

Spatial Revitalization:
“Recovering” the Public Spaces of Abasto
and Puerto Madero in Buenos Aires

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Introduction

Known as the “Paris of Latin America”, the attraction of Buenos Aires can be understood as stemming from its contradictory nature. The nickname in and of itself, *Paris of Latin America*, marks the space as exceptional or even out of place. Looking through any number of travel guides provides us with insight into the current allure, especially from an international perspective. The guide book Lonely Planet, popular especially among young travelers, is a perfect example of this complex magnetism:

Mix together a beautiful European-like city with attractive residents (call them *porteños*), gourmet cuisine, awesome shopping, a frenzied nightlife and top-drawer activities, and you get Buenos Aires, a cosmopolitan metropolis with both slick neighborhoods and equally downtrodden areas – but that’s part of the appeal. It’s an elegant, seductive place with a ragged edge, laced with old-world languor and yet full of contemporary attitude. BA is somehow strangely familiar, but unlike any other city in the world (Lonely Planet).

Let’s Go, another hit guidebook targeted towards backpackers on a budget, emphasizes these points as well, calling Buenos Aires:

A city reborn... reinventing itself as Latin America’s trendiest and most exciting capital... Buenos Aires is a cosmopolitan city, and that cosmopolitanism plays out in ways both delicious and downright confusions. It’s a city where high-heeled fashionistas and broken down garbage drivers inhabit the same fifty-year-old streets, where incessant arrays of protesters in front of the Casa Rosada mix with innumerable German expats in new bars carved out of old, luxurious townhouses, and where trendy boutiques in Palermo Soho get busy only after the bakery next door has sold its daily fresh bread (Let’s Go).

While we keep in mind the complicated nature of travel guides as cultural texts – literature that is a combination work of fiction, selective documentary, and advertising – they are useful texts because they reflect both the interests of potential tourists as well as the image that the city and tourism industry wants to convey to the international community, tinting truth in more appealing

colors. What we can see from these excerpts is an attempt to understand Buenos Aires' seduction in terms of its ever-present contradictions. This is not simply getting at the social and economic disparities that are present in most major metropolises, but hinting towards an internal conflict and continual active shift of the space that has moved Buenos Aires into the list of "international cities". This mismatch is as economically based as it is historical and cultural – both slick and downtrodden, old and new, Argentine and international.

It is this exact incongruity that will be the focus of this paper, for when we move deeper past the surface seduction that boggles and intrigues visitors, we find that Buenos Aires does in fact incorporate a multitude of cultures, economic statuses, histories, and populations. While this diversity is at the heart of the city's beauty and dynamism, the physical space and political rights within the city are, as always, not equally distributed. Questions of citizenship and what that entails for differing populations comes into play directly via the spatial structure of Buenos Aires. Recent shifts, particularly during the 1990s, rearranged and "revitalized" the public spaces of the city in ways that are both contradictory and subtle. The discordance of certain spaces posed against others immediately drew my attention while I was living in Buenos Aires. Not surprisingly, I was among many others – lifelong *porteño*¹ residents, fellow foreigners, scholars, working-class populations, young and old – who all felt the curious sensation of incompatibility within a single space. Buenos Aires raises an eyebrow with each contradicting view passed on the bus, every opposing image placed side by side on broken down streets. It seems slippery and seductive and a tantalizing research opportunity. The contradicting spaces of Buenos Aires allow us to see a palimpsest narrative of some other kind of project going on, the hidden remnants of where development meet citizenship, and have led myself among many other scholars to probe

¹ *Porteño* is a Spanish word colloquially used in Argentina and surrounding regions meaning "people of the port" used to refer to the characteristics and local inhabitants of Buenos Aires.

how and why *porteño* space is implicated in the question of who has rights to the city, of who deserves to belong.

The 1990s mark a global turning in economic history that for Argentina spurred a new method of planning and development. Based on adopting a set of neoliberal economic policies, the administration of President Carlos Menem (1989-1999) worked to reform the previous redistributive economic agenda that had been dominating since the 1940s set by President Perón. Among other major economic changes (most noted being the law of convertibility that pegged the Argentine peso to the U.S. dollar) was a political project called *Reforma del Estado* or Reform of the State. The core components of these reforms promoted, among other policies, a strong push for governmental deregulation, the liberalization of the labor market, increased focus on foreign investment, stronger enforcement of property rights, and privatization of public goods (Szusterman).

The privatization of public resources is a key feature characterizing the temporary economic boom of the 1990s and continues to be a controversial issue today. While certain services such as electricity, public transit, and water and sanitation are some of the most obvious examples of privatization as the government sold the rights to distribute these goods to individual private businesses, scholars and residents also look at many of the spatial transformations of the city of Buenos Aires as a component of a “privatization agenda”. However, upon closer inspection, these spatial transformations do not quite fit many of the definitions of privations – this term itself would require a much deeper critical analysis than this paper is prepared or attempting to handle. Yet, the reasons behind explaining the shifts in public space through the lens of privatization are important to note. The core component linking the two is a transfer of ownership, shifting many of the affected public spaces from governmental to private hands. In

order to more thoroughly understand the spatial transformations of the city and their ties to the political changes of the 1990s, we will be looking at two cases of “revitalization” projects within the city of Buenos Aires that will serve as proxies to explore the development style and tactics used under Menem’s presidency and into the current day. The first is the reconversion project of Buenos Aires’ oldest port *Puerto Madero* into an urbanized residential and commercial area. The second example is within the informal neighborhood of *Abasto* that straddles the line of two official neighborhoods in the middle of the city. The case of Abasto centers on the reconversion of the old Abasto market (the namesake of the neighborhood) into a shopping mall.

I have chosen these two cases firstly because their similarities mirror the shifts in the economic and political agenda piloted by the Menem administration and fit into a larger contention about who has the “right” to live in, consume and shape urban space. Abasto’s and Puerto Madero’s revitalization are just two instances taken from a series of similar private development projects occurring in Buenos Aires during the 1990s. They have been chosen because of both their similarities showing their implications in the political reforms during the Menem administration. Both cases are critiqued by *porteño*-focused scholars (Gorelik; Guano; Pírez) as examples of a local privilege for transnational values of consumption and modernity, a frivolity that was partially responsibility for the economic crisis of 2001 that pushed over 50% of the population below the national poverty line. Both are cases of revitalization projects promoted by the Argentine government as part of a city-wide recovery of public space. A central part of the shared narrative of these two sites hinges on labeling these spaces as once public space that have fallen to pitiful decline. Envisioned through the political project of recovery as obsolete and void, the account of these spaces tells a tale of success and decline, ending in their necessary recovery – failed public spaces that must be recovered for the sake of *el pueblo porteño*, the local

people of Buenos Aires. Both projects redeveloped through private investment and regulation of the space, which was a particularly problematic issue for many residents who saw this as part of the destruction of the essence of public space. Both sites have been examined in scholarly research (Centner; Carman) as illustrations of how space is manipulated in order to exert hegemonic dominance over a society, advancing the interests of the local elite, placating to the middle-class by reinforcing elite values and catering to these newly established needs, and neglecting the rights and needs of the marginalized.

The shared narrative of these spaces links them along with a variety of other “revitalization” projects that occurred all over the city. However the spaces themselves, both in the current day and throughout their history, do not lend themselves to immediate comparison. In fact, their differing functions and particularly their disparate scales make it difficult to draw direct links between the two. Puerto Madero was a central port system established by the government that fell almost immediately to decline throughout its history. The Abasto market was started by an organization of wholesale vendors and farmers, and only after its growth and popularity was it taken over to be run by the Buenos Aires local government. Puerto Madero was converted, via a master plan unlike anything Buenos Aires had used for development before, into an urbanized neighborhood. The Abasto market became a shopping mall. It is curious, then, that both of these spaces were “recovered” under the same umbrella project for public space revitalization. Despite the differing functions of these two spaces, they are both included in the public space debate during the 1980s and 1990s, demonstrating how very expansive and all-inclusive this category was during the promotion of public space recovery (Gorelik, 2008). The lack of differentiation between spaces as different as one of the Buenos Aires ports and a local wholesale market (or later an entire neighborhood and a single shopping mall) leads us to

question why can we see these both as public space, and even more, why were they both celebrated and promoted as such through these political projects? The differing scales are also useful tools for understanding spatial changes at both the micro and macro level within the city. This gives us insight into what many scholars have seen as the socio-spatial fragmentation of the city, which has occurred in many different forms. While the transformations of a singular site like the Abasto market had a drastic impact on the cohesion of the surrounding neighborhood of Abasto and thus tells a tale of micro-fragmentation, or the *fractiousness* as Centner (2011) discusses, of Buenos Aires, Puerto Madero's reconversion demonstrates the city-wide socio-spatial divide that congregates wealth in particular places (historically in the Center and North) and poverty in others (the Peripheries and the South).

Both the Abasto shopping mall and the Puerto Madero neighborhood present a new perspective to the discussion about socio-spatial fragmentation, which is best seen through the ways in which they stand out against the surrounding spaces of Buenos Aires. Why exactly do they seem to clash with the urban fabric of this metropolis? What are the characteristics that make them especially unsuited, whether or not this *otherness* is because they are "better" or "worse" than their surroundings? By standing out against their surroundings, both sites contest the environments in which they are situated – each site like a physical manifestation of the city nickname, "Paris of Latin America". When it comes down to it, our first interest much be in why they seem distant, separated, or ultimately uninvolved in the realities of *porteño* life. They are sites that offer a moment escape from the other public spaces they are in relation to. Both the Abasto mall and the Puerto Madero port are spaces of solace among chaos, of cleanliness surrounded by grit, of safety amidst crime, of stability within a world of uncertainty. Whether the mall and the exclusive neighborhood were a response to the gritty, unstable, crime-ridden reality

of Buenos Aires, or whether they created a geography of fear that over-presents the chaotic nature of the city is impossible to decide. Like much discussion on the popularity of gated neighborhoods, the central point to note is fear begets fear – gating, private security systems, and exclusion makes the outside areas and the Other who occupies it more menacing, more chaotic, while fuels the cycle (Caldeira). It is through a concomitant process of production that the Abasto mall becomes a refuge and the surrounding streets a dangerous reality, or Puerto Madero a developed haven within the third-world of the rest of Buenos Aires.

