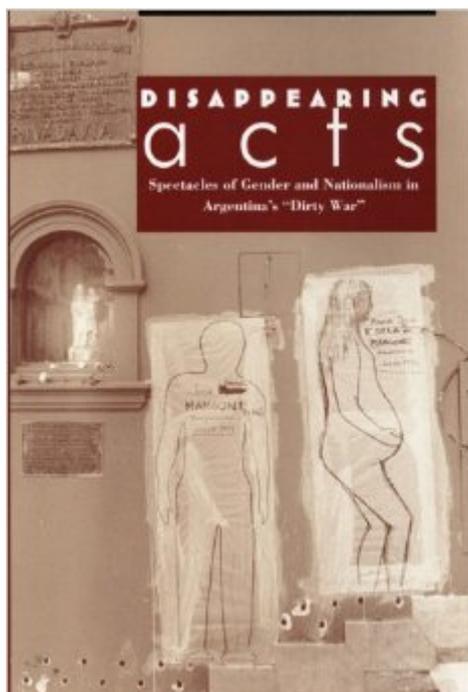


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Disappearing Acts: Spectacles Of Gender And Nationalism In Argentina's "Dirty War"



Synopsis

In *Disappearing Acts*, Diana Taylor looks at how national identity is shaped, gendered, and contested through spectacle and spectatorship. The specific identity in question is that of Argentina, and Taylor's focus is directed toward the years 1976 to 1983 in which the Argentine armed forces were pitted against the Argentine people in that nation's "Dirty War." Combining feminism, cultural studies, and performance theory, Taylor analyzes the political spectacles that comprised the war—concentration camps, torture, "disappearances"—as well as the rise of theatrical productions, demonstrations, and other performative practices that attempted to resist and subvert the Argentine military. Taylor uses performance theory to explore how public spectacle both builds and dismantles a sense of national and gender identity. Here, nation is understood as a product of communal "imaginings" that are rehearsed, written, and staged—and spectacle is the desiring machine at work in those imaginings. Taylor argues that the founding scenario of Argentineness stages the struggle for national identity as a battle between men fought on, over, and through the feminine body of the Motherland. She shows how the military's representations of itself as the model of national authenticity established the parameters of the conflict in the 70s and 80s, feminized the enemy, and positioned the public—limiting its ability to respond. Those who challenged the dictatorship, from the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo to progressive theater practitioners, found themselves in what Taylor describes as "bad scripts." Describing the images, myths, performances, and explanatory narratives that have informed Argentina's national drama, *Disappearing Acts* offers a telling analysis of the aesthetics of violence and the disappearance of civil society during Argentina's spectacle of terror.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Diana Taylor is a brilliant writer and an obviously informed expert on the Dirty War of Argentina (1963 - 1976), a writer who has composed a Doctoral Thesis approach to her well-informed information about this misunderstood atrocity that nearly destroyed Argentina. Yet sound as her thoughts are and intensely well documented though her theories prove to be, this book is not recommended as the first line of information about this subject. Taylor's premise involves theories as to how the Dirty War, or the atmosphere under the military juntas that replaced Peronism, are based on her observations as to how the public remained fearfully silent during this time of concentration camps, torture, atrocities, and most importantly the 'desaparecidos' (or disappearing ones) whose only voices were in the quiet marches of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. She informs us that the use of plays and spectacles attended by the Argentinians were in their own way a show of defiance to the manipulative military juntas. Performance, theatre, and poetry were the elected means of tacitly protesting the totalitarian military rule that choked this country until the fall of the juntas in the war over the Malvinas/Falkland Islands with Great Britain. While all of what Taylor has to say is interesting and novel and important, what is needed to gain the most from this heady book is more time spent educating the reader about the political and social history of Argentina. Though the "Dirty War" is at times referenced in conversations about South American politics, sadly most of what we as the general public know of what lead up to the military takeover of the government is what we glean from such feeble resources as the musical EVITA!

As a graduate student of Latin-American literature, and a history buff, I can recommend this book to any uninformed individual on the Dirty War and its origins. But at the same time I would recommend that you take some of Dr. Taylor's comments with a grain of salt. Her neo-feminist attitude and strict anti-Christian stance on U.S. politics would lead some readers astray in understanding the Junta and their torture, abuse, rape, and subsequent murder of over 30,000 desaparecidos (disappeared persons). She begins the book with her analysis of a play entitled "Paso de Dos" in which a woman, who represents the "Patria" is brutally abused in a sexual encounter with a uniformed man in a mud pit - not exactly an appropriate way to begin educating the ignorant reader about Argentine history or theatre. She could have begun differently. But after having read many of the plays of Argentina, and analyzing them in a University setting, I CAN say that Argentine theatre was written in order to be a metaphorical representation of Argentine history and "Paso de Dos" does indeed serve as an

accurate metaphor. Dr. Taylor's basic argument - which is well-documented with pictures, plays, and other historical sources - is that the Dirty War's inevitability lies in the struggle of violence (particularly against women), and that the "feminization" of opponents of past regimes in Argentina coupled with the loss of basic rights to the more subaltern groups of the country when the military are in power, both worked together after the regime of Juan Manuel Rosas to produce the Dirty War.

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