Introduction

The Signature of a "Bad Cinema"

In the first decade of the 2000s, during one of my research trips to Argentina, I was sitting with friends in a tango bar, listening to a nostalgic *milonga* being played by a local band. I was exhausted, trying to find the Museo del Cine, which had moved locations, and looking for a way to connect with Isabel Sarli, for an interview as a foundation for my first exploration into her stardom. Deflated, but enjoying the sounds of the melancholic *bandoneón*, I noticed that my friend turned to the person next to her and asked: how can we obtain Isabel Sarli's phone number? A seemingly naïve question in an unlikely place, but the words, like a game of telephone, made their way from person to person through the intimate neighborhood establishment. And by the end of the night, I had the number. At this point in time, Sarli did not really do many interviews and only indulged me by phone. She still lived in Martínez, a suburb of Buenos Aires, with her many pets and two adopted children. The conversation I managed to secure was enough to write the article first published in the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* that deepened for me a passion that took over two decades to develop into *Violated Frames: Armando Bó and Isabel Sarli's Sexploits*.

The anecdote settles what I suspected when I first started this journey: the popular celebrity was not only still relevant in Argentina but had also reached another status. Everyone, young and old, in that tango

bar in the barrio that night remembered her legacy. For Argentines, Isabel Sarli was a name synonymous with sex. But she also represented the popular culture of decades past, particularly one of the darkest periods in the nation's history. Ever since she became Miss Argentina in 1955, her image and success have resurfaced in a long list of recognitions. Internationally she was an inspiration: her poses circulated on stamps in Japan;[1] the Chinese poet Wu Jiang dedicated an eclogue to her;[2] she was recognized by the Association of Film Critics of Mexico for being the most brilliant and discussed actress;[3] and she was honored with *carioca* and *paulista* citizenship for films made in Rio and São Paulo.[4] She was invited to film festivals all over the world from Colombia to France, Paraguay to Spain. Even at an old age and well after her retirement, she became an esteemed guest at the Festival de Cine de Guadalajara in 2008, and a retrospective of her work was featured in 2010 at the Film Society of Lincoln Center in New York. In Argentina, there were and continue to be many more instances that memorialize her inspiration—a rock band Isabel Sarly founded in 1986, the 2002 summer clothing line by designer Ona Saez with the star's images on T-shirts titled "South American Woman"—all featured in my first article. I have since discovered more instances, such as fridge magnets from local artisan markets and her embellished poses on the Nac & Pop's storefronts, a fast-food vendor that opened its doors in 2010 throughout Buenos Aires. They handed out a five-peso coupon in the form of a bill with none other than Sarli's image from *Carne* (*Meat*, 1968). In the popular culture world of Nac & Pop, the diva was worthy of a medium-shot image on coupons. The same one is reproduced on the truck of Frigorífico Fura, a meat-packing company fully owned by Argentine capital, as its logo explains, 100 percent "Argentine meat." All the aforementioned examples celebrate Sarli as a truly authentic Argentine myth, revalorized as part of everyday reality of a national popular culture.

Ever since 1956, when actor-producer-director Armando Bó and actress-producer-star Isabel "Coca" Sarli began their film experiments together, they provoked audiences by featuring explicit nudity that with time increasingly became more audacious, constantly challenging contemporary norms.[5] Their Argentine films shaped a growing fan base with a popular following extending beyond national borders. Between 1956 and 1981, Bó made twenty-seven films with Sarli. They included her first nude scene in *El trueno entre las hojas* (*Thunder among the Leaves*, 1958), a film that launched Sarli's stardom, and ended with the release in 1984 of *Insaciable* (*Insatiable*), following the dictatorship

that had prohibited its exhibition, which finally happened three years after Bó's death.[6] Bó and Sarli made fast, independent, and cheap films popular throughout Latin America, parts of Asia, in Hispanic theatres and sexploitation circuits in the United States and European markets, a circulation that continues today through online versions of their work. Throughout their almost three decades of collaborative work, the duo fought the censors and critics to make rather unique erotic movies that were unlike any other in the history of Argentina, as well as holding a special place in world cinema.

