

QUEERING LATIN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE

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By publicly articulating our queer positions in and about mass culture, we reveal that capitalist cultural production need not exclusively and inevitably express straightness. . . . Indeed, the more the queerness in and of mass culture is explored, the more the notion that what is "mass" or "popular" is therefore "straight" will become a highly questionable given in cultural studies--and in culture generally, for that matter. (Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer* 104)

The title of this essay exploits a clear structural ambiguity in the English language, one in which the right-posed noun phrase can be interpreted to function as either the subject or the object of the left-posed present participle. Thus, they (at least) two interpretations that may be extracted from the phrase are: 1) The process whereby one queers popular culture; and 2) The process whereby popular culture produces a queering effect.

The need to queer popular culture, in the sense of producing a queering of popular culture in a deliberate and agentive sense, is certainly an imperative ideological undertaking, one that accompanies a commitment to the deconstruction of compulsory heterosexuality or heteronormativity¹. If modern bourgeois society has, as a consequence of what Jonathan Katz has called the "invention of heterosexuality," worked diligently to impose a notion of social normalcy whereby heteronormativity is the ground zero of human experience--whether in the sense of being always and ever naturally so, or whether in the sense of our wishing to enforce it as historically desirably so--cogent exceptions to the reign of that heteronormativity would want to see every opportunity to deconstruct it, along every possible axis of cultural production. By its very nature, popular culture, because it is majoritarian, egalitarian, democratic, and--quite simply--all pervasive, offers itself as an important arena for this deconstructive effort.

Indeed, as Alexander Doty has brilliantly shown in *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, such an effort of queering is inevitable in popular culture, both because popular culture stands as something like a perverse antiphony to the realms of decency enforced by heteronormativity (the rules of the patriarchy work from the top down, and

down toward the bottom flatland of popular culture, the reigns of the patriarchy are slack, which is why there tends to be, from on high, a disdain for the messiness of popular culture and the recurring belief that it is morally corrupting) and because popular culture, since it is frequently driven by rather transparently crass commercial motives, must always be probing the fringes for new creative opportunities. The very mass nature of popular culture results in a voracious machine of representational opportunity, where anything and everything is potentially permissible to see if mass audiences will "buy" into it in every sense of the word: the only impediment is the perception that "the public is not quite ready" for something, which brings with it the implied belief that at time it will be. The point I am making here is that the arena of popular culture lends itself very well to undertaking a queering of the patriarchy--that is, to defying the patriarchy with queer signs--whether it is done out of a sheer need to pursue unrestrainedly new creative impulses or out of a commitment to using the "indecency" of popular culture to defy patriarchal restrictions.

One thinks immediately of someone like Madonna, who pursues very effectively both options at the same time. The moral ditherings of the guardians of virtue over her efforts demonstrate how popular culture can get away so relatively easily with underscoring the limited attractions of patriarchal soberness (see Robertson on Madonna and feminist camp; also Frank and Smith). Yet, in this understanding of the relationship between patriarchal heteronormativity and popular culture, there is an implied adherence to the idea of the form as a norm that must and can be challenged, with the interesting possibilities of popular culture deriving from the relative success in effecting that challenge. As part of the logic of the binary, what popular culture is doing in this regard would not be particularly interesting if it were not for the fact that the patriarchal norm remains centered as the reference point for the endeavors--as much unconscious and unreflective as deliberate--of the former.

In the second construal of the phrase "queering popular culture," it is popular culture, rather than its creative agents, that provides the instance of queer effects. The creators of popular culture, rather than organizing a production that is ranged specifically against a bulwark of patriarchal heteronormativity, channel the very nature of lived human experience that makes that heteronormativity such a remarkable (for many, terrifyingly remarkable) invention: lived human experience is, in the terms of that normativity, fundamentally queer, and the need to control that queerness (the Freudian civilization vs. Eros) and the elaboration of a draconian fear of a queer planet (cf. Warnen) have the effect of distracting attention from our essential queerness, our essential polymorphous perversity. High bourgeois culture is able--or, at least, for a couple of centuries, has been more or less able--to enforce a heteronormative premium, but the very messiness, the uncontainability, and the excessiveness of popular culture have always been there to constitute an arena where the heteronormative either does not hold sway or only barely does so. The very way in which queer scholarship now is able to read so much of apparently normalizing Hollywood filmmaking against the grain and to demonstrate, over and over again, how the queer is hardly contained by Hollywood's Main Street fantasies, is an eloquent index of how even what we may tend to think of as the pinafore and candy-stripe normalcy of mainline filmmaking is also a realm of only tentatively contained queerness (cf.

