

REMEMBRANCES OF MARTA BUNGE

SILVIA BUNGE, ANDRÉE EHRESMANN, AND VALERIA DE PAIVA

MARTA BUNGE AS MOTHER

I have an early memory: my mother was waiting for inspiration to strike. She was lying on the sofa listening to classical music when she suddenly got up, went to her study, and closed the long sliding door. I knew from experience that she wouldn't emerge for hours. On such occasions, my father – who greatly admired my mother and sought to protect her time – would ask me not to disturb her. I didn't understand the precise nature of my mother's work (actually, it's still a mystery to me), but I did understand that she required periods of intense focus to write whatever it was she was writing behind the sliding door.

Reflecting on my mother's life after she passed away in October 2022, I wrote to my friends:

“My mother was born and raised in Buenos Aires, after which she and my dad lived in the U.S. and Europe before settling in Montreal for decades. She was a theoretical mathematician with many outside interests, including music, literature, politics, and more. She was such a creative writer that we begged her to retire and write a novel, but she didn't want to give up on her work. A native Spanish speaker, she spoke English flawlessly and was fluent in French, Italian, and Greek. She was an adventurer, swimming long distances while dodging motorboats, cross-country skiing in the bitter cold north of Montreal, etc. – and she planned elaborate family trips to faraway lands like Egypt and India.

My mom was the only woman in her department at McGill University for the first 30 years of her faculty position, after which a second one was hired. She experienced sexism but didn't consider herself a feminist; she just pursued her passion for math. She didn't talk about her work much (we wouldn't have understood it), so it's been gratifying to hear from her colleagues and former students that she was a brilliant mathematician, an inspiring and generous teacher, and a warm colleague.

Farewell to a bright, funny, cultured, elegant, passionate, and fearless mom.”

Being a mathematician was as central to my mother's self-concept as was being a mother; this was true right up until the end of her life. She told me that mathematicians don't ever really retire: they just stop working when they die. Less than a week before

she passed away, and already very ill, she made a concerted effort to complete one last editorial review for a journal. As I told her, it would have been perfectly understandable under the circumstances for her to either decline to handle the submission or to conduct a cursory review. Instead, she read the paper carefully and wrote a detailed report. I was astonished then, as I have been on many other occasions, at both her formidable intellect and strength of character. On behalf of my mother and my brother Eric, I would like to sincerely thank all the authors who took the time to contribute to this special issue. And, of course, warm thanks to Valeria de Paiva for spearheading this effort, and also to Jonathon Funk and Maria Manuel Clementino for serving as co-editors. My mother was eagerly anticipating the contributed articles. Although she didn't get to read them, she left the world knowing that her work was going to be acknowledged by esteemed colleagues and dear friends.

Silvia Bunge¹

MARTA BUNGE AS AN OUTSTANDING 40-YEAR EDITOR FOR THE "CAHIERS"

Charles Ehresmann and I first heard about Marta C. Bunge (1938-2022) in the early '70s from foreign categorists who came to lecture at our Paris Seminar. Shortly afterward, some of our students met her at different European category meetings and appreciated her and her talks. That is why we invited her to give a talk in 1973 at the "1er Colloque sur l'Algèbre des Catégories à Amiens". She replied that she'd be happy to come, but that it was not a good time for her to take such a long journey. From then on, we kept in touch via some of our researchers and, over the years, via articles she published (alone or with others) in the "Cahiers de Topologie et Géométrie Différentielle", namely in:

XVIII-3 (1977, page 291); XX-4, pages 373 and 401; XXII, page 31; XXV-3, page 221; XXVII-3, page 3; XXVIII, page 127; XLV (2004, page 243).

However, Marta and I only met 'in person' in July 1980, when she participated in Amiens to the "Colloque sur les catégories dédié à Charles-Ehresmann" after his death in September 1979. Due to the number of participants we had not much time for talking together. However I mentioned to her that, being now Director of the "Cahiers", I hoped she could help me by participating in their management. Finally, it wasn't until 1983 that, with the help of René Guitart, we decided to adapt the "Cahiers" to the new conditions, on the one hand by adding the word "catégoriques" to the title, to better represent their new readership, and on the other hand by creating an Editorial Committee, then made up of 8 Editors to help in the selection of papers to be published. Marta immediately accepted to become one of these Editors, and at that time she was the only woman in this Committee. In spite of different changes and extensions of this Committee, she remained an outstanding Editor for 40 years up to her death.

