

The Role of Art in Two Neighborhoods and Responses to Urban Decay and Gentrification

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Abstract

One of the most troubling aspects of cultural studies, is the lack of comparative cases to expand the horizons of micro-sociology. Based on this, the present paper explores the effects of gentrification in two neighborhoods, Riverwest in Milwaukee, Wisconsin USA and Abasto in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Each neighborhood had diverse dynamics and experienced substantial changes in the urban design. In the former arts played a pivotal role in configuring an instrument of resistance, in the latter one, arts accompanied the expansion of capital pressing some ethnic minorities to abandon their homes. What is important to discuss seems to be the conditions where in one or another case arts take one or another path. While Riverwest has never been commoditized as a tourist-product, Abasto was indeed recycled, packaged and consumed to an international demand strongly interested in Tango music and Carlos Gardel biography. There, tourism served as an instrument of indoctrination that made serious asymmetries among Abasto neighbors, engendering social divisions and tensions which were conducive to real estate speculation and great financial investors. The concept of patrimony and heritage are placed under the lens of scrutiny in this investigation.

Key Words: Abasto, Riverwest, Gentrification, Patrimonialization, Discrimination, Tourism.

Riverwest: How Artistic Work Makes the Moral Bonds of a Community

Social studies of art offer illuminating perspectives on art's roles in societies, how social conditions affect art, and how the arts affect and reflect social conditions. The following makes use of all these and it adds a neglected perspective. That perspective examines the work of artists as social actors in time and space. More specifically, it looks at the effects of artists making art in a neighborhood. It interrogates the effects of people who make art and how their making art also makes a neighborhood. The perspective is broadly anthropological in that it offers a holistic description and explanation. The holistic view assumes that culture and society, although separable for analytic purposes, remain indivisible in their concrete actuality. Therefore, what people do, makes their society, and their society in turn conditions what they do.

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The Neighborhood

Riverwest is fairly centrally located in an upper Midwest former industrial city, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The city comfortably fits the ‘rustbelt’ name. The city reached its population apex in the early 1960s, topping three quarters of a million. It has declined to slightly more than 600,000 in 2010.

Before the post-WWII in-migration of African Americans, Milwaukee’s ethnic composition reflected extraction from middle Europe--German, Polish, Italians mainly, who came in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the mid-twentieth century, the economy was mainly manufacturing, favoring heavy industry along with beer and dairy. The manufacturing base employed a relatively highly skilled workforce. Politically, the city was exceptional, having socialist mayors through 1960.

Riverwest is former industrial and residential neighborhood. Today the heavy industry that once interspersed housing, mainly duplexes and small tenements, has largely, although not entirely, disappeared. The neighborhood, like the city, and the entire upper Midwest went through deindustrialization since the 1970s. For most such neighborhoods, deindustrialization resulted in deterioration in the quality of life for their denizens. With the loss of the industrial economic base came a host of urban problems: a shrinking tax base, flight by long term residents to suburbs, depopulation, racial and ethnic segregation, concentrated poverty, increased interpersonal predatory crime, and so on. Riverwest did not experience these ills. Moreover, today it shows vigor and vitality without gentrification. It has remained a working class neighborhood, now more racially and ethnically integrated than ever. It has a thriving artistic community, and has attracted new migrants from around the world because of its character.

Situating Riverwest

Milwaukee fits with the other industrial cities in virtually every respect, with some slight variation on the timing of socioeconomic shifts. In late modernity, beginning in the 1970s, it ranked among the most residentially segregated by race (Massey and Denton 1993). More diversified than Detroit or Pittsburgh, its industrial base rested on various ferrous metal products: machine tools and dies, castings, forgings, and heavy equipment, most notably. Its workforce reflected a relatively high degree of skill, in part a heritage of the ‘Forty-eighters,’ German democrats who fled the failure of the 1848 rebellion. Unlike the contemporary wave of Irish immigrants fleeing the potato famine, Milwaukee German immigrants tended toward what today would be called middle class, at least in the United States. Literate, skilled in various technical occupations, they formed a template that would persist in Milwaukee and its central institutions, especially education and government (Ortlepp 2009).

Riverwest has reflected the ethnic makeup of Milwaukee, which by the 1920s had a German-Italian-Polish character. By the 1940s, a small Puerto Rican contingent along with a smattering of other ethnic heritages made the neighborhood one of the more diverse in the city. It remained ethnically stable until the 1970s, when Black residents began to populate its northwestern quadrant. The workforce also reflected Milwaukee’s traditional composition: about one-third skilled workers, one-third semi-skilled, and the remainder clerical-sales, managerial, and a few professionals. Among working class neighborhoods, Riverwest also boasted of relatively high levels of educational attainment. About 20 percent were high school graduates in 1950 rising to 25 percent in 1960 and about one-third by 1970. Demographic characteristics began to change in the 1970s with more Black residents, out-migration of long term residents with an influx of households with more diverse backgrounds. Although losing population since 1940 when it had about 40 thousand residents to the present with approximately 30 thousand, the housing stock remained much the same.

Riverwest is a walkable neighborhood. It is about 20 blocks on its north-south axis and 12 to 15 blocks on its east-west axis. It has three parks, schools, churches, small stores, restaurants, and many taverns. Several bus and trolley buses have run through it, and some still do. Riverwest is the western part of the northeast quadrant of

the city. Topographically, the neighborhood slopes downward toward the river. The Milwaukee River forms its eastern boundary and partially its southern boundary as the river makes a southwesterly bend. Its northern boundary is less physical than social, as the site had heavy industry in the earlier years and retail outlets since about 1980. The western boundary has shifted through time and has always been less well defined. The southwestern boundary has been problematic, as that part of Riverwest bordered the traditional Black neighborhood, Milwaukee's so-called Bronzeville (Greenen 2006, Trotter 1988). By the later 1960s Bronzeville ghettoized (O'Reilly et al. 1965). Since 1990 the area gentrified and became what today is called Brewer's Hill. The southwestern part of Riverwest has had disputable boundaries. The area has shifted back and forth over the years according to social changes, especially regarding race and the political economy. These changes and the reasons for them constitute one of the focuses of this study.

Other defining sites in and about Riverwest include industry, parks, schools, and churches. Heavy industry concentrated in the north and south parts of the neighborhood with medium and light industries such as dry cleaning plants, lumber yards, and food packing scattered throughout. Light and heavy industry has largely given way to retail space with a concomitant decrease in capital concentration and wage decline. Three municipal parks modestly sized but with attractive recreational facilities, are situated in the north east corner, the central eastern area along the river, and the central southern part of Riverwest. In the past, there was a public indoor swimming pool, but that site is now a non-school educational center. Three public grade schools still operate. In the early part of the period four Roman Catholic and one Lutheran school served the neighborhood, but by 2010 that had diminished to one Catholic and one private non-denominational school. All the schools were associated with churches that still serve the neighborhood. Since the 1970s small Pentecostal churches have appeared in addition to a Society of Friends meeting house. Significantly, the pattern of industry, recreational facilities, schools, and churches does not differ from most neighborhoods in Milwaukee.

Social Change

Beginning in 1940, just before the United States entered the Second World War, Riverwest was dotted with machine shops along with a few large metal and electrical fabricators and assembly plants. The neighborhood economy began to thrive with the looming war's armament demand. It became a center of specialty machining and tool and die manufacture during and after the war. The post war period well into the 1960s was what Michael Johns (2003) called "a moment of grace." Many residents of the neighborhood walked to work at nearby factories and shops. After work, they repaired to neighborhood taverns, often accompanied by children, for leisure and recreation. They could shop at neighborhood groceries, bakeries, butcher shops, get their clothes and shoes repaired, buy hardware items, and so on, all within the neighborhood and through commerce with their neighbors.

