s and mid-1950s Latin American-centric ads; Ford and GM used the *gaucho* (the Argentinean equivalent of a cowboy that constituted a well-established trope in

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<sup>21</sup> Podalsky 178.

<sup>22</sup> As reproduced by Podalsky 130.

<sup>23</sup> Podalsky 159.

Argentine traditional literature) in ad campaigns in the mid-1930s.<sup>24</sup> Yet these Porteños' memories and notions of the ways in which other Argentines viewed these brands demonstrate how Ford and GM's advertising attempts to associate with the symbol of the quintessential Argentine lifestyle failed to a greater extent than Coca-Cola's.

When asked specifically about Coca-Cola upper-class Porteños had a great deal of trouble remembering much about the arrival of the drink. Mario Mariscotti, when asked if he ever drank coke in the 1940s and early 1950s responded "Was there Coca-Cola?"<sup>25</sup> Yet, he remembered Bidú and Orange Crush. Elen Manrique, who grew up in Buenos Aires drinking Coca-Cola from a very young age, had very little memory of Coca-Cola ads. Interestingly, at the same time, Manrique could recite a Pepsi jingle from the 1960s. Even though she was a regular consumer of Coca-Cola, the messages Coca-Cola attempted to communicate to their customers through the ads had little effect on Porteños like Manrique. Similarly, Berta Sanchis knew the early history of Coca-Cola in the United States, but could give no details of its early days in Argentina.

The most Elen Manrique could recall of Coke's advertisements was "lots of red."<sup>26</sup> This memory of red likely stemmed from Coca-Cola's extensive street and point-of-sale advertising. Coca-Cola used billboard advertising in Buenos Aires the same way they used it in the United States: like their print advertising, the company translated the exact images. The quintessential Coca-Cola girl in a bathing suit at the beach appeared on a Buenos Aires corner in the 1940s, while the image of a hand holding a Coke bottle in the air was placed on a building façade circa 1950.<sup>27</sup> These images were certainly not

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<sup>24</sup> Salvatore 226.

<sup>25</sup> Mario Mariscotti, Personal Interview, 7 Aug 2011. In Spanish: "Coca-Cola había?"

<sup>26</sup> Elen Manrique, Personal Interview, 27 Jul 2011. In Spanish: "Me acuerdo mucho rojo."

<sup>27</sup> Coca-Cola Company 52.

distinguished in their placement; Coca-Cola placed billboards on busy street corners and squares that were crammed with other advertisements for consumer products. One Coca-Cola billboard sat next to a Piloto (an Argentinean cigarette brand), while another sat across the street from a bright 43 sign (also Argentinean cigarettes). All these ads were either dominated by red backgrounds, or used the symbolic red Coca-Cola circle to distinguish the product. Even while the ads' placements were not necessarily unusual, they were still strategic. Coca-Cola placed one billboard in the 1940s above a pharmacy, recalling the original claims of the product as a headache tonic. Similarly, point-of-sale advertising was, of course, the most obvious placement strategy. The Coca-Cola circle could be seen outside *almacenes* (local grocery stores) as early as 1950. At the same time, delivery trucks, and in the early years, delivery bicycles all sported the traditional red of Coca-Cola. The fact that Manrique recalled the color, but none of the images or messages that went along with the advertisements is yet another example of how little these Porteños consumed Coca-Cola's actual message.

There is a striking difference between the ways in which these Porteños remember Ford cars as opposed to Coca-Cola. While Ford's advertising visibility is certainly not as strong as Coca-Cola's in Buenos Aires today, both have large presences in the public sphere. Coca-Cola's small presence in the interviews is less attributable to its current place in Porteño life when compared to Ford, which shares a similarly large place. Coca-Cola's repeated attempts in the 1950s and 1960s to associate itself with the status and luxury of the American way of life failed relative to a brand such as Ford or GM.

The fact that many of my upper-class informants rarely gave Coca-Cola as an example of imported goods, and when prompted, often stated they had few recollections



of Coca-Cola from that period has several implications. On the one hand, it demonstrated that Coca-Cola was successful in integrating its product into the Porteño lifestyle. On the other hand, it indicates that for them, Coca-Cola did not retain, or perhaps ever have, a sense of the exotic. While these Porteños attributed the positive meanings associated with foreignness to other products, they did not see Coca-Cola in those terms. This may, in part, have been because the content of Coca-Cola's advertising campaigns were not highly differentiated from other Argentinean advertisements. Yet it also reflects Porteños' abilities to create their own understandings of the products they consumed.

