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Violated Frames: Armando Bó and Isabel Sarli's Sexploits
by Victoria Ruétalo (review)

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pands other key books on Latin American and Mexican queer literature such as Sifuentes-Jáuregui's *Transvestism, Masculinity, and Latin American Literature* (Palgrave, 2002) and *The Avowal of Difference: Queer Latino American Narratives* (SUNY Press, 2014), Domínguez-Ruvalcaba's *Modernity and the Nation in Mexican Representations of Masculinity* (Palgrave, 2007), and Irwin's *Mexican Masculinities* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003). There is some overlap between Bisbey's book and Ana Alejandra Robles Ruiz's *El arcoíris de la disidencia: novela gay en México* (Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 2019), strictly in relation to the analysis of Zapata, Calva, and Blanco, although not in terms of the focus on humor. The careful attention to literary texts makes Bisbey's study different from other monographs that center queer Mexican culture and performance, such as Laura G. Gutiérrez's *Performing Mexicanidad: Vendidas y Cabareteras on the Transnational Stage* (University of Texas Press, 2010) or the expansive bibliography in Spanish by Antonio Marquet. Bisbey is to be commended for this very successful and very generative book.

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RUÉTALO, VICTORIA. *Violated Frames: Armando Bó and Isabel Sarli's Sexploits*. U of California P, 2022, 264 pp.

Victoria Ruétalo has written an exceptional work of Latin American sexploitation film history in *Violated Frames: Armando Bó and Isabel Sarli's Sexploits*. Carefully researched, theoretically bold, and elegantly written, the book is a page-turner, a captivating history of Latin American adult cinema. *Violated Frames* focuses on the legendary film couple, director Armando Bó and actress Isabel Sarli. Ruétalo engages with a torn film archive fragmented by decades of state censorship, military dictatorships, and preservation mismanagement to examine “remnants of relocated materials to debate questions of performance, authorship, stardom, sexuality, and circulation in the Sarli–Bó films” (3). *Violated Frames* constitutes a vital contribution to exploitation cinema, a much-undervalued subfield in Latin American film scholarship.

The considerable significance of this book stems from the scarcity of critical literature and primary documentation of the state's responses to the Sarli–Bó films in a context of political turmoil, proscription, censorship, and

militarism in Argentina (1955–1984). Jorge Abel Martín’s *Los films de Armando Bó con Isabel Sarli* (1981), Octavio Getino’s *Cine argentino: modernidad y vanguardias* (1998) and *Cine argentino: entre lo posible y lo deseable* (2005) are key scholarly precedents. However, *Violated Frames* is the first exhaustive analysis of how Sarli–Bó’s experimental cinema dared to reinvent social realism through a camp aesthetic and naïve erotica that conquered local and international publics. The book explores multiple angles concerning the Sarli–Bó cooperation, from the birth of Bó’s authorial signature of fast and low-cost productions, spontaneous realism, and new “clumsy montage” (8) to the role of censorship in delaying film production as much as creating anticipation.

The story of an archival loss that recorded the censorship of all films screened in Argentina during an age of strict control is a salient concern of the book. The disappearance of a large number of documents concerning the Sarli–Bó legacy makes it difficult to investigate the cultural politics of screen sexuality in 1960s and 1970s Argentina. And yet Ruétalo puts together an extensive collection of press clippings, surviving film versions, press releases, official laws, and surviving secondary literature to write a provocative work that will fascinate scholars in fields where marginal cinema, political science, and gender and sexuality studies intersect.