Neighborhoods to the west and northwest of Riverwest had similar configurations of geography and demographics until the 1970s. The exception was the neighborhood to the southwest, Bronzeville, which contained most of Milwaukee's Black residents. The Black population expanded beginning after the Second World War but tended to remain geographically cohesive. It was an expanding circle. Due to deindustrialization and persistent discrimination, that Black core experienced ghettoization. The neighborhood to the southwest ghettoized, then gentrified; those to the west and northwest ghettoized. In a microcosm, the area of Milwaukee's central city north went through what Sugrue and others described for industrial cities (O'Reilly 1963, O'Reilly et al. 1965, Palay 1981). Nonetheless, with no physical boundary to the west, Riverwest defied the pattern: no ghettoization and no gentrification.

Thomas J. Sugrue's 1996 *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* offered a pivotal if not definitive account of urban decline in the United States. In his preface to the 2005 reissue of the book, he summarized his historical argument. Using Detroit as a model case study, Sugrue attributed the decline to three forces: deindustrialization,

workplace racial and ethnic discrimination, and residential racial segregation. He argued that grassroots conservatism, especially regarding race, had been built into the “New Deal’s ‘rights revolution’” (Sugrue 2005: xix). His case for Detroit as exemplary rests on similar studies of Detroit (Farley et al. 2000) along with those of Baltimore, Brooklyn, Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and St. Louis, to name a few (Bauman et al. 2000, Bluestone and Stevenson 2002, Bobo 2002, Diamond 2009, Durr 2003, Jones 2009, Meyer 2000, Pritchett 2002, Rieder 1985, and Wolfinger 2007). Sugrue traced the origins of decline to several turning points. Capital mobility especially beginning in the 1970s made possible and potentiated deindustrialization of the centers of capital. The developing world became the global workshop. Urban devastation followed (Harvey 1973, 2005). Demographic changes exacerbated shifts in the political economy. Suburbanization reflected the obverse of urban depopulation. Sugrue also pointed to gentrification as an attempted solution to urban decline, but argued that it did not trickle down to older, industry dependent neighborhoods. The result for most working class neighborhoods, especially in the rust belt cities, but also in places like Los Angeles and Oakland, revealed a now familiar story of crumbling infrastructure, housing dilapidation and abandonment, rising street crime, racial segregation, concentrated poverty—in sum, ghettoization (Orfield 1985).

While generally cogent, the argument by Sugrue and similar arguments by other scholars have some cracks. It is in those cracks that the present research focuses. Cultural anthropology has an old saw about the Bongo tribe. For any generalization about the human condition at least one exception, the Bongoes, calls it into question. By doing so, the Bongoes render an important service to the science. They show the faults in an explanation and call forth more exacting thought and revealing research. The neighborhood of Riverwest in Milwaukee is the Bongo tribe of contemporary critical urban theory. One of the most important of those lacunae appeared as early as 1970 in Henri Lefebvre’s *The Urban Revolution*. In Neil Smith’s forward to the translation, he summarized one of Lefebvre’s main points: “For Lefebvre, by contrast, space holds the promise of liberation. . . . Space is radically open for Lefebvre” (Lefebvre 1970:xiii). Lefebvre implies the liberating potential of space comes from the power and promise of social force among people in their interactions. In the 1930s and 1940s the site for creative social change was on the shop floor, but late modern capitalism with its changing nature of work militated against that space. Neighborhoods, in contradistinction, might still resist and offer a site for resistance against the interpenetration of capital into social relations.

Frameworks and Explanations

Bongoism, however fascinating as a case study in exceptionalism, still cries out for explanation. Bongoes may be unique, but the student of society still must explain their way of life, even if it turns out to be *sui generis*. Several explanations follow.

Drawing heavily on the Chicago School tradition of urban studies leads to an appreciation of Riverwest’s exceptionalism. That tradition stretches from Jane Adams and Albion Small in the late nineteenth century, through Park, Burgess, and Louis Wirth ([1925] 1964) to the recent work of Robert J. Sampson, his collaborators and students (Sampson 2008a, b, Sampson and Wilson 1995, Sampson et al. 2005, Sampson 2011). Another explanatory framework derives from perspectives that link urbanism, culture, and developments of late capitalism such as Mark Gottdiener (1985), David Harvey (1985, 1998, 1989, 2005), Henri Lefebvre ([1970] 2003, [1974] 1991), Saskia Sassen (1994), Edward Soja (1989), and Sharon Zukin (1995). The third trajectory of the research explores the transformative potential for creative work among working class people. It builds on historical studies by, for example, George Lipsitz (1994) and Michael Denning (1996). As Karl Marx famously observed in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, “Man makes his history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such things as he finds close at hand” (Marx [1885] 1963:5). The present research examines how people used their neighborhood and its close to hand materials to make a sustainable and resistant culture.

Enter Art

Art entered, and like the Dude in the movie, *The Big Lebowski*, the neighborhood abided. For a while it looked shaky: declining population, declining home ownership, a shift in racial composition from Euroamerican to various minorities, closing small businesses. This was most noticeable in the 1980s into the early 1990s. But it stopped declining. Now there are a few new businesses: a large hardware store adjacent to an older lumber yard, a furniture manufacturer, a coffee roaster and café, and several new restaurants and bars. Population has not soared, but it stabilized. True, there are a few condominium units made from remodeled factories, but they fail to dominate the neighborhood.

So, what is the secret to this neighborhood's preservation? It is not government action. It is not grass roots activism in the form of community development organizations. It is not urban frontier investors. No, I suggest that the answer is art. Art entails artists, of course, and there are many different kinds of them. There are painters and poets, sculptors, musicians, ceramicists, wood workers, and so on. Riverwest has them. In fact, Riverwest has always had them—working class artists, at least since 1940. They are artists who made and did their art in addition to their day jobs, or night jobs in the days when factories ran three shifts. They are not the Hemingways and Fitzgeralds, the Dalis and Picassos, the Josephine Bakers, and the like. Riverwest is not Paris in the 1920s, or Greenwich Village in the 1940s and 1950s, or Harlem in the 1920s, Chicago in the 1930s, Weimar Berlin. Riverwest does not have the world famous artists, writers, and musicians. Like it always has, and along with the non-artists, it has the worker artists: the school secretary artists, the tofu factory poets, the house cleaning photographers, and so on.

The art and the artists are not important for Riverwest because of their renown, because they have very little of that. What they have is social form, to borrow an idea from Georg Simmel and applied to art by Howard Becker. Their effectiveness lies in making and sustaining the neighborhood for three or four generations, at least, depending on how one counts generations. It comes from an old Chicago School discovery—cultural transmission. Cultural transmission operates despite changes in populations, because the artistic cultural tradition is passed from one generation of residents to the next. The secret to Riverwest is art, workers' art. It is the art of people creating; something unique to our species, even in the face of humanity-robbing political and economic systems.

David Harvey (1989) submitted a convincing argument on the role of art in economies. The discoveries of new worlds, conquest, and advances in technology were pivotal for European culture, creating a profound revolution. Every nation, since industrial revolution to contemporary, digital times was marked by substantial changes in the arts and science. Those changes contributed to the imperial expansion of Europe worldwide. Among other functions, the arts legitimate the spirit of the status quo. Urban centers were designed according to the forces of economics. In times of Fordist mass-production, cities followed patterns of centralization; populations settled around central financial and manufacturing placements. With the advent of postmodernism and radical defragmentation, there ensued an ongoing dynamic of decentralization. Segmentation invaded the minds of architects and painters. Quite aside from this, Harvey's account sheds light on the connection among arts, the status quo, capital, and economiest. Harvey provides with an insightful and all encompassing model to understand the real effects of economies in social relations over centuries.