Richard Dyer's many efforts, Alexander Doty's *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon*, and Ellis Hanson's and Chris Straayer's collections of essays). (I understand that I am basically speaking here of popular culture as synonymous with a straightforward commercial culture, a meaning that excludes popular culture in the artisanal or folkloric sense of the word. As theorists like García Canclini have shown, it is no longer very easy to distinguish the two. But even where it is, artisanal and folkloric popular culture is equally on the margins of the bourgeois patriarchy, which is why a lot of it is hidden away in "secret museums" (like the Kinsey collection).

Such an understanding of the possibilities of popular culture is, in many ways, outrageous, both because of the importance conferred on an arena of cultural production that is—at least from the perspective of bourgeois values—considered aesthetically unsatisfactory and frequently morally and politically disdainable. Because of the alarming confirmation of the power of that arena to undermine the pillars of heteronormativity that bourgeois society undertakes so energetically to maintain, the image becomes one of forms of cultural production that are all over the place and lack any principled commitment to maintaining heterosexual decency. Moreover, in the Doty et al. formulation, even when popular culture appears to be enforcing heteronormativity, as in classical Hollywood filmmaking, the veneer of decency is very thin indeed, and what is often most interesting about these films is the free-wheeling queerness that bursts through, even if it is routinely condemned and punished in the last reel. This is, after all, the essential fascination of the double discourse of film noir, where we get to enjoy the titillation of all that raunchiness and nastiness, even if the "right values" reaffirm themselves in the end. Or do they?, since often the agents of the right values—i.e., bourgeois heteronormality—are often just as nasty and raunchy as those who get punished.

Thus, when one turns to popular culture, one finds, among many other things (i.e., the representation of a wide range of social subjects systematically excluded or marginalized by high bourgeois culture), a display of erotics that can rarely sustain the normalizing gaze of bourgeois heterosexuality. My goal in this essay is to explore some examples of Latin American popular culture to show how this arena of cultural production is particularly important because of the ways in which it furnishes such a counterpoint to bourgeois hegemony and how this cultural production cannot but be anything other than a site for the display of the essential queerness—i.e., the nonheteronormativity, the impossibility of the heteronormativity—of lived human experience (see Foster, *Producción cultural* for my specific formulations of the queer with reference to Latin America). I will not be maintaining that the producers of this popular culture are queer in some essential way or that they are even conscious of unleashing—or enabling the unleashing—of queer interpretations of lived human experience: indeed, many of them might be quite concerned at such a suggestion, particularly those artists who adhered to leftist positions who have seen in popular culture a radical or revolutionary alternative to bourgeois art and the social ideology it embodies, while at the same time refusing to acknowledge queerness as itself a radical, liberating political position (this is less of a possibility as of this writing than it was in the 1960s and 1970s, when many social revolutionaries who were, nevertheless, firmly homophobic, invested in the ideological potential of popular culture modalities).

Nor will I be maintaining that popular culture is solely or exclusively an arena for opposition to bourgeois heteronormativity, even if it is true that one need not be primarily a sexual dissenter in order to oppose heteronormativity: because of the redundant homologies of social life, when sexual definitions (such as the unimpeachable division of the universe into masculine and feminine) are taken as the ground zero of the social semiotic, any deconstruction of social primes becomes a deconstruction of everything else and thus necessarily refers back to the sexual. But what I will be maintaining - keeping this last statement firmly in mind - is that popular culture meets, in a far different and expanded register (that is, of course, the popular one), elite vanguard culture in constituting an implacable demonstration of the inconveniences of bourgeois values and, with that, of its sustaining compulsory heterosexuality.

