

## ***Construir Bicentenarios: Argentina***

Margarita Gutman (editor)

The Argentina Observatory - The New School & Caras y Caretas

Buenos Aires, 2005

### **Introduction**

Margarita Gutman

The eve of an anniversary offers us the possibility of choice. It allows us to choose whether we take it into account and commemorate it, or let it slip by on the calendar. We know that an anniversary is a window of opportunity. If we choose to make use of it, a vast spectrum of possibilities for commemoration opens up for us, some known and others to be invented. Every choice requires criteria and values to guide it. Those criteria and values are usually agreed upon or at least debated by those who participate, whether in a family, a neighborhood, or at the level of the country as a whole.

Anniversaries may be tied to the chariot of the calendar, but they still offer the possibility of preparing for them in advance, pondering, discussing and planning. They do not happen suddenly, by surprise, as a crisis or an earthquake; rather, they take place at predetermined moments and arrive through the simple passage of time. However, what does not happen simply through the passage of time is the form, the content, or the social importance they may acquire, the memories that they may leave behind. In sum, the forms and functions of a commemoration are constructed; and they are constructed collectively.

There is no doubt that, among anniversaries, centennials occupy a special place in the calendar, that almost universally accepted Gregorian convention that sets up regular intervals and allows recurrent milestones to be established with the desired periodicity. Although some mortals reach a hundred years of age, and centennials are often commemorated of the births or deaths of representative figures in art or literature or politics, centennials seem made to measure for the celebration of events that pertain to the shaping of the modern western nations and the construction of their identity. This is what some historians maintain when they state that centennials are an invention of the late nineteenth century.

**Getting together to consider and collectively construct the meaning of the bicentennial**

We began the preparation of this book of multiple voices in order to advance the discussion and collective construction of the meaning and the options for the commemoration of the bicentennial of Argentina in 2010. We invited a group of historians, architects, philosophers, scientists, educators, public officials, social researchers, politicians, and youths in the midst of their education, who were all concerned about the future and social welfare. They all seemed ready to investigate the social, cultural and transcendental meaning and options for national commemorations. We organized the book into four parts that group perspectives of the past, the present and the future of Argentina, as well as views from abroad. We asked each author for their opinion on specific subjects: problems, challenges, options, memories, or expectations that could be generated by the occasion of the Argentine bicentennial.

Although the authors of this book are mainly Argentine, others are from Latin America, Europe and the United States. Most of the Argentine authors live and work in the country, but some live overseas. We invited this diversity of authors, because it is our understanding that these globalized times, whether we like it or not, permit and even require internal perspectives to be complemented by external perspectives. However, from abroad, we chose perspectives which would contribute textures of difference and not of homogenization. With Latin American countries, we have a lengthy shared history: many countries, like Argentina, are on the eve of the bicentennial of the emergence of the revolutionary movements that brought the colonial period to a close, with the exception of Haiti which celebrated it in 2004. Ecuador and Bolivia will have their bicentennials in 2009; next will be Argentina, along with Chile and Mexico, in 2010, and then Venezuela and Paraguay in 2011. Colombia has decided to commemorate its bicentennial in 2019, in 2021 it will be Peru's and Guatemala's turn, and Uruguay will possibly mark its bicentennial when a hundred years have passed from the celebrations of 1930. We also incorporated voices of Argentine authors abroad, because in the current world, national identities are more complex, unfolding from within and outside national territories. Exercising one's Argentine identity depends on passion and commitment, not only on circumstantial geography.

Far from claiming to include all problems and perspectives, this collective effort seeks to collaborate in the dissemination of the idea that the bicentennial offers an opportunity for the mobilization of multiple and diverse voices in the years preceding 2010. Launching these conversations in 2005 will allow us to transform the commemoration into an extensive and multiple series of socially transcendent activities that will endure in the memory of the future.

## **The first centennial**

Argentina decided to celebrate its first centennial in 1910, as had been done by other countries of the western world and several of the new Latin America nations at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. It did so with all the pomp that its leading and intellectual class was able to imagine and carry out. It celebrated the progress, the wealth, and the potential of the Republic. Events were organized in 1910 in many of the country's cities, and public works were erected. But the capital city, Buenos Aires, was the main setting for the celebrations and for the euphoria, heading to its hours of metropolitan splendor in open competition with the great cities of the world. The celebrations began in May 1910 and, preceded by the passage of the Halley comet, included six large international and national exhibitions, numerous scientific conferences, receptions, parades, patriotic demonstrations, community festivals, and sports competitions in Buenos Aires. The cold May nights were lit with rows of little electric lights that illuminated the elegant borders of cornices and ornaments of downtown buildings and the profiles of ships in the harbor. But no sooner were these marvelous garlands of lights switched on, on the night of May 25, they suddenly went out. The blackout possibly was one of the many protests and attacks of the time. Because, despite the government's efforts, including declaring "a state of siege" and police repression, it proved impossible to erase social protest during the centennial, and it remained present, in its absence and in its struggles.