This volume gathers the scholarship on the pair and introduces new approaches to explore their overall works, within the explicit Argentine context where censorship and regulation played a crucial role. *Violated Frames* mourns the loss of an important Film Censorship Board archive, which would have shed insights on Argentina's onscreen sexuality norms. Instead, this book proposes to develop a new, roughly constructed, or "bad" archive by exploring remnants of relocated materials to debate questions of performance, authorship, stardom, sexuality, and circulation in the Sarli-Bó films. Through the case of Sarli and Bó, the film historian can assemble a new history that begins in the nation and extends beyond it. The first part of the book, "Bodies and Archives," merges the various contexts for how to amass a sexuality archive with different bodies in post-1955 Argentina. The second part, "Censoring Bodies in Labor and Leisure," begins with the context of the new laws that expanded strict regulation of what was permitted in public and onscreen, moving on to explore the duo's films through the lens of bodies engaged in labor and leisure.

BECOMING AN AUTEUR: RISKY STYLE, PROVOCATIVE MODE OF PRODUCTION

"In all of Armando Bó's work, when all is said and done, coherence makes him seem like the only true Argentine auteur."[7]

Armando Bó's onscreen career was launched during the classical Argentine film period of modern studios, film stars, and elaborate film shoots: what was known as the "golden age." As an actor, he appeared on the silver screen in national productions from the late 1930s on, in such movies as *Ambición* (*Ambition*, Adelqui Millar, 1938), *Y mañana serán hombres* (Carlos Borcosque, 1939), *Fragata Sarmiento* (Borcosque, 1940), *Melodías de América* (*Melodies of America*, Eduardo Morera, 1941), and *La cabalgata del circo* (*Circus Cavalcade*, Mario Soffici,

1944), films which won over national and regional markets. By 1944, however, the Argentine film industry was on the verge of collapse.[8] The studios' fates had changed with Mexico's replacement of Argentina as the film-producing nation in Spanish America. War politics influenced the availability of raw film stock from the United States. By the time General Juan Domingo Perón came into power in 1946, there were already strong protectionist policies to shield the national industry, mainly through investment on production and with guaranteed exhibition quotas.[9] The industry did not thrive under Perón and continued to decline; but the waning of the studios allowed for independents to grow.

In 1948, Bó founded the production company SIFA (Sociedad Independiente Filmadora Argentina), after acquiring the rights for *Pelota de trapo*, a story about a poor boy who becomes a soccer celebrity, based on the writings of sports journalist Ricardo Lorenzo. Bó starred in and produced *Pelota de trapo* (*Ragged Football,* 1948), which was directed by classical film pioneer Leopoldo Torres Ríos.[10] As an independent and small company, SIFA's films were shot on the streets, and represented the tastes and desires of the popular classes. Through SIFA, Bó launched the career of Torres Ríos's son Leopoldo Torre Nilsson by producing many of his early films, including *Días de odio* (*Days of Hate*, 1953), a tale based on a Jorge Luis Borges story. The arduous trajectory of *La tigra* (*The Tigress*), a 1953 example also directed by Torre Nilsson, foreshadowed the eventual censorship challenges that Bó faced throughout the rest of his career with Sarli. Due to its lesbian undertones, *The Tigress* was banned and never fully premiered. All of the other films produced by SIFA were popular, generally based on sports, featuring Bó's athletic talents or other topics relating to local experiences in the barrio. Bó's roles as producer and actor helped him transition to directing his first feature with his star and muse, Isabel Sarli.

Laura Podalsky calls Bó's contribution a "cottage industry," referring to the small and often informally organized business model he developed with the production of over two dozen films based on a formula that he refined with time, using a regular cast and crew. Sandwiched between the studio industrial model and the new auteur practices, Bó's mode of production was very different, an amalgamation of both, while also unique in other ways. The fall of Perón's government in 1955 brought a change to the already ailing industry. The new Instituto Nacional de Cine (National Film Institute) or INC began to play an ever-increasing role in the shifting reality.[11] More foreign films were imported, and the weakening of the studio system opened a new space for independent

cinema.[12] When Arturo Frondizi came into power in 1958, the INC, headed by Narciso Machinandiarena, began to support the work of independents like Bó and SIFA. Consequently, a new generation of filmmakers emerged, known as the "Generation of 1960." The New Argentine Cinema developed by independent auteurs critiqued modernity through a focus on the city, as Laura Podalsky explains in her book *Specular City: Transforming Culture, Consumption, and Space in Buenos Aires, 1955–1973* (2004).[13] Bó took another route. He was an experimenter and risk taker with a different vision in mind. With the release of *Thunder among the Leaves* in 1958, he homed in on a new formula of independent films featuring nudity, produced completely outside any state funding model. His autonomy gave him more freedom to develop a set of films that would never have been possible within the state apparatus of the INC.