Part I organizes the first two chapters under the subtitle “Bodies and Archives.” It begins with an investigation of the political context under which the Sarli–Bó partnership operated, and closes with a discussion of the challenging conditions of undertaking film research in Argentina due to the unfortunate circumstances of its audiovisual archives. Chapter one discusses the period between 1955 and 1973, the years of Juan Domingo Perón’s political proscription and exile, military governments, and institutional instability, all sociopolitical aspects that impacted the production of twenty-three of the twenty-seven Sarli–Bó films. Bó’s filmmaking practices, the birth of youth movements, the films’ popular audience, and the aesthetics of “belonging and excess” configure one of the key theoretical proposals in the book: Peronism’s “affective mode” (30). Through a history of a popular spectatorship of “working-class males” (36), the chapter traces an affective commonality between Perón’s movement and the male audience subscribed to Sarli–Bó films. The political place of female nudity on the screen and the social attitudes toward marginal cinema constitute a significant debate about popular culture and taste formation. Chapter two tells a riveting story of the “disappearance”

of the files contained in the Ente de Calificación Cinematográfica [Film Classification Board], the body from which censorship was exercised through various mechanisms that included partial cuts and prohibitions under Law 18,019 of 1969. The archive's vanishing act happened during the late 1990s and evidences an act of technological mismanagement and negligence that ended in the destruction of paper documents, together with all official traces of a dark period in Argentine cultural and political history. In her "most self-reflective chapter" (61) about methodological approaches, Ruétalo formulates the notion of "bad archive," a tool for studying the past by acknowledging incompleteness and the limits imposed by loss.

Part II, "Censoring Bodies in Labor and Leisure," groups the last three chapters, which render an in-depth look at the Sarli-Bó filmography and its reception in local and global contexts. Part II deepens the analytical focus on film censorship processes and the trajectory of Sarli's body through its diverse sexualized representations. Chapter 3 opens with a striking analysis of the song "The Incredible Adventures of Mr. Scissors" by the Argentine rock band Sui Generis. Ruétalo engages with the 1974 hit to argue that the task of the censor implied an act of abuse, a violation of the pictures' frames, insinuating the main argument behind the book's title and establishing a link between censorship and torture. Cultural prohibition and body aggression became mechanisms of both symbolic and physical violence that seemingly predicted the brutal oncoming dictatorship of 1976–1983. The chapter discusses the federal institutionalization of film censorship from the 1950s to 1984 by reviewing a series of Sarli-Bó productions through the distinct lenses of race, class, and gender; the films *India* (1959) and *Intimacies of a Prostitute* (1974) are discussed at length. Through the difficulties of production and release, the chapter shows the influence of the Catholic Church and the state in shaping the cinema industry, influencing taste, and legislating on-screen sexuality.

Chapter four evaluates the different affective portrayals of the working-class male body. The chapter uncovers the 1958 film *Thunder among the Leaves'* melodramatic treatment of capitalist exploitation in rural settings, to then focus on the movie *Meat* (1968), where Ruétalo critiques Bó's complicated portrayal of plebeian male sexual violence against female workers in the context of a precarious assembly-line job. Finally, chapter five explores the reasons behind the commercial success of the famous film partnership. Bó's cinematographic techniques to exhibit Sarli's voluptuous body on the screen reveal

a paradoxical phenomenon. Objectification and liberation demonstrate the contradictions of his cinematic project. Ruétalo shows how the instances of erotic exacerbation in moments of nudity create autonomous moments in the films' storylines. She calls this mechanism "suspended instances of affective charges," a series of "jolts" that produced a "familiar brand of images that draw in audiences by galvanizing a multiplicity of possible affective responses" (158). Sarli posing, dancing, bathing in the water or masturbating in nature in films such as the aforementioned *Thunder among the Leaves* (1958) and *India* (1960), *Naked in the Sun* (1969), *Fever* (1972), and *Arden Summer* (1973), among others, fabricated "affective networks" that led to the politization of the female body in an era of revolutionary politics and sexual liberation (161).

Violated Frames continues a line of inquiry opened in *Latsploitation, Exploitation Cinemas, and Latin America* (2009) the volume edited by Victoria Ruétalo and Dolores Tierney that consists of a bright reconceptualization of the defining features of exploitation cinema in the region. *Violated Frames* gives rise to an entire set of new and dynamic directions to address the history of erotic films in Latin America. A rigorous account of the Sarli-Bó exploitation films that parallels foundational works such as "*Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*": *A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* by Eric Schaefer, *Violated Frames* is a multidimensional feminist inquiry that rethinks the intersections of nation, politics, gender, and sexuality and that will stimulate Latin Americanist film scholarship for years to come.

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