Within the framework of the official celebrations and mass events, notable foreign visitors were received in Buenos Aires. These included, among others, the Bourbon Princess Isabel of Spain and the president of Chile, Pedro Montt. Public squares were built, and large and small monuments were constructed, some presented by foreign communities and some commissioned by the national government. Their aim was to embellish the city and at the same time to educate the public on the history of the fatherland. They were set up in the downtown and northern sectors of the capital, on the road leading to the major international exhibitions. These traces of the centennial currently constitute an inescapable part of the urban landscape, like the British Tower in Retiro, the public squares dedicated to France, Uruguay, Chile and Germany on Libertador Avenue, and the Monument to Spaniards where it crosses Sarmiento Avenue. Numerous postcards were printed, as were a collection of large illustrated albums describing and exalting the wealth and the achievements so speedily attained by Argentina. Historical paintings were produced, illustrating the construction of the pantheon of national heroes, stamps, medals and souvenirs of all kinds. There also remained the

memory of the euphoria and the expectations of a wonderful future, which lasted until very recently, despite the difficulties and conflicts of a century of history.

## **Second centennial**

The memory of the first centennial leads us almost naturally to consider the second. Because whatever the opinion held about the form that these celebrations took in 1910, the fact cannot be ignored that they set up the first milestone in a sequence of national centennial commemorations. And it is now up to us, to the current Argentine generations – the older and the younger ones, those who live in or outside the country – to consider with what aims and in what ways to carry out this second commemorative milestone, and launch the nation's third centennial cycle.

Like any anniversary, the second centennial offers us the possibility of comparing. We know well that the current circumstances, both nationally and internationally, are very different from those of a hundred years ago, some better and others – many others – dramatically worse. But we also know that the hundred years lived since 1910 constitute capital as regards our experience, the development of our capabilities, and the future which belongs to all of us: individuals, families and society, the time and efforts of our own lives, and of those of our parents, grandparents and children.

This second centennial also offers us an opportunity to transform it into a collective rite of passage. Like any rite of passage, it includes a break or separation, a reflection on oneself, and the taking on of new status. For that reason, we are inclined to take on a triple look through time: toward the past, incorporating evaluations of achievements and disappointments over the last hundred years; toward the present, recognizing the problems and challenges, drawing up diagnoses and proposals, and towards the future, designing a horizon for the third Argentine century that will frame and give meaning to our decisions in the present.

## **Choosing the paths of the second centennial**

The eve of the second centennial places us before a wide spectrum of choices and possibilities. Every commemoration demands decisions regarding its aim, forms, activities, actors, times and messages. It cannot skip over questions such as: what is being commemorated? why or what for: with what aims is one commemorating, on the basis of what values? How does

one commemorate? Through what type of activities, works, events or projects? When does one commemorate: over just one day, one month, or over the course of a year? And, fundamentally, who are commemorating, who are the actors whose voices are entitled to think about, carry out, circulate, and consume the commemoration? In sum, who commemorates and how do they benefit from the commemoration?

We know there is no pre-established truth, a something that must be, a what, or how to commemorate, nor those who are entitled to commemorate. But this is not uncertainty either; in fact, it is the opposite. We believe with certainty that these decisions should not be adopted by one sole group or one sole institution, or one social sector exclusively. Rather, decisions on commemorating should reflect the diversity and multiplicity of groups, community associations, institutions and entities that compose society. Special emphasis should be placed on empowering the voice and the imagination of those who are not usually heard in such discussions.

We start, therefore, on the basis of a few, but precise *basic values* that lead us to consider the bicentennial as an excellent opportunity to collectively construct a project for a nation under the banner of *social justice and equity*. This project of social justice and equity is necessary to face the trend that increases the gap between the haves and the have-nots, at the national, regional, and global levels. On the basis of these values, it is our understanding that the diverse and multiple public and private activities of the bicentennial commemoration should – from their conception and execution through the memory they leave in the future – be *acts of inclusion, of mobilization, and of social justice*.

In 1910, the State was the main organization planning the celebrations, the agent constructing the major works and international exhibitions, monuments and educational projects. The feast only represented one perspective: the official one. Today, society is more complex and the State has a different scope. Certainly, in the preparations for the second centennial the participation of the State is a necessary but not a sufficient condition.

Society as a whole and in its varied forms should, if it so wishes, exercise the right to commemorate and to celebrate: to deploy diverse and multiple initiatives, to follow rituals or to invent new forms, in an organized or decentralized manner. Activities could be conceived and implemented by large or small groups, by families, unemployed people, children and youths – including those trapped on the margins of poverty and those who float in cyberspace; through schools, cooperatives, neighborhood associations, clubs, cultural centers, unions and other civil associations, corporations and State entities, both in large and small cities and in provincial towns. An invaluable role of the State would be to provide the spaces for these multiple initiatives to be developed and come together. Only through the participation of these multiple

actors and diversity of initiatives can a path be opened which will enable a commemoration with social and national transcendence.