Thus, the study of these social transformations must be understood through a spatial lens that examines how these spaces are *produced* to become *other* spaces within Buenos Aires. In order to examine these spaces, I will be basing my analysis theories developed by Henri Lefebvre in his book The Production of Space (1991) and Michel Foucault's work "Of Other Spaces" (1986) which have been elaborated and manipulated by spatial theorists extensively since their creation. Using these theories, I will examine how space is actively involved in hegemonic power structure of the ruling class, and how the sites in Abasto and Puerto Madero in particular are classified as public spaces for all while being adorned by codes of first-world modernity which works to normalize a striving for a type of "civilization" that is not naturally found in Buenos Aires. The ways in which these selected sites stand out works to invert and contest their surroundings, and thus what is seen as an unsatisfactory reality of Buenos Aires. Via their *otherness*, they critique what the rest of Buenos Aires lacks, and thus normalizes their spaces as the structure necessary for the satisfaction of particular elite goals. Some critics have overeagerly seen the incorporation of foreign structural and cultural forms as simply a result of globalization; other have demonized them as a part of a process of global imperialism, especially in the case of Buenos Aires, as the "Americanization" of ideals, standards, values, and space.

These interpretations see urban spatial transformations as evidence of ideological shifts. But we must not see these changes as mere byproducts of ongoing political changes, and rather understand them as part of the creation and discourse that works to produce and reproduce our social relations according to the dominant ideology (Guano). Both Lefebvre and Foucault remind us not to view space as a static dimension, and instead offer a third type of spatiality that views space as neither entirely material nor completely imagined.

Still, it is not enough to simply note that both the Abasto mall and the Puerto Madero neighborhoods are, to use Foucault's terminology, *heterotopias*, "other" spaces that invert, contest and critique their surroundings, thus normalizing the hegemonic interests of the local elite. Instead, we have to critically examine the *process* through which each space was transformed; explore how these heterotopias came to be produced. In the case of Buenos Aires, the creation and normalization of these heterotopic spaces is deeply intertwined in an understanding of public spaces, and what is to be considered public. I argue that these spaces came to be heterotopic because they were understood as strongly public while throughout their creation but then, through various circumstances, fell to decline, failing to provide the qualities of a successful public space that promoted the interaction, exchange, and accessibility to a large variety of social groups. These moments of successful and failed public spaces were envisioned; notions employed under a political project to "recover" public space, which is linked to notions of recovering the public sphere. Because of the political atmosphere after Argentina had recently ended its years of military dictatorship in 1983, public space became a synonym for democracy, equality, *el pueblo porteño*. Revitalization projects such as the Abasto market and the Puerto Madero port were included in a larger series of "recovery" projects for public spaces which served as a tranquilizer (Gorelik, 2008), or as Guano (2002) states, "this reterritorialization of the

metropole in Buenos Aires is rather the product of very much a local hegemonic imagination – one that utilizes the discourse of ‘modernization’ to legitimize inequality,” (182).

This paper will use the sites of Abasto and Puerto Madero as case studies which give insight into the use of space, and in particular the all-encompassing category of “public space”, as a means to reproduce unequal notions of citizen right to the city in a period of political and economic transition in Buenos Aires. First, I will look at the term public space and the discourse that has developed surrounding its supposed demise, exploring the multitude of ambiguities and implications hidden within the term. I will then outline two underlying spatial theories developed by Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Michel Foucault (1986) that shape my interpretation of these spatial revitalization projects as *produced* spaces of *otherness*. Next, I will analyze the two sites of the Abasto market turned mall and the Puerto Madero port turned urbanized neighborhood, dividing the transformation into three distinct moments: the first looks at how both the Abasto market and Puerto Madero are read through the political projects of “revitalization” as spaces that were once explicitly and successfully “public spaces”; the second focuses on their moments of decline or failure, envisioning each space eventually as obsolete or void; the third being the culmination of this narrative of success to failure, creating a need for the “recovery” and revitalization of these public spaces through private mechanisms. Finally, I will analyze how the rhetoric of public space comes to be employed as a political tool. I will explore the implications for how this revitalization process dictates unequal right to the use and appropriation of these spaces and how this codes certain populations as more deserving of the space than others. In doing so, we will develop a critique of these revitalization projects and the heterotopias they produce, viewing them not as end products, but instead as dynamic *processes* that claim to recover the “public” but in actuality mask the spatial exclusion of marginalized populations. This

also threatens to be a process that continues, expanding to other “nonfunctional” spaces inhabited by marginalized groups that can then be demolished and reconstructed as a space of ascension for a selected population.

Public Space as a Political Tool

As any writer dealing with the concepts of public and private must note, the terms are nuanced and complex, carrying a multitude of meanings and implications, varying depending on the institutional sphere in which they are used. While I will attempt to clarify these terms throughout the work and indicate what I mean when I discuss both Abasto and Puerto Madero as public or private spaces, it must be emphasized that part of the complexity of these spatial transformations comes from a political project, be it explicit or not, to keep these terms particularly ambiguous. Urban historian Adrián Gorelik (2008) elaborates on this concept, dissecting how the term *espacio público*, or public space, in Buenos Aires has evolved to be a catch-all term manipulated by the local and national governments as well as the business community. Gorelik argues that the notion of public space has converted into a sort of spectacle, an ethereal space, and a new urban fetish that in fact masks the reality of the space itself as accessible to only a privileged few (2008, 34). Exploring how we come to understand the category of “public space” will also demonstrate the ways in which the term was expanded and made especially ambiguous, highlighting the political agenda behind the revitalization projects as a “recovery” of public space via private methods.

Defining Public Space

There has been much scholarly commentary on the “loss” of public space during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as countries around the globe shifted the methods of

regulating public spaces for a variety of reasons. Not just pined for, the more radical scholars such as Davis (1992), Mitchell (1995), and Flusty (2000) to name just a few, assert that the disappearance of public space is in fact an elimination process. Through spatially reconfiguring a city so that “truly” public spaces no longer exist, the State slowly eliminates the visibility of marginalized populations in favor for pushing the values and interests of the middle-class, local elite, and business communities. These authors are not pining its loss, but rather uncovering the covert tactics used through these urban spatial transformations that successfully erase “undesirable populations” (the homeless, the working poor, racial and ethnic minorities, etc.) from public sight, and thus from the public sphere. This, they highlight, is a type of urban war (Davis).

Such movements are indeed present, not only within Southern California (the focal point of many of these authors’ research) or the United States, but occurring in urban centers globally. Public spaces like parks and plazas in developing countries alongside many international cities such as New York and Los Angeles have come under the control of private companies – the rationale being that these spaces can be more efficiently and effectively regulated by the market rather than the government. The implication does not necessarily mean a decrease in the amount of physically *open, accessible* space, but rather a change in how public space is *produced and maintained*. Many municipal governments choose to enter into contracts which provide incentives for the private sector to create or manage public spaces – this increasingly popular type of hybrid ownership, or “public-private partnership”, however comes with its own set of ambiguities (Németh & Schmidt).

The question that surfaces is “what are the qualifications for a space to be considered public?” Must public spaces be publicly owned in order to assure equal access to all? Must they

be distanced from the market forces as to not filter through class status? Does the term public space require the space be politically charged, and if so, a space of political activism? What is the relation between public space and the public sphere? What is the state's role in the governance of a public space? In other words, how do we measure the *publicness* of any space?

Often, and not unjustifiably, public space is defined by what is understood to be its counterpart, pegging the “public” against the “private”. Like most dualistic divisions, the distinction between the two hardly holds past a surface glance. Public can imply governmental, non-governmental (distanced from the state's control), civic, open, accessible. Similarly, private can refer to the market, the family, the individual, the hidden, the closed, and so on and so forth. Dyads such as this only further muddy our grasp of the terms. Many scholars then turn to older understandings of urban public space through the Greek concept of *agora* (Mitchell, 2000; Dehaene & De Caeter, 2008; Dear & Flusty, 1998). Serving a myriad of functions, the agora was a marketplace; a place of political liberty where legal interactions and exchanges occur clearly within public view; a place of display for bodies and interaction; a place of spectacle and performance; a place where citizens of all class statuses have the chance to see and be seen by one another, interact with one another, and an open, mixed, active forum. However beautiful this vision, we remember that such an understanding of public space is in fact idyllic rather than realistic. Even in its old Greek form, vast segments of the population were excluded from participating in these supposedly open and equally accessible spaces – women, slaves foreigners, the physically unable, for example (Mitchell).

The concept of the public sphere is central to the functioning of public space. In this relationship, the public sphere is understood as a political concept whereas public space is a physical concept. As Schmidt & Németh (2010) highlight, “public space takes on meaning only

insofar as it is the site of the development of the public sphere, while conversely, the public sphere *requires* ‘the occupation or active creation of public space’ in order to have one’s claims heard (Blomley, 2001, p.3),” (454). This inextricable link between the two signifies that public space – and more importantly its transformations and disappearance – has severe implications on notions of citizenship and rights to the city. The developing discourse on the “death of public spaces” ultimately discusses who is being allowed in and who is being eliminated from public spaces, thus from participation in the public sphere. Focused on recent transfers in ownership from public (governmental) to private (market-driven) hands, the fear is recognizing that when market-driven forces begin to govern public spaces, populations with limited economic means and/or political power lose access to the use of these spaces, weakening their ability to participate openly in the public sphere.

We can see this connection more explicitly between public space and citizenship rights when we look at which urban areas are often more policed, monitored, and closed-off to non-citizens in countries going through a period of tight immigration control. Holston and Appadurai (2003) explain, as “formal citizenship is less necessary for access to substantive rights,” the association between citizenship form and its substance is devalued (298). One common response is to try and renew the rights of citizens by making citizenship itself more exclusive – tactics include cutting off social services to various types of noncitizens, charging the police with rights to arrest anyone under suspicion of being a noncitizen (thus coding the physical appearance of citizenship), declaring one language as the official legitimate language over all others, etc. A major component of making citizenship more exclusive is also achieved through “urban incorporation to gain the powers of the local government. [The] objective is to privatize or dismantle public spaces and services and to implant zoning regulations which in effect keep the

undesired out,” (298). Parks, plazas, bus stops, market places, government buildings, and a slew of other essential public spaces are often the first to experience an increase in policing during these times of heavy immigration control and restriction, strategically limiting the movement, health, and political functioning of noncitizen populations. These common surveillance and policing tactics demonstrate much more clearly this (sometimes ambiguous) connection between citizenship, rights, and public space. We can see that access to public spaces is a marker which bestows rights upon certain populations to belong and interact with the rest of the urban society.