Work, Creativity, and Species Being

Karl Marx famously analyzed the nature of capitalism and described the capitalist system. In his early writings on the subject in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (EPM) He distinguished work under capital to work before capitalism. He also distinguished human work from the labor of all other creatures. According to him, work under capital is estranged, alienated from the workers: “the worker is related to the *product of his labor* as to an *alien* object [sic]” (Marx 1844 EPM XXII). He argued that it is alienated because it is forced and forced

by someone other than nature. In simple, non-capitalist societies, people have to work to sustain themselves—subsistence activities—but no one else forces them to work. In slave-based economies masters do the forcing. In capitalism the social system does it—nameless and faceless it appears as a natural condition, although it is anything but natural. Compared to other creatures, human labor is always mediated through culture, of which the time and place bound political economy is a part. For other creatures, work is not mediated. “The animal is immediately one with its life activity” (Marx 1844 EPM XXIV). Humans’ life activity consists not only of subsistence but also the production of consciousness and human culture, both unique to the species. That is what Marx meant by his reference to species-being. “Man is a species-being, not only because in practice and in theory he adopts the species . . . as his object, but . . . also because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a *universal* and therefore free being” (ibid). That is, humans create; they create human culture—languages, political systems, economic systems, reproductive systems, and so on—and as each individual contributes to these creations, they create universal humanity.

“In creating a “world of objects” by his personal activity, in his work upon inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species-being, i.e., as a being that treats the species as his own essential being, or that treats itself as a species-being. . . .” (ibid). It could not be otherwise. Basic human productions are things like language; essentially human; essentially social; therefore essential to humanity and humanness. In contrast, “An animal produces only itself, whilst man produces all of nature” (ibid.). Another way of saying this is to say that the ecological niche in which people live is culture—their own production. Marx goes on to argue that animals produce only in accordance with their animal needs, whereas humans produce according to social standards, which they themselves have set and continually re-invent. One of those standards is a Kantian judgment, a value, which by definition is a cultural product: “Man therefore also forms objects in accordance with the laws of beauty” (ibid)—that is, people as species-beings produce art, defined according to their own standards of art and beauty.

This species-being production of beauty and art is what makes art relatively resistant to the penetration of capital. When capital penetrates human activities and social relations, it makes them into commodities. Commodification is another reason workers are alienated.

“As a result, therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal” (ibid XXIII).

Art shields against capital’s penetration by resisting commodification. It offers an imperfect shield. A moment’s reflection reveals its lacunae and aporias. Paintings and sculptures have become investments, for instance. Technologies allow mass production of artistic products from illuminated manuscripts to Gutenberg’s Bible, streamed music and videos, plastic replicas of the Venus de Milo. Walter Benjamin (1936) began his “The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ by quoting Paul Valéry.

“Our fine arts were developed, their types and uses were established, in times very different from the present, by men whose power of action upon things was insignificant in comparison with ours. But the amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are creating, make it a certainty that profound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful. In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art” (Paul Valéry, Pièces sur L’Art, 1931 Le Conquete de PUbiquite).

Benjamin goes on to lay the foundation for Theodore Adorno’s invidious distinction between high and low art, the art of the connoisseurs versus that of the masses (1970). In popular art, according to Benjamin, the masses uncritically enjoy the conventional (11). Inevitably the popularization of art leads to fascism and war (Benjamin

1936:15). While Benjamin and later Adorno see popular art as a vehicle for fascism, they neglect the truly social aspect of art—art as social action and relation. Moreover, Adorno especially fails to see art works as texts in which each painting, song, performance, and so has its own integrity (Gendron 1986, 2002; Lefbvre 1974;70). Adorno's, and his epigones' vituperative comparison overlooks the point by Paul Magritte in his painting *La Trahison des Images* (The Treachery of Images) (1928-9) or *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (This is not a pipe), or in another way by Marcel Duchamps notoriously signing urinals and similar common objects, or painting a mustache on a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*. What makes a work of art is always already and thoroughly social. One finds a singular work of art no more than an idiosyncratic language. Neither can exist. Moreover, there is no art without technology, as the earliest examples of art, the cave paintings from the dawn of humanity, required and relied on the latest technology of 40 thousand years ago. Where Benjamin ascribes the artistic aura to the singular and original, its real origin is the socialization of what David Lewis-Williams calls the autistic end of the spectrum of consciousness.

Lewis-Williams argues that the cave paintings of the Upper Paleolithic found in France, Spain, and several other locations in western Europe represent images of altered states of consciousness, which when inscribed on the rock walls, became a socially circumscribed cultural product. He further argues that the emergence of higher level consciousness, the reflective and reflexive kind that relies on symbols, co-emerged with anatomically modern humans, social stratification, and symbolic representation. The latter most relevantly realized as art and language. Art's aura, to use Benjamin's trope, is that of the sacred, the socially sacred as opposed to the socially profane in Emile Durkheim's (1912) formulation. Lewis-Williams also proposes that the cave art objectified a basic if not defining characteristic of humanity: the conflict between the individual and the group. Such a conflict presupposes reflective consciousness, an awareness of the self as a distinct and autonomous entity.

Artists, Individualism, and Society

One of the most anthologized pieces of social science begins with the assertion of the same conflict as central to modernity. Georg Simmel began "The Metropolis and Mental Life," first published as a passage in his 1900 book, *Philosophie des Geldes* and later as a standalone article (1903) with "The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society . . ." ([1903] 1971: 324). Later in the piece, he distinguishes between the modern metropolis and rural and small town life, but the reader rightly suspects a certain romanticization of the latter. Nonetheless, that conflict occupied Simmel's sociological writings in ways pertinent to understanding the social roles of art and artists. Its central significance flows from the fact that however technology affects works of art, the work of artists follows prehistoric social forms and cultural functions that appear intrinsic to human group life. The same conflict regarding art and artists persists *a fortiori* under the capitalist mode of production with its insatiable commodification.

In another article, Simmel considers the role of the stranger. According to him, the role of the stranger presents a synthesis of detachment from and attachment to a group. He also, albeit parenthetically, notes that "This is another indication that spatial relations not only are determining conditions of relationships among men [*männer*], but are also symbolic of those relations" (Simmel [1908] 1971:143). That is, social distance creates social (symbolic) space. In the present case, a neighborhood, social distance among those in it creates the social space of neighborhood, one with somewhat hazy or at least fluid boundaries depending on this same symbolic social distance.

Simmel goes on to observe that strangers differ from wanderers in that the latter—those who come today and leave tomorrow—have "not quite got over the freedom of coming and going" (*ibid*). The stranger, however, remains, or in the reference above, abides. "The state of being a stranger is of course a completely positive relation; it is a specific form of interaction" (*ibid*). The stranger is both of and not of the group; essential to it,

yet distant, coming and going, but always inextricably tied to it. “The stranger is an element of the group itself, not unlike the poor and sundry ‘inner enemies’” (144). In Durkheimian terms (1895), the stranger role is a necessary function, like crime. Those accorded the stranger role can keep “a distinctly ‘objective’ attitude, an attitude that does not signify mere detachment and nonparticipation, but is distinct structure composed of remoteness and nearness, indifference and involvement” (145). Simmel’s models for the stranger were traders, and Jews, with a good deal of overlap in the categories. Of course, in this sense, Simmel himself was a stranger. Finally, Simmel connects the stranger role to a reflexion of and in the group—a primal reflectiveness and reflexiveness constitutive of humanity.