While Bó established SIFA early on in his production career, collaborations with Sarli were of an equal partnership after the huge success of *Thunder among the Leaves*. Sarli owned 50 percent of every film she ever made with Bó; she worked as a producer drawing on her accounting skills and taking advantage of her fluency in English.[14] What began as a socially inspired cinema with realism at its base grew into at times seemingly preposterous topics with only one function: to feature his muse and partner. Bó worked within the ideals of his own star system. Most features, except their first made together, revolved around his starlet, whom he and the public "discovered" after her debut.[15]

Unlike the examples taken from classical cinema, where stars were empowered through their appeal within a studio system that bought and sold their features, the Sarli-Bó case highlighted the muse excessively, and it was almost parodic of the whole system itself. In some ways, the official acknowledgment of the true partnership of their work reflects the ideals of a star system that empowered Sarli to cultivate her own career within the partnership. Incongruous with other examples, Sarli's role in the film enterprise was unique in production history. Their partnership in business and their exceptional brand of films that revolved around star attraction led me to veer away from the study of the auteur. For clearly, Sarli, as a star, was very much a part of the brand. As their work grew together, she contributed her own dialogue and camera suggestions. She was a force and inspiration behind the camera as well as in front of it, keeping the company going. Since both Sarli and Bó were inextricably linked to the brand of films they made, throughout *Violated Frames*, I will refer to them as Sarli-Bó or Bó-Sarli

to reflect the equally weighted role both auteur and star played in their common project. Their films, meanwhile, exhibit a unique film style that both of them had a hand in building, but more importantly while they each tried to make films outside their collaborative enterprise, they were unsuccessful and eventually returned to producing exclusively as a power couple.[16]

Regardless of their collective path, Armando Bó was a holistic auteur who fully contributed to the enterprise. He not only directed his own films but starred in them, produced them, eventually wrote the scripts or developed the story ideas, and composed the melodramatic and romantic music under the pseudonym of Eligio Ayala Morín. The arguments for the films were at first based on literary scripts that eventually developed a freer form. His first two productions were written by the famous Paraguayan Boom author Augusto Roa Bastos.[17] *India* (1960) was cowritten by José Martínez; and he adapted three other works: *Y el demonio creó a los hombres* (*Heat*, 1960), *Favela* (1961), and *Intimidades de una cualquiera* (*Intimacies of a Prostitute*, 1974). The rest were all penned by Bó.[18] The early productions used scripts; however, the written form eventually disappeared, evolving into a filmmaking process that just began with an idea and allowed actors to improvise the dialogue with some direction from Bó, adding to their spontaneity and confirming his trademark.

The new approach of foregoing written directions, developed after *La tentación desnuda* (*Naked Temptation*, 1966), required the cooperation of a cast that was comfortable with the unconventional method.[19] The cast always starred Isabel Sarli, playing characters each with different simple names and similar, usually humble traits. The director incorporated the medium shot as the most commonly used for capturing his starlet's most important feature: her breasts.[20] Armando Bó or his son Victor Bó costarred with Sarli as her onscreen lover. They relied on the same actors (Ernesto Baéz, Mario Casado, Santiago Gómez Cou, Miguel Ángel Olmos, Juan José Míguez, and Jorge Barreiro), who generally played modest working-class men. Occasionally, they featured notable local stars such as Alba Mujica, Jorge Porcel, Pepe Arias, Fanny Navarro, or José Marrone.

Similarly, they counted on a consistent crew; cinematographers trained in the studio system, like Julio Lavera, Américo Hoss, and Ricardo Younis all brought a practice of studio photography with a balance of frontal and back lighting to produce the shot.[21] Francisco Mirada was the main cameraman. When Bó bought a modern Cameflex

camera, Mirada and he were able to experiment more.[22] For instance, they created in-camera superimpositions by returning the shot and continuing to film on top of the previous images. The infamous masturbation scene in *Fiebre* (*Fever*, 1972), discussed in detail in chapter 5, is accomplished using this method. Rosalino Caterbetti, the editor, helped Bó create a look that was fragmented and defied the rules of continuity. Orlando Viloni and Jorge Bruno provided the melodramatic makeup for Sarli's excessive appearance; Paco Jamandreu was her preferred costume designer, enhancing her extravagant star persona even when she played humble characters.[23] As music had a central role, generally alleviating the chaotic images, many popular and folk singers made appearances, such as Luis Alberto del Paraná y los Paraguayos and Los Iracundos. Bó was mainly an experimenter and risk taker from early on.

