Two years after the 1966 military coup in Argentina, three musicians, Norberto Chavarri, Roque de Pedro and Guillermo Gregorio formed the intermedia performance collective Movimiento Música Más (MMM). Movimiento Música Más — which can be translated as “the movement of music plus,” or the “more than music movement” — combined experimental music, visual art, poetic performance and political action, carrying out activities in concert halls, plazas and city buses during one of Argentina’s most brutal juntas.

This chapter examines the activist art of this little-known “Other” avant-garde that existed at the periphery of 1960s internationalism, focusing on two of MMM’s performance pieces: “Plaza para la Siesta de un Domingo,” (1970) in which the group held a well-publicized birdsong contest in a city plaza while MMM performed in a large cage, and the 1971 “Música para Colectivo Línea 7,” composed by Norberto Chavarri, during which the group performed on a city bus, using the vehicle itself as an instrument. These two performances embody MMM’s approach to experimentalism; a commitment to bringing art and people into public spaces during a time of rigid governmental control of those spaces and bodies, and an interest in the political symbolism generated by their actions.

Though seemingly conceptually indebted to the activities of Fluxus and other 1960s arts collectives in Europe and the United States, MMM were for the most part unaware of these developments, creating domestically inspired aesthetic responses to the complex problems of late 1960s and early 1970s Buenos Aires.

The primary ethnographic and archival sources for this research are MMM founders Guillermo Gregorio, a composer/performer living in the United States since the late 1980s, and composer Norberto Chavarri, who remains in Argentina. MMM as a group was always in flux in terms of its membership, but it counted among its ranks photographers, graphic designers, painters and blue collar laborers in addition to musicians and composers like Gregorio, Chavarri and de Pedro.

Prevailing narratives of Argentine history and 20th century experimentalism ignore MMM, but this chapter argues that their activities shed light upon how creative individuals respond to extreme situations. In addition, a look at MMM’s work allows us to explore some problems in the narratives of experimentalism to put forth another case study of what Branden Joseph has called “minor history,” in his work on canonically-challenged intermedia artist Tony Conrad.¹ This chapter examines the intermedia “outsystem” of MMM in Buenos Aires, the group’s localized take on experimentalist aesthetics, and their interconnections to more cosmopolitan forms of these practices.

The arts and music scene of 1960s Argentina was a complex period of almost obsessive aesthetic internationalization, in an (ultimately failed) attempt to bring Argentine arts to global attention (cf. Giunta 2007). There was an enormous amount of

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¹Adapting DeLeuze and Guattari’s 1986 work on Kafka and “minor literature,” Joseph argues that “the ‘minor’ is not the qualitatively or quantitatively inferior, but what is marked by an irreducible or uncontainable difference. It is not a subcategory or subsystem in the conventional sense, but what Deleuze and Guattari call at one point an ‘outsystem.’” (Joseph 2011:50).
institutional support for this internationalist project, which created its own problems as the relationship between artists and the institutions eventually became untenable, in part because of the perceived imperialist nature of some of the funding sources, as art historian Andrea Giunta (2007) has argued in-depth.

What set MMM apart from their Argentine contemporaries, according to Gregorio and Chavarri, was a committed focus to collective art-making and engagement with the general public. According to Chavarri, “violence and intolerance have been present throughout my musical life. Before, during, and after Ongania, with governments that were democratic or military – death came from both the left and the right...art was our exit door from the shadowy world that plagued us.” (Translated email correspondence with the author, 8 September 2010). Regarding the broader historical backdrop of 1960s Argentine artists’ incorporation of politics in their work, Giunta has described “a constant friction between the political and cultural spheres” that led to a situation within which “politics became unavoidable for artists not only as a theme in their work, but also as a problem that had to be resolved with the creation of new art forms” (Giunta 2007:5). Chavarri suggests that the deep and continuing problems of artmaking in Argentina are not simply delimited by what we as onlookers might call “times of turmoil” such as those of the Ongania regime, but are wounds that continue to injure for years beyond the initial trauma.

Although the effectiveness of political activism in the arts is typically judged by its enduring impact, MMM’s work presents an interesting vantage point from which to consider the cultural work achieved by smaller gestures that remain submerged in a culture’s prevailing historical narratives.

As we continue to push outward from our studies of canonical locations of experimentalism like Western Europe and the United States, we have an opportunity and responsibility to learn from these peripheral or “minor” forms of experimentalism and incorporate their unique expressions into a more globally representative historical narrative. In the case of MMM, what are the implications of the fact that, inspired by the proto-Fluxus text pieces of LaMonte Young, MMM carried that cosmopolitan inspiration to very different localized ends? How does the difficult and perilous political backdrop of a military regime affect our interpretation of these creative works and the people who make them?

As a growing number of scholars reconsider the “great stories” (Berkhofer 1995) of experimentalism, the case of MMM presents us with another diving board for further exploration and critical revision of these narratives.

Works Cited