I would like to devote the remainder of this essay to modeling an understanding of the queering of popular culture by focusing on the graphic art of Quino (Salvador Joaquín Lavado; b. 1932)². Quino, who left his native Argentina in 1973 at the time of a deeply disturbing crossfire (literal as well as metaphoric) involving right-wing cultural nationalists who saw his work as subversive (during the period of the neofascist tyranny [1966-73; 1976-83], there was a dense and uncontestable discourse of what was to be considered subversive) and left-wing militants, who saw his work as too "light," too "entertaining," and too grounded in "U.S./internationalist" artistic codes to constitute a satisfactory and appropriate "contestatorial" artistic production—i.e., it was insufficiently committed and inadequately dialectical (once again, those who exercised cultural power from the left, if only symbolically, adhered to a tight and uncontestable standard of sociopolitical commitment) (see Herández, whose title evokes the by-now classic anticapitalist work on cartoon art by Dorfman and Mattelart). Less from the left (although there were some cases of acts of violence from the left directed against cultural producers who came up short in the area of adequate commitment), there was unquestionably a climate of violence—and, frequently, assassination—of cultural producers at the hands of the right, which usually counted directly (through dictatorial regimes) or indirectly (through the tacit and implicit support of nominally or precarious democratic governments—e.g., the Peronista presidency, 1973-76) on the apparatus of state terrorism to impose their way of viewing things. Quino decamped for Italy, ceased drawing his signature strip *Mafalda* (created in 1963, and published in ten gathered volumes between 1966 and 1967; see the memorial volume, Lavado, *Toda Mafalda*), and has devoted himself since to single-panel drawings that are increasingly bleak and biting (he has published a half-dozen volumes of gathered single-panel cartoons or one-time cartoon strips since 1973, and his new work is carried by numerous publications throughout the Spanish-speaking world).

It might be difficult at first to associate queer elements with the work of a humorist whose principal fame has been in terms of a production centering on a pre-teen middle-class girl and her paradigmatically Porteño neighborhood family and friends (see my own work on *Mafalda*, Foster, "*Mafalda*: The Ironic Bemusement" and "*Mafalda*: From Hearth to Plaza"). As is well known, *Mafalda* always assumed a very critical stance toward the bourgeois values of her parents and friends, and she criticized unrelentingly an entire spectrum of hypocritical attitudes that are often viewed as paradigmatically Argentine (even when, of course, they intersect with those of other Latin American and world societies, such as the treacherous idealization of the maternal figure in the postulation "*Madre hay una sola*"); these attitudes also included the propositions that Argentina was the most civilized, the most sophisticated, and the most prosperous country of Latin America. Someone once remarked that if Quino had continued to draw *Mafalda* and if he

had had her grow up during the course of his strips, she would have become a *desaparecida* (missing person) during the period of the so-called Dirty War against subversion in the late 1970s (by which time she would have been around twenty years old; young people who were deemed disrespectful of established

society were a particularly preferred group of those viewed, first, as subversives and subsequently detained, tortured, held in concentration camps, and murdered by the apparatus of state terrorism).

This may be a matter of inconsequential speculation, because left-wing criticism of *Mafalda* centered, precisely, on the degree to which no effective sociopolitical criticism was going on in the strip--certainly nothing approaching the groundbreaking politically focused material in publications such as *Satiricón*, *Humor registrado* and *Superhumor*, to refer to publications that emerged subsequently as unremittingly trenchant commentaries on national life via the vehicle of graphic humor (see "Cronología de una década de humor," Trillo and Saccomanno 163-71) or the various strips of Roberto Fontanarrosa (*Boogie, el aceitoso* and *Las aventuras de Inodoro Pereyra, el renegau*) (see my discussion of Fontanarrosa, "Fontanarrosa's Gauchomanía and Gauchophobia").