There are certain stylistic elements that make his films easily recognizable and signpost his own authorial signature. Bó's style entailed fast productions made cheaply with a crew and cast accustomed to his mode. The low cost meant that scenes were shot in one take. Inexpensive budgets and tight shooting schedules made elaborate transitions and multiple takes impractical. Bó tells an anecdote about shooting in South Africa. *The Virgin Goddess* (1975), a movie that was not directed or produced by him, stars both him and Sarli.[24] The director, Dirk de Villiers, relied on conventional methods. Bó recalls feeling anxious about the South African director's work ethic. De Villiers looked through his visor for a long time as he set up each shot.[25] What bothered Bó and contrasted with his own mode were the long shoots that repeated different takes until they were perfect.

In his own filmmaking process, Bó only had money for one take and would risk all by hoping that the shot would turn out just right. On the other hand, there were other reasons for not overstaging the shot. Bó was practicing a type of realism that could only be fostered with spontaneity. He was a believer in producing rather simple stories that spoke about everyday circumstances in the most impromptu and natural way. To achieve realism, he overextended himself to get the right shot, making people engage in actions as they would in real life, meaning he preferred setting up realistic situations rather than faking them. In part this drive explains why he eventually gave up writing scripts. He aimed to set up events so that they unfolded in front of the camera without interfering. For instance, he arranged the fight scene between Sarli and Alba Mujica in *Sabaleros* (*The Shad Fishermen*, 1959) by building up each side with comments about the other. Once the shooting of the

scene began, Mujica was very agitated, and upon staging it, kept shoving Sarli's face into the water. Bó encouraged the scene to play out. They were performing it in a river that collected untreated sewage. Bó became obsessed with the realism of the shot and did not realize that Sarli was almost unconscious. She contracted hepatitis from the scene. The drive for a documentary feel in the early films continued and even took on a more familiar aspect with the inclusion of Super 8 footage from their international travels to reinforce its homemade impression.[26]

The cheap and fast modes of production resulted in the lack of continuity in the visual look of the films but also allowed for spontaneity in new ways. As Rodrigo Fernández and Denise Nagy argue:

> for Armando, the means and ends of the tools were dissociated; specificity did not exist; the limits produced distance. The shot is not cut, but overlaps. The editing does not omit but is redundant. The image in movement does not proportion continuity but exposes the fragment.[27]

What the authors mean here is that Bó's excessive style is both overabundant and fragmented. His ability to bring together seeming contradictions and yet produce a somewhat coherent film is a remarkable talent. It was a product of the blending of two systems, an old one with a set of norms and a new one that challenged norms at the level of style, mode of production, and content. Discontinuity in regard to editing and cinematography is the product of his quick filming techniques. The editing and montage sequences, clean cuts, and smooth transitions implicit in classical style are generally absent in Bó's version, an effect created by their devoted editor Caterbetti.

The awkward and clumsy montage in some ways is more akin to the auteur aesthetic of European cinema of the 1960s, a style that resisted coherent structure and perfection. Bó, like the French New Wave directors, mocked the elemental rules of continuity. But unlike the French auteurs, he made it look coherent even when it wasn't. From early on, since Sarli's first nude reveal, the fragmentation and visual discordance shows the true nature of the scene, a style particularly visible in the moments of sex onscreen, elaborated more fully in chapter 5. What makes scenes such as this first one seamless is the music that glosses over the fragmentation. Rodolfo Kuhn, a fellow director who belonged to the Generation of 1960, argues that despite all the many contradictions, Bó is rather coherent as a director. Kuhn believes Bó's fragmented effect is as impactful as Jean Luc Godard's *Breathless* (France, 1960).[28] One reason why Bó ignores the rules can be attributed to censorship.