“The stranger is close to us insofar as we feel between him and ourselves similarities of nationality or social position, of occupation or of general human nature. He is far from us as these similarities extend beyond him and us, and connect us only because they connect a great many people” (147)

I propose that the artist fulfills the stranger role. Artists come and go in that the making of their art entails a great deal of solitude and inner subjectivity, which tends toward what David Lewis-Williams calls the autistic. The artist fits the model in several ways, the intrapsychic or psychological, the social psychological, and the cultural—the last especially through works of art. Simmel detects a tension, and I would add, both an inner and outer tension, because “the consciousness of having only the absolutely general in common has exactly the effect of putting a special emphasis on that which is not common” (148).

Lewis-Williams supposed that the archaeological evidence coupled with more contemporary ethnological evidence of rock and cave art means that their spatial location reinforces the social nearness-distance that Simmel observed. Upper Paleolithic cave art is removed from the common living of space. So is contemporary rock art of peoples such as the San of southern Africa, which Lewis-Williams studied, but also of the Australian and North American rock art. Similarly, nonobjective art, both that of the Piro, an Amazonian people (Gow 1999) and the constructivist art associated with revolutionary movements of the first third of the twentieth century, especially Russian, achieved remoteness, not by geographic or geologic space, but by the abstractness of design and execution (Juda and Tollemache 1970; Martin, Nicholson, and Gabo 1937; Rotzler 1977). Among the Amazonians and the Constructivists, the inside-outside relationship relies on the unfamiliar and abstract nature of the representations while at the same time presented for public exhibition. That is, the Constructivists wanted public presentations of the work—whether design, literary, or performative—but the works themselves, because they were nonobjective, called for the audiences to retreat into their own more autistic selves, as if they were entering a prehistoric cave. The Piro also place drawings and paintings on public surfaces and pottery with a nonobjective, abstract representation. One last word from Simmel’s 1908 article: “It is strangeness caused by the fact that similarity, harmony, and closeness are accompanied by the feeling that they are actually not the exclusive property of this particular relation” (148). This was, I would argue, what the surrealists sought to achieve, but it is also true of what we today consider traditional art. Hundreds, often thousands per day gaze upon the *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre. Both a public and private, subjective aura attaches to it.

These instances of art come from the solitary creative work of artists. Even when artists collaborate and work in groups, they draw on inner mental states. The artists themselves remain part of the groups, but they are strangers, as their work attests to the continual withdrawal from the group and the inferred detachment they achieve by and through their creations. In another article by Simmel, “The Adventurer” ([1911] 1971) he explicitly compares artists and adventurers, vagabonds, tourists, and the like.

“Here, above all is the basis of the profound affinity between the adventurer and the artist, and also, perhaps, of the artist’s attraction by the adventure. For the essence of a work of art is, after all, that it cuts out a piece of the endlessly continuous sequences of perceived experiences, detaching it from all connections with one side or the other, giving it a self-sufficient form as though defined and held together by an inner core” (189).

Indeed part of the complex often called aesthetics relies on precisely this relationship. It provides the “aura” in Benjamin’s terms. It is also precisely because artists are strangers and adventurers that they contribute to that social glue found in cultures.

Art Worlds and Social Fields

In addition to providing a degree of social glue, artists working as such institutionalize art worlds and generate artistic social fields. Howard Becker made a sociological analysis of art worlds. He argued that such worlds, which are really networks with vague boundaries, are and should be the basic unit of analysis, at least in his sociology (Becker 1982: 36). He defined them as consisting “of all those people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art” (34). Noting that the term ‘art’ often functions as an honorific by various and usually hierarchic gatekeepers, he treated his analytic subjects inclusively. He specifically mentioned cake decorating, embroidery, and folk dancing by way of illustration.

In deriving his concept of art fields, Pierre Bourdieu acknowledged Becker. Bourdieu particularly pointed to Becker’s recognition of the collective nature of art. “Here one might point to the contribution of Becker who, to his credit, constructs artistic production as a collective action, breaking with the naïve vision of the individual creator” (Bourdieu 1993:34). He recognizes differences between the two concepts, but eschews discussing them. Instead, Bourdieu describes the “artistic field is not reducible to a *population*, i.e. a sum of agents linked by simple relations of *interaction*” (35). Within the concept, therefore, resides a caution against imagining any kind of fixed system or structure within which the relatively more dynamic social agents play out their interactions. Instead, the field, to an extent, generates itself in a process of autopoiesis (Luhmann [1968] 1982, [1984] 1995, [1995] 2000; Maturana and Varela 1980, 1987). The limitation comes from its relation to other fields. That is, actors do not organize themselves just as they please to make art worlds or field. They do so within constraints of history, culture, and social structure. Bourdieu uses diagrams in which the art field square appears within a field of power, which itself is encased in the class structure field. Each field has a degree of autonomy, but each affects the others.

“It is thus the site of a double hierarchy: the heteronymous principle of hierarchization, which would reign unchallenged if, losing all autonomy, the literary and artistic field were to disappear as such (so that writers and artists become subject to the ordinary laws prevailing in the field of power, and more generally in the economic field) . . . The Autonomous principle of hierarchization, would reign unchallenged if the field of production were to achieve total autonomy with respect to the laws of the market . . .” (Bourdieu [1993]:38)

It is the relative autonomy of the art field that gives the art world and artists the ability to challenge and overcome those empirical generalizations aspiring to achieve the status of laws of urban social formation. In the particular case of the Riverwest neighborhood, the relative autonomy of its art world challenged the social forces pushing it toward ghettoization. Riverwest’s art world succeeded in producing a space of vitality and stability—an autopoiesis of self organization—in several dimensions and in several ways.

Riverwest as Bongoland

A certain homology obtains at different levels of abstraction—the mental, the interactional, and the social structural levels. Consequently, artists’ imaginaries, their creation of art works, and their social interactions come to be reflected in social structures—that is, urban social formations. It followed particular institutionalizations in Riverwest, and these homologies only form sensible and analyzable patterns when viewed from the correct theoretical perspective.

Art institutions are visible in Riverwest: an artists’ association with a gallery, a small press bookstore that stages

writers' public presentations, avant-garde galleries, artists' workshops and studios, several cafes and taverns that display art works and hold public readings, and so on. In addition, there are a host of informal, often ephemeral writers' and artists' group meetings. The neighborhood boasts a history of regular publications, including a neighborhood newspaper published since 2001, and many short-lived publications representing literary and artistic works or focusing on the arts. Relative to the metropolitan area, the neighborhood contains probably the highest concentration of such institutions in the metropolitan area. Moreover, their members and influence suffuse the neighborhood, its denizens and visitors.

Such phenomena would be remarkable anywhere, especially given the paucity of art trade and merchandizing. This is one of the distinctions between Riverwest and the currently fashionable art neighborhoods in New York, Paris, London, and other centers of art. One thinks of Greenwich Village, Montmartre, and others, especially in certain epochs. Artists in Riverwest cannot expect to sell their works, at least not for a sustainable income, by their presence in the neighborhood. In addition, given the social geography of the city, an artistic concentration would have been expected in other neighborhoods, not Riverwest. For instance, directly across the river forming its eastern boundary is a neighborhood with a major university, a theater, along with a variety of nightspots and cabarets. That is where the community should be, but it is not. Therefore, it is not the existence of the aforementioned art institutions, but their occurrence in Riverwest that needs explaining. Of course the other siren call for explanation is how a motley collection of artists could stem the tide of urban decay and ghettoization.

The following attempt at explanation relies and draws heavily from the theory of urban space by Henri Lefebvre, especially his monumental work, *The Production of Space* (1974), and the historically focused theoretical study by Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor* (1981), an investigation of working class production outside of waged labor. Both contribute to my explanation that focuses on the mechanisms by which art and especially the artistic productions of working class artists produce a certain social space, Riverwest. The form of my theory uses the genealogical method along with a historical accounting and an ethnographic present.

Why Here and Not There?