With this understandings set forth, it is no wonder that public space transformations can often promote a seemingly uncalled for social upheaval and negative reaction. Although the State is sometimes expected to govern the space, distancing it from market forces, it is also a continual threat to the functioning of the space as a means for political empowerment. Failure to maintain a public space comes to represent the State’s disinvestment in the people it serves, and transfers in ownership bring up feelings that the state is selling off the public sphere to corrupt or unjust market forces. This double-edged sword places the local and national governments in a continual bind. In fact, as the discourse around public spaces continues to expand and develop, it seems that public space has taken on a symbolic charge of its own, forming its own self-sustaining rhetoric. As Schmidt & Németh (2010) point out, “instead of serving as a means to an end,” as a space dedicated to fostering interaction in the public sphere, “the production of public space is now interpreted as a normative goal unto itself,” (453). This normative goal is what needs to be problematized further. As I hope to have highlighted, the category of public space itself is extensive, ambiguous, carrying a slew of definitions each of which is connected to another implication of public space functioning. However the development of public space, its

promotion, renewal, or in our case, “revitalization” embodies the normative goal and must be explored in order to deepen our understanding of this new method of developing public space.

Rhetoric of Public Space as a Political Tool in Buenos Aires

As Gorelik (2008) mentions, the discourse on and obsession of public space in Buenos Aires is not just coming from scholars or citizens – in fact much of the promotion comes from the local and state governments that use the term public space to equate it with the notion of the public sphere. This, Gorelik explains, is a method of placating the public through symbolic rather than tangible gestures of promoting democratic participation and inclusion. Transformations such as the revitalization of the Abasto market into a shopping mall and the newly urbanized port of Puerto Madero are, as I argue, noteworthy cases of spatial transformation deeply implicated in a notion of who deserves a space, and thus who deserves a voice, in the social structure of the city. Scholars have looked at the series of reconversion projects throughout the 1990s as examples of assigning types of microcitizenship which differ based on access to space within Buenos Aires (Centner, 2011), as a means of promoting a local elite dominance to “reproduce the same century-old tale whereby the future is always another country,” perpetuating “a story of transnational modernity whereby the privilege of the few strives to become the pride of all,” (Guano, 203). At the heart of these transformations is the shifting notion of “public space”. As Gorelik (2007) writes about Buenos Aires:

Public space was fully introduced into the urban discourse in 1983. Public space in the new context was transformed into the backdrop of a sort of urban democratic ritual that provided continuity to the anti-dictatorial struggle, bringing together the most varied expression of celebration and protest. The other transformation was that the new democratic governments shelved projects that assumed large public investments. Projects that had previously appeared as the natural continuity of urban development were regarded as ‘pharaonic’. What became fundamental was the idea of ‘city by parts,’ which allowed a dismissal of the structural ambitions

of the traditional plans: the new vision of the city, as a mosaic of different situations, offered not only a pluralistic perspective in terms of breaking from totalizing (read: totalitarian) illusions of the modernizing city but also a realistic reading inasmuch as it supported the execution of small, fragmentary projects (67).

Especially after the reestablishment of the Argentine democratic government in 1983, the spatial development of the city began to shift form, focusing on increased “public” development to reemphasize the recovery of participatory democracy. The focus on the redevelopment of accessible public space became a powerful political project which benefited greatly from shifting the term “public space” into a catch-all category of spaces. Streets and sidewalks, publicly and privately developed parks and plazas, national libraries, museums, universities, and so on and so forth all fit within this larger symbolic project to return the city and thus the power to *el pueblo*, to the people. As Argentine Gorelik (2008) argues, the notion of the public slipped slowly away from being a delimited and explanatory term to become a sort of urban fetish, *the* obsession for the new development of Buenos Aires. As public space became the emblem of a recovering democracy, the term developed a romantic culture of its own – public space as the pillars of a democratic society.

But what Gorelik (2007) points out in the selected section is a dual process containing two lines of thought that guided the spatial transformations of Buenos Aires after the military dictatorship. Not only was the “recovery” of public space becoming the new urban fetish of the democratic regime, but the plan was to do so via the fragmentary approach of developing *la ciudad por partes*, the city by parts, which became the dominant method of urban development in the 1990s.

This tactic of designing the city by parts was part of a backlash against totalizing strategic planning. After reestablishing democracy, many of the city- and nation-wide plans were heavily

criticized if not totally rejected because this type of planning was reminiscent of the non-representational dictatorship. Instead of holistic city-wide planning, development became a responsibility of the individual neighborhoods or regions (such as the informal neighborhood zones of *Barrio Norte* and *Abasto*) within the Buenos Aires. Decentralized and participatory, this method of development through the city by parts consolidated a larger urban network that would allow the city to grow, rediscovering the importance of neighborhood identity as especially influential for real estate and for the cultural consumption (Gorelik, 2008).

La ciudad por partes meant that development responsibilities would be parsed up and decentralized to the local lever. This worked in tandem with the project to “recover” or “rediscover” public space. Although the sentiment promoted participation and a citizen-focused planning tactic for the city, the results of the actual production of public spaces, or the tailored development of *la ciudad por partes* was never guaranteed because of the ambiguity of each project. In fact, the division of the planning responsibilities to the level of the neighborhood was a major factor in what a number of scholars commenting on Buenos Aires (Pérez; Guano; Centner; Gorelik) note as the socio-spatial fragmentation of Buenos Aires. However, because the responsibility lay in the hands of various private developers, the narrative of the public became less and less obvious, and instead marked the beginning of a movement of privatization of public goods.

Such spatial political projects thus are purposefully ambiguous, leading to an almost constant sense of a loss of publicness and a nostalgic longing for the public spaces of the past. Because the category of “public space” is in and of itself a very complex notion that does not truly exist in its idealized form, the political projects especially under Menem could claim their successful recovery by pointing to examples like the Abasto mall and the urbanized

neighborhood of Puerto Madero, disregarding the newfound inaccessibility these two privately developed spaces created. Both the old Abasto market and the Puerto Madero port re envisioned as idealistically public during their historic years of successful functioning. The narrative promoted immediately prior to and after their revitalization ignores the moments of decline and failure that preceded the dictatorship, thus they were able to be spatially employed to differentiated the later political parties from the authoritarian regime. By lamenting the loss of public space, the Menem administration was able to point to each revitalization project as an example of reestablishing an equal and democratic public sphere, and avoid a critical examination of who was being left out of this public sphere. This critical examination only surfaces because the newly “revitalized” spaces draw attention to themselves exactly because they are so very unlike their surroundings, and even unlike the spaces that they used to be. The transformation process both normalizes the pseudo-public spaces, or what some scholars call “post-public” spaces, and at the same time calls attention to the process of erasing specific populations from the visible spaces of Buenos Aires.

Theoretical Background

Two major theoretical frameworks run through the course of this analysis, and must be understood beforehand in order to contextualize how I am envisioning space. The first notion comes from Henri Lefebvre’s work The Production of Space (1991), and the second from Foucault’s piece “Of Other Spaces” (1986). In conjunction, these two works arguably mark a turning point in spatial discourse, encouraging a view of space that is neither empty nor passive, but rather as an active and dynamic component in shaping our understanding of reality and social relations (Soja). Both works also look at space as something beyond the external, navigable

world of our day to day lives, but at the same time stay in the realm of *social* rather than logical (mathematic) or physical (natural) space.

This distinction may be difficult to grasp at first, so it is useful to dissect the idea of social space to illustrate its diversity. Firstly, the practical or “real” spaces of our external world make up part of our vision of space, but there are also many other spaces that are only existent within our minds while being inaccessible to our physical beings. These are imagined or “non-real” spaces. The utopia is the most extreme example of this non-real space – purely invented and defined by its non-existence, the utopia is still shaped from our visions of real space, time, and social relations, projecting them into another here-and-now (Marín). This is a space imagined, but also exceptionally present, constructed by reflecting and inverting the world as we know it to be a more perfect version of a life we do not live. Other imagined spaces may not be as controlled or dictated by our consciousness – the space of dreams, Foucault notes, is an intangible and yet unmanageable space, one that our minds tailor much like a utopia, but runs rampant at a self-developing pace. There is also real space imagined, shaped by our memories more than our desires. When we leave a familiar space – be it a town, a home, a café, a school – we reconstruct and navigate it as we believe it to be. A map can be the physical product of this space, reconstructed from our understandings of real space, yet wholly created, imagined, and inaccessible at the time of use. Portrayed space, found in movies, pictures, and paintings, is understood by the viewer to be real and again inaccessible, often much like looking into a mirror. We can see the space as reflective and filling the image opposite us, but it remains safely out of our hands, fixed and impenetrable at the moment we are consuming it.

Lefebvre and Spatial Production

The gap that we find between real versus imagined space becomes extremely problematic because, as Lefebvre notes, this growing rift between mental space and practical space disregards that they are in fact associated. The danger with this dualism is that of many other dualisms – setting up two options poses them against one another and tends to forget about the interrelations between the two. This practical-mental division also presupposes that space is a fixed object that we are able to classify, entirely forgetting about the process in which space comes to be – the *production* of this space. Lefebvre offers instead a three-way interdependent relation of space in which each form of spatial engagement is active in this social production of space.

Spatial practice or *perceived* space is the space of our everyday lives. We can think of this as navigable, material, and requiring a certain continuity and cohesion so that it can be easily used and reproduced. This interaction with space in the context of Abasto and Puerto Madero in Buenos Aires is manifested in the practical use of each site as it shifts through time. The Abasto Market was navigated by a different population and in a much different way than the revitalized Abasto shopping mall that took its place. Each site can be distinguished by who uses the site and how it is taken in before and after the revitalization projects. The same is even more obvious for Puerto Madero: although it could be perceived by all individuals, a limited population consistently engaged in its spatial practice while it was a functioning port system – port authorities, employees, travelers, etc. The shift to an urbanized neighborhood requires an entirely different form of spatial practice, with a new population of residents and visitors requiring entirely new modes of perception.

Representations of Space or *conceived* space is the collection of knowledge, signs, codes, theories, and abstractions that allow us to talk about space. We can understand this space to be a

matter of concern to specialized professionals – architects, planners, urbanists, social engineers – whose interests lie in identifying the material and symbolic context of space so it can be put into discourse. This paper, for instance, fits neatly into the form of conceived spatial engagement, dissecting how the symbolic shifts within the realm of public and private for both Abasto and Puerto Madero affect the practical use of the space. We also look at how the space is coded, made ambiguous, and what effect it has on the subjects that interact with or are excluded from the sites.

Representational Space or *lived space* is determined by the inhabitants and users. This form of engagement is also a coherent system, but instead of based on strict utility and perception, it is also a system made up of symbols and signs that stem from the perceiving and then imaging space, imbuing it with morals and values as well as functionality. This is what causes the sense of nostalgia when looking back at the unifying and characteristic nature of the Abasto Market in the neighborhood. It is what charges the newest neighborhood of Puerto Madero with a chic and exclusive feel of modernity. This representational space marks the Abasto mall by its functional characteristics while also making a symbolic critique of concentrated consumption. Lived space sees the physical separation of Puerto Madero from Buenos Aires and morphs this distance into a view of the neighborhood as metaphorical island for the elite.