¹Silvia Bunge, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience, University of California Berkeley

Over these years, we have exchanged a large number of e-mails to discuss the policy of the Journal, for instance: nomination of new editors, rules on the length of the published articles; and, in 2018, the change to transform the “Cahiers” from a paid periodical into a freely downloadable Open Source Journal. For authors who chose Marta as their Editor, she responded promptly and, if there were delays, she acted herself as an excellent reviewer, and this up to the end. Our last exchange of letters was nearly a month before her death, about the acceptance of a paper submitted to her. Though already ill, she chose to review it herself very quickly, making a well thought out detailed report. This is testified by her son Eric Bunge who, just after her death, wrote to me: “In her final weeks, our mother often spoke of you and the paper she was reviewing – this was her last work. She was determined to complete it.” To conclude I would say that, although we had few opportunities to meet in person, Marta and I developed a 40-year very close bond together, which led to real friendship partially based on a number of similarities in our private lives. I will remember Marta as an important mathematician and as a dear friend.

Andrée Ehresmann²

MARTA BUNGE: A FEMINIST AT HEART

Marta was more than a dear friend; she was someone I initially admired timidly from afar. At the outset, she seemed too mysterious, too stern, and her command of mathematics appeared too formidable. However, in the early 2010s, a realization dawned on me – women navigating fields like Mathematics, Computer Science, Philosophy, AI, and practically anything else, faced disproportionately challenging paths. Despite legal strides granting women access to universities, voting rights, and the ability to open bank accounts, it was evident that they still encountered second-class status in the communities I belonged to. Fueled by this recognition, I decided it was imperative to instigate change, even amidst the chaos of a full-time job, raising children, and managing a household. Thus, I embarked on celebrating ‘Ada Lovelace Day’. Ada Lovelace Day revolves around honoring a woman you admire, be it through organizing a meeting, giving a talk, recording a video, or writing a blog post. In 2013, Marta Bunge became my Ada Lovelace Day heroine, though I didn’t delve much into her work at the time. Fast forward to October 2016, after I launched a blog named ‘Women in Logic.’ Marta reached out with a thoughtful message:

“In response to your earlier suggestion, Valeria de Paiva, I delved into the proportion of women among the invited speakers at the International Category Theory Conferences (CT) since 2000. The figures (Women/Total) tell a revealing story:

CT 2000 (0/5), CT 2006 (1/5), CT 2007 (0/8), CT 2008 (1/7),
 CT 2009 (0/5), CT 2010 (1/6), CT 2011 (1/6), CT 2013 (2/6),
 CT 2014 (2/6), CT 2015 (3/6), CT 2016 (2/6), CT 2017 (0/6).

²Professeur Emérite; LAMFA, Univ. Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens France

Deciding whether this is an adequate proportion requires additional data on the total number of deserving category theorists and how many of them are women.”

Marta acknowledged the subjectivity of this assessment and, true to her logical nature, urged a more qualified individual to tackle this issue. While she didn't transform into a feminist overnight, her shock at these numbers mirrors the sentiments many of us share. I couldn't discuss with her the subjective nature of determining “deserving’ category theorists” and the pervasive bias that questions women's competence compared to men. Numerous studies attest to this misguided perception. By then, I had already decided to edit a volume, celebrating her work in Category Theory. This was long before anyone knew about the disease that would take her so swiftly in October 2022. I thought we would have time to discuss the nuances of “deserving category theorists” and many other issues. But it wasn't to be so. Marta, it seems, wasn't just “a very decent person as well as an imaginative and undervalued mathematician” to quote a good friend; she was a silent advocate, unveiling inequalities with the precision of her logical mind.

Valeria de Paiva³

This article may be accessed at <http://www.tac.mta.ca/tac/>

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