Mafalda does engage in a modicum of pithy observations on the institution of patriarchal matrimony and the sacred bourgeois family, but there is no significant critique of their ideological premises, and the scandalous reactions of parents, friends, and neighbors to some of *Mafalda's* observations are more the corrective horror of the bourgeois (for whom any dissonance is scandalous) than the site of a perception that something incisively subversive or deconstructive has been uttered. For this reason, it is necessary to view the *Mafalda* material as something like a bemused mocking of patriarchal institutions, and from there to see it as foreshadowing the ways in which Quino will, in fact, more subversively and deconstructively address heteronormativity in the one-time graphic production to which he devotes himself exclusively after, in his own words, "sending *Mafalda* on vacation" (and there is no sign that she will ever come back again).

Allow me to begin with a survey of some examples of queering in Quino's single-occasion cartoon art:

In *Déjenme inventar* (1983), a scowling hypermasculine type stands before a full-length mirror with a sledgehammer in his raised hand; in the mirror, there is an attractive and smiling woman, also holding a sledgehammer in the same raised hand. Does the man wish to destroy the feminine he sees inside him? The woman may be as equally real as the man, and the man may be her mirror image, although one would, in this case, be more inclined to believe the woman wishes to counterattack the male aggressor.

The following cartoon also involves mirror images, and focuses on a grandfather who selects, to wear out on the street, a hat that shows up in the mirror as a woman's; his granddaughter convinces him to wear one that is "translated" correctly by the mirror. After the grandfather has departed, somewhat befuddled by the experience, the woman looks at herself in the mirror and sees an old man; she walks away wondering if she will, in time, be an old man like her father/like the man in the mirror. This interplay between masculine and feminine speaks to the instability of gender identity and, surely, to how it is/may be less and less important for the elderly individual.

In *Humano se nace* (1991), a sober man of means is dressed by his valet in an impeccable business suit. As he makes his way through the streets--through a public space which his disdainful look insinuates he wishes he could control--he encounters a sloppily dressed hippie and an extravagantly dressed New Age-type woman. Arriving at his destination, another valet takes his hat, his gloves, and his briefcase, and then we see him entering a courtroom, decked out in the curly-locks wig, starched bib, and flowing robes of a judge. All dress is drag, all dress is the performance of social identity. During the military regimes, men in hippie dress were severely persecuted, since their loose cloths, inappropriate colors, long hair, peacenik jewelry marked them as "women," traitors to their gender. Equally, women whose cloths, although feminine, were gauged as hippie-like, were homologated with hippie men, and read as insufficiently feminine and perhaps (although it would not be the case with the woman in Quino's cartoon) even masculine; this, too, was viewed as a form of gender betrayal: anything smacking of the blending of the genders, of the confusion of the absolute God-given primes of Adam and Eve, was understood to be subversive. But, of course, the feminine apparel of judges (feminine because of the wig and flowing robes) is the neutralized marker of an establishment institution. This institution--which is masculinist in nature and becomes unisex with the incorporation of women judges--is questioned here for presumably lying outside the realm of gender enforcement based on an imperious coherence of the secondary features of dress.

In another cartoon sequence in *Humano se nace* (all of the strips deal, evidently, with issues of human identity, sexuality being one of them), Adam and Eve, along with the serpent, are thrown out of the Garden of Eden by an infuriated angel, who brandishes the flaming sword of the Law. As they bewail their expulsion--one assumes, for having tasted of the fruit of sexual knowledge--they see another man and a monkey being expelled by the angel in the same fashion. One perceives that their sin has been inter-species sexuality; since inter-species sexual contact is of a higher order of proscription than same-sex sexuality, it is immaterial whether the monkey is male or female.

One single-panel, full-page cartoon in *Humano se nace* is the setting of a gay/punk/rock/countercultural bar. It is difficult to be sure, but one has the sneaking suspicion that the extravagant gender-bending denizens are based in large measure on the children who are the cast of characters of *Mafalda*. Unquestionably, the waiter, who uncaps a bottle with an opener attached to a chain that is attached on the other end to a nose ring, is a dead ringer, twenty-some years later, to the bonehead Manolo of the earlier series, down to the crewcut and the protruding tongue that marks his efforts to concentrate on the task at hand. In any event, this antiestablishment and antiheterosexist environment is far removed from the petit-bourgeois family-oriented world of *Mafalda*.