We see the bicentennial as a road to be covered, a process rather than the result of an activity that begins and ends on May 25, 2010. It should consist of a series of activities carried out over the years that precede 2010 and that have the possibility of leaving a mark on the memory of succeeding years. And the transcendental and enduring meaning of the bicentennial should consist of having offered an opportunity for the construction and the exercising of a socially equitable country model, legitimated by the participation of diverse sectors and actors of Argentine society.

### **Building bicentennial: Argentina**

We have organized this book into four parts: the first, “Horizons of the bicentennial,” presents a selection of views of the past; the second, “Commemorating from other horizons,” brings us closer to other ways of thinking, feeling and celebrating centennials in other cultures and nations; the third, “Constructing the bicentennial,” concentrates on the goals, the means, and the specific aspects to consider in the preparation of the commemorations of the bicentennial, and, lastly, “The future of the bicentennial” explores future ideas and projects that could give meaning and orientation to the decisions that must be taken in the present. The four parts of this collective book contain 31 chapters of which 23 were prepared by Argentine authors, two from elsewhere in Latin America, three Europeans, one from India, and three from the U.S. The book benefited as well from the collaboration of other individuals, living either in Argentina or in New York.

### **Horizons of the bicentennial**

+

In this first part, eight authors critically explore a selection of historical issues, approaches, and events. Most of the chapters deal with the hundred years that separate the first centennial from the second. But, taken as a whole, they do not seek to cover the entire century or its complexity. The subjects chosen have been triggered by current challenges and concerns and are clearly oriented toward the future. As a group, the authors of these chapters review diverse aspects of the memory of the past from the vantage point of current problems, and project that memory toward the horizon of the bicentennial.

Cristina Fernández de Kirchner opens the book with a proposal that foreshadows what is stated in diverse ways in many of the succeeding chapters: taking the historical opportunity of the bicentennial of the May Revolution as a strategic moment to “take on the major goals demanded by foundational stages.” Stressing the contradictions and conflicts of any historical process, she analyzes the conflicting aims and interests that confronted each other around 1810, and the replacement of the nationalist revolutionary ideals by conservative and plutocratic thinking. The chapter reviews the centennial that demonstrated the wealth amassed by the sectors linked to the agro-exporting model, the exclusion of the popular classes and their struggles, and economic expansion without much industrialization. It analyzes the decades of military dictatorship, the separation of the economy from politics, and the return to democratic institutions in 1983, with, however, the lack of a national project. The author points to the current challenges facing Argentina within a continental framework marked by inequality and institutional fragility and within a world context of globalization. She concludes by calling for a society for the twenty-first century that is able “to achieve and maintain a basic consensus and concrete policies that build up citizenship and consolidate Argentina as a serious country.”

Argentina in all its territorial, demographic and productive expanses – the development and potentialities of the “interior country” during the first centennial – is reviewed by Olga Paterlini, along with an investigation into the forms that were adopted by the celebration in provincial cities. Provincial celebration is an all but unknown subject because of the dazzling effect caused by the vast celebrations of Buenos Aires on national and local histories and historians. The author was born, educated, and works in the city of Tucumán, the venue of the Declaration of Independence in 1816. After reflecting on the centennial festivities that frequently followed the model of the capital, she concludes her chapter with a reaffirmation which must not be ignored on this eve of the bicentennial: “for the people of Tucumán, and maybe for the interior of the country, this [that of 1916] was the true centennial.”

The next chapter deals with the views toward the future that were imagined a hundred years ago. This chapter, which I wrote, analyzes a selection of images and forms that were adopted in anticipations of the future in Buenos Aires around the first centennial, the period of greatest confidence in the advent of a wonderful future for Argentina. On the basis of a review of 4,000 issues of the magazines with mass metropolitan distribution published between 1900 and 1920, I analyze the forms of the technological imagination vis-à-vis the urban future. I comment on the expectations for the future sketched out from the intellectual, leadership and political sectors. These aspirations for the future, as diverse and contradictory as the society itself that produced them, informed and perhaps helped reach numerous private and public decisions. The

strength of these expectations and hopes emphasized the value and the need to again institute the right to aspire among all our fellow citizens, as one the emerging rights of Argentina in its third century.

Fernando Devoto analyzes the perspectives of the past. He reviews the historical narratives constructed as of the middle of the nineteenth century by Bartolomé Mitre, until the first revisionism around 1930. The chapter studies the circumstances under which Mitre constructed the narrative of the shaping of the country with which many generations of Argentines later identified, as well as the employment of historical narratives and the invention of a tradition for the purpose of guaranteeing the rights of the Nation-state and shaping citizens from the heterogeneous immigrant population. The author points out that the reviewed historiography, both against and in favor of Mitre, was marked by this unifying historical imaginary, and responded to the beliefs and expectations prevalent in the first years of the twentieth century. One question seems to be implied in this chapter: will it be possible or desirable to construct a unifying historical narrative today? Also focusing on the first centennial, Dora Barrancos analyzes the new ways of feeling and thinking through statements that render modernity manifest, and encourage transformations of the public and private spheres. She reviews the evidently modern discourses such as those that claim women's right to civil and political equality, and the issues regarding the social question. She reflects on socialism, with its immovable faith in science, reason and evolution, and its reformist efforts in education, hygiene, workers' protection, the care of childhood, workers' housing, the defense of popular consumption, civil reform, etc. The author classifies anarchism as "hypermodern," and concludes by stressing the generalized concern with "education, the panacea, the great redeemer, the midwife of modernity."