The interviewees' perceptions of Coca-Cola in the period after its arrival may, of course, be effected by their relationship with Coca-Cola today. However, in comparison to other American products prevalent in current Argentine culture, especially Ford vehicles, this does not seem to be the dominant factor in their lack of Coca-Cola memories. Naturally, cars and beverages are not the same kind of good, nor does the decision to purchase one or the other carry the same weight. Yet the place where the interesting comparison emerges is in the fact that upper-class Porteños could recall numerous imported consumer goods of comparable value to Coca-Cola, which is to say that they associated the prestige of foreignness with some quotidian goods, but not with Coke. At the same time, they could recall another American product that is highly visible in Buenos Aires today (Fords). The fact that they remembered Fords' foreign origins more than Coca-Cola's indicates that they held stronger associations of foreignness with Fords than Coke during its early years in Buenos Aires. Thus, Coke's current ubiquitousness is not the reason for my upper-class informants' difficulties in remembering its arrival.

My informants from working-class backgrounds had vastly different perceptions of Coca-Cola than those from the upper class. Porteños who had grown up in the lower class tended to have strong reactions to the mention of Coca-Cola that reflected their associations with its American background. When speaking with working class Porteños they many times asserted Coca-Cola's place as a symbol of American commercial aggression. As noted in Chapter 1, Perón used anti-Americanism as a tool to increase his popularity amongst the working class. Glenn Dorn, in his article "'Bradenism' and Beyond: Argentine Anti-Americanism, 1945-1953," discusses how Perón relied on anti-Americanism to win him not just the 1946 election, but later ones as well.<sup>28</sup> An interview I conducted with Jorge Luis Ubertalli, a man who grew up in a working class neighborhood, provided the clearest example of anti-American associations with Coca-Cola. His first statement on the issue was "Coca-Cola is a symbol of North America" and went on to discuss how it represented American imperialism and overbearing capitalism.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Juan Di Masi, who also came from a working class background and fondly recalled Perón's industrializing policies, asserted that "Coca-Cola was one of those things that seemed to me that—really as it actually was—the face of the guy who came to screw us over."<sup>30</sup> These working-class Porteños were well aware of the American values Coca-Cola projected through its ads, but they did not accept those ideals.

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<sup>28</sup> Glenn J. Dorn, "'Bradenism' and Beyond: Argentine Anti-Americanism, 1945-1953," *Anti-Americanism in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Alan McPherson (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006) 64-68.

<sup>29</sup> Jorge Luis Ubertalli, Personal Interview, 11 Aug 2011. In Spanish: "Coca-Cola es un symbol de Norteamerica."

<sup>30</sup> Juan Di Masi, Personal Interview, 12 Aug 2011. In Spanish: "'Coca-Cola era una cosa que se me parecía que—realmente como lo que era—era la cara del tipo que nos venía a joder.'"

Despite clearly disagreeing with Coca-Cola's values, these Argentineans also consumed the beverage. Ubertalli had no hesitation in admitting that he drank Coca-Cola, but gave the explanation that "it tastes good."<sup>31</sup> In the matter of fact way in which he answered the question, Ubertalli gave the impression that he would not allow this immoral capitalist company to keep him from enjoying a drink he liked. Di Masi was more reticent to admit that he drank Coca-Cola, saying instead that he drank Bidú because it was a national drink; however, when pressed, he admitted that he consumed American sodas, specifically 7-Up. Di Masi clearly recognized the somewhat contradictory nature of his willingness to purchase American beverages in his statement: "I got hooked first with 7-Up because it was good—I mean, it's also from a foreign group, but, well, it seemed less demonstrative than the symbol of Coca-Cola."<sup>32</sup> While he was willing to make a statement with his purchasing decisions regarding Coca-Cola, when it came to a nearly identical American product (7-Up is owned by PepsiCo), he did not feel the necessity to take a moral stand. At the end of the day, despite their beliefs, these working-class Porteños purchased products that they saw as symbols of ideologies counter to their own.