One of Quino's most wicked cartoons appears in *Yo no fui!* The automotive garage is easily one of the most masculine spheres of any society, and it remains particularly so in Argentine, where small neighborhood shops are the norm, staffed by men who

resolutely enforce and all-male zone in which women are clearly unwelcome. Oscar Viale's and Alberto Alejandro's play from the 1983 season, *Camino negro* makes this brutally clear, where the garage, complete with a rape scene, becomes a terrifying metaphor for Argentine machismo. One of the features of such outre masculinity in such a space is the girly pin-up. as a stand-alone (or better, lie-alone) image, as the vehicle for an advertisement of an automotive product, as a calendar, or as both. In Quino's panel, which carries no dialogue, a middle-class man and a woman are in the garage, where a mechanic of paradigmatic masculine aspect, is working on their car. While the man watches the mechanic work (the male-male circuit of communication, whereby the man is supposed both to understand what the mechanic is doing and to be making sure he is doing it right), the woman's gaze was wandered the walls of the shop. Typically, what the woman would see are pin-ups of curvaceous women, and there are five in full view. But there is a sixth.

The sixth one, which adheres to the language of the girly pin-up, which includes a naked figure in a provocative pose, with an automotive part that has bears suggestive sexual, preferably phallic symbolism (in this case, a large wrench strategically overlaying the region of the anus), is of the mechanic himself, complete with full moustache, glasses, mechanic's cap, and tight-lipped smile; they are the same features we see as he leans over the couple's engine under the man's gaze. The fact that the man's body contrasts so graphically with those of the female models - not only is he a man, but his body mass is that of a middle-aged man who has eaten as befits his name (the pin-up is an advertisement for Car-Service Ivan Moncucco) - makes the shock of the juxtaposition and the violation of the cultural code of hypermasculinity all that much more hilarious. The disconcerted look on the woman's face is the trace of the bourgeois gaze directed at the queer.

Far less hilarious, but equally focusing on gender bending, is a panel includes in - *Qué mala es la gente!* The administrator of an enterprise is saying to a portly middle-aged woman, "-Puede pasar un momento, Señorita Dolly? Habría un cierto tema a tratar con usted" (Can you step in[to my office], Miss Dolly? There a certain matter I need to discuss with you). The certain matter her supervisor wishes to discuss with Miss Dolly is that not only is her dress not in concert with the hyperfeminine dress, hairdo, and accessorizing of the other five female employees one can study in the panel, but that she is dressed in a skirted version of her supervisor's three piece suit, down to the flower in her button hole, a matching tie, identical glasses, and matching shoes; her breasts, her earrings, and her longer hair (but not as long as that of her female companions), which serves her to hold a pencil, are all that distinguish her from him. One could read the panel as to imply that the conflict is that the woman aspires to the man's job, and so she dressed to merge with him: in this sense, sexism is involved, especially since the Argentine work place still has virtually nothing in the way of safeguards against sexual harassment. But it is also possible to view it in the specialized sexist way of being addressing the even less protected homophobia of the work place. The fact that the woman is unmarried is a significant marker; Argentine popular culture assumes unmarried women to be lesbians (as it does any woman with what can be taken as a "feminist" agenda), and this is even more the case with a portly middle-aged woman. The fact that she affects masculine dress is, therefore, iconic of her presumed deviant sexuality. This is reinforced by the way that two of her female co-workers are looking very much askance at her as she is being called into the supervisor's office.