Censorship made Bó's films easy targets, with the elimination of offensive shots and entire scenes. However, from *Thunder among the Leaves* onward, he established a way of allowing censorship-mandated cuts to happen, while at the same time still creating the anticipation of seeing more of Sarli's body, a strategy unique in his mode of sexploitation.

The films' content had two distinctive features: first, a social cinema that exposed exploitation, corruption, and injustice, and second, an element of sexuality, through Sarli's body, that grew to become the main attraction. From the beginning, innocent themes about unrequited love in *The Shad Fishermen* were paired with more substantial social topics exposing the exploitation of workers. Sarli's nude reveal in their first feature is seemingly dissociated from the story about human exploitation in a sawmill in the hidden jungles of Paraguay. Following *Thunder among the Leaves*, the films began to feature Sarli in more prominent roles, while still not promoting her to be an active agent in the story but rather a victim of circumstance. For instance, in *Heat* she moves from lover to lover in search of real connection but as a victim who is not empowered in her own future. Slowly, she begins to embrace her onscreen presence and adopt more powerful roles. In *Favela* she becomes a film star and works her way out of the Rio shantytowns. Her characters grew stronger in films like *Los días calientes* (*The Hot Days*, 1965) and *Naked Temptation*, where revenge for the death of her brother in the former and lover in the latter take place. In *The Hot Days*, she returns to El Tigre, a gateway town to the rivers and wetlands of the Paraná Delta with a fruit harbor, to find out what happened to her brother. She uses her sexuality to discover the true identity of her brother's killer and then manages to enact her revenge. Similarly, in *Naked Temptation* she avenges the men who have hunted her for half of the story and killed her lover. In later films, sexual norms become the focus of the story, beginning with *Meat*, *El sexo y el amor* (*Sex and Love*, 1974), and *La mujer de mi padre* (*My Father's Wife*, 1968), where father and son struggle for the prostitute's love. Notable in this period are *Fever*, about the love for a horse, and stories about prostitution, nymphomaniacs, homosexuality, and sexual dysfunction. In *Furia infernal* (*Ardent Summer*, 1973) Bárbara avenges the murder of her husband and her kidnapping, weaving a plan that eventually kills her captor and frees his victims.

Sergio Wolf provides a convincing analysis of the trajectory of their films, defining their work within three distinct phases. The first, encompassing their early four movies, is about setting limits and establishing the basic themes of exaggeration, crudeness, and exoticism, with a strong

link to classical filmmaking through the convention of melodrama.[29] The second, what he calls the transition, begins with *Favela*, filmed in the shantytowns of Rio, and ends with *My Father's Wife*, about the struggle between father and son for the same woman, ironically starring Bó and his son Victor. The productions from this period are made quickly and cheaply, eventually discarding the script and giving music a more prominent role.[30] Morality ensures a contradictory position. As Kuhn has explained, the Sarli-Bó works were abundant with clear moral ideals.[31] And yet morality, as it makes its appearance through the dialogue and references to God, is continually being contradicted. The final phase comes after the release of *Meat*, and is defined by excess, new topics relating to sexuality, constant flashbacks, and indulgent music.[32]

Wolf's definitions can also be couched within the development of the sexploitation genre in the United States, which fits perfectly in the three phases described and adds another context that informed Sarli-Bó's path. The early films fit within the "nudie cutie" era, which featured nudity for its own sake. The subgenres of roughies, kinkies, and ghoulies dominated from 1964 to 1968, adding more violent and nonnormative sexuality to the offerings, like those found in Wolf's transition.[33] For example, *La leona* (*The Lioness*, 1964) is about the kidnapping of Susana by exploited workers at her husband's company. The film shows an interracial kissing scene between Sarli and Monsueto. By the late 1960s, classic soft-core movies included more sexuality and nudity, and daring proposals.[34] To map the development of sexploitation onto the description provided by Wolf makes sense: Bó-Sarli were responding to the demands of the world market. Also important to take into consideration are the laws that were developing in Argentina to control the amount of sex onscreen seen in theaters. In 1957, law 62/57 helped to centralize the film industry and allow for independent producers to grow. By the middle of the sixties (1963–66), new laws began to limit the possibilities of exhibiting sex onscreen, while already by the end of the decade (1968–69) law 18.019 brought the harshest regulation, permitting the prohibition of films. All three contexts disclose the competing pressures on the duo to adapt to national and international expectations.

