

# More than Fishnets & Fedoras: Filming Social Aesthetics in the Neighborhood Tango Scenes of Buenos Aires & The Making of *A Common Place* (2010)

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## Abstract

Around the world, ideas of tango culture have long been associated with a set of hyper-sexualized visual images of brothel culture – a passionate world of fishnet stockings, fedoras and scantily clad dancers. These visual stereotypes continue to saturate representations of the genre in international media as well as in tourist industries that market what is known in Argentina as tango “for-export.” Over the past decade, new generations of tango artists have contested these stereotypes, developing new scenes that position tango within the contemporary aesthetics of everyday city life in Buenos Aires. My research uses film as a medium to construct alternative forms of visual, sonic, and sensory knowledge about the social aesthetics of these growing local scenes, in places where tango is primarily sung and not danced. Drawing from the interdisciplinary fields of visual and sensory ethnography, this audiovisual essay presents one of my short films about a century-old neighborhood tango bar in the Almagro neighborhood of Buenos Aires and positions filmmaking as a theoretical and methodological approach capable of empowering local understandings of exoticized popular music genres.

*Non solo calze a rete e Borsalino: filmare l'estetica sociale nel mondo del tango di quartiere a Buenos Aires e la realizzazione di A Common Place (2010). Nel mondo l'idea della cultura del tango è stata a lungo associata a una serie di immagini visive ipersessualizzate da bordello – un mondo appassionato fatto di calze a rete, cappelli di feltro e danzatrici in vesti succinte. Tali stereotipi visivi continuano a pervadere la rappresentazione di questo genere nei media internazionali così come nell'industria turistica che smercia quel che in Argentina è noto come tango “da esportazione”. Negli ultimi dieci anni nuove generazioni di artisti di tango hanno contestato questi stereotipi, sviluppando nuovi scenari che collocano il tango all'interno dell'estetica contemporanea dell'attuale vita quotidiana cittadina di Buenos Aires. La mia ricerca usa il film come mezzo per costruire forme alternative di conoscenza visiva, sonora e sensoriale dell'estetica sociale di questi scenari locali sempre più diffusi, in luoghi dove il tango è in primo luogo suonato e non danzato. Basandosi sui campi interdisciplinari dell'etnografia visiva e sonora, questo saggio audiovisivo presenta uno dei miei cortometraggi*

*su un tango bar di quartiere nel barrio Almagro di Buenos Aires, proponendo la produzione filmica come un approccio teorico e metodologico in grado di consentire una comprensione dall'interno di generi di popular music presentati come esotici.*

Film: *A Common Place*, 10'45", 2010.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/14583510>



**FIGURE 1.** Screenshot from *A Common Place* showing the outside of “El Boliche de Roberto” in the Almagro neighborhood of Buenos Aires.

*A Common Place* is the first of four short experiential films made as part of my doctoral dissertation on neighborhood tango music scenes in Buenos Aires (Gubner 2014). It is a 10 minute film about a tiny century-old bar in the Almagro neighborhood of Buenos Aires known as “Lo de Roberto,” meaning Roberto’s Place, or “El Boliche de Roberto,” Roberto’s Bar.<sup>1</sup> Starting in the late 1990s, Roberto’s became a popular late-night gathering place for live tango music and played an important role in reframing tango as an appealing, intimate, and participatory form of neighborhood culture for younger generations – both Argentine and not.

In “El Boliche de Roberto”, intergenerational crowds of regulars from all walks of life would gather multiple nights a week after midnight to listen to a handful of locally revered singers interpret classic tangos with guitar accompaniment in an un-amplified and dimly lit room with no stage.<sup>2</sup> There was never a cover to enter the bar and artists

<sup>1</sup> The formal name of Roberto’s is “Bar 12 de Octubre” but rarely does anyone refer to it by this name.

<sup>2</sup> In 2017 Roberto’s son Esteban Perez closed “El Boliche de Roberto” for renovations and has yet to finish as of May 2018. I use the ethnographic past tense in this article, but am hopeful that its doors will soon reopen to the public.

would pass a hat after each set for tips. While each night of the week featured one of a few main older performers, impromptu performances, invited duets, and sing-a-longs were common. Each singer had their own unique repertoire of tangos that they would interpret each night, crafted to avoid songs burnt out by the tourist industry, with the exception of a few strategically placed for late-night sing-a-longs.

