from one city reached the other, and people travelled back and forth too. Radio personalities like Niní Marshall fled Peronist Argentina and reappeared on Uruguayan radio. Ehrick prompts historians of Argentina to pay attention to these connections. She also draws productively on recent developments in the cultural history of Peronism, especially the increased focus on consumption. Her description of Peronism as a ‘noisy phenomenon’ (p. 104) resonates with Ezequiel Adamovsky and Esteban Buch’s *La marchita, el escudo y el bombo* (Planeta, 2014).

Most historians of Peronism would not think to compare Eva Perón to Paulina Luisi or Nené Cascallar, but Ehrick’s analysis raises questions about the role of women in the public sphere that could push future scholarship in unexpected directions. Studies of Peronism tend to focus on the working class, but the example of Nené Cascallar’s melodramas hints at the degree to which Peronist ideas and rhetoric infiltrated middle-class life. How did women of various class backgrounds respond to the political, social and cultural messages they heard over the airwaves? By 1947, Argentina had one radio for every two households across the country, and a number of radio stations in provincial capitals. Radio played an important role in connecting listeners in rural regions of the interior to national and international issues. To what degree did those listeners identify with the values of Ehrick’s ‘rioplatense cultural zone’?

Ehrick argues persuasively that ‘radio was a crucial arena for struggles over women’s citizenship and place in the public sphere’ (p. 208). Her examples show that the debate about women’s rights involved many women who were not affiliated with the feminist movement. This book highlights the advantages of an expansive, interdisciplinary approach to the history of women and gender.

*King’s College London*

CHRISTINE MATHIAS


As many democracies have gone into a reverse tide of illiberalism, the concept of populism has enjoyed a resurgence. From Venezuela to Turkey, the United States of America to Hungary, seismic social, cultural and political shifts are neatly bundled and explained as ‘populism’. The polarisation and conflict that fuel and follow from populist responses feed the fad for quantifying populist tendencies and actions, with the distant exercise of counting, codifying and pooling assumed to contribute to our capacity to anticipate, identify and address populist tendencies – or at least have the opportunity to look at an interesting data set.

In this context, the most salient contribution of *Evita: The Life of Eva Perón* is to re-orient us back to engagement with the sentiments, sounds, hopes and searing tensions that pervade societies and cultures on the cusp of transformation. The author steers us away from the usual trawl of explanatory variables that shape assessment of populism – institutions, party systems – and to engagement with people, personalities and circumstance. The approach is valuable in reminding us of the importance of understanding how social groups come to trust random, ‘outsider’ individuals by forcing us to better appreciate the actors themselves – with all of their contradictions, frailties and inconsistencies.

Jill Hedges frames her assessment by acknowledging that Evita is a deeply polarising figure, and that this in turn ‘obscures a remarkable career’ (p. 7). Gently putting aside
tired stereotypes, unflattering biographies and layers of myth, Hedges explains Evita’s potent combination of ambition, idealism, tenacity, impetuosity and – as emerges very strongly from this reading – unswerving commitment to social justice, as rooted in Evita’s own background that is lucidly detailed by the author. At the same time, the ‘dangers of untrammelled power’ of non-elected office are highlighted but in the skilfully elaborated context of the deprivation and marginalisation of Evita’s core – and at that time, disarticulated constituency.

Through a richly textured and vivid narrative, Hedges enables the reader to understand the windows of opportunity that vacuums and voids serendipitously provide for some actors. Here is the story of ‘how an ordinary person can do extraordinary things’, colourfully told through the lens of cultural change and, in particular, the rise of radio as a mechanism for social mobility and political mobilisation. To her discussion of Evita’s youthful ambitions, early career path and social networks, Hedges brings an evident affection and deep knowledge of Argentina, of its geographical diversity, class antagonisms, harsh social norms and evolving culture. She writes empathically of the challenges posed by provincial isolation, illegitimacy and the ‘boundless contempt’ of elite classes, positioning the reader almost alongside Evita in the aspiring actress’s youthful quest to relocate to Buenos Aires (at age 15 years) and find employment in the exploding broadcast, theatre and music scene.