Some of the explanations are simple and apparent with knowledge of social fundamentals in this city. The region of the city on the other side of Riverwest's eastern boundary, the Milwaukee River, known as the East Side, seemingly would offer more genial conditions for an artistic neighborhood. With its major university, and relatively upper bourgeois character, it had a historical claim to a bohemian, avant-garde pedigree, somewhat on the order of Paris' Montmartre. Several factors militated against it. First, it is and has been a high rent district which most artists and their studios could ill afford. Second, its bourgeois character had two consequences. The bourgeois subculture of Milwaukee partakes strongly of its German heritage, which remains culturally conservative, even when, as in its history of socialist city government, promises a more left leaning and liberal atmosphere. Also, the bourgeois character might encourage the consumption of art, but fails to permit much in the way of conditions for production. This is where it stops resembling Montmartre.

Another aspect of Riverwest's salience as an art center is how it differs from surrounding neighborhoods. In the early part of the study, say from 1940 to about 1980, Riverwest had no great flowering of artistic institutions and establishments such as studios, book and writers' center, and the like. It had working class artists, but so did many other neighborhoods in Milwaukee. The critical period of Riverwest's differentiation emerges from its period of crisis in the 1980s, most visibly with its deindustrialization. The other, surrounding neighborhoods largely succumbed to the expectable urban decline and decay; Riverwest did not. In its crisis years a number of civic organizations, with varying degrees of formality, fought against the decline in a variety of ways, ranging from political movements and pressure groups to attempts at cultural renaissance.

Some of these efforts promoted art. Significantly, the kind of art promoting movement that anticipates

gentrification fell flat and its entrepreneurs gave up after a few years. The alderman who represented both the East Side and Riverwest, tried to convert a space formerly occupied by a co-op grocery and a co-op natural foods store—two separate establishments next to each other. On the contrary, some of what became institutions—the Riverwest Artists Association, Woodland Pattern Bookstore, most prominently—had no such gentrifying goals. Moreover and more importantly, they were indigenous efforts, not primarily aimed at enhancing real estate values. These and similar efforts earn the ‘grass roots’ sobriquet. They were indigenous, working class, and oriented toward production rather than consumption of art.

Workers’ Arts

Jacques Rancière found worker artists in the origins of the industrial proletariat of nineteenth century France. The artists among the toilers were both inside and outside—strangers and adventurers in Simmel’s terms. Their impetus came from the need for self expression coupled with recognition of the common lot of those who work for wages.

“ . . . if the manual laborers were to exist as subjects of a collective discourse that would give meaning to their manifold meetings and clashes, then their strange spokesmen already had to have made themselves “different:” doubly and irremediably excluded for living as workers did and speaking as bourgeois people did” (Rancière [1981] 1989: ix)

Concentrating on diaries, journals, manifestos and the like, Rancière found the ‘voice’ of workers in their writings. Here he quotes from Jean Pierre Gilland from September 1841 in *La Ruche populaire*.

“It seems to me that I have not found my vocation in hammering iron, although there is nothing ignoble about that calling. . . . Great artists have caught the ample, manly poetry of our bronzed faces . . . our illustrious Charlet . . . when he sets the leather apron alongside the grenadier’s uniform and tells us: ‘The common people are the army.’ . . . As you can see, I know how to appreciate my craft and yet I would like to have been a painter” (Rancière [1981] 1989:4-5).

To reflect upon oneself as an individual and as a member of a class needs a panoply of symbols with which to arm the artist. For questions of identity involve concealing, maintaining, or transgressing barriers, especially the barriers between those who think and those who work with their hands (10). For it is in the moments when the real world wavers and seems to reel into mere appearance, more than in the slow motion of day-to-day experiences, that it becomes possible to form a judgment about the world” (19).

Identity and judgment emerge from art, but so does social space, a creation of social actors from whom it is concealed by a double illusion. “These two aspects are the illusion of transparency on the one hand and the illusion of opacity on the other” (Lefebvre [1974] 1991:27). The quotidian is the ordinary physical, social, and cultural surround within which neighbors live, work, play, and so on. The opaque presumes the barrier between as noted above, between those who think and those who work with their hands, because “the producers of space [thinkers] have always acted in accordance with a representation , while the ‘users’ passively experienced whatever was imposed upon them” (43). By creating symbolic representations through whatever medium—writings, music, paintings, sculptures, and so on—the ‘users’ become the producers. They then transcend the master servant dichotomy first articulated by Hegel, which forever separates a real view of nature into a class perspective (Hegel [1807] 1977). Art works provide observation platforms by which we humans know ourselves as species-beings who create the world in which we live. Our primary ecological niche, after all, is culture. Also, it is through art that people produce space, including and especially neighborhoods.

“The answer is: through the production of space, whereby living labour can produce something that is no longer a thing, nor simply a set of tools, nor simply a commodity. In space needs and desires can appear as such, informing both the act of producing and its producers. . . . In and by means of space, the work may shine through the product” (Lefebvre [1974] 1991:348).

And so it is that Riverwest became a created space by those who live and work in it. By their own productions,

by their institutionalization of transcendent visions, they broke the barrier that sequesters users from producers. They broke out of the prison of the class barrier. They refused to allow ghettoization of their own space, their own creations. Because they were no longer passive users and recognized themselves and each other as creators.

Abasto: Rethinking Gentrification and Local Patrimony

Human beings, no matter the time or culture, elaborate mythical constructions to denote specific forms of dwelling space, their boundaries, and barriers to exclude out-groups. Heaven for Christians, Nirvana for Buddhists, Valhalla for the Norse, Olympus for Greeks, are imaginary cynosure spaces. All cultures build an archetype based on an exemplary center to symbolize their own attachment to the soil, which represents their collective patrimony. Political economies determined by modes of production, which find representation in the boundaries between home and abroad, the village and bush, the city and hinterland. In view of this, it is difficult to compare two cases, when indeed American (United States) and Argentine development partake of different cultural matrices. Nonetheless, understanding the cosmologies and mythologies of each culture, one might advance the study of social behavior.

The Anglo-protestant culture draws on Calvinistic conceptions to emphasize work, prosperity, and frugality as the way to access divine grace and eternal salvation. Historically and for sociological reasons, the Anglo view condemned poverty because it was assumed to come from laziness. The Puritan tradition in New England viewed individuals' worldly success as a sign of spiritual salvation, not as a means to gain it (Bremer 1976). While in Anglo-speaking countries, working class populations were situated in the core of the city, in Spanish countries, unskilled workers and temporal migrants dwell in peripheral settlements. These different patterns may very well be explained by attending to the differences between the respective mythologies of the United States and Argentina.

The Latin American countries were conquered by Spain, the more Romanized province as opposed to the British Isles. Rome's legacy focused on poverty as a prerequisite for emancipation and betterment. This cultural value was adopted and expanded in the Middle Ages. The Catholic Church erected several monasteries where the poor were protected and lodged. Charity was a pre-condition for spiritual salvation. Spain conquered America by the imposition of force and blood. The army-machine carved out Spanish colonies, which were rich in gold and other resources. The products of America were exported to Europe. The Spanish rulers then imported European products in sublimated forms: religion, clothes, and styles of consumption. These styles not only created dependency between the Empire and its metropolises, but also changed the cosmology how Latin American aristocracies saw the poverty. Being poor was not a sin, like in Anglo culture, but a condition of things, of progress, and of economics. This justified economic asymmetries and inequalities between lords and slaves in Latin America.

The cities of Latin America reflected the Spanish ideology of social stratification. Starting from the premise that one should be poor to enter to heaven, the Latin American city generates a pole of attraction for people, rich and poor indiscriminately. Richer aristocracies and the elite opted to occupy the most central places where other groups were relegated to the geographic margins, reflecting their social marginalization. The hierarchical order is set according to a group's proximity to the exemplary center of the city. In contrast in Anglo culture, since poverty was castigated and pushed beyond the boundaries of soul, the rich elite settled in the peripheral area of the downtown. They did not develop the need to be near to their place of work. Anglo and Spanish cultures have historically developed different forms of inhabiting the land. While concentration and urban sprawl is still consistent with the centrifugal growth of Latin American economies, the Anglo world had centripetal expansion—concentration of manufacture within urban areas.