Lefebvre's work opens up opportunity to see these sites as more than evidence of social and temporal shifts. It looks beyond the view of space as defined either materially or mentally – space as more determinant than a stage or a screen on which history and social developments are projected and play out, and more external than spaces imagined, subjective, coded, but intangible. (Soja, 126-130). More importantly for the purpose of this paper, Lefebvre highlights

that these forms of engagement are tied into a social process of *producing* space. He emphasizes that space does not exist as is in any static form, but is understood and experienced through perceiving, conceiving, and living. The surrounding space will shift the flow and actions of people and things, which subsequently appropriates it by using it, thus shifting the space and the interactions with the space in a continual and cyclical process. The interdependency of these three forms of engagement make them inextricable – one does not exist without the others – and susceptible to transformation.

Foucault

Like Lefebvre, Foucault tries to negotiate between the limited forms of spatial visualization by opening up the categories of *other* spaces that are neither solely external in the sense of general use, nor completely imagined and separated from the domain of the physically accessible. His notion of *heterotopia* is the embodiment of this third spatiality. As Foucault explains, this third spatiality exists in real-space, can be located physically and frequented by visitors, but it simultaneously seems to exist outside the normal flow of reality, and thus comments on surrounding real spaces. Religious spaces are a good example of heterotopias, charged with social and spiritual codes that filter out the visitors via implicit regulations (adopted by both individuals inside and outside the space) seeming to transcend their surroundings.

Another characteristic essential to understanding heterotopias are the set of specific codes and signs that dictate both who uses the sites and how. A prison is another example that further clarifies this idea – controlled by strict rules and regulations that separate those who exist within the prison system from those who exist outside of it. These spaces function under separate notions of time and separate social guidelines which serve as a break from the normal

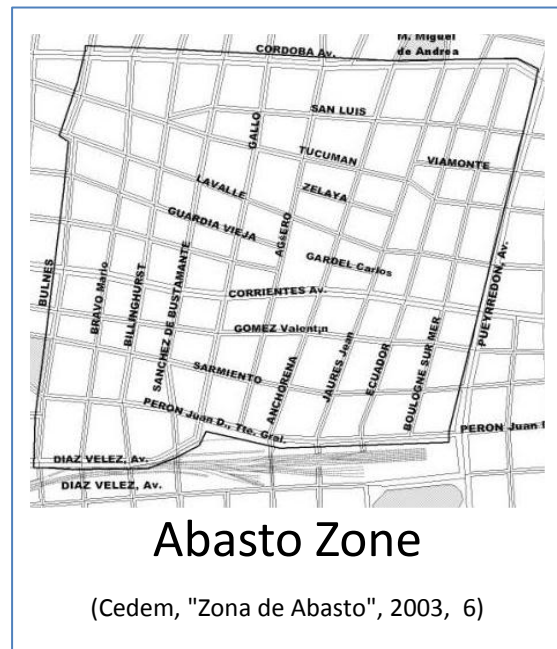
dimensions of real space; by existing with the real external framework of space but also outside of it, these spaces reflect and even invert our notions of real space. As a “counter-site”, the heterotopia is a space which allows for the disregard of certain norms in favor of the heterotopic ones defining it. Investigating these spaces allows for a deeper understanding of the larger regulatory forces that shape the use and production of the everyday fabric of life.

In our cases, we look to the heterotopias of Puerto Madero and the Abasto market to gain an understanding of how and why they seem so incompatible to their surrounding spaces. While many examples that Foucault gives view heterotopias as spaces of crisis – hospitals, birthing centers, boarding schools – or spaces of deviation – prisons, psychiatric asylums, rest homes – the idea of heterotopia has also been appropriated to encompass spaces of illusion – museums, theaters, theme parks, and so on. We can see both Puerto Madero and Abasto in this light to a certain extent. As I will explore later on in more depth, the revitalization projects of each of the selected sites are often criticized because of the “foreign” and “elite” character of the projects. These, which I colloquially refer to as “spaces of ascension” form a sort of illusion that the users temporarily rise above the reality of their class or social status – they allow for an experience of transcending the daily life of Buenos Aires which is viewed as chaotic, dangerous, gritty, developing, and dip into the controlled life of what is perceived to be the first-world. They bring with them a certain internationality through their design and their functions, permitting especially the middle class who cannot fully participate within them (because of economic limitations) to experience moments of “international citizenry” (Centner, 2011) by taking part in these “spectacles of modernity” (Guano).

Past Public Spaces

Abasto: Mercado Abasto as Public Space

Buenos Aires is physically divided into 48 separate neighborhoods as defined by the autonomous government of the city of Buenos Aires (*Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires* – CABA). However, within the city, there are areas that are locally recognized as a separate zone, becoming what I term “informal neighborhoods”. Abasto is one of many of these spaces. These areas sometimes span multiple neighborhoods, such as the area of *Barrio Norte*, which is locally used to refer to a group of multiple neighborhoods (*Recoleta*, *Palermo*, and parts of *Retiro*) in the northern and more expensive section of the city. They can exist within the boundaries of one official neighborhood like the areas of *Palermo Soho*, *Alto Palermo*, and *Palermo Hollywood* all within the Palermo limits.



In the case of Abasto, the zone is a small section that straddles the official borders of the neighborhoods *Balvanera* and *Almagro* located slightly east of the geographic center of the city.



Old Abasto Market

(Latido Buenos Aires, 2011)

While the Abasto zone is regarded as a separate space informally defined, it is treated in the same manner as the other 48 officially recognized neighborhoods, as demonstrated by the 2003 CEDEM report analyzing the economic development of Abasto. This report identifies Abasto as bound by the streets *Medrano*, *Bartolomé Mitre*, *Avenida Córdoba* and *Avenida Pueyrredón*, forming a

rectangular zone with the old Abasto market as its center focal point (CEDEM, 2003).

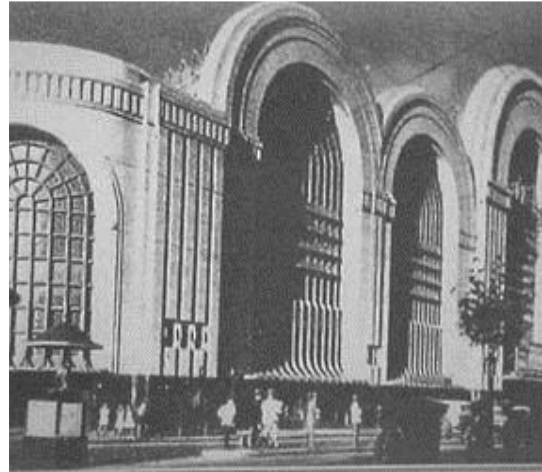
In 1880, the city's main wholesale market *Mercado Modelo* located close to the waterfront shut down, and there was a need for a new marketplace where grocery and retail vendors could meet and sell their goods to the public. In 1889, the farmers and vendors from the original market Modelo formed an organization called the Anonymous Society of the Market of Wholesale Providers (*Sociedad Anónima Mercado de Abasto Proveedor*), and purchased land in the now-Abasto zone to construct a new market. In 1890 the group was transferred to the mayor of the city, making it a governmentally run operation. The inauguration of the *Mercado de Abasto Proveedor* (meaning Market of Wholesale Providers in Spanish) in 1893 satisfied this demand, becoming the new central market for the city.

The space surrounding the market took on the name *barrio del Abasto* (the Abasto neighborhood) among locals, which eventually became shortened simply to Abasto,

characterized by not only the market but then the subsequent developments that the market spurred. In order to accommodate to the new flow of goods and people in the area, the city extended the streetcar system, creating the second line *Linea B* in 1930 that ran down avenue *Triunvirato* (which today is *Avenida Corrientes*, known as one of the city's central avenues). These developments prompted increased urban development, attracting further wealth and population into the center of the city. The space itself developed its identity (based on population structure, and name) because of the introduction of the market. This was also a central to the expansion of Buenos Aires outward from the waterfront, opening up more room for infrastructural developments and the people of areas on the edges of the city. As the population increased and spread outward, Abasto remained a space defined by accessibility to many of the central components to urban life: goods and services, water and land, transportation and commerce. The zone was a space of opportunity (Carman, 81-101).

The market itself offered not only goods and services for consumption, but ample employment opportunities, attracting the wave of Italian immigrants that came to Argentina in the XX century. The new immigrant population heavily influenced the shape and culture of the Abasto neighborhood. These immigrants opened up Italian-style restaurants, cafes, bars, and sports and entertainment clubs. These years of European and particularly Italian migration to Buenos Aires have come to define the cultural identity of the contemporary city's population and structure. Argentina is still distinguished in comparison to its Latin American partners by its Europeanness. Abasto, then, was seen as the heart of this *porteño* identity and history – a life-source the pumped out cultural developments, historical landmarks, and iconic figures that have come to be representative of essential *porteñidad*, *porteño* identity (Marimón, 13-20).

As the influxes of new immigrants, workers, and consumers moved in and out of the area, the surrounding space filled with new cultural hubs which spurred increased attention. By 1934, the market space was insufficient for the amount of business that it hosted every day, and so the market was redone, designed by architect José Luis Delpini. The “new” Abasto market received international attention as an architectural jewel of South America (Carman,



New Abasto Market

(Latido Buenos Aires, 2011)

2006, 81-101) – the facade still stands as the front of the current shopping mall. Now the building regarded as a historic and cultural landmark of *porteño* achievement.

Again, the surrounding area of Abasto reacted to the new physical transformation of the market. The architectural merit and aesthetic appeal of the market towering over Corrientes Avenue was especially remarkable because the prestigious place was still home to farmers and vendors of lower class status. International attention and the increased investment in the surrounding neighborhood, making not only the Abasto market but also the neighborhood of Abasto a place of prestige that attracted a new wave of middle-class families. Such demographic and physical transformations added to the sense of true *porteñidad*, now emanating not just culture but also middle-class prosperity. During this time period Abasto housed spaces for a wealth of diverse socio-economic groups: brothels and theaters, boarding houses and single-family homes, local eateries and elegant restaurants. As María Carman (2006) quotes in her ethnography of the neighborhood, there existed a romantic sense of community and

neighborhood diversity in which “solidarity was the everyday food of this babel of immigrants that bunch together in neighboring tenements of the market” (86)².