Their willingness to buy Coca-Cola reinforces the fact that purchasing the product did not mean subscribing to the ideology its company espoused. They could drink Coca-Cola while simultaneously standing against the ideals and messages of American supremacy Coke maintained. The act of buying a bottle of Coke was, and is, removed from an acceptance of the moral structure and culture from which Coca-Cola originated.

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<sup>31</sup> Jorgue Luis Ubertalli, Personal Interview, 11 Aug 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Juan Di Masi, Personal Interview, 12 Aug 2011. In Spanish: "Me engaché primero con 7-up, porque era rico—digamos, era tambien de un grupo extranjero, pero bueno, no se me parecía tan demostrativo como podría ser el simbolo de la Coca-Cola."

While there is a degree of contradiction in the act, the fact that these Porteños were so virulently anti-American, and Coca-Cola a symbol of American power, meant they were perfectly capable of maintaining a distinct set of beliefs and moral codes from those associated with the products they bought.

Incidentally, their actions proved this point in an entirely different way than in the case of the upper-class Porteños. Whereas the upper-class Porteños' forgetting the ideas promoted by Coca-Cola through its ads demonstrated a disassociation with Coke's moral schema, here, it is precisely the fact that these lower-class Porteños very distinctly remember the morality posited by Coke, and chose to buy the product anyway, that provides evidence. Both groups prove, however, that, at the end of the day, the decision to buy Coca-Cola had little to do with its cultural background and everything to do with its taste. The fact that people from the same city surrounded the same product with entirely different meanings also indicates how the consumption of a product cannot be associated with a subscription to one single belief system.

Upper-class Porteños' lack of memories of Coca-Cola indicates the extent to which Coca-Cola did not retain a sense of the exotic. Despite the fact that Coca-Cola continued to run ads that depicted American scenes well into the 1960s, Argentineans did not necessarily view the product as bringing with it the status and prestige of other foreign goods. These Porteños were quite clear that the images came from the United States, yet this fact did not seem to have the effect of giving Coca-Cola exoticness. My informants could easily identify the figures in Coca-Cola ads as representing North Americans, not Argentineans, yet this seems to have had little consequence. Porteños could discern that the ideology Coca-Cola attempted to promote was one of American

values, in the present and the past, but their lack of memory of the specific messages in the advertisements indicates their dismissal of those ideals. Thus, while upper-class Porteños knew the product was American, they did not feel they were buying more than simply a drink when they purchased a bottle of Coke.

Their disassociation with its foreign nature demonstrated one of the ways in which, while Porteños may have consumed Coca-Cola, they did not necessarily subscribe to the ideals its advertisements espoused. The advertisements held clear notions of how Argentine families were supposed to live, more often than not, in the fashion of typical American families. The advertisements depicted what Argentineans should see as success, on the societal, career or romantic scale. They spelled out what constituted modernity, as contrasted by Coca-Cola's conceptions of backwards Latin American ways. They showed what a successful businessman providing for his perfect family of four looked like, or how modern people should dress. The advertisements demonstrated how women should interact with the public sphere and under what circumstances. Yet in Porteños' failures to remember the American nature of the product, they also show how they failed to absorb the very American lifestyle the product tried to promote. Because upper-class Porteños rarely remember the arrival of Coca-Cola, while they clearly remembered other foreign products, Coke failed to capture the prestige and allure of foreign ways of life that other imported goods managed to retain. While Amalia Mariscotti desired a Barbizon nightgown for the associations that came with the product, she consumed Coke simply for the sake of drinking something cool. Thus, while Coke's failure to retain the notions of foreignness it promoted in its advertisements of the late 1950s and early 1960s indicates the extent to which Coca-Cola became rapidly

incorporated in daily life, Porteños' failure to remember Coke's ads or any details of its arrival demonstrates that Porteños incorporated the product on their own terms.

This comes back to the question of cultural imperialism. The evidence produced by these Porteños runs counter to the fundamental concept that the consumption of foreign goods automatically indicates subscription to the ideologies of those companies and is therefore a form of colonization. My informants' memories and notions of Coca-Cola push back on Ariel Dorfman's arguments in *How to Read Donald Duck* and the concepts key to the ideas of cultural imperialism. Whereas Dorfman takes for granted that when people consume a good, they automatically consume the ideology presented by the makers of that good, these Porteños show that the one action is not necessarily tied to the other. If people can consume a good without also consuming a system of beliefs, then they can also partake of a good without being colonized by its culture of origin.