The three chapters that round out the first part cover selected moments of the last century analyzing changes in society, the economy, culture and politics, and take the time to point out the pending challenges. Juan Corradi identifies three stages: "the society that makes faces and promises" of the first centennial; the half century of "the society of guarantees" (1930 to 1980), and the current "society of risks." He terms the gestures of modernity of the centennial an "imaginary mimicry" that mirrors the modern urban milestone par excellence: Paris. He frames the review of the State-dominated, national and popular half-century within the economic and political context of Latin American modernity, with its ending marked by the scourge of State terrorism and the application of neoliberal (i.e., neoconservative) policies. Lastly, he analyzes the global context of the current society of risks and evaluates the possible options for the Latin American regions. He concludes by observing the country in the mirror of the second centennial,



and makes seven proposals for emerging from geopolitical uncertainty and broaching the third Argentine century.

Margarita Pierini reflects on readers and their reading material over the course of the twentieth century, as sounding boards of a society's political, historical, economic and cultural manifestations. She poses three questions: who reads? what do they read? and where do they read? She analyzes three moments: the centennial, in which the expansion of publishing output and the educational and civic spirit stand out – “a school that opens is a jail that closes”; the 1950s, in which she exposes the fallacy of “shoes for the people, yes; books, no,” and the present, in which she picks apart the statement that “nobody reads nowadays.” She stresses that the map of today's reading replicates the existing polarization in the consumption of material and symbolic goods; she points out that reading is a path to freedom, and proposes that “this path toward the shaping of the reader is, at the same time, the path toward the shaping of the citizens of the twenty-first century.”

Bringing the first part of the book to a close, María Seoane presents a comprehensive overview of Argentine politics over the course of the second century, articulating the historical interpretation on the concepts of political action and exception, the latter defined as the violation of republican and democratic mechanisms. The author condemns its imposition as a norm during the twentieth century, leaving political action as a circumstantial exception. She identifies the repeated military coups of the twentieth century as the attacks on the State which, from the angle of power, expressed the path of political exception. Seoane analyzes the problems of the restoration of democracy in 1983, threatened by the crisis of political representation of political parties, originating a new form of political exception “no longer through violence but through anomie.” And she concludes by proposing to “extract democracy from its taciturn mode, to define, face to the future, the inclusion of millions; that is to say, to take up the path of action again, definitively leaving aside that of tragic exception.”

### **Commemorating from other horizons**

The authors of the six chapters that constitute this second part come from diverse geographies and cultures. They reflect on the associations, meanings, and modes of the act of commemorating. They open up other horizons of ideas, experiences and expectations for us. Their gazes crisscross with the local ones. They offer us other textures of commemoration; they are narratives of differences, not of homogenization. Coming from Spain, India, the United

States, Brazil, Mexico, and Africa, this diversity of manifestations is, nevertheless, traversed by the recurrence of memory, of identity, of hope and projects for the future.

Josep Ramoneda launches this second part with a meditation from Barcelona with regard to commemoration. Its role: “to tuck in the present,” that precarious, evanescent moment, that slips away between the past and the future. To tuck it in, dress it up warmly: making the past present by means of a transforming memory, which constructs fluid, multiple, and supra-territorial narrative identities. Dress it up warmly: with the convergence of politics regained as a factor of meaning, which connects with the project and looks toward the future. The value of commemorating, one only: against evil, the abuse of power, and violence. If commemorating is a foundational moment, to provide a basis for the future of Spain Ramoneda proposes the taboo of the Civil War. This is a taboo in which Spain meets up again with Latin America – after the latter’s nations have been ravaged by terrible dictatorships, suffered collective amnesias, and are in a slow recovery of memory – in an identity as a project, against violence and the abuse of power.

The affinity between memory and desire, and a new view directed at archives and their relationship with aspirations for the future, are presented by Arjun Appadurai, an Indian anthropologist, using the case of globalized emigrants. In the era of the electronic archive – built in a collective and interactive manner, a true popular archive – and of the new conditions of sociability offered by the Internet, the author proposes seeing the archive of the diaspora as a result of a deliberate intervention, as a collective instrument for the refining of desire. And desire is linked to the work of the imagination, essential for the development of the capacity to aspire, especially critical for the poorer emigrants. For emigrants “the archive is a map, it is a guide among the uncertainties of the construction of identity under adverse conditions.” Appadurai defines one of the dimensions of poverty as the unequal distribution of the capacity to aspire, and maintains that the right to exercise that capacity is a precious resource for those who have the least and need it the most.