Another difference in habitation patterns pertained to the different treatment of aboriginal peoples. Unlike the English conquest where the native peoples were radically excluded pushed to form autonomous nations,

Spaniards subordinated aborigines to partake of colonial economies, although this participation was not on equal terms. This process created a pigmentocracy, because Spaniards adopted the aboriginal women and had children with them, but they were relegated to occupy a second line with respect to their European families. This hierarchy based on the skin color not only determined the political life of Latin American countries, but also their turn of mind. In this respect, the American South with its slave economy more closely resembled Latin America than it did the more northern regions of the United States, New England, the Ohio River Valley, and the Great Lakes regions.

Of course, not all Spanish-speaking countries developed the same policies respecting the ethnic order, once liberated from Spain. While Colombia and Venezuela accepted the African and Indian legacy, Argentina preferred to stimulate European migration. The state, in parallel with this, nourished a pro-Europe discourse trivializing the important role of other ethnicities such as native peoples and Africans. Racialized exclusively under White interests, there was no place for other than European cultures in Argentina. In the United States ethnic minorities were condemned to live in physical segregation while in Argentina this segregation never took root except in the social imaginary. Argentines were educated to think that they only descended from Europeans, which obviously is not true, but to mistrust neighboring national cultures where the different ethnicities commingled. Literature, education, science, painting, and poetry reflected this powerful discourse. England and France were symbolic archetypes that guided the life and styles of Argentine elites and part of middle class as well. The dynamics of urbanization and growth followed the respective cultural archetype of both societies, both models, in the United States and Argentina.

As a multifaceted phenomenon, gentrification presents a diagnosis of our times, or a connection between social pathologies, economy, and demography. The demographical ecological formula, proposed by J. J. Palen and B. London (1984), argues that when housing prices rise, the demand goes up too. Depending on household compositions, and if the couples are child-free, a more affluent white-collar population would displace blue-collar workers. Additionally, since skilled a workforce would need a more urban-centric style of housing than low skilled workers, a conflict about common resources arises. In some cases, a population is moved and pushed to other peripheral zones by intervention of states, in others by the market. Other, additional explanations of this issue were provided by Marxism, which argues that political and economic factors influence in the revitalization of the city and its spaces. Also, gentrification can come from other mechanisms of social control such as discrimination or exclusion. Although the thesis of gentrification has been widely studied over years and in diverse countries, It says less about the role that tourism and patrimonial celebration play in the process.

Basically, gentrification occurs through a combination of private and state policies such as:

- Urban refurbishment
- Tax regulation
- Real estate speculation
- Private investment
- Tourism that allows the patrimonialization of spaces

In this vein, H. Herzer (2008) argues that gentrification creates the necessary conditions in environment and the market to increase the average income within an urban space, district, or neighborhood, but at the same time, it counteracts income rise with negative actions such as exclusion and social discriminatory practices. As a result of this, sentiments of resentment and conflict arise. Some scholars insist on defending gentrification because it revitalizes the infrastructure, helping neighbors and expanding the community well being. Nonetheless, the fact is that financial loans that facilitate access to property are not affordable to lower class working people. They are pressed to live in peripheral zones, and sometimes they are moved by the use of force. If the space is rich in

tradition, Herzer adds, it becomes a fertile source to be patrimonialized. In so doing, the process opens the doors to investment by stakeholders, many of them coming from other outside the area. The more impoverished workforce is displaced by the regulation of taxes and other financial instruments. The cycle of decline is accelerated by crime, social pathologies, and drug-abuse that make housing cheaper, but when it is named patrimony of the city, heavy investment moves in. As a result, the undesired populations that depreciated the lands, often ethnic minorities or migrants, are deported from their homes in order to offer a more attractive appearance of the neighborhood.

Rodriguez, Banuelos and Mera (2008) revalidate Herzer's viewpoint by saying that Buenos Aires reinvention was accompanied with the exploitation of a fabricated cultural imaginary where patrimonial restoration was very important. There is a clear link between capital, consumption, heritage, and conflict. Today, patrimony is globally accepted as a social asset, but first of all seems to be a positive aspect of social life in the community. The argument of patrimony is that communities are more resilient if they embrace their past and traditions. The problem is how and under what interests that heritage is recognized and recreated. The ideology of capitalism creates the patrimony, which is touristically sold and exploited, in order to hide long-simmering conflicts between owners and inhabitants, master and slaves, white and blue-collar workers, and so forth. Not only does the encounter between new owners and old occupants generate conflict, but it generates a pretext for state intervention. When the city is designed to compete as a tourist destination, the process is accelerated.

Similar conclusions are found by A. Redondo and Z. D. Singh (2008) who explore the historic changes of La Boca, San Telmo, and Barracas in Buenos Aires South. Witnessing a mass-migration from 1880-1930, Buenos Aires embraced a significant influx of migrants from Europe (desired-migration) who originally settled in the south of the city. Urban growth and recycled structures (conventillos) provided housing for these immigrant workers. Although this type of migration were planned and encouraged by the state, there were some other migrations in subsequent years from neighbouring Latin American countries to the same locales. In the last 40 years, since the 1970s, La Boca and San Telmo suffered a decline, partly a product of years of a combination of government intervention and inaction. They now have become areas housing migrants from Bolivia, Paraguay, and Chile. Unlike the mass migration from Europe encouraged by the state in the early twentieth century, more recent migration is often deemed undesired. The long simmering discrimination and prejudice, rooted in an historical disdain for these migrants, reinforced the process of gentrification as an effective way to get rid of these undesirables. Under pretexts such as crime, the discourse of the Argentine social imaginary draws a specific depiction of what "being Argentine" means, alluding to a problematic otherness which is overtly rejected.

M. Di Virgilio (2008) contends that unemployment, social risk, and drug dependence not only are indicators associated with the decline of a borough but relate to a much broader ideology that draws the map of the city. This ideological pro elite discourse is enrooted in the ownership spirit. The perception of risks, whatever their nature may be, are socially constructed and negotiated combined with market practices. In La Boca housing owners reap the benefits of gentrification so that their properties are reappraised, but they are unable to see the long term results even for themselves. First and foremost, owners who ask for urban refurbishment and tourism to increase their property values engage in conflict with occupants who have no access to property ownership. Development and progress involve taxes re-evaluation that pushes many owners to sell their holdings. The commercialization of culture is conducive to elite private interests who want to ensure stability, safety, and security for all who are able to pay.

M. Gomez-Schettini and L. Menazzi (2011) point out that at the end of 1990s as the beginning of revitalizing certain southern boroughs, elaborating new identities, and attachment to heritage. This happened especially respecting to the Tango and San Telmo or La Boca and the projects today are pending to approval. All these spaces are recycled, appealing to an invented heritage, designed according private goals. According to the created cultural matrix, where these stereotypes are coined, the market selects one or another site. This means that a space without any or with scare attraction may be rapidly refurbished using the last marketing resources and

techniques to transform it in a newly imagined patrimonial zone. The question of its patrimonial value is created according to a widely shared ideology using marketing and public relations.