Roberto's bar was my point of entry into tango culture in Buenos Aires in 2005. From 2005-2006, and then on-and-off during fieldwork trips between 2008 and 2014, I spent countless nights in this tiny bar learning about tango as a participatory music tradition and learning the deep importance of small neighborhood bars as places of intergenerational cultural transmission of tango knowledge. I also participated frequently in late-night sing-a-longs and in jam sessions at Roberto's and other nearby bars as a violinist. My short film, *A Common Place*, seeks to share some of the valuable lessons I learned about the cultural importance of small intergenerational neighborhood music venues and to evoke alternative sensory experiences of tango for viewers more familiar with tango as a flashy dance spectacle. The film was made to be accessible to academic and general publics, as well as to the artists and regulars represented in, or familiar with this venue.

This audiovisual essay marks an exciting step toward what I envision will eventually become a fairly "normal" way of doing and sharing multimodal ethnographic research in ethnomusicology through digital platforms. However, as an experiment in new territory, it requires readers to approach things slightly differently than they would with a standard journal article. Instead of treating the audiovisual material as auxiliary examples of my written arguments, I ask readers to take the filmed component of this essay as seriously as its written counterpart. The two are intended to work together with the written work acting as an exploration of the short film and the short film as an audiovisual exploration of the written ideas. Understood in this way, this format aims to destabilize the hierarchy of text-based scholarship within academic discourse, and spark productive conversation about the theoretical and methodological backbones of contemporary audiovisual research and knowledge transmission.

Earlier this year, the editors of *Etnografie Sonore* asked me if I would submit one of my short films to the first edition of the journal. After recent discussions among members of the ICTM Study Group for Audiovisual Ethnomusicology about the need for peer-reviewed platforms for audiovisual research, I jumped at this opportunity. Although the editors only required a short explanation of the film, I found I needed more than a few short paragraphs to contextualize *A Common Place* within the larger framework of my research. As a part of a larger multimodal project in which text and film do different things, I have used this essay to reflect on this short film and my broader film practice, both methodologically and theoretically. I am grateful for the flexibility of the journal to accommodate the length of the essay, and encourage readers to be equally flexible and creative in finding the right balance of filmed sequences to written words in your own multimodal publications. I leave it up to my readers

to decide whether they would prefer to watch the film or read the essay first, as each should enrich the experience of the other.

## Tango-For-Export

Imagine two dancers trapped in a passionate embrace under the yellow glow of an old-fashioned lamppost on a cobblestone street somewhere in Buenos Aires in the 1940s. They stare into one another's eyes with all the intensity of the world, bodies pressed together, hands outstretched, heels high, slowly twisting and turning to the pulsating syncopated rhythms and dramatic melodies of a tango orchestra playing somewhere in the distance. A black dress presses against every curve of her body, her long legs covered in fishnet stocking. He wears an old-fashioned pinstriped suit, his hair slicked back, leather shoes shining.

Now imagine that same scene on a theater stage, set to look like an old-fashioned street outside a dance hall. The passionate scene ends, the dancers bow, and the dinner theater, full of tourists from around the world, bursts into applause. The same choreography could be imagined on a tourist street in the bright afternoon light. The dance ends, more applause, and more tourists line up, eager to take sensual photos with the dancers in exchange for tips.

In Buenos Aires today, many musicians and dancers refer to this kind of tango as tango-for-export. The aesthetics of tango-for-export feed directly into an international



**FIGURE 2.** Dancers working in the tourist area of Caminito, Buenos Aires (Photos courtesy of Natalia Almeda 2013).

imaginary where visceral experiences of “passion” and “Latinness” are bought and sold to foreign audiences in the form of stage shows, festivals, merchandise, film and television, advertising, and tourist activities. These exoticized and hyper-sexualized ideas about tango developed over the past century as tango moved through globalized markets of circulation from Buenos Aires and Montevideo to Paris, New York, Bogota, Mexico City, Helsinki, Tokyo and across the world. Dance scholar Marta Savigliano attributes the exoticization of genres like tango to what she calls a larger political economy of Passion, in which «core countries of the capitalist world» looked to the cultural practices of the colonized to fulfill a desire for all things «‘mysterious,’ ‘wild,’ ‘primitive,’ ‘passionate’» (Savigliano 1995: 1-2). In the early 20th century, Paris and other European cities played an important role in converting tango into a symbol of passion steeped in complicated relationships of colonial exoticism (Viladrich 2013: 35). In the 1980s and 1990s, as tango’s popularity waned in Argentina, exotic stereotypes of tango dancing were revived as tango cabaret shows began to tour the United States and Europe. The most renowned of these shows, *Tango Argentino*, debuted in Paris in 1983, on Broadway in 1985, and only later in Buenos Aires. The current aesthetics of the tango-for-export culture are still largely based on the aesthetics of this and similar stage shows.