David Harvey, a British geographer, approaches the future – the future of the city – by covering the memory of the past that contains it. He observes, experiences, and reads about cities. He speaks of collective memory, different from a fragmented and evasive historical narrative, adhering to its places, fermented in movement, but politically powerful. Harvey notes that “hope is a memory that desires” and “without remembering anything, one cannot have hopes about anything.” The images distilled by the processes of the city are surpluses of the imagination that come back to urge or paralyze action. Harvey invokes the city as a place of creativity and conflicts, of permanencies – in which the past is still present – and asks: whose memory? What is

the collective urban memory? How is one to construct “a vision to guide us in our struggles”? For the city to be re-imagined and re-made, he warns: “in the absence of that evasive memory, which lies outside history such as we customarily write and know it, there can be no alternative to the sad, everyday undertaking of the usual.”

From Islam and the experience of African cities, Abdou Maliq Simone interprets commemoration as waiting, as a memory of duration, as a capacity to be transformed into many things. In Islam, it is the waiting itself that is commemorated, it is the patient task of making time that attracts attention and promotes tactical resistance. Because, unlike the reverence conventionally associated with it, for Islam commemoration is a heretical capacity. He illustrates that capacity to wait with the experience of generations of Sahelians in Djibouti in their delayed voyage to Mecca, and with the searches of young Muslims in the peripheral neighborhoods of Marseilles. Because “Islam is something that has never been fully born, since it patiently waits for the next journey, the following journey to be passed from hand to hand, always postponing its own achievement so as to be accessible to the exercise of an incipient totality of potential applications, which is the *Tawhid*.”

And in Latin American countries, what is and how is one to commemorate national independence in the era of globalization? From Brazil, Jorge Wilhelm broaches these questions and discusses issues of independence and the sovereignty of national States. He analyzes neoliberalism and the new market economy, the new social contract that has rendered the proletariat more fragile, and the transformations in communication technologies that have marked the new level of global connectivity. He identifies the paradoxical effects of telematics (computers plus satellites) and warns of the need to transform “data into information and the latter into *knowledge*.” He studies the impacts of globalization on national identities, the dizzying urbanization and its impact on the major cities that today form “urban archipelagos.” He proposes replacing hierarchical structures by structures forming networks, reconsidering socialism as a construction project and promoting this century as a period of a “new Renaissance.” In that way, “we would commemorate the Revolution of Independence, *building* sovereignty in a fairer, more solidary and truly young society.”

Rounding out these external perspectives, Enrique Florescano reviews the Mexican experience of the first centennial in 1910. This was one of the paradigmatic Latin American national commemorations held the same year as in Argentina. The author analyzes the iconography that represented the manifold commemorative events and undertakings organized on a vast scale by the Porfirian State with its epicenter in the capital. He stresses that the recovery of the past and its images were powerful instruments for the creation of the historical and cultural

identity of the independent nation, and concludes that the celebration of the first Mexican centennial was transformed into an exaltation of the works undertaken by the government of Porfirio Díaz and of its image. The author stresses the repercussion obtained by this official program in the middle and popular sectors. The images associated with the fatherland printed on flags, painted plates, postcards, artifacts and children's toys give an idea of the popular repercussions obtained by this celebration, very shortly before the Revolution burst out.

### **Building the bicentennial**

The third part of the book takes the bull by the horns: what can we, or should we, or may we do to construct these commemorations, so as to have them gain social, national and individual significance, and be an exercise in social inclusion and justice? The authors of the twelve chapters that compose this part bring together theory and practice, values and ethical and political goals, and ideas and proposals for action. Added to previous chapters, these chapters offer a record of subjects, critical approaches and activities which, in the authors' judgment, should be present in the bicentennial agenda.

The first three chapters deal with general aspects of the construction of the bicentennial from the angles of philosophy, morphology, and politics, with concrete proposals.

In his notes towards an ontology of the periphery, José Pablo Feinmann picks up the challenge, not only of interpreting the world, but of transforming it. Questioning the relationship between hope and politics, he issues a two-fold warning: against the excess of hope (as a certainty that weakens and blinds political praxis), and in favor of a first horizon of hope in which brutal things are less brutal. He invokes the imperative need to recover the country from the sands of the free market, bringing politics back into the national and Latin American arena, and including all the "polarized" victims. He proposes turning the first centennial on its head and setting up, in opposition to those boisterous and elitist festivities organized by a non-productive class, a sober second centennial organized by many, with work, with justice, transformed into "a banner, a point of convergence, a national obstinacy." It is the utopia of the second centennial. While lacking guarantees, it is a map and an ambitious manifesto.