In her the district of el Abasto, *Traps of Culture* (2006), Maria Carman explains the pervasive goal of patrimony in the process of gentrification. There are two ways of life in the city. One is a dark side which is not broadcasted or televised. Its urban space embodies a dynamic of hierarchies where popular sectors face discrimination through direct and indirect techniques. While Tango and the singer Carlos Gardel remain eloquent ambassadors of culture, there are others, strangers who live between the wall and blue sea. They lack formal access to the land, they have no rights, no voice. In Buenos Aires, a considerable sector of housing is illegally occupied by immigrants and ethnic minorities. These groups have no voice, nor does the state see them. They are invisible. Squatters lack of access to the status of legal citizen, and therefore their claims are not met. The tactics of commoditizing the site consists in blurring the boundaries of what today is popular with other tales, importing from the past. Traps of culture lie in the tergiversation of patrimonies and their meanings given to citizens. Since some in-group identities are exalted, others suffer a progressive deterioration. The refurbishment of Abasto appeals to a broader discourse, designed by an elite, whose interests are not representative of all habitants of Almagro. The invention of patrimony gives further legitimacy to practices that otherwise would be neglected.

M. Gomez and Z. Singh (2008) remind us that San-Telmo's example, shows how urban patrimony sets the conditions for property negotiations between formal and informal owners. The staged-authenticity (MacCannell 2003) valorises the existing housing. This late capitalism and its trends towards the patrimonialization of space for local consumptions is the result of complex processes. Culture is the efficient motivator for travel to exotic destinations, and this suggests that being tourist in a society characterized by mass production denotes a propensity to consume patrimony and folklore which serves not only to emulate social distinctions but also forms an identity, an attachment to a panacea.

The Case of El Abasto

Unlike Riverwest, El Abasto, in Buenos Aires, suffered the most blatant kind of gentrification. Built around a shopping mall, it was founded in the 1880s in the borough of Almagro, situated in the core of the city. Originally, the name was linked to the old market that served as the central wholesaler of vegetables, meat and fruits. This market was associated with Tango dancing, but also directly to Carlos Gardel one of the most famous singers of Argentina. The Abasto Shopping mall adjoined a new underground station to the subway line B and with contained many other financial projects from banks to small, medium, and full size tourist establishments. In almost one decade, this borough was completely refurbished changing from a blue-collar working class borough fraught with street crime to a growing attraction that receives almost 10,000 tourists per day. The Abasto case may be typified as a clear example of how the gentrification process works. In next section, we examine and describe how terms such as tourism, patrimony, and safety are conducive to the capital expansion. At the same time, the old dwellers were obliged to move to other, less central boroughs by the imposition of new higher taxes or by the coercive force of the state and its police. My own experience as ethnographer and anthropologist and the years I lived in Almagro may suffice to give details about the process. Anyway, personal experience does not mean a valid scientific ethnography. During 1990 and 1992, the growth of el Abasto shopping enticed many financial projects. My own experience involved ethnographic field work that explored the diverse changes this borough experienced. A brief summary of the findings follows.

At a first glance, business and real estate played a vital role in investing considerable money in Almagro. Its architecture was altered over several years; the houses were sold by the original owners at the cheapest prices thanks to the climate of conflict and crime which affected the image of this borough. Soon thereafter, many buildings were renovated and re-built according to new styles and patterns. Office buildings, skyscrapers, and

other structures of more than 20 floors were accompanied by shops, tourist establishments, hotels, and so forth. Of course, the rates of crimes and robbery did not decline, but neighbors to some extent seemed to feel safer than in the immediate past. This begs a more than troubling question, to what extent are our perceptions of risk real? How is the social imaginary about a place is formed? What is the role of art in such a process?

In contrast to Riverwest, in el Abasto, art represented a deep-seated transformation of Abasto in two senses. First, Tango was of paramount importance in order for the government to establish Almagro as a patrimony for all Argentines. Secondly, but most importantly, some restaurants, walls, and streets were decorated and painted to emulate the atmosphere of Buenos Aires in 1930. Following this, tourism and the invented patrimonial tradition brought many businesses, but no less conflict with the old dwellers. The climate of insecurity that predominates today in Buenos Aires, and many other larger cities, is not new. Likely what it does is serve real estate interests. For example, in 1970 a square meter in Almagro was worth USD 50 but this today it is about USD 1800. Just before the gentrification, many companies, which invested in the project, bought extensive lands at low prices pressuring the old inhabitants to sell. Once the infrastructure was finalized, the buildings were sold to highest bidder. The state aided the process by imposing high taxes on those who did not want to sell their homes and move their households. The kind of art found there did the same by appealing to a social imaginary of Tango, a romantic pastime of porteños (the denizens of Buenos Aires). The pervasive nature of claims to patrimony and the tourism it entails showed a dark side with respect to the old, poor inhabitants, especially the many undocumented immigrants coming from Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru. They had not the money to own property and many of them occupied illegally, squatted, in houses, called *conventillos*. Although the financial pressures and proactive measures by the state, such as intensified policing, were largely sufficient to push these immigrants to peripheral areas, some remained. First by harassment by the police, and secondly by the requirement of a fee of ARS 1500, they were evicted from Almagro. What is important to discuss here, in contrast with the Riverwest case, is the role of art as a commonly shared past, to promote an image that is conducive to the interests of market. Patrimony as a social construct not only refers to an invented self image created according to capitalist logic, but also it is inextricably linked to the state and its promotion of the arts.

An overview reveals that due to the urban logic, Buenos Aires shows indications of organic stability in fertility. As per the following Table, one might appreciate how the number of inhabitants from 1947 up to 2001 was not radically changed.

Table 1 – Demographical evolution of Buenos Aires

Year	Habitants	Variation in %
1947	2,982,580	
1960	2,966,634	-0.53
1970	2,972,453	-0.2
1980	2,922,829	-1.67
1991	2,965,403	+1.46
2001	2,776,138	-6.38

Source: INDEC, Statistics and Census Secretary.

In spite of relative stability, as table 2 shows, in 2001 Almagro was one of the fastest growing boroughs in the city.

Table 2 – Population and Demography per 2001 census.

Borough	Population	Km² Surface	Pop. Density.
Almagro	128,206	4.1	31.597
Balvanera	137,521	4.4	31.602
Caballito	170,309	6.8	24.894
Flores	142,695	7.8	18.193
Palermo	225,245	15.9	14.158
Recoleta	165,494	5.9	28.163
Villa Lugano	108,170	9.0	11.925
Villa Pueyrredon ³	8,558	3.3	11.599
Villa Urquiza	85,587	5.4	15.739
Floresta	37,247	2.3	16.134
Liniers	42,083	4.3	9.700
Paternal	19,058	2.2	8.608
La Boca	43,413	3.1	14.175

Source: General Department of Statistics of Buenos Aires city (CABA)

Although this table is only a selection, the numbers are so clear as to confirm that Almagro holds an interesting population density per km². With a population of 128,206 and a surface of 4.1, the density is 31.597 inhabitants per km². In density, Almagro surpasses the other crowded boroughs like Balvanera 31.602, Caballito 24.894 and Recoleta 28.163.

In perspective, Almagro nowadays represents fourth place in the size of residential concentrations with 4.6%, only superseded by Palermo at 13.6%, Caballito 10.10%, and Villa Urquiza 8.1%. This concentration of buildings contrasts with other districts such as La Boca 0.3%, Villa Soldati 0.1%, Villa Lugano 0.6%. This gap exhibits not only a difference of opportunities in one side of the city with respect to other, but it shows how tourism contributes to gentrification theory. Almagro is the most densely populated place of Buenos Aires.