I would like to round this discussion out with a detailed analysis of a cartoon taken from Quino's most recent production, a drawing from 2001 (as unyet gathered into a published volume) that illustrates very well where he has gone with his social commentary. One of the staples of Quino's cartoon art is the "well constituted" bourgeois family, version Argentina: this is not surprising, since for heteronormative societies, the family is what it is all about. Argentina is no different in this regard, although one ought to note that the rather hysterical enshrinement of the family (at least when viewed from the perspective of those who sought to challenge patriarchal hegemony) was high on the list of the neofascist dictatorships that served as the backdrop of Quino's first successes as a cartoonist. Indeed, from a broader perspective than the issue of just how critical of the family and patriarchal society *Mafalda* is, the mere fact of having centered clever and often rather mordant observations around--and therefore, about--the bourgeois family in Argentina was sufficient unto the day to bring censorious scrutiny upon Quino, even though he may not have risen to the level of the subversive as, for example, in the queer fiction of Manuel Puig, the dirty realism of Enrique Medina, or the feminist deconstructions of Griselda Gambaro, Reina Roffé, and Cecilia Absatz, to mention only a few of the cultural producers who suffered concrete persecution (see Foster, "The Demythification of Buenos Aires"). Any version of the family other than sentimentalized evocations necessarily contain a germ of critical analysis, and the forthright critique of the institution of the family, by virtue of its challenge to the heterosexist patriarchy, contains per force a germ of queer analysis.

In the cartoon at hand, the typical middle-class Argentine family is assembled for dinner. The earrings of the mother, her hairdo, and the wine goblets--even if they are only being used for water--indicates a level above that of the working class; both mother and father manifest the physical traits of the characters found in Quino's cartoons who are most likely to be associated with the mid-level bureaucrat. The typicalness of this family is signalled by the fact that they are eating a basic Argentine meal, *pasta* (here, specifically, spaghetti), which in itself is a subtle sign of the changes in the Argentine middle class: if before they might be eating meat, during the past decade the changes in their status has made *pasta* the main meal preferred for reasons of economic necessity; they are also drinking water rather than wine (and the working-class syphon, used to cut cheap wine, has been replaced by the plastic bottle).

With his wife looking on benevolently, the father asks the son: "Bien, y cuándo llegue a grande qué quisiera ser nuestro hombrecito" (So, then, what would our little man like to be when he grows up?). There are three patriarchal details about this innocuous dinnertime question. First, it is formulated by the father: the father speaks, while the mother listens, and it is the father's right to demand information, even if it is framed as family chit-chat. Secondly, the information demand has, in addition to implying the right of the father always to know (one family-centered campaign of the military dictators was to exhort families to know where their children were, especially at night), carries the sense of enforcing patriarchal constraints on the life-choice decisions of his children. And finally, the question is directed to "nuestro hombrecito": the pride of the patriarchal family is the male child, who is sustainedly viewed in terms of his conversion into an agent of the patriarchy--the *hombrecito* will, with proper guidance, become an *hombre*, and he will,

in turn, have his own son to enquire after and guide in a proper (that is, heteronormative) subject formation.

One can well imagine what sort of responses the father might be soliciting, what sort of responses would retain the happy look on his face, the benevolent gaze of the mother, and their continued joy over their son. We should well speculate on what response is appropriate because we, as the reader of the panel, occupy the subject position of the two parents: is our career choice appropriate to the implied ideological position from which they are coming? Certainly, for the Anglo-American reader as well as the Argentine one, any professional option is "correct," although for Argentina the desire to be President might seem odd, given the pox on the majority of occupants of that office throughout Argentine history. And in Argentina, depending on the politics of the family, the desire to be an army officer is a bit dicey, as would also the desire to be a policeman--and even more so in Argentina, given sharper class prejudices. Concomitantly, an expression of career choice--and this is always supposing that what the father is after is career choice, rather than any other social category that might occupy the nominal predicate answer the *qué* (what) of his question--that would be inappropriate to the presumed "normal" patriarchal expectations can also be imagined: say, torturer, garbage collector, CIA undercover agent. Yet, what the son provides is, indeed, an inappropriate answer.