From the angle of morphology, Roberto Doberti sees the bicentennial as a form and, as such, as an open and diversified construction that demands to be the result of a process in which time and space, matter and meaning, personal resonances and mass celebration crisscross. As a form, the bicentennial is a container of diversities and is critical; it is a challenge to review the

meaning of the past and to exercise the emancipating will that is required for the future “not to be fate, but a conscious project.” Doberti draws and designs three powerful figurative metaphors of the bicentennial: the first speaks of the bicentennial as an instance of condensation and spaciousness; the second reclaims the binary, dual condition of the bicentennial, and the third alludes to the logics of transformation and interpretation of the bicentennial as a mutable result of multiple processes and of polysemic apprehending. He concludes by allowing entry to dreams: “the commemoration, guided by institutions and intentions, which are the ones that plan its modes and manifestations, should also leave space for the commemoration to celebrate itself.”

José Nun proposes viewing the bicentennial as a festival (according to Durkheim), as a moment of great effervescence and collective enthusiasm, which will encourage us to change, to review values, to question certainties and fatal crisis routines. A war – political, social and economic – is the way that the author describes the events in Argentina in recent decades. He stresses that representative democracy is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the exercise of “good government” and proposes the development of a national project around the hubs of autonomy, unity, cultural diversity, and solidarity. He sets out three broad paths for the construction of the bicentennial: the carrying out of productive infrastructure works, schools, theaters and others; the establishment of goals for 2010, regarding industrialization and fiscal, political and judicial reforms; and the shaping of a citizen consciousness of “the importance of the construction itself of the bicentennial as a common horizon that gives unifying meaning to the work and goals that we must immediately undertake.” This work and these achievements will constitute the national project, which will be celebrated at the great festival of the bicentennial, along with the achievements attained and the commemoration of Independence.

The next articles develop specific subjects and achievements regarding science, education and the young, migrations, human rights and environmental rights, planning and infrastructure networks, and poverty and inequality. They explain why and how they must be included in the agenda for the construction of the bicentennial.

The dilemmas and the paradoxes of the Argentine scientific system are discussed by Diego Golombek who analyzes its evolution since the centennial “when, of its virtues, there was little to show.” The author proposes an analogy between science and what we want for society: that it exercise the capacity to pose questions, alternatives, to issue judgements and develop the tools to put them to the test. Its dissemination is likewise crucial, since “as a form of understanding the world, science is an exercise that can aid us to be better people, better citizens, and better students.” He asks that people trust and employ the backing *of* science rather than invoking the political campaign slogan of giving backing *to* science. Noting the lack of public

information on the operation of the system of science and technology, he proposes that the science of the bicentennial communicate with people in a broad and generous manner. He concludes: "In evolutionary terms, two hundred years are as nothing. But neither must we remain asleep like good bicentennial babies: science is a weapon loaded with the future and beginning to employ it wouldn't be a bad idea at all."

Edith Litwin analyzes the practices and the challenges of the teachers who today shape the tracks of the future, framed by the changes that have taken place in pedagogical knowledge, in the *minds* of students and the impact of the new communication technologies on teaching. Employing political, cognitive, cultural and pedagogical reflections, she rethinks education for the bicentennial. She underlines the heterogeneity of the educational proposals that reflect a profoundly unequal system and the educational debt that remains pending; the expansion of the universe of socialization of youths through the media, television and the Internet, and the contrast with the limited space taken up by the school and the responsibility allocated to it. She points out that the practices of teaching "require the execution of very diverse performances in real time, in unforeseeable and uncertain contexts," are temporary and are shaped by local conditions: "pedagogy is never innocent."

Looking to the future, what are the roles for Argentine teenagers and youth when the moment comes to decide on priorities and to establish strategies for a consensual project? More specifically: how do we help and strengthen them so that they will be in a condition to exercise the right to participate in the decisions, from their own place in society? Alberto Croce issues these challenges, exposing a strange paradox: "Argentina has given the worst treatment to what has been the best it has had over these two hundred years." The author proposes and works for the inclusion of the young in education, in the economy and in the organizations of civil society. And he practices what he preaches: he consults a group of youths who are working with other youths on social projects in different parts of the country. He asks them about the challenges facing the country, about their dreams for the future and about the bicentennial: its importance for society and the place that youth might take in the construction of the commemorations; and his chapter incorporates these proposals by the young.

In an Argentina that benefited from the contribution and the interbreeding of four million immigrants between 1850 and 1930, it continues to be the Latin American country with the highest proportion of immigrants. Argentina continues to receive population from neighboring countries, and has, at the same time, become a country that has had emigration as well in recent decades. This leads to the question of what role is expected to be played by migrations in the bicentennial, within the framework of a national project? These issues are treated by Lelio

Mármora, comparing the current situation with that at the beginning of the twentieth century and proposing criteria for migration policies. He points out that the inclusion of the Latin American immigrant population and that of the historically relegated Indian peoples is pending. He notes that “the Argentine migratory narcissism is over.” He sums up: “Future immigrations will continue to occupy a preferential place in terms of supplying scarce labor, of filling its extensive territory, and of cultural input that will enrich it.” In this way, a diversity of origins will continue to be a feature of the construction of the Argentine nation.