If in other situations the arts criticize the status quo; Almagro is the exception. The conflicts between immigrants and property owners with real estate businesses is covered over in favor of a broader imaginary of Tango, more polished and made for export according to European tastes. It is important to remember that Argentine Tango was originally a musical genre that originated in the riverside, south of the city, at the end of nineteenth century. As noted above, Carlos Gardel and others were one of the principal figures, but basically the genre it was danced by the lower classes and/ or criminals—much like southern French Apache dancing or flamenco. Over the decades, Tango was not only exported to Europe, but it captivated the elite. It was transformed into a tourist attraction that characterized but did not determine the life of Argentines, since Tango is only one rhythm among many others in the country. Nonetheless, thousands of travel agencies promoted Argentina on the basis of this Tango stereotype. These conceptualizations correspond with a biased, fabricated, and romanized image of past which has nothing to do with reality. Since immigrants from other Latin American countries do not match these stereotypes, they were silenced and subordinated to the imaginary racial order. This means “porteños”, inhabitants of Buenos Aires, ethnically reflected only European immigration in the nineteenth century. One of the interesting questions in this aspects is how this social imaginary is shaped?

The Semiotics of Tourism and Gentrification

The concept of staged authenticity, originally coined by D. Maccannell (2003), exhibits in part, a concern for the change in sites according to the market-driven interests. Capitalism has monopolized the meaning of what we see in television, or in packaged tours. Subject to a life of alienation and depersonalization, the urban consumer looks not only for real experiences but new sensations. The combination of novelty and authenticity are two key factors that determine mass tourism. Unless otherwise resolved, tourism leads travelers to an encounter in nowhere. The history and heritage of sites are selectively designed according to the logic of capital, highlighting what may be sold at one time while other aspects or negative points are made invisible. Hedonism based on the trends of consuming environments are a way, an efficient way, of counterbalancing the alienation and frustration human beings suffer in their daily life (Maccannell, 2003; 2007; Korstanje, 2012)

Unlike R. Barthes (1997), who considered tourism as an alienable activity and industry, Maccannell acknowledged that tourism, as a form of leisure, plays a crucial role in entertaining modern workers, and therefore it is very important for the mental health of citizens. Tourism has a specific function. The class struggle creates many psychological problems and deprivations. Tourism would resolve these shortcomings. Nonetheless, in the politics of class struggle, there is a combination of some disciplinary powers that mix silence, violence, and ethnicity, while power is a negotiation between two or more groups. If we refer to “Black or White power” involuntarily we are speaking of two factions—the victors and vanquished. Ethnic minorities accept the hegemony of their masters and do not display any type of resistance. By means of the text, writing, the European powers have systematically exterminated any non-white resistance in the world they conquered (p. 214).

N. Wise (2012) sheds light on how the image of a tourist destination is portrayed by the media by invented conceptualizations to impose stereotypes, identities, and a political discourse. Basically, if a site a history of conflict, or any tale interesting to tell, it gets recycled according to a political discourse, fixed by the state or private corporations. This discourse would be the alma mater of the site. Based on three clear tactics which are landscape remembrance, fading memory, and replacing memory, the site becomes a tourist destination whose attractiveness suffices to attract additional investments. Since tourism is globally a mechanism to change sites or economies which are facing problems, landscape remembrance refers to a broader process of integration where the discourse is socialized and internalized by tourists. To some extent, tourists are educated by giving them certain reflection based on fabricated facts. Secondly, fading memory is characterized by the recognition of facts while the discussion is put in terms of remembering and forgetting history. The facts are presented not as really occurred, but as should be remembered. In this stage, media and journalism play a crucial role in creating a re-signification of the destination. In so doing, replacing memory involves the elimination of all negative aspects of historical protagonists so as to draw a new image of place to be attractive for consumers.

In Abasto, all this is replicated by the mediation of art. On one hand, although some Peruvian restaurants keep their identity by offering traditional dishes along Corrientes Avenue, the demand do not come from tourists or Argentine locals. These restaurants receive daily a influx of Peruvian or Bolivian migrants who like to bolster their heritage connection with their homeland. Argentines and international tourists somehow keep out these places to attend other establishments linked to Tango and Argentine flesh. Here we see how the tourist demand corresponds to a previous imaginary discourse fixed by capital and tourist companies. A visual inspection reveals popular arts devoted considerable effort and time to painting some walls in streets but these art works do not reflect the suffering of neighboring immigrants. Rather, other icons and figures are emphasized, such as Carlos Gardel, European mass migration, and Tango. All these stereotypes are associated with a much broader discourse, stated and designed by the state to promote some parts of Buenos Aires to the world, where strangers (like the Black and Latino ghettos in some American cities) are excluded. This does not mean immigrants do not exist in Abasto. They represent almost 9% of local residents. What is important here is that their culture is not significant for nourishing the tourist discourse of the moment. We inspected almost five art galleries and saw 15

places of popular painting and graffiti. Tango, accompanied with the Gardel face, are the common values expressed on all these places. Was Carlos Gardel by chance an immigrant? Yes, although the birth place of Gardel still is disputed between Argentina and Uruguay, there is agreement that he had a French origin.

If there are some places of conflict in Abasto where immigrants resist their clearance—a kind of internal deportation—the process of demonization is orchestrated in two stages. First, mass media and journalism during the 1990s focused on immigration from Latin American countries, which they depicted as the primary cause of unemployment and crime. This engendered anti-immigration policies and persecution supported by Argentine citizenry. Most of immigrants were thought to commit minor offenses along with robbery and drug trafficking. These images legitimated a negative stereotype about immigrants that depreciated the price of housing. Considered a dangerous place, Abasto allowed the arrival of many corporations that together with police and the state connected the undesired aliens with conflicting and crimes. Many owners sold their properties to these real estate investment companies at low prices. Once Abasto gentrification became established, the sense of safety radically shifted. Declared an icon of Argentine patrimony, Abasto became a tourist place that received an influx of capital in the form of projects, business establishments, and buildings. Real estate speculation accompanied tax increases pushed many immigrants from neighboring countries to abandon the borough, but some few remained. The policies of security and crime reduction were conducive to real estate interests. In a second move, the state offered illegal dwellers an amount of money to move. The old Conventillos were refurbished into modern commercial establishments and hotels. These developments caused two reactions. On one hand, they created an atmosphere of intolerance and anger because legal inhabitants opposed to payment to illegal squatters which reinforced the previous negative view of immigrants. On another, Abasto was an allegory of Tango: an invented past where the immigrants from neighboring countries had no place, no words, and no views. As ideology, artists were certainly functional to the capital replication not for what it says, but what it covers over.

To cut the long story short, Abasto contrasts with Riverwest in Milwaukee, in three significant points.

- Arts were deployed in Abasto to reinforce a political discourse in favor of European immigrants but against those from neighboring countries.
- Arts were used in Abasto in a discriminatory function.
- The arts and patrimony made from Abasto accelerated the process of gentrification ensuring their profits and business.

If a conclusion should be made, it is that fear accelerates the commoditization of spaces, human beings, and social relations. In Abasto, fear produces a progressive abandonment of public space, a gap that is then filled by the market. In this process, art, tourism, and patrimony of the state are inextricably intertwined.

Conclusion

Two neighborhoods present two different responses to urban decline and two different ways people use art. In Riverwest art is an organic and continuous creation of its inhabitants. By making art, they resisted urban decay *and* resisted imposed gentrification. In Abasto elite forces, property owners, and controllers of capital used their influence and the power of the state. In Abasto the art of Tango was transformed from an organic art of common people into a tool of the elite. With this tool they re-made the neighborhood of Abasto and removed those they deemed undesirable.

Like all inventions of human beings, art can be a tool of power or resistance to power, the force of capital, and the might of the state. To paraphrase Marx, people make history, but only within the confines of forces and powers mostly outside their control. Elites never targeted Riverwest to be a profit zone like the elites did with respect to Abasto. Consequently, the inhabitants of Riverwest had the space, geographic, social, and political, to resist gentrification and conduct urban life in their own way. The inhabitants of Abasto were not so lucky. A commodified and alienated form of their art was thrust upon them for purposes of profit.

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