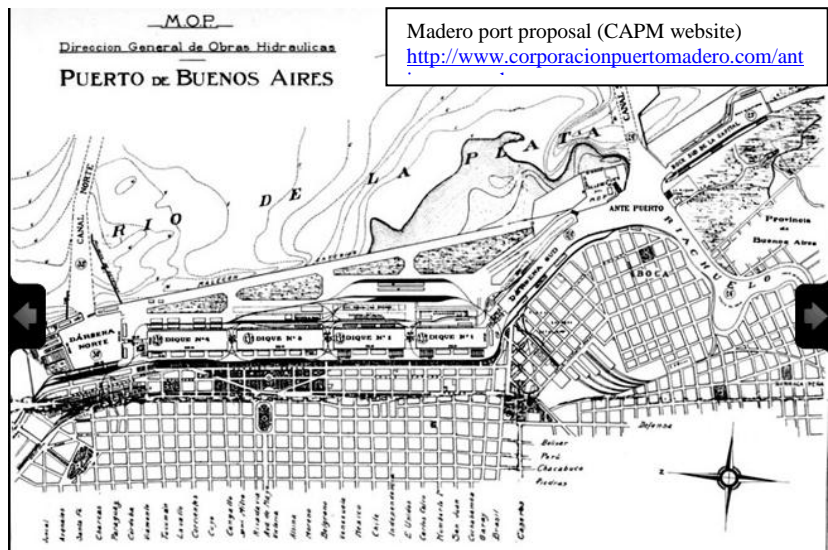
While Abasto’s transformations must take into account the changing social and temporal values of the time, we also see how Abasto itself came to mark our understandings of *porteño* history and social relations. The market’s utility attracted populations that reconfigured the space to meet their social, cultural, and economic needs – these very transformations combine into our contemporary understandings of historic transitions and cultural development. It is not necessarily space demonstrating these historic and social moments of transformation, but space *creating* the moments that we then see as important. The major transformations of the Abasto market contributed to solidifying its name as a separate zone – el barrio Abasto – and particularly in the latter half of the XX century, dubbing the neighborhood as “the heart of the city” both physically and culturally.

Puerto Madero: The Port and Story of successful public space

Geographically, Puerto Madero sits on the far eastern edge of the city, perfectly centered as it extends out into the *Río de La Plata*, and physically separated from the city by a canal built in the late nineteenth century. Originally designed as the city’s first port, the space is now home to the 48th neighborhood of Buenos Aires, sitting as a symbolic bastion for *porteño* progress. In order to truly understand the significance of Puerto Madero, both before and after its revitalization, we must begin with the symbolic relationship between the city and the river that has been a defining feature of Buenos Aires.

² Original text in Spanish, “la solidaridad era la comida cotidiana de ese babel de inmigrantes que se arracimaba en los conventillos vecinos al mercado,” as cited in Carman (2006, 86) from *Tiempo de Barrio* 12/1990.

In 1853 after Argentina's newfound independence from Spain, the population began to organize their statehood by establishing a national congress, constitution, and federal government system. Along with these political developments was a need to transform the country and especially its capital city, both physical and symbolically, into a welcoming, civilized, and progressive space. Such a goal required economic growth and international recognition, both of which could be achieved through the city's port system – the gateway to Argentina on the *Río de la Plata*. Ultimately, the goal was two-fold: the government had to design an efficient port system that would facilitate trade and build international relations so that Argentina could enter the global economy, as well as develop an aesthetically remarkable space in the form of a promenade (Liernur).



Puerto Madero was developed by Eduardo Madero, a business man involved in trading, under the design proposal of Juan Bateman. In 1884 Madero, along with the port's engineer Luis Huergo, was officially contracted by President Roca and construction for the port began in 1887. The port plan consisted of four central docks and two bounding docks north and south of the area. Altogether the port system was made up of 9,700 linear meters of loading docks, 660,200 square meters of water, and twenty-one warehouses along the city-side waterfront for storage. For many years, the Madero port was not only a major component for the physical and economic growth of Buenos Aires, but it was also recognized as a great technical spectacle, “the place



Warehouses for storage along the waterfront. The facades are still kept today as a celebration of the city's history (CAPM website)
<http://www.corporacionpuertomadero.com/antiguo>

where *porteños* could contemplate in awe a great scene of progress, with bold engineering responsible for an impressive display of men, steamships and trains, novel machinery, and enormous buildings,” (Liernur, 37). The port

was separated by an artificial channel for entrance and exit called *Canal Sur*. Both Canal Sur and the northern

dock *Dársena Norte* were exclusively controlled by the city rather than the nation, which allowed Buenos Aires to become an independent hub for the importation and exportation of goods, giving the city a new autonomy from the region (Marimón, 137-144). Such developments allowed Buenos Aires to take the lead in imports and exports within the region, but the level of trade rapidly surpassed the ports capacity and neighboring cities such as La Plata, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay soon were the preferred trading cities. Neighboring competition among other issues such as administrative difficulties, outdated cargo methods, slow operations, and a delayed response to the need for transformation led into Puerto Madero’s first of many periods of decline (Liernur).

Financially, the port system was much more costly than the city had expected or was prepared to handle. Attempts were made to address the administrative difficulties that hampered efficiency, but after multiple failures, the Ministry of Public works turned instead to developing the new port to the North (current day *Puerto Nuevo*), which furthered Puerto Madero’s decline in port functioning. As the northern port increased in activity, much of the urban construction to accommodate to Puerto Madero’s port activity fell to disuse, and this eastern center section of the city took on the form of a mini urban wasteland. Puerto Madero never fell fully into disuse,

but the construction north (of *Puerto Nuevo*) and south (*Dock Sud*) advanced ahead of the central port system and within a few decades Puerto Madero was extremely inefficient (Marimón, 137-144). The XX century brought with it radical political reform, shortening work hours and days and generating a demand for recreational areas which were places along the waterfront. The waterfront area became the center of attention for extravagant leisure activity, spotted with parks, pavilions, gardens, yacht clubs, cafés and restaurants – a new expression of Argentine prosperity (Liernur).

While the port itself fell fairly early to inefficiency and decay, it was a strong symbol for progress and thus essential to the notions of *porteñidad*. Even the hard times – of crisis and decay – were embodied in this port, which physically and metaphorically bridged the city and the people to the river, which is at the core of *porteño* identity. Strengthening this connection of the Buenos Aires population with the natural geography of Argentina was a symbolic gesture to assert Argentine independence – framed as such during the early years of its construction. The city of Buenos Aires and its people had to be understood as grounded in Argentine values based in its history. The dangerous browned river of La Plata that ran through the rough Argentine terrain was at the heart of this historic restoration that defined *porteño* endurance, thus the port was seen as the embodiment of both hardship and progress (Marimón, 137-144). Upon reflection, Puerto Madero could never be simply conceptualized in terms of economic advancement, but must also be recognized as a symbolic gateway to the city and thus to *el pueblo porteño*, the people of Buenos Aires.

A Romanticized Memory of Public Space

Both the Abasto Market and the Puerto Madero port have their roots in some definition of “public”. Their historic development however marks the difference in what the term “public

space” implies in each case. Firstly, both spaces are intricately tied to the development of the local economy, indicating that the dominance of market-interests still does not exclude these sites from being classified as public. Although the rhetoric for developing the market hardly touched on its political implications, it came to be understood as public much like the Greek agora because of the diverse social groups it attracted and hosted. In its origin, the market was developed and owned by a *Sociedad Anónima Mercado de Abasto Proveedor*, a cooperative of wholesale providers, the market and its functioning was later taken under control by the municipal government of Buenos Aires, making it publicly owned as well. Because the Abasto market was the city’s largest functioning market providing a space for the sale of wholesale fruits and vegetables to people from all over the city, it attracted citizens from all social groups. While some visions of public space peg the “public” against the “private” and equate this to an implied separation between the governmental and the market-driven, we see that Abasto’s economic purpose was in fact what made it public in the first place. Despite its associations with private profit, the market was the epitome of public space, being the central location for the entire population of Buenos Aires to find a variety of goods and resources. The market also served as a central space for meeting within the neighborhood and a useful physical landmark for orienting oneself in the city. It housed low- and middle-income farmers and vendors and serviced people of all socioeconomic statuses and ethnic backgrounds. Though not necessarily a space of explicit political activity, it was a unifying point in the city that served the democratic goal of interaction and participation amongst social groups.

The foundation of Puerto Madero, like the Abasto market, is rooted in the potential economic success of the city. In terms of understanding Puerto Madero as a place of public interaction, we must take into consideration the way in which it first facilitated *economic*

international interaction. Its development allowed Buenos Aires to distinguish itself as a regional leader and a space that would draw international attention. The port is a unifying tie to both the global economy, but also was the physical gateway to the city, facilitating international flows of not just goods but also people. The port system was a welcome center for international travelers, migrants, business and political leaders. Unlike the market, the port was not a space for political activism, freedom from top-down regulation, and daily societal interaction. While the port was publically owned and operated, it was also a site for the primary use of the government rather than the location population of Buenos Aires. This highlights a first questionable moment in the rhetoric which romanticizes the old functioning of Buenos Aires' public spaces. While the market can more explicitly be read as a *porteño* version of the Greek agora – used and appropriated by the local population – the port itself doesn't seem to fit the same definition.

Still, the recovery of Puerto Madero port emphasizes its historic usefulness, and even essentiality, to the *porteño* population. Similarly, the Abasto market is deeply implicated in the foundation of what is now referred to as true *porteñidad*. Here, we see public space as a tool to represent the local population – the physical manifestation of a population's identity. For Abasto, for instance, the impact of the Italian immigrant population drawn by the market's opportunities was a major element that defined the neighborhood as a space of cultural exchange. The mix of the Argentine with the Italian and other immigrant populations transformed the language, the art, the music, and the foods of Argentina which is now a definitive trait of *porteño* identity. Abasto was home to famous cafes and restaurants, and drew in artists, actors, and authors that shaped and celebrated the neighborhood for its wealth of culture and vibrant urban feel. Especially important to the neighborhood's current cultural value was iconic Argentine tango singer (a music style typical of Argentina that has strong Italian roots) Carlos Gardel who, like many other

local artists, grew up in Abasto and celebrated the area in his work. Carman writes, “The Abasto was already imagined as the most *porteño* site in Buenos Aires at the beginnings of the XX century, two decades before the ‘golden’ era of tango,” (87). Now, the neighborhood is often referred to as a sort of tribute to Gardel. The unifying nature of the market was disseminated into the neighborhood, creating a sort of solidarity that has surely been romanticized, but still celebrated, throughout history. Still, this is the memory of public space that characterized both the market and the neighborhood which was hugely important for its future development.