The second panel of the cartoon exemplifies brilliantly Quino's artistic genius. First of all, the gaze is reversed: the reader is no longer the direct object of the parents' gaze, as well as the neutral observer of that gaze. The reader becomes the active subject of a gaze directed at both the child (i.e., the perspective shifts 180 degrees) and at the parents, as the reader engages in a calculus of interpretation between these two separate objects. Indeed, the way in which some languages distinguish between a third and fourth person is appropriate here: having been, in a displaced sense, the second person of the parents' gaze in the first panel, the reader becomes the first person of the second panel, and the parents become the third person of this shifted gaze: the third person is the immediate non-second person direct object of the discourse formula. Thus, the son becomes a fourth person (also called the "obviate"; see Crystal 240), an individual in the third person position, but farther removed (often nonpresent) than the immediate third person (Spanish, but not English, captures this four-person scheme with the distinction in the deictics between *éste*, *ése*, *aquél*/*aquél de más allá*).

The son's response--*gay*, which essentially means only "male homosexual" in Spanish--is problematic in a number of ways. In the first place, it is "incorrect" because it is a predicate adjective or nominal (it could be either) referring to something like a lifestyle, but not the career noun being implicitly sought. As a noun, *gay* refers to a social identity that is still intensely pariah in the view of most middle-class Argentines (and Anglo-Americans, of course). As an adjective, it is doubly problematical, because, in addition to having nothing to do with careers, it serves to characterize traits and behaviors that are pariah-like. Some adjectives might properly respond to the patriarchal inquisitiveness--such as "rich" and/or "famous," but *gay* is undoubtedly not among them: no one is brought up to be gay. It's not so much that gay parent's don't bring their children up either to be gay for whatever homophobic reason one might suppose, but that, precisely a tenet of queerness is that children should, as in everything else, find their own sexuality: straight, gay, whatever. Obviously, straight parents are categorically constrained to do everything possible to ensure that their children grow up to be straight.

The seizure-like look on the father's face is continuous with the realization that he may have failed to comply with the patriarchal imperative to ensure his son's heterosexuality. His seizure is accompanied by the objective correlative of the utter chaos that is imposed in the domestic microcosm--the dinner table--by the son's declaration (most middle-class Argentine household's are dominated by the *living-comedor*, the combined living/dining room, the patriarchal center of the household, which is in turn dominated by the television set, which is frequently viewed while eating, and serves as the vehicle of the transmission into the household of a fundamentally patriarchally dominated popular culture, not to mention direct and indirect propaganda during neofascist military regimes. The objective correlative of the chaos of the dinner table involves the mess created by the father's panic-stricken gripping and dragging of the tablecloth toward himself and the food that has been spilled in the process, some of which falls to the floor, along with broken crockery. Particularly hilarious is the way in which his plate of spaghetti ends up all over his lap and crotch (are the strands of spaghetti icons of the diminishment of his phallus in the face of his son's declaration?). And of particular note is the spilled salt from the unstopped shaker: in Western culture spilled salt is considered bad luck, something like the curse on a family that has produced a gay child.

The father's shock is complemented by the startled look on the child, who is standing on his chair, gripping its side (just as the father is gripping the tablecloth). The mother is fanning the father with a napkin and, with tears in her eye, reading aloud from the dictionary. She is shown to be upset (the tears) and fulfilling the paradigmatic maternal role of conciliation by attempting to defuse the situation with an alternative reading of *gay*. In the first place, *gay* is a word only recently incorporated into the Spanish language, with varying degrees of success in different dialects. In Argentina it has become widely known, especially in urban settings, because of the ways in which redemocratization following neofascist tyranny has meant a measure of "tolerance" for personal, including sexual difference (confirmed by Article 11 of the 1996 constitution of the city of Buenos Aires). It has also meant an often uncritical assimilation of what is perceived to be the vanguard of American life, which includes the rights of women and sexual difference. Certainly, it is the younger generation that is more likely to adopt postdictatorship parameters, including an acceptance of--if not an adherence to--queer issues. Of course, the son in the cartoon is far too young to have exercised much of a discriminating choice, and so one is left both to assume how he has acquired the word and exactly what it means. Young children often use words they have heard but of whose meaning they are unsure or ignorant.