The notion of cultural imperialism has circulated throughout Latin American historiographies since the 1970s. In 1971, Dorfman and Armand Mattelart published *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, which outlines how "Disney [...] establishes a moral background which draws the child down the proper ethical and aesthetic path."<sup>33</sup> This is possible, Dorfman argues, because "children have been conditioned by the magazines and the culture which spawned them."<sup>34</sup> For Dorfman, Disney, and in fact, most foreign cultural goods, bring with them not just the product itself, but an ideology. Beyond that, however, they have the power to inculcate and modify the consumers' systems of belief. While cultural goods may certainly have that effect on some people, the notion that consumers, as a whole, are so passive that the

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<sup>33</sup> Dorfman 29.

<sup>34</sup> Dorfman 30.

act of consumption automatically means the act of acceptance fundamentally removes the agency from the consumers.

The issue of agency, of course, is at the heart of the notion of cultural imperialism. The framework writes out consumers' abilities to differentiate between the entertainment or taste value of a good and the moral values the company espouses. It also assumes that consumers understand the meaning of products in only one way—the way the company presents them. A more agency-providing interpretation of how individuals attach meaning to products, however, acknowledges that people consume and understand products in the context of their individual experiences. A person's background and experiences shapes the ways in which she understands the world. Thus, the meaning that an individual in the United States attributes to a bottle of Coca-Cola will be fundamentally different from the way in which a person in Argentina gives it meaning. The notion that, because an Argentinean drinks Coca-Cola, they automatically share the same ideas about Coca-Cola as those of an American consumer denies the power of the local context in the process of meaning creation. The framework of cultural imperialism inevitably simplifies peoples' experiences and processes of bestowing meaning.

The question at hand, then, is how much agency we attribute to consumers, and how nuanced we believe they can be. Consumers can be viewed as one-dimensional beings that choose not to, or do not have the ability to differentiate themselves and their identities and belief structures from those that belong to an outside force. This is the approach that Ariel Dorfman takes. He holds the view that the readers or consumers of Disney comics must be transformed by the process of consumption into mirrors of Walt Disney, just as the people who drink Coca-Cola must share the moral codes and desires

presented by Coke's ads. Yet these Argentines tell a different story: one of subtlety, differentiation and taste. Their consumption of Coca-Cola did not stem from the product's Americanness—either because they failed to bestow upon the product the prestige of other foreign goods, or because its Americanness was exactly what they disliked about the product. That Porteños from differing class backgrounds held drastically different views of Coca-Cola also suggests the differentiated ways in which these informants exercised their agency. My informants debunked the notion of cultural imperialism not simply on a national level (Argentines can attribute their own meaning to objects), but also on a socioeconomic level (Porteños from different backgrounds create meaning in different ways based on their experiences). Thus their consumption of Coke was more nuanced than a simple packaged approach; rather, they could drink Coca-Cola while picking apart, or choosing not to accept, the morality it set forth.

The relationship to Coca-Cola and other foreign products that these Porteños describe also relates to the findings of other recent historians. Robert Foster, in his work on Coca-Cola in Papua New Guinea, notes how Coca-Cola took on meanings in the local, New Guinean context that are completely separate from the ideas presented by Coca-Cola. He argues that this occurs because “commodities are thus mutable, and this mutability has been most clearly recognized by anthropologists who regard consumers as agents capable of appropriating commodities for ends not imagined by producers.”<sup>35</sup> Just as Porteños gave Coca-Cola a multiplicity of meanings, the people of New Guinea may have consumed the drink, but nothing more.

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Foster, *Coca-Globalization: Following Soft Drinks from New York to New Guinea* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008) xix.



David Miller comes to nearly the same conclusion looking at Coca-Cola in Trinidad: residents attributed their own, local meaning to the action of consuming Coca-Cola. He discusses how Trinidadeans attached their own understandings to Coca-Cola that were entirely fitted to the local context. In this sense, he is “questioning the theory of commodity power that is involved in assuming that the company controls its own effects.”<sup>36</sup> He also addresses the global nature of Coca-Cola only to conclude that “globality is itself a localized image, held within a larger frame of spacialized identity. As has been shown within media studies, an image of the global is not thereby a universal image.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, Miller, like Foster, also argues that even a good that is exactly the same all over the world can only be analyzed within the local framework.