Human rights, whose defense and application are today a fundamental part of Argentina’s social and institutional agenda, and their transcendence vis-à-vis the thinking about the bicentennial are reviewed by Leonardo Franco and Alejandro Kawabata. Taking the coup d’état of 1976 as a key point, they show how the concept of human rights became part of everyday thinking and entered the customary and institutional vocabulary of all of Argentina’s society owing to the eruption of State terror. They trace the history of two hundred years of partial and intermittent application of civil, political and later economic and social rights in our country, until democracy was again set up in 1983 and the defense of human rights re-emerged. They stress the intense activity of the citizenry and of the State in the creation of organizations to defend them and, among others, the ratification of international treaties. They point to the pending debt for the bicentennial: the reactivation of the economic, social and cultural rights seriously affected by the economic policies implemented between 1976 and 2002, insofar as their results – poverty and inequality – prevent the free exercise of citizens’ rights.

In the next chapter, Daniel Sabsay analyzes environmental rights and their implications for the construction of a sustainable and participatory development model, that will ensure the future by balancing the needs of current and future generations. He analyzes the right to a healthy environment – incorporated in the last Argentine constitutional reform in 1994 – as a milestone in the evolution of constitutionalism and part of a new and significant generation of rights that protect collective and diffuse interests. He warns against defective compliance with the established rules. He stresses that the notion of sustainable development demands the adoption of institutional mechanisms that improve representative democracy and lead it toward participatory democracy. Sabsay notes that the experience in environmental issues over recent decades demonstrates a marked participation by the citizenship. He analyzes the instruments of the General Environmental Law and points to its application as an exceptional opportunity for the launching at nationwide level of an advanced participatory model that will ensure an encouraging future for us.

The search for a sustainable development based on the protection of environmental, material and social resources, setting up a sustainable productive model and recovering the positive features of cultural forms, is explored from other angles by David Kullok. After analyzing a selection of aspects of our country's historical trajectory since 1810, he proposes the construction of a new social contract, in fulfillment of all citizens' right to the satisfaction of their basic material and non-material needs, one which overcomes the "stigma of banality." He reviews the events of 1810, questioning "whether we are really faced with a bicentennial," the reason for being of the vigor experienced by the country on the first centennial, and the future options that may be opened by the occasion of the bicentennial, stressing the need to "adopt and work on several strategies simultaneously."

Berardo Dujovne proposes a series of specific strategies and policies for the construction, renewal and expansion of infrastructure, transport, energy, service and communications networks. He regards these networks as key factors in the design of strategies for a comprehensive and inclusive development framed within long-term policy planning. He points out that this "country project" is indispensable since the mere aggregation of expansion and macroeconomic growth does not in itself ensure inclusive development. From a systemic standpoint, the author underlines the need to expand and consolidate the "society of knowledge," as well as the reconstruction and consolidation of the "network of actors who will produce, disseminate and employ the technologies, the knowledge and the innovations." Stressing the link between the urban system and the productive areas, the author proposes strategies for the development of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region, since it is, by virtue of its scale and complexity, one of the paradigmatic nodes of the system of cities and at the same time a terrain of extreme polarization and inequality.

The scourge of poverty and overt inequality emerges in the majority of analyses of the current Argentine situation. It is unavoidable in any reflection on the meaning of the bicentennial, and runs through almost all chapters of this book. This is the subject analyzed by Adriana Clemente, who studies the evolution of State policies and institutions for treating poverty, from the first centennial to the present, as a field riven by contradictions and disjunctions. She researches the impact of social policies in the construction of citizenship and in social integration processes. She points to the active integrating effect of some social policies between 1930 and 1970, particularly during the government of General Perón (1946-1955), and the strong involution of this trend between 1986 and the crisis of 2001, a backsliding heightened by the military dictatorship (1976-1983) which segregated, discipline, controlled and stigmatized the poor and their living environment. She proposes a series of issues for inclusion in the



bicentennial's social agenda against poverty and inequality and concludes by maintaining that, under current conditions, the active participation of the State in the redistribution of wealth "appears to be the sole way not to condemn half the population to endure second-class citizenship."

### **The future of the bicentennial**

The fourth and final part dares to forge ahead within an unknown and uncharted territory: the future. This attempt to think about the meaning and options open to the commemorations of the bicentennial would not be complete without asking ourselves, point blank, what we want for the future, what are our dreams and our fears, our hopes and wishes. Expectations for the future are a critical component of our individual, social and national life. Without a future, there is no guide to the present. If the bicentennial as a commemoration marks an end and a beginning, we need to know where we are heading in this new stage, what we want, for whom, with whom and how. We know that disagreements about the future are as large as the disagreements about the present. But we also know that there cannot be a future if it is only for a few.

In actual fact, this presence of the future as a horizon of expectations is visible in most of the book's chapters. However, we explicitly asked the five authors who flesh out this part about the future: about its history, its possible forms, its role in the commemoration of the bicentennial, its values, goals and lastly its possible paths.