As Hedges reminds us, Evita was just 26 years old when her husband was elected to the Argentine presidency in June 1946, thrusting the young but somewhat talentless actress into the world of protocol, dignified dressing and a discreet burying of her Vaudevillian past. In Chapters 4 and 5, the figure of Colonel Juan Domingo Perón is introduced and the circumstances of his rapid political ascent from the initially insignificant post of Secretary of Labour and Social Security (December 1943) to Minister of War (February 1944) to Vice President (July 1944) detailed. The stars of both Evita and Perón, whom she first met at a fundraising gala for the January 1944 San Juan earthquake, rose exponentially in a compressed period of time driven by the astute building of a political base among the industrial labour sector and following the granting of female suffrage in September 1947. In her account of the nascent but subsequently visceral conflict that has pitted pro- and anti-Peronist elements for decades, Hedges neatly contrasts the energy and resilience of organised labour and working-class women against the resistance, sexism and snobbery of the traditional elite of Argentina, from business leaders and landlords to ‘well-heeled’ protestors, from the Catholic Church to the pervasively present military.

Chapters 11 and 12 detail Evita at the height of her political influence within the Peronist Women’s Movement and the Eva Perón Foundation. Hedges focuses on the merging of Evita’s public and private roles, the gruelling schedule of engagements maintained by the First Lady and the increasingly distinct paths and responsibilities assumed by President Perón and his wife. But Evita’s ‘fatal preoccupation’ (p. 183) with work meant that, according to her doctor, ‘unconsciously, she committed suicide’ (p. 181), ignoring haemorrhaging, acute gynaecological pain and anaemia. Her death in July 1952 came at a time of deepening political tension between the Peronist base and its leadership, as Evita’s popularity was overshadowing that of her husband, as the military were preparing to move against Perón and as the strong performance of the economy in the aftermath of World War 2 was going into reverse. She died at the height of her popularity and before association with decline. Chapter 15 details the frustrated efforts of the military that displaced Perón and seized power in September 1955 to prevent Evita’s resting place from becoming a shrine of grieving.
and agitation – by dispatching her corpse first to Milan, then on to Madrid. Finally repatriated in 1975, Evita and her symbolism have, according to Hedges, been most particularly resurrected by the administrations of Néstor Kirchner (2003–7) and his successor and wife Cristina (2007–15).

*Evita* is an engaging and accessible read that is delightful in its evocation of mid-century Argentina. Neither blinding the reader with complex equations of power nor boring with long trawls through institutional fragility, this exploration of populism locates the study of enduring, iconic leadership in the details of personality and cultural circumstance.

*Central European University, Budapest*

JULIA BUXTON


At the height of the rampant inflation that plagued the Brazilian economy during the first half of the 1970s, at a time when the price of beans was increasing 400 per cent in one year, the artist Cildo Meireles produced a series of ersatz bank notes with a value of zero cruzeiros. Using the same design and printing methods as the Casa da Moeda and replacing the signature of the president of the Banco Central do Brasil with Meireles’s own, the notes were sold on the streets of Rio de Janeiro using the slogan ‘Veja a que ponto chegamos: zero cruzeiro’ (Just look how far we’ve come: zero cruzeiro). For a brief period before the street vendors stopped selling them, fearing reprisals from the military government in power at the time, the artist’s bank notes infiltrated the currency system, exposing the instability of state economic institutions as well as the unreliability of money as a marker of value. In an economic context in which, between 1968 and 1971, the cruzeiro was devalued 24 times, Brazilian citizens would be forgiven for questioning which value system was real and which was false.

*Art Systems* is a study of conceptual art during the 1970s in Brazil, a period dominated by a military government which was at its most repressive until 1974, under the leadership of the hard-line General Emílio Garrastazu Médici, before entering a period of gradual distenção or relaxation of authoritarian rule, moving towards the first democratic elections in 1985. Understandably perhaps, this a moment in which cultural production has most frequently been considered to be a reflection of the political system and, in particular, as a response to the censorship in place following the repressive Ato Institucional No. Cinco (Institutional Act No. 5), which was issued in 1968, propelling many musicians, writers and artists into exile. Based on extensive interviews with artists and critics and combining analysis of individual art works with cultural history, Elena Shtromberg’s study aims to provide a broader view by examining the connection between art and politics during this period in all its complexity and multiplicity.

Rather than as responses to political repression, *Art Systems* interprets conceptual art works during this period as interventions or ‘infiltrations’ into four main ‘systems’ of communication, exchange and representation: currency, newspapers, television and maps. Shromberg uses the perspective of Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s general systems theory to view artworks in relation to the ‘network of relationships’ (p. 3) they both produce and are conditioned by, a critical approach that was influential in the art worlds of the 1960s and 1970s and that lends itself particularly well to the Brazilian