Jeffrey Pilcher describes the same phenomenon when he discusses how residents of San Juan Chamula, Mexico attached their own meanings to the Pepsi they consumed. He describes how Chamulans gave Pepsi a religious meaning when “religious leaders celebrated church services with Pepsi instead of wine, telling parishioners that carbonation drives off evil spirits and cleanses the soul.”<sup>38</sup> In incorporating this foreign product into religious life, the Chamulans brought Pepsi into their belief system, rather than leaving behind their moral code in favor of the morality that Pepsi put forth. The meaning of Pepsi for these Mexicans had little to do with anything a Pepsi executive might describe her product as representing.

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel Miller, “Coca-Cola: A Black Sweet Drink from Trinidad,” *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating*, ed. James L. Watson and Melissa L. Caldwell (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005) 56.

<sup>37</sup> Miller 67.

<sup>38</sup> Jeffrey M. Pilcher, “Mexico’s Pepsi Challenge: Traditional Cooking, Mass Consumption, and National Identity,” *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, Eric Zolov (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) 83.

Yet an absence of cultural influence does not indicate an absence of economic dominance. Coca-Cola had an undeniable economic advantage coming into Argentina because it had the backing of a multinational corporation and all its resources. The Coca-Cola Export Corporation could offer huge subsidies for advertising to bottlers, as well as advertise itself (as seen in the abundance of advertisements in *Selecciones*). The Coca-Cola Company provided up to 50% of the cost for any advertising campaign.<sup>39</sup> It also had the economic stability to run campaigns of free samples in Buenos Aires. At the end of the day, Coca-Cola won out over local products. Bidú, Refrescola, and Bilz can no longer be found in Porteño supermarkets, whereas the Coca-Cola red can be seen on every block and every street corner of Buenos Aires. There is little doubt surrounding Coca-Cola's economic force.

Yet what my informants show is that economic force does not directly translate into cultural influence. Feminist theorist Peggy Phelan addresses a similar disconnect in her discussion of the politics of representation: "If representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture."<sup>40</sup> In Coca-Cola's case, its widespread representational visibility did not necessarily amount to power in shaping Argentines' views. Coke could not control the meaning of its product because Porteños are an essential part of deciding how to interpret the information presented. Coca-Cola's meaning was malleable to the Porteños who consumed it.

Nor did Coca-Cola's message fail because of any lack of clarity on the part of the advertisers regarding the values the company wanted to communicate. Coca-Cola's attempts to associate itself with modernizing forces were abundantly clear, yet Porteños

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<sup>39</sup> Miller 58.

<sup>40</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993) 10.

took or left the idea as they desired. Also, the message already existed in the city, thus even if Porteños had accepted the notion that Coca-Cola came with modernity, it would be difficult to argue that they were accepting an entirely foreign concept. At the same time, *50 Años de Coca-Cola* reiterates the fact that the company believed the message they broadcast had an effect on Porteños. The advertisers writing for *Síntesis Publicitaria* held similar views of their efficacy in shaping Argentinean thought. My informants, on the other hand, show otherwise.

The failure of cultural imperialism as a framework comes from the fact that, while it can account for a company's intentionality in sending a particular message, it does not acknowledge the consumer's agency in interpreting those ideas. It gives far too much weight to the cultural producers, and none to the cultural consumers in the representer/viewer relationship. Porteños, it seems, were perfectly capable of asserting their power as viewers in the process of attributing meaning to Coca-Cola.

## Conclusion

To say that the Coca-Cola Company's advertisements had no effect on how my informants gave meaning to its product would not be true to the reality they presented. Coca-Cola did participate in these Porteños' processes of creating meaning, but only in so far as its advertisements were a part of their local surroundings. When Coca-Cola began bottling operations in 1942, it became a part of the Buenos Aires landscape. Its advertisements became one more billboard, sign, magazine flap that composed the Porteño scene. Yet Coca-Cola saw its place differently. Through the messages it presented, the company attempted to create a meaning that extended well beyond the functionality of its product. For Coca-Cola, its product contained much more than 6-ounces of sweet soda; each bottle came with modernity, industry, prosperity, and most importantly, morality. Yet Argentineans, especially in the advertising business, were already striving to achieve many of the values Coca-Cola purported to bring to Argentina. Coca-Cola provided little to the country that was new, besides a formula for syrup.