Another important function of public spaces is how they integrate and unify their surroundings. As we see in the case of Abasto, the surrounding zones transformed with the development and expansion of the market, capitalizing on the continuous flow of people. Residents and entrepreneurs, both local and immigrants, opened up restaurants, cafés, theaters, and a wide array of other entertainment venues, which operated both during the day and at night. Especially after the reconstruction of the market, the new architectural prestige drew even more attention to the neighborhood, bringing more investment and inhabitants to the neighborhood. Similarly, the Puerto Madero port is romanticized as a public space by locals and foreigners alike because of the symbolic connection the port serves as a link between the city and the river. It was also seen as a gateway connecting Buenos Aires to the world as well as a foundation for establishing *porteño* and Argentine identity as a newly independent nation. The river Río de Plata has long been a defining characteristic of the region and the population living there. Populations along the river are identified as *Rio Platenses* and the port furthered the connection between the people and this symbolically powerful river. After years of colonial domination and repression, it was not only fundamental to establish economic stability within the country, but

also to reestablish a unifying identity. The port allowed for the creation of the identity category of *porteños* – defining the local residents of Buenos Aires as a “people of the port”.

The celebrated history of Puerto Madero as a symbol of *porteño* progress, identity, and as a successful public space is particularly interesting because this story glosses over the almost immediate failure of the port which is only really emphasized later in its history. The port’s functioning declined only decades after it was established but the waterfront area came to be equated with the port itself and filled into part of the narrative of the port as public space. The *costanera* or waterfront boardwalk development is much more explicitly public than the port itself. The port was not a place of common use among citizens of Buenos Aires, but the waterfront area, also publicly owned and maintained, served as another unifying feature between the city and the river. With its open parks, recreational spaces, and pathways, it was considered open and accessible to all – a place that facilitated interaction between a variety of social groups whether they be member of the high-end Yacht Club Argentino, sipping espresso at one of the many boardwalk cafés or simply walking along the waterfront. By developing the port along with the waterfront, the Argentine government worked to make the entire region a unifying feature of Buenos Aires, both among citizens and with the rest of the world.

Spaces in Decline

Abasto: Neighborhood Decline and the Failure of Public Space

The previously celebrated social mixture of the neighborhood soon began to be seen as a growing problem rather than an important ingredient in the *porteño* identity, especially in the late twentieth century. Newspapers and magazines, government officials and local residents took note of developing issues that come from increased interest in dense urban space. As more and

more people moved to and through Abasto to take in its economic, social, and cultural offerings, the surrounding neighborhood increased in density, congestion, pollution, poverty and crime. Abasto's unique quality as a sort of Babel for a wide array of socio-economic and ethnic groups meant that it was also particularly attractive to the lower-income and immigrant populations flooding into Argentina at the time. Unlike the developing *villas miseria* (shantytowns) developing on the peripheries and in the south of Buenos Aires, the Abasto neighborhood benefited from its central location, the market, the entertainment venues, and the middle- and upper middle-classes that generated diverse forms of life within the space.

Interestingly enough, even with the increased investment in the neighborhood throughout the twentieth century, the area continued to house and be defined by a culture of working-class citizens and immigrants from other part of Argentina and neighboring countries interacting daily with the middle-class families and establishments (Carman, 81-101). While this may seem to counter the trend of gentrification that we see in US urban development today, the strong presence of middle-class consumers and residence still symbolically dominated over the developments of the popular sector. These populations were not pushed out of the neighborhood, but rather shuffled around into concentrated areas that were of less value to middle-class interests. The unused land behind hotels and new apartment towers began was implicitly designated to house crowded and precarious tenements for the poor working class and often immigrants in the neighborhood.

Newspapers and locals observed the decline of the Abasto neighborhood which went hand in hand with a decline in the market's functioning. As the city's population grew and spread further out, the Abasto market was no longer the dominant option for commerce. Especially because the neighborhood was slowly becoming less and less desirable, seen as

increasingly dangerous and dirty, the market itself received less business throughout the 1960s. Talk circulated of a number of ambiguous projects to move the market out into a less congested zone circulated among residents. Alongside the decentralization rumors came further discussion about what would be done with the skeleton of the massive market if the Abasto market was longer housed there – what would take the place of the market in the once “architectural jewel”, the embodiment of publicness that gave this neighborhood its name? Local Argentine artists proposed a number of alternative uses – the creations of a cultural center, a workshop for fine arts, a space for tango music and dance, and auditorium, a theater, and so on. But, in 1982 when the rumors finally came to fruition and a new wholesale market was established just outside the city’s boundaries in *La Matanza*, these ideas were left stagnant in the wake of the grand market’s fall (Carman, 93-101).

The majority of the farmers and vendors followed the decentralization out to the new market and in October of 1984, the almost century-old market was officially closed by the city. Many of the local businesses depended on the presence of the market to attract customers, families were suddenly unemployed, landlords interests turned elsewhere. The neighborhood became a central space on the margins (Carman, 93). Both a symbolic and very real neglect was felt around the space. Interestingly, in contrast to the many cases of urban city decline, there was not a mass migration out of the area by the middle-class residents. As Carman writes, “one of the peculiarities that distinguished the neighborhood during this time period was the marked contrast between the social groups that lived there: middle-class residences (apartments, duplexes) adjoining deteriorating tenements of the popular sector,”³ (Carman, 93).

³ “Una de las peculiaridades que distinguían al barrio para esta época se puede resumir en el marcado contraste entre los grupos sociales que allí convivían: residencias de clase media (edificios, casas dúplex) contiguas a deteriorados conventillos de sectores populares.”

An important component to understanding the “decline” of the Abasto market as well as the neighborhood was the new wave of working-class migrants that had moved into the Abasto zone. These immigrants came largely from interior parts of Argentina and the neighboring countries of Perú, Boliva, and Paraguay which were less economically successful and industrialized spaces in comparison to Buenos Aires. This shift in the racial and national identity of the popular sector once again made Abasto a space of new cultural encounter, much like the wave in Italian and European immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, national and racial issues of discrimination and preference, at least retrospectively, shaped this new population in terms of illegitimacy and illegality. While both of these immigrant groups shared similar ways of life, living in overcrowded *conventillos* or tenements, generally constructed by the immigrant groups themselves, made of scrap material, holding similar precarious jobs such as selling food characteristic of their native country, each was received extremely differently in terms of creating a national narrative of identity. The latter group of Peruvian, Paraguayan, and Bolivar working-class migrants came to be closely associated with crime, laziness, and poverty, whereas the Italian immigrant was looked upon as a foundational component to Argentine life. The struggles of these Italian migrants filtered into the narrative of Argentine endurance and fostered the popular surge of music and art that is now a staple of Argentine culture. The immigrants of neighboring Latin American countries, because of racial and cultural stereotypes that had distinguished Argentina from other Latin American nations, were simply part of what sociologist call a “culture of poverty” (Carman, 93-101).

Though cohabitating the same physical space, there was little symbolic about the social rift between these two groups – the middle class residents and the “urban slum dwellers” of the working class. What was once seen as a modern day Babel of immigrants feasting on solidarity,

drinking in cultural exchange and interaction, now becomes one of the earlier examples of the micro-fragmentation of the city of Buenos Aires. This defining feature, the new shift of interaction, was pinpointed time and time again as the failure of the democratic public sphere, and at the heart of this chaos, mutual distrust, and grit lay the abandoned market of Abasto, boarded up but hardly unoccupied.

The space itself was of wide interest to a number of investors looking to capitalize on its size, structure, and history. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the rights to the land changed continued to be purchased by various owners and then resold after plans could not be realistically executed. Aside from the troubling issue of neighborhood decline and the abandonment of the market, a series of recurring economic crises swept through Argentina during the late 1980s that drastically impacted the lower- and middle-income residents of Abasto. Landlords began to let the surrounding buildings deteriorate, which was followed by influx of squatters moving into these unregulated spaces. One of these spaces was the Abasto market itself, This provoked not only a decrease in real-estate values, but also marked new conflicts within the neighborhood between old and new residents over class, security, and sense of right to the neighborhood. The question was not necessarily over who owns the space, but rather who *deserves* the space (CEDEM, 2003).

Middle-class neighborhood residents were hardly silent. They looked to a variety of institutions – churches, mass media companies, and various opposing political parties – to call attention to what they viewed as an “intrusion” of space and violation of property rights. These families argued that they were rent-paying, law-abiding citizens that were forced to live in increasingly decaying buildings while squatters inhabited the same spaces but were free from all responsibility of maintaining the buildings’ conditions. Like many of the surrounding buildings,

the Abasto market was also a home to squatters and the temporarily unemployed residents of Abasto, many of which were working-class immigrants as well. The occupation of the building made it even more difficult to sell the land rights, and along with middle-class demands, the local and national government eventually stepped in and took action. In the early 1990s, the Secretary of Security of Buenos Aires piloted a project to remove illegal squatters in various effected neighborhoods in Buenos Aires like Abasto and *San Telmo*. This project was financed and supported by the national government and allowed for the local police to physically remove these squatters under threat of several penal actions. Alongside this metropolitan push was a series of laws enacted by the national government in 1994 that deported 23,000 immigrants from neighboring countries, claiming that these citizens were “robbing” Argentines of their land and jobs (Carman, 53-77).

Puerto Madero: Port Decline and Totalitarian Neglect

Over the next several decades of the twentieth century, not substantial changes were made to the Puerto Madero port. Instead, the national government focused on the improving the functioning of the ports both north and south of Puerto Madero as a means to keep Argentina as a regional leader in importation and exportation of goods. While Puerto Madero continued to function, albeit inefficiently, the port ceased to be a means for fostering the independent economic development of Buenos Aires distanced from the rest of the country. In 1964, the Argentine government donated 50 hectares of the river to be filled in with land in order to construct an archipelago in which one of the city’s soccer teams *Boca Juniors* could build a large stadium. While the landfill operation was finished, the plan for the stadium never followed through. Canals separating the mini-island from the rest of the port were eventually blocked by

circulated dirt and debris and eventually the canals were filled in, almost doubling the size of the land (Liernur).

After years of gradual decline and physical deterioration, the entire port system, including the ports both north and south of Puerto Madero, was officially closed under the military dictatorship for “national security” concerns. Public spaces all over the city were highly patrolled or closed, and those that facilitated international interaction posed an even stronger threat – the dictatorship fearing international intervention for their political tactics. During this time, the military government, under a declared program of modernization, created a plan to turn in the landfilled space into what is now the city’s ecological reserve. Along with other major expansion plans like the construction of a large system of urban highways, and extending more of Buenos Aires out into the river through a similar landfill process, the military government took control of the decision-making process and attempted to connect this landfill fully and expand it so as to “solve some of its [Buenos Aires’] problems by extending its area over the river,” (Liernur, 41). However, due to economic crisis in the 1980s, these plans did not come to fruition, but they did help build up an association with Puerto Madero and the military dictatorship. The growing line of thought was that the river and the port were somehow taken from the people by the totalitarian regime, reinforcing again the sense of nostalgia for a successful public space that had not truly existed (Liernur).