We begin with some aspects of the history of the thinking about the future in Argentina, through one of its most widely-read and colorful literary manifestations: science fiction. Pablo Capanna reviews Argentine science fiction from its inception toward the mid-nineteenth century to the present, and stresses how the ideas and states of mind of local science fiction are related to the political and social circumstances of the moment in which it is generated. He analyzes the idea of a dazzling future of technological progress contained in the science fiction around the time of the centennial, and its relative survival until the mid-twentieth century when it became tinged with irony. He underlines the break represented by H. G. Oesterheld who politicized science fiction with *El Eternauta* (*The Eternaut*, 1957-1959), turning that comic strip into a revolutionary parable. Thus, the future was a rending and later a disenchantment. During the military dictatorship it turned into a refuge for evading censorship and during the bubble of the 1990s, it was pure decadence and a threatening nightmare of national dissolution. Capanna concludes: "May Argentines face this new centennial as a rite of passage, to begin to rebuild hope and to outline projects that will include us all, accepting the past in order to overcome it."

Urban planner William Morrish sketches a future in which a robust association of large and small cities through a national network of generating undertakings articulates the entire national territory with an active network of mutual exchanges. The author, embedded in the local culture, launches us into the metaphor of the tango which requires two to dance and an audience to look on. He issues a call to the design of projects and programs to create places for the bicentennial in cities as poles of a network for generating undertakings that fuse economic and environmental systems in a visible human landscape, unleash the flow of creativity, supply information to increase the capability, skill and curiosity of people to communicate with one another, and transform borders that separate into borders that are creative and productive. He gives the examples of Pico Truncado/Koluel Kaike, Curitiba, Phoenix and Barcelona, and specifies: “this is not about a public services undertaking hidden in the backyard, where it remains unseen. Nor it is a decorated benevolent authority. It is a culturally catalytic infrastructure: one which produces economic and environmental energy beyond its main role.”

Saskia Sassen analyzes the large cities that currently face off against the major forces and acute accelerations of globalization and the impact of digitalization; cities in which the rising importance of flows obscures the materiality of the place; cities which are spaces where the most acute contradictions of our time are generated and rendered legible, and that gradually fall into a deep unease. She explores the commemoration of the bicentennial and a set of interventions by design and active art oriented toward the experiences of daily life in the city. She reflects on an expanded version of the “political economy of design,” viewing this work of design as a narrative strategy born of the everyday urban field and very different from the design that mainly seeks commercial gain. “This design work,” she maintains, “and artistic and cultural practice may destabilize global dynamics because they describe the unease and insert what is local and has been silenced in the urban landscape, rendering it legible, giving it a presence.” And, she proposes, “If the unease emerges from doing and from participation, it may well serve to excavate possible futures glimpsed through the fractures of that unease.”

It is not a good thing to make a mistake in the choice of the future horizon because one’s map is not up to date. Michael Cohen reviews the definitions of wealth (of the nation) and geography (organization of the territory / natural and human resources) that we have employed since the centennial. He proposes new definitions of wealth and geography adapted to global, regional and national transformations, capable of opening up new options and expectations for the future. Instead of continuing to concentrate attention on the farming commodities it produces for world markets, the author maintains that Argentina ought to define itself within the global economy, for which purpose he proposes to: define a series of public policies that recognize and

support economic and social interdependence between urban and rural areas in the economy; support investment to train the population, placing greater emphasis on science and technology; and strengthen the role of the State to allow it to legitimate and institutionalize this new geography which breaks with dichotomous views. “This,” he concludes, “should be an active part of the process of the bicentennial, centering on forms for developing and applying the knowledge that crosses dichotomous borders and thus helping to build a strong and cohesive country, prepared for the twenty-first century.”

If we assume that up to this point we have an idea of what we want for the future, what do we do now? We asked Oscar Tangelson to conclude this book with a chapter in which he debates, brings together and summarizes outlines and priorities for the construction of a comprehensive plan for the nation’s development and future: a “country project.” The author poses four challenges: regaining economic growth; attaining and consolidating the Mercosur integration process and its expansion to the South American Union; defining Argentina’s position in the world to adapt itself to the transformations triggered by the technological and productive revolution, and rebuilding social justice so that all its inhabitants benefit from the wealth that they contribute to generate. He concludes by posing the guidelines for a comprehensive productive project for Argentina. Among others: turning from “the breadbasket to the supermarket aisle”; manufacturing organic products that are in increasing demand; awakening the Andes to mining; using the lengthy coastline for fisheries; maximizing the availability of water in a thirsty world; developing Patagonia’s energy potential; increasing the economy of the diverse areas, taking advantage of their diversity; promoting intelligence and creativity as a product. Insofar as the hegemonic dispute of the twenty-first century is brain-intensive, in this knowledge society “the education process again acquires the critical character it had at the beginning of the century, for social inclusion and mobility, scientific and technological development, production and competitiveness.”

This is our contribution to a collective conversation on the meaning and the forms of the commemoration of the bicentennial. These are our first comments – they do not attempt to be definitive. But, as Raymond Williams maintains regarding the future, thinking about the bicentennial is the first step toward constructing it. We are on our way.

Margarita Gutman  
Buenos Aires-New York  
October 2005