The use of location shooting, mainly in marginal areas, identifies one of the main features of the Bó-Sarli productions. The shift from simulated spaces inside studios to the outdoors was common in the postwar years, particularly the 1950s, with the arrival of Italian neorealism that brought shooting into the streets. By the mid-1950s, the technological advances (lighter-weight cameras and more sensitive film stock) made

the shift an inevitable and cheaper option for independent newcomers like Bó, since on-location shooting required no rental fees of studio space or highly lit elaborate and modern interiors. From the first films, the shooting locations were intimately connected to the funding of the projects and their status as coproductions. In this way, the duo traveled throughout the region, making movies in specific locations, some of which were in marginal filmmaking countries with underdeveloped film industries, such as Paraguay (*Thunder among the Leaves* and *La burrerita de Ypacaraí* [*The Girl Ass-Keeper of Ypacaraí*, 1962]), Uruguay (*Heat*), Venezuela (*Lujuria tropical* [*Tropical Lust*, 1964]), and Panama (*Desnuda en la arena* [*Naked on the Sand*, 1968]). Others were in more established filmmaking nations, like Mexico (*La diosa impura* [*The Impure Goddess*, 1964]) and Brazil (*Favela*, *The Lioness*, *Extasis tropical* [*Tropical Ecstasy*, 1978], and *Embrujada* [*Bewitched*, 1976]). In Argentina, location shooting took place in the provinces of Buenos Aires, the Alto Paraná, El Tigre, Tierra del Fuego, and other remote areas. Even the productions that didn't have funding from an international partner were filmed in some of their favorite exotic places, such as the border between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay at Iguazu Falls (*India*, *My Father's Wife*, and *Bewitched*). Marginal locations became a trademark of their cinema, easily integrated into the social dimension of the context but also, in its commercial aspect, appealing to the people in the whole country. By exploring settings in rural or natural landscapes, they were able to exploit the connection of the star to nature, as bodies and sexuality found their home in awe-inspiring surroundings.

From the very first collaboration, the Sarli-Bó productions were made with international private funding, facilitating their early entry into foreign markets, filming in exotic locations, and building a fan base abroad. On the other hand, the connections they established with key players both in the region and the United States helped open their work to new audiences.[35] In 1961, after the filming of *The Girl Ass-Keeper of Ypacaraí*, a representative from Columbia Pictures Argentina came to see Bó and bought the rights to distribute *Thunder among the Leaves* to all of Latin America. Around the same time, while on a trip to Central America and the United States, the pair met Orestes Trucco, who purchased the rights to distribute *The Shad Fishermen*, *India*, *Heat*, and later *The Girl Ass-Keeper of Ypacaraí*, the last of which premiered in New York on 4 July 1962.[36] The screenings in New York were all a success. When Columbia Pictures International, interested in their success abroad, then requested another film, they promised them *Tropical Lust*, which they had already

agreed to produce in Venezuela after signing a contract with Lorenzo González Izquierdo, a local businessman. Sarli and Bó had toured all of Venezuela with *The Girl Ass-Keeper of Ypacaraí*, creating momentum for the star before releasing the Venezuelan coproduction.[37] The contract for *Tropical Lust* began their relationship with Columbia Pictures International, which was maintained on a film-by-film basis until the end, although it was never guaranteed Columbia would distribute all of their films. That would change with the release of *Fuego*, which consolidated their relationship with Columbia Pictures, especially in the late 1960s, at the height of their careers. When Bó realized that *Fuego* would not be released in Argentina, he decided to take it to New York, where it premiered and played for fourteen weeks on Broadway and Forty-Second Street at the Rialto Theatre. It took fourteen days to make, cost US $15,000, and made over $1 million in New York alone, according to the anecdotes.[38] The international focus meant that certain standards had to be maintained. For instance, their films used *tú* for the Spanish "you" instead of the usual Argentine *vos*, common in the vernacular.[39] Furthermore, different contexts required special concessions. In Japan during the 1970s, all the Sarli-Bó films screened, but the nudes were covered with spots in the pubic areas. Certain films entered different parts of Europe. One can still find French and Italian versions of *Fever*, *Fuego*, and *Intimacies of a Prostitute*. As Adrian Smith notes, there were plans to export four productions (*Naked Temptation*, *The Hot Days*, *Tropical Lust*, and *La mujer del zapatero* [*The Shoemaker's Wife*, 1968]) to the United Kingdom in the mid-1960s through Crompton Films.[40] However, as his research has uncovered, Crompton submitted the first one to the British Board of Film censors in 1966. *Naked Temptation* was refused the certificate and thus never released.[41] Crompton's inability to exploit the film brought an end to the whole project in the UK. The different distribution paths and their failure abroad invite new possibilities for further research projects.