Throughout the years of its complete stagnancy, Puerto Madero fell to pieces, so that by the time it was officially reopened in 1983, it looked more like ruins of the past than opportunity for the future (Liernur). By the middle of the 1980s, national competition from other major Argentine cities such as Rosario, San Lorenzo, and San Nicolás has surpassed the Buenos Aires ports in productivity and Buenos Aires again had fallen behind (PRODET, 2002). Not only was

the system expensive and inefficient, but the original port of Puerto Madero hovered over the river in pieces, reminding all of Buenos Aires about the pain and neglect felt in those long years of repression.

Again, the river became a means to inspire the population by drawing on these old sentiments of Argentine endurance and true porteñidad. Reinserted into the political campaigns, the waterfront and the port were part of a project for the, “recovery of democracy,” in which “‘public space’ was transformed into a symbol of the new political agenda, and the catchphrase ‘recovery of the river’ meant the recovery of public coastline space,” (Liernur, 2007, 29). The new democratic projects turned to the port and the La Plata coastline to evoke a sense of unifying nostalgia, memory of past moment of *porteño* success.

Two ultimate goals emerged, particularly when Carlos Menem was elected in 1989: One was to return focus to the still functioning northern and southern ports, boosting their productivity and reinserting Buenos Aires into the global economy as a regional leader in exportations. The second goal was to establish Buenos Aires as an aspiring world-class city, and in order to do so, economy developers emphasized that the port system must also be seen as an attractive gateway for tourists and potential international investors. However, the government’s funds were drastically weakened during the reestablishment of Argentine democracy as well as the sense of faith that many Argentine people put in the government. These goals required significant capital investment that was not present within the country, and so, in 1989, a series of legislative changes under the Menem government marked a new approach to economic development. Through the decree 1279, the national government was allowed to grant public land away to private investors, putting the center section of modern day Puerto Madero into the hands of the Corporation of Old Puerto Madero (CAPM) which began urbanization project. The

organization was private in the sense that it was detached from the city of Buenos Aires' government but was made up of public officials and private investors (PRODET, 2002, 194-6).

This moment in Buenos Aires planning opened up opportunity to experiment with new means for shaping public space. As a long standing state-owned port system, the space was never urbanized for residential use. Without having to consider the use and the lives of the citizens in the area, CAPM had the potential to completely tear down the existing structure and build a place unique to the city, something that stood apart from other existing areas. The goals of the urban plan set out by CAPM were to “contribute, with the reconversion of Puerto Madero, to creating a new image and urban dynamic of the city,” while, “promoting economic development through the urbanization and introduction of new sectors that incorporate those new technologies that the city currently lacks,” (Busquets, 43- 4). Puerto Madero's revitalization was hardly limited to the bounds of this stagnant urban island – as we see, it was part of a larger symbolic and progressive plan to move Buenos Aires as a metropolis into the future. But we must remember that these plans were pushed forward exactly because this port was celebrated as a once essential public component to Buenos Aires' identity and unity that had been neglected and manipulated by the military dictatorship. It was Puerto Madero's failure that spurred its “necessary” recovery.

The Revitalization of the Public

Abasto: Recovery of Public Space

1997 serves as a sort of historical turning point in the neighborhood, all spurred by the eventual revitalization of the market into the high-end shopping mall that currently sits in its space. The city's largest property developer, IRSA, bought the Abasto market, paying many

squatters who had not been evicted to leave the surrounding buildings even though they had no formal title to the land. This quiet removal pushed many to the peripheries of Buenos Aires where many *villas misería* (shanty towns) and social housing options were located (Centner, 2011). Alongside the installation of the new *Abasto shopping* (officially inaugurated in 1998) came a series of large scale conversion projects – the construction of a massive grocery store franchise *COTO*, a four star Holiday Inn hotel, and a high-end apartment complex *Torres de Abasto*. Real estate prices skyrocketed with the increased investment in the neighborhood.

The Abasto mall was just one of many that had come into the city, and into direct competition with each other. Because the malls were competing amongst each other, the surrounding businesses in the neighborhood failed to keep up. Throughout the subsequent years these businesses had high turn-over rates that made for instable commercial activity, and eventually they were closed or refitted as housing options. The Abasto building, now home to the new chic shopping center, was again the central draw of the neighborhood, and in fact, came to dominate the market, offering the same array of goods and services found in North American shopping malls. Theaters, food, beverages, clothing stores, technology stores, hardware stores, furniture stores, all compact into one tight space, reducing the need to even spend time in the surrounding neighborhoods (CEDEM, 2003). The mall and the interest in the mall grew simultaneously, promoting a distance between the-mall goers inside and those outside on the streets. As Guano (2002) notes in her work, the mall served a variety of purposes. It was a spectacle – a museum of modernity for the *porteño* middle-class who, because of the economic crisis of 2001, could hardly afford to buy anything in the mall with their exorbitant prices, but liked to walk around and window shop. The mall provided an opportunity for locals to develop their contemporary cultural capital on the high-end life and style of the local elite and the latest

in trends for Europe and North America. Even more, it was a sign of the transformations of the city – a long-awaited promise of Buenos Aires modernity and change.

But most important to the appeal of the mall was the contrast it posed to the alternative options. It, unlike the rest of Buenos Aires, the mall was “a world apart – away from what they [*porteños*] perceive as the sometimes unsettling and threatening chaos of an open street increasingly becoming appropriated by the poor,” (Guano, 194). The mall was outfitted with its own security and sanitation system – clean and contained, it promised a guaranteed safety, based first on segregation, for the middle class – shelter from the unwanted interaction with the poor. Homeless people, slum dwellers, panhandlers, robbers, delinquents – these were all non-existent in the kempt and regulated space of the mall, simply because, they were not allowed entry.

Puerto Madero: Recovery of Public Space

The revitalization of Puerto Madero was part of the larger project for the revitalization of the entire port system along the Buenos Aires waterfront. The move to privatize the port system was, in terms of economic development and increased productivity, extremely successful for the Menem administration and the local government of Buenos Aires. The 1990s saw major improvements in the quantity of imports and exports, inversion rates, and efficiency in the system while under private control. As the ports developed in the new hands of international companies, both the city and national government of Buenos Aires took a purposefully stand-off approach to encourage the international investment (PRODET, 2002).

This boom of the port system north and south of Puerto Madero reflected the vested international interest in making this soon-to-be urbanized land. Looking at the official plan of Puerto Madero gives us incredible insight into the mindset and goals of the developers. Most emphasized is the goal of reestablishing the relationship between the city and the port. By

promoting a renewed sense of identity with the riverfront, the plan hoped to establish a clear path for future success based on Puerto Madero as a gateway to the city. The plan uses examples of successful urbanized ports from around the world, focusing in on three primary types: Asian, European, and North American, although we see that the Asian style urbanization is dropped fairly quickly from the discussion, brought up in the first few proposals and hardly mentioned later on. Perhaps this has to do with aesthetics but in reading the plan, we see that the emphasis on unity of *porteño* past and future may have been the reason behind moving toward a more Western design. Not only does the plan discuss the style of development, but also the approach. The planners chose to pass up the European approach – making holistic and large scale changes that inevitably slow down the development process – and opt for the North American “piece-meal” method – quick series of large transformations that tend toward more commercial success promoting an industry of mass-tourism (Busquets, 1990).

CAPM partnered with the governments of the city of Barcelona and the city of Buenos Aires. In 1990, the master urban plan for the urbanization project of old Puerto Madero was created, making this neighborhood completely distinct than any that had come before in the city’s history. No other space in Buenos Aires was developed according to a strategic urban plan, which is defining characteristic of the individuality of Puerto Madero. International competitions were held in order to determine the shape and design of the space, all hoping to project a new era for Argentine modernization without completely neglecting the city’s culture or history. The complex and controversial nature of the urbanization of Puerto Madero comes from exactly this goal: trying to reflect the interests and culture of the public while advancing the political and economic interests of the city in the international arena. The 1990s were also a time of major shifts in the demographic makeup of the city. The poorest areas of Buenos Aires increased

dramatically in population while the overall population decreased. Many of the wealthier *porteños* began to move either outside of the city's limits to the newer suburbs, or into gated neighborhoods located in the north (Liernur). The development of Puerto Madero could be an opportunity to lure the fleeing upper-class back to the center by offering high-class residential housing, a safe and new developed area and all at the front and center of the urban core.

The major economic crisis of 2001 however brought almost all Argentine development to a halt, yet the development of Puerto Madero pushed through, developed almost entirely from international investors hailing from Germany, China, Italy, Spain, and the United States among other countries. This created a strong sense of resentment within many local citizens toward the Puerto Madero project, seeing it as a perfect example of political disinvestment in the needs of the middle-class and popular sector in order to cater to the wealthy few and the international community. While the local population struggled and the popular sector faced serious threats of starvation, Puerto Madero continued on toward its goal of first world style modernity, hoping that this would eventually trickle down to the rest of Buenos Aires. The space that had hoped to reunite the city and the population with the river and re-invoke that old sense of *porteñidad* seemed to reject the public's interests altogether (PRODET; Liernur).

Looking at the official plan for Puerto Madero helps us understand the heterotopic quality of the space, both in its expressed goals as well as how these goals led to the eventual revitalization of the current day space. The plan opens up with a brief explanation of purpose, namely to “channel the transformation of Old Puerto Madero into an authentic urban piece in the river facade of the city of Buenos Aires,” (Busquets, 2). The plan consistently uses words such as “reconversion”, “transformation”, “creation”, and “recuperation” among others, all of which imply the need to reimagine the existent space in order to achieve a better future reality. The

revitalization of Puerto Madero serves as a symbolic gesture to push toward a new stage of *porteño* progress, or as Guano (2002) explains, toward a new type of international modernity. The previous “revitalizations” of Puerto Madero throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also carried this sense of utopic hope. By redesigning the space over and over again, the port of Puerto Madero has always been a space meant to critique the current functioning of Buenos Aires. It was not only a gateway to the river, but also the window to the world of modernization. Each successive transformation project worked to make Buenos Aires a serious competitor in the international arena. Each successive decline marked a symbolic failure on the part of the city to keep up with the dominant ideology of the time, whether it be furthering capitalist production or establishing Buenos Aires as an international city.

Revitalized Public Spaces

Each of the revitalized sites experiences a transformation which, in many superficial ways, maintained its connection to a romanticized public past – a period in time in which both the market and the port were successful functioning sites that fostered the economic, political and social growth of the *porteño* population. Invading the skeletal structure of each space, the new revitalized spaces of Abasto and Puerto Madero proclaim publicness despite the ulterior purpose or function that they serve. It should also be noted that the type and mode of development that took over these sites previously celebrated as public were exceptionally foreign to the city.