The goals of Argentinean advertisers and The Coca-Cola Company were very much intertwined. Coca-Cola and local advertisers both put forth conceptions for the nation that included the goal of modernity. Both believed they had the power to shape other people's perceptions of the world—to create imagined communities. Yet, while they were a part of the influential Porteño print culture, this fact indicated little more than discursive dominance. My informants demonstrated their relative autonomy in shaping their value systems, as well as independent decision-making regarding the ways in which they performed their identities.

Cultural imperialism disallows this autonomy because it utilizes an extremely rigid conception of how meaning is formed. It fails to account for the fact that meaning is made situationally, performatively, and, in many cases, arbitrarily. My informants associated prestige with some imported goods, yet did not bestow that meaning on Coca-Cola. My working-class informants saw Coke as a symbol of empire, yet the meaning they attributed to the action of consuming Coca-Cola in no way indicated an acceptance of United States hegemony. When examining the variety of meanings different people give to objects we must take into account local experience.

At the same time, whether or not Coca-Cola could provide cultural change, it could bring an economic force to be reckoned with. The bottle in 8-year old Luis Trabb's hand was Coke, not Bidú. Today, Refrescola is merely a vague memory to a few Porteños, not a product lining the supermarket shelves. Coca-Cola's late 1950s advertizing shift towards promoting domestic consumption may well have been a coincidence, but it was a lucky one. Coca-Cola is now a dominant force in the Argentinean markets. Yet at the end of the day, the overlaps between shifting Porteño cultural and Coke's changing ad campaign were likely just chance. The advertising may have become more powerful because of the coincidence, but it did not cause Porteños to focus more on the private than the public sphere. Economic power does not necessarily translate directly into cultural power.

Returning to the question of how to understand Trabb's childhood story, Dorfman's notion of cultural imperialism falls short. To say that Trabb began drinking more Coke because Coca-Cola inculcated him with its advertisements denies him the agency to place his own meanings on objects. It denies him the opportunity to increase

his consumption of Coca-Cola because he began associating it with weekends playing soccer, spending time with his friends, or because he simply came to enjoy the taste. By forming a decision-making process and belief system for its subjects, cultural imperialism takes away their agency in creating those ideals themselves. A bottle of Coca-Cola contains only the meaning its consumers bestow upon it.

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## Appendix



Figure 1. Editorial Atlántida. *Síntesis Publicitaria* (Dec 1941).





Él domó los ríos para provecho del hombre

El ingeniero especializado en hidrodinámica encauza la fuerza de los ríos por medio de represas, la convierte en luz y energía, y así transforma sitios antes áridos en florecientes campos e industrias. Los que se dedican a tan magna tarea contribuyen al progreso, y dan rienda a su poder creativo. Quizá usted también descubra una vida plena en la ingeniería hidroeléctrica.

*Este mensaje lo dedica a usted el Embotellador de Coca-Cola en su comunidad, como un homenaje a aquellas personas emprendedoras que ejercen la ingeniería. Acaso inspire a los jóvenes a hacer carrera en esta profesión.*

 © Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola se embotella en más de 100 países por embotelladores independientes

Figure 2. Coca-Cola. *Selecciones del Reader's Digest*. Jul 1957: Back interior flap.

La Invitación Universal...  
**“¡TOMEMOS UNA COCA-COLA!”**



*Arcaico Monolito Guatemalteco*

Haga sus horas de recreo más placenteras con “Coca-Cola” bien fría. En reuniones, comidas, deportes—a toda hora y en toda ocasión “Coca-Cola” es la compañera ideal. “Coca-Cola” es siempre digna de confianza.




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UNIDAS HOY  
 UNIDAS SIEMPRE

Figure 3. Coca-Cola. *Selecciones del Reader's Digest*. Dec 1944: Front interior flap.





Figure 4. Coca-Cola. *Selecciones del Reader's Digest*. Oct 1946: Back interior flap.