In Argentina the Bó-Sarli films are generally disregarded as international and commercial, having little to do with the national reality. While there is truth that the duo played an important role in the regional circulation of Hispanic cinema and later entered the sexploitation markets transnationally, most of the films actually refer to the context of Argentina. They were originally made for a national market with an eye to attracting a more regional one. Therefore, *Violated Frames* begins in that nation: first due to the strong ties to the national and regional contexts that their cinema makes, but second because the Sarli-Bó work

is a treasure trove for understanding sexuality, state censorship, populism, and popular culture in Argentina in the context of a history of regulation that spans three decades. The national lens will help unpack how the female body was censored from the time when the duo began making films until the end of the most vicious authoritarian dictatorship in Argentina's history. The Bó-Sarli films attracted a large popular audience. Sarli tells Néstor Romano about its changing face:

> First the men came to see me. The women came by the end of the 1960s. From the mid-1970s an intellectual and snob public, which wasn't mine, began to appreciate our cinema, relating it to a kitsch aesthetic.[42]

This shift from men, to women, and then to a more intellectual audience set the stage for a wide range of spectators and a popular all-inclusive culture.

In the first chapter, "Bodies through Time . . . Time through Bodies," I use Diana Taylor's concept of "scenarios" to gather the many differing and at times contradictory narratives and affects surrounding the work and historical moment of the Bó-Sarli brand to understand the charged traumatic wounds of history left on the body and visible onscreen. Interweaving both narratives from the duo's work and scenarios from interrelated historical events (the threat of the return of Eva Perón's body, the founding supporters of Peronism and their ties to the worker's body, the emergence of the category of youth and its connection to the sexualized body), I attempt to encapsulate the changing dynamics of Argentina from 1955 to 1983. I argue that the Sarli-Bó movies entered into dialogue with the social volatility of the times, and I study how Peronism's populist affective mode delves into questions of taste. Analogously, the chapter looks at how, alongside Peronism, the Bó-Sarli films provided a place onscreen of national belonging for excessive bodies, which elsewhere faced looming threats that endangered their existence. The values that Bó exalted through his work with Sarli were somewhat old-fashioned, yet in true contradictory form they operated within an economy of risk, one where limits were certainly pushed by publicly displaying the private (bodies and sex) within a very traditional public space.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Upon release of each film, the press was generally severe in its reviews. The excessive violence, bad acting, and simplistic plots were often

criticized, while the cinematography and landscapes were lauded. Mostly, their work was seen as folkloric, melodramatic, humoristic, picaresque, and even ironic. The shock that it produced echoed in some of its criticism. Podalsky explains how the films "were ridiculed by contemporary intellectuals for *not* having any political or social bite."[43] Despite Bó's fight against censorship, no one defended the films publicly, and he was considered an outcast by his peers.[44]

It is not until the 1980s and 1990s that a brand-new appreciation took place. With the publication of Jorge Abel Martín's foundational *Los films de Armando Bó con Isabel Sarli* (1981), a new critical era was born. The book sets the scene for a newfound approval for Sarli-Bó. Full of anecdotes, interviews, images, and a thorough filmography, the compilation brings together a clear history of their work and grounds the many myths surrounding it. Kuhn's short thesis, *Armando Bó, el cine, la pornografía ingenua, y otras reflexiones*, followed suit.[45] In the introduction, Kuhn explains that in 1976 before leaving the country to go into exile, he signed a contract for a book on the Bó-Sarli films, using some of Bó's private archive. He sent the original to the publisher a year later, but because of the "difficult economic situation" they refused to publish it. He suspected, however, that they rejected his book due to his status in exile and because he was a "prohibited" author in the new regime. The graphic material that Bó had promised for his book went instead to Martín right before Bó died in 1981. After the return to democracy, Kuhn published an intellectual and more thoughtful criticism that reevaluated Sarli-Bó's work in spite of its ideology.[46] Kuhn's reflection appreciates the innovative unique style and authentic challenge to authority that they offered. In the 1990s two more books were released—*La gran aventura de Armando Bó, biografía total* and *Isabel Sarli al desnudo*—both of which reproduce much of Martín's work with additional anecdotes. The duo entered official national film history with their inclusion in the publication of *Cine argentino: Modernidad y vanuardias, 1957–1983*; a one-tome analysis of the film industry from after the 1957 cinema law and ending with the conclusion of the most brutal dictatorship in Argentina.