The mother's verbal attempts at conciliation play of the way in which children often do not know what words they use mean. Thus she consults an English-Spanish dictionary, and she reads a definition that insists on the primary meanings of *gay*--to wit, the Spanish equivalents of "happy," "festive," "carefree," "delighted," "good humored," "catchy" (it is doubtful there is a Spanish-English dictionary that contains the word *gay*). Homophobic decrying of the expropriation of "good, normal" words is very much of a willful ignorance of how the lexicon of a language evolves, and it is in evidence here as the mother wishes to distract attention from the

current primary meaning of the word to designate gay male (at least in Spanish), while it is certain that the father knows all too well what that primary meaning of the word is as it has become incorporated into the everyday vocabulary of Argentine (or, better, Buenos Aires) Spanish. And, too, even if the son does not really know the meaning of the word he is using, it is highly unlikely he has heard it used in Spanish in any way other than with the meaning of which the father is emphatically conscious.

Quino's strip queers Argentine bourgeois values in its perception of the way in which the word *gay* means (its very use in a self-attributory fashion is enough of a bombshell), what it means, and what it means to subscribe to it as something to be when one grows up. It queers Argentine bourgeois values in the demonstration of how it cannot yet, despite a public ideology of tolerance, be really assimilated into everyday life: this is demonstrated by the need for the mother to attempt to divert the father's attention toward alternative and nonthreatening meanings. It also queers Argentine bourgeois values in the way in which it constitutes one more example of the system of hypocrisy that controls all aspects of Argentine social life. The major goal of Quino's graphic humor is to demonstrate this truth; in recent years his work has become bleaker and bleaker, more mordant, and, I would insist, therefore more eloquent in the coherence of its critique.

Quino, to the best of my knowledge, never publicly defended any version of queer culture, and he has never aligned himself with any political or social movement; it would be unreasonable to view him as anything of a spokesperson for lesbigay liberation--even if it is reasonable to assume that his manifest commitment to human dignity would include such support, if only implicitly. Additionally, none of his cartoons really addresses anything that is part of the lesbigay agenda in either the West in general or in Argentina specifically.

Yet, what I have done here is to show that this one medium of popular culture, graphic humor, can pursue its analytical critique of social issues via utilization of a queering perspective--that is, a perspective that questions in a principled way the closed system of patriarchal and heteronormative values. In the case of the cartoon that I have analyzed so extensively, Quino might not recognize all of the elements I have identified: the critic necessarily sees beyond what the creator may claim to "have meant," which is part of the critic's function and part of the critic's contribution to the semiotic process of culture. But the point is that, by seeing a queer perspective in this cartoon, one can see how effective it is in questioning one iconic example of patriarchal attitudes, those relating to career choices, in Argentina.

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¹ By "heteronormativity" I understand the imperative of straight reproductive sexuality, sustained through the confluence of monogamic fidelity, romantic love, exclusive sentimental investment, and multiply binding matrimony; by "compulsive" I understand the unquestioned and unquestionable imperative for all members of society (with the exception of a few who are--i.e., prisoners--punished by being excluded from it) to engage in straight reproductive sexuality. For some sectors, it is possible, under unique circumstances to opt out of compulsory heteronormativity (i.e., some religious people, such as Catholic priests and nuns), although for large sectors of society those who opt out through religious orders, through the decision, even if duly married, not to have children, or by refusing to marry are considered pitifully "abnormal" or even "queer." Obviously, in Latin America religiously driven opting out of compulsory heteronormativity for religious means becomes a particularly complex issue. Finally, one understands that the queer, as the counterpoint to compulsory heteronormativity, does not only include sexual matters or matters of sexual desire, but rather an entire range of social dynamics--dress and body appearance, language, ways of being in the world, professions, regionality, ethnic and social class, race--that are homogeneously correlated with sexuality as the dominant discourse of our society.

² The best information available on Quino is to be found at his website: www.clubcultura.com/clubhumor/quino/espa-nol/intro.html.