This “invasion” of foreign development was not celebrated or accepted by all – the late 1990s in fact also constituted a period of social upheaval towards the promotion of a life of “hyperconsumption” and the “Los Angelization” of Buenos Aires. The wave of mall development was criticized as a suburban, North American infiltration into the heart of the city. Puerto Madero was named as a little Manhattan by local and international newspapers. Protests

were frequent with the successive revitalization projects by private methods. But the city's retort, under *El Partido Radical* government, was a reminder that through these methods the government had returned public parks to functioning, protected historic sites from decay, erected and maintained monuments, and in fact reopened the city of Buenos Aires to public use. As Guano explains, "the Radical Party presented itself as the paladin of citizens' rights – the rights of the 'public' – against the abuses and unfair privileges of the rapacious neoliberal *clase emergente*," (187).

The new Abasto *shopping*⁴ stands out in comparison to the surrounding area of Abasto in ways that worked to normalize the values of hyper-consumption and the liberalized market in Buenos Aires during the 1990s. Guano (2002) explores how the installations of shopping malls in Buenos Aires in fact directly coincided with the law of convertibility (*ley de convertibilidad*) in 1991 pegging the Argentine peso to the U.S. dollar. This transformation under Menem's Reform of the State was part of a push to promote mass foreign investment and development in Argentina along with fostering the importation of goods from developed countries. The shopping mall, along with the goods and technologies it offered, was essential to creating the heterotopic quality of the space. In contrast to its surroundings, the Abasto mall was seen as a refuge, a safe haven. The presence of the mall also exacerbates the perceived danger of the surrounding streets of Abasto. In this way, the heterotopia of the mall justifies the private development of public spaces, demonstrating how through private methods, particular populations like the middle- and upper-classes can get the type of protection they "deserve" by excluding the marginalized working class population that led to the conceived failure of the neighborhood to begin with.

⁴ *Shopping* is the Spanish word in Argentine vernacular for shopping mall. As Guano (2002) so eloquently points out, these malls are termed "shoppings in local parlance – no *castellano* word seemed appropriate for such foreign entities," (192) which adds insight to our understandings of their powerful incompatibility and heterotopic qualities in comparison to the rest of Buenos Aires

Like the Abasto shopping mall, the port reconversion was not unanimously accepted. While the public was informed of the governmental grants giving the land away to be urbanized as a residential neighborhood, the Master Urban Plan was designed quickly and discreetly. Most provocative was the close partnership the CAPM had with the city of Barcelona – the entire Master Plan published and written by two Spanish architects – which caused significant backlash among the an Argentine association for architects *Sociedad Central de Arquitectos* (SCA), who felt that the city was neglecting local and national perspective on such a transformative project. They also criticized the plan for its restrictive framework and failure to take into account the larger connection of Puerto Madero with the city. The new plan, though continually declaring Puerto Madero as a salvation project for *porteño* past, was ignoring the most immediate past of authoritarian control. Local architects and planners were invited to discuss the potential redesign of the plan; however few if any of the ideas made an impact on the implementation, which had stuck fairly strictly to the original plan. This type of under-the-table outsourcing for such a landmark project still remains a source of resentment among Buenos Aires residents who feel the constant tension between the declared intentions and the eventual outcomes of Puerto Madero (Gorelik, 2007).

Physical development began to appear during the 1990s, and the Puerto Madero project was finally beginning to show the type of development that would soon create the postcard imaged of Buenos Aires as a modernized and beautiful city. International urban planners, like Liernur (2007) hailing from the Harvard Design School, from a variety of Western countries have named Puerto Madero one of the most successfully reconverted port projects in a number of urban planning and architectural reviews. However, issues of access and intention continue to circulate under the critical local eye. Part of the pitch and publicity for the Puerto Madero

revitalization project was the promise of a sort of “trickle-down modernity” that was never achieved, and the city has still not benefited significantly from the foreign private investment in the new neighborhood. Instead, it became a place designed by foreigners and intended for foreigners (Gorelik, 2007).

The transformation projects of both Abasto and Puerto Madero were drastic turns away from the *porteño* identity that they once held in favor for the interests, styles, and values of an international and local elite. However another part of their transformation is in terms of access to the space, or rather, the publicness of each of the sites. Once, the market was the central meeting space for a variety of social groups, run by the city’s working-class groups and appropriated by the flow of immigrants that flooded to the neighborhood. The Abasto market turned mall shows a drastic turn away from a space seemingly free of State intervention, of bottom-up development, and promotion of the local. Replacing this space of daily interaction instead was the hyper-regulated space of the mall. Set with its own security system, its series of designated businesses and stores all of which are national or international franchises, the carcass of the Abasto market serves as a host to a world of foreign others, feeding off its structure, location, history. Yet the very unity that the market building represents is torn contradicted by the separation the mall poses between the Abasto mall users and the Abasto neighborhood residents. Not only can the working-class poor not afford the goods in the mall, but many of the *cuadra tomada* residents physically aren’t allowed inside. Exclusion and privilege fill the market’s skeleton.

Likewise, the “publicness” of Puerto Madero drastically shifted during this transformation; however in this case the neighborhood offered more public utility than it had in the past. As a port system, Puerto Madero was always publicly owned by the nation; however, it was never intended to be used or consumed by the Buenos Aires community. Only through the

urbanization of the space under private interests was the land accessible to the local population, thus taking on a new meaning of public space. The plan explains the importance of making this space a place of mixed uses: both a center for private commerce and private residence, but also filled with public plazas, boardwalks, and an expansive ecological reserve that is dedicated to all peoples for recreational use.

As the plan came to fruition, the prices of the land made it so that only a select few could actually own the private land. The apartments and offices are now occupied by the *clase emergente*⁵ made up of the top-tier wealthy upper-class, businessmen, politicians, and stars. It is also dominated by a class of international businesses and renters. The public space, especially the boardwalk, is then a symbolic way of entering a world of exclusion, of wealth, and of international modernity for those who aren't part of this upper-tier class. It is frequented by fashionable, young, middle-class *porteños* who visit the bars and restaurants and take in the space as a means to see and be seen. In order to exist within the Puerto Madero structure, visitors must put on the clothes and behaviors of international exclusivity. Guano writes, "as they admire the spectacle of transnational modernity surround them, they make sure they are *seen* as part of it, too," (Guano, 190).

Lastly, each transformation shifted how the site interacted with the spaces around them. The heterotopic Abasto mall not only stands out against its surrounding neighborhood (culturally, socially, historically, economically) but it has also shifted the way in which the neighborhood is now understood. No longer are the diverse socio-economic and ethnic groups part of a Babel-like culture that interacts and melds. But rather this fortress of exclusion comments on the surrounding neighborhood in the same way – fragmented and governed by fear. Though high-end apartment buildings rub up against the precarious tenements that fill in empty

⁵ emergent class; refers to a young up-and-coming upper-class

lots, the two are worlds apart. Right outside of the Abasto market stand a line of vendors with precarious jobs, selling knickknacks and other used items at extremely low prices. The dumpsters of the mall are rifled through for recycled materials that could be put to use or sold. However these efforts are not viewed as innovation or as a symbiotic lifestyle that comes from the cohabitation of a diversity of groups in the area – these are examples of extreme wealth dominating over extreme poverty.

While Guano (2002) looks at Puerto Madero as if it were an isolated space of transnational hegemonic dominance, we must remember that it only serves as a symbol of transnational values because of its relation to the rest of Buenos Aires' real spaces both now and in the past. Puerto Madero seems to symbolically stand alone, both a physical and metaphoric island that provokes the sensation of separateness, modeled off international styles and values, dedicated for the select few yet technically open to all. It was built in a time of economic despair pushing aside the public needs yet still part of the public urban space intended for public consumption. Imagined with the dual purpose of creating an international future and invoking a *porteño* past, the spatial transformations of Puerto Madero shift our understandings of *porteño* social life and *porteño* history, as if marking a new emergent stage for the future of Buenos Aires.

Conclusions

Sometimes celebrated, sometimes condemned, the revitalization projects in both cases undoubtedly stood out because they did not quite match the history, culture, or structure of the rest of Buenos Aires. They did not match the spaces in which they now sit. Is this erasure of an old public space? Not quite. The market of Abasto was indeed restructured to limit its original

public nature as a space of open, accessible, societal interaction. Yet the Puerto Madero port actually created new spaces for local public exchange. However, what is erased is the public sphere from these revitalized public spaces. Charged with new codes, physically outfitted with their own security systems, and privately owned and regulated, the spaces in fact reshape the notion of who is the “public” by who can enter and exit this new form of public space.

The revitalization of these two sites established two powerful heterotopias within the city that embody the political agenda of the Menem administration’s Reform of the State. Values of governmental deregulation, increased foreign investment, and the privatization of public goods went hand in hand with transnational values that dictate citizenship via level of capital and the ability to consume. The previously public spaces of the Abasto market and the Puerto Madero port physically engulfed by spaces of limited access, reaffirming the values of the local elite and allowing for moments of elite experience by the middle-class who use these spaces as mini-museums and temporary transcendence of their *porteño* reality. The middle-class citizens who frequent these areas cannot afford to indulge in their primary functions (residing in Puerto Madero and purchasing goods in the Abasto shopping mall), but they do in fact further their heterotopic functions – passing through these spaces to indulge in the hegemonic values they continually reproduce (Guano; Centner 2011). Meanwhile, the mall and the urbanized port boast a publicness that is not accessible to all. Each outfitted with their own security systems, distanced from the “realities” of Buenos Aires around them; they filter out the low-income, the working-class, the marginalized populations that previously called this space their home.

These two cases of revitalization projects declare a bold and noble recovery public space and thus the recovery of democracy, equality, justice. Classifying these spaces as public along with a myriad of other public spaces that fit into the catch-all category distracts from the private

methods through which the public is being reclaimed. Even more important, the production of these spaces is deeply involved in untraceably reproducing the hegemony of the state and local elite. The end-product is thus spaces such as the Abasto shopping mall and the Puerto Madero neighborhood which are claimed as public but powerfully coded in order to exclude various marginalized populations, slowly negating their presence and even working to erase them from the physical, accessible landscape of the city. However, while their heterotopic nature works to normalize the shifting values of the state by critiquing the surrounding spaces of Buenos Aires, it simultaneously draws attention that marks each of these sites as peculiar, incompatible, *other*. Here we find room to explore the ways in which urban space is employed in a game of power in a three-fold relationship of state-space-subject (Magaña). Just as the state promotes the production of these heterotopic spaces which code marginalized citizens as excludable and removable, we can use heterotopias to delve deeper into the process of their production, the threats they pose to their surrounding spaces, and thus, the reproduction of social rights to the city.

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