Internationally, when their most notable film, *Fuego*, which had a large following in New York during its initial run, was later released on VHS by the distribution company Something Weird Video in an English-language version, it in fact was responsible for stimulating and creating a second wave of global fandom. But even prior to that, critics like Roger Ebert were big fans, writing reviews for their films and appreciating

their camp aesthetics.[47] It is no surprise that Ebert valued the Argentine duo; around the same time he then went on to cowrite the script for *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*, a highly produced sexploitation film directed by Russ Meyer (USA, 1970). More recent works have been developed following the reappreciation of low popular cinema from the 1960s and 1970s in my 2009 book.[48] Due to *Fuego*'s success globally, many consider the Bó-Sarli work as internationally focused and distant from its Argentine context and reality. Conversely, to not consider the complications imposed by their mode of production, the Argentine social and political reality, censorship practices, the global framework of the sexploitation trends, and the affective register that exceeds the simplistic plots is to ignore the complex assemblage of circumstances that played into their work and established a rich popular audience.

HOW TO READ A SARLI-BÓ FILM: THE CASE OF *FUEGO*

The problem with using a simple plot-based and aesthetic analysis of one of their films, such as *Fuego*, is that any such reading will always be incomplete. *Fuego* is a film that can lend itself to many interpretations and contradictory analysis, yet none quite explain the actual slippery text.[49] What are the challenges of studying a film whose main attraction was the topic of sex? In many ways, *Fuego* is the epitome of the trope of an overly sexualized Sarli: a text meant for a mass male audience, an example of populism at the very least. Yet the images of crowds attest, and Sarli's anecdote cited earlier confirms, not only men attended the screenings. Moreover, *Fuego* reflects the tastes and pleasures of the "people" and the problematic way of defining such a group. It exposes the very worst aspects of popular culture that many critics despise.[50] Similarly, from a contemporary perspective *Fuego* can be seen as a retrograde and simplistic representation of sexuality, a misogynist statement on women's pleasure, and a very stereotypical representation of homosexuality (fig. 1).[51] It is a simple exercise to watch the Sarli-Bó films today and deconstruct them as sexist, poorly made, and exuding all types of stereotypes. But the problem with those readings, not necessarily incorrect, is that they eliminate any further discussion on the value that popular cinema can provide. Furthermore, they assume a similarly progressive reading cannot be legitimately made. When I was visiting the University of Wisconsin–Madison to give a talk in a workshop about "Garbage Cinema in the Global South," a participant read the plot of the film as progressive from a third-world perspective. By

FIGURE 1. In *Fuego* (1968), Laura is devoured by Andrea in the opening scene.

juxtaposing progressive and regressive critical readings of *Fuego*, I will untangle some of the problems with staking positional interpretations of any of the Sarli-Bó productions. My intention is to not to belittle either point of view, as each presents equally convincing arguments that help to situate *Fuego*, but instead to show that in the end, to have a better grasp of the film's many layers and its complex context, one must change approaches. I will argue for an important shift in how to approach such examples, one that will guide the rest of the book.

Fuego is a "true story" about Laura, a nymphomaniac who cannot control her sexual urges. The name *Fuego*, which is never translated into English (only to French and Japanese), takes advantage of the Spanish and exotic original to describe Laura and her constant thirst for sexual pleasure. Laura meets an engineer, Carlos, who falls in love with her, and they finally marry. Despite her love of Carlos, Laura cannot be faithful to him because of her thirst for sex. Thus, Laura has escapades with her housekeeper, Andrea, and with other men she finds on her walks through the town. Carlos takes her to a doctor, who diagnoses her with a sexual neurosis and recommends that she see a specialist in New York City. They travel to New York to "fix" her ailments and restore her sense of monogamy. The cure is an utter failure, and she continues to