Today, this side of tango culture continues to thrive and grow thanks to lucrative public and private enterprises that market the sexy and passion-filled aesthetics of tango-for-export to global audiences. Within Argentina, tango-for-export industries have grown exponentially in recent decades. The boom in international tourism following the economic crash and devaluation of the Argentine peso in 2001, and the declaration of Argentine and Uruguayan tango on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009 each contributed to this growth in tango tourism.<sup>3</sup> Capitalizing on the UNESCO declaration, the city government of Buenos Aires (run by the PRO party) has since shifted tango’s cultural politics to prioritize the genre as a resource for tourist revenue (Kanai 2014: 9). In marketing tango to foreign consumers, two-dimensional narratives of tango as a symbol of passion have reemerged. Hernan Lombardi, the minister of Culture for Buenos Aires after the UNESCO declaration, told the Associated Press in 2009 that, «Tango is a feeling that can be danced, and that feeling of course is passion» (Surk 2009).

Today, many professional tango dancers and musicians in Buenos Aires find work in these economies of passion in what are colloquially referred to as tango-for-export dance companies or in local tourist shows.<sup>4</sup> When I lived in Buenos Aires between 2010-2014, many of the artists I knew worked jobs that required them to spend seven nights a week performing for tourists, frequently with poor pay, precarious working conditions and no benefits. Since performing artists are rarely the producers of these stage shows, artists

<sup>3</sup> “Tango: Argentina and Uruguay,” UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists, accessed May 1, 2018, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/rl/tango-00258>.

<sup>4</sup> Argentines use the term tango-for-export in English, without translation.

are frequently asked to adapt their own artistic and aesthetic preferences to fit the palate of emotions, colors, and sounds of this industry of commodified passion. While these jobs provide needed income for artists, the combination of poor working conditions and compromised artistic aesthetics become a drain and often create tensions between artists and for-export tango industries in the city.<sup>5</sup>

## Tango Not-For-Export

As is the case with many artists entangled in tourist industries, tango musicians and dancers are multidimensional; for many, exoticized stage shows represent only one part of their artistic identities and endeavors. After their day or evening jobs end, many artists go back into their dressing rooms, peel the layers of makeup off their faces, take off their bow ties and stilettos and change into comfortable clothes. Then, they grab their instruments or dance shoes and head off to other places in the city where they can play, dance, socialize, and experience tango in dance halls, small neighborhood bars, and cultural centers where tango is more intimate, less staged, and more oriented towards local aesthetics and local audiences. These kinds of venues are often frequented by amateur, semi-professional and professional artists and dancers, young and old local tango aficionados, neighborhood habitué, and non-locals who may live in or be passing through the city but who intentionally seek out what I call the *not-for-export* side of tango culture. These independent scenes are driven by very different vocabularies of emotional capital, vocabularies that intentionally distance themselves from the commodified and hyper-sexualized aesthetics of tango's global political economy of passion.<sup>6</sup>

This *other* side of tango culture provides a necessary counterpoint to the tango-for-export industries for many artists, where artists are able to feel more creative freedom, agency and belonging, and where local aesthetics predominate over those of the global tango imaginary. This other side of tango culture has been particularly important to younger generations of artists who became interested in tango after the 2001 crash and have experienced the simultaneous growth of the very visible mainstream tourist tango industries and the less visible underground grassroots tango scenes over the past two decades. Many of these underground venues have facilitated rich intergenerational social and cultural connections where people, places and aesthetics of tango's urban past have merged with newer people, places and aesthetics of the genre's present. Alongside

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<sup>5</sup> For a thorough discussion of the cultural politics of tango in relation to the UNESCO ICH declaration, see Luker 2016, Chapter 4, "Tango as Part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity."

<sup>6</sup> Of course there are many instances where the lines between for-export and not-for-export venues blur as foreigners seek off-the-beaten path places to experience tango and venues adapt to foreign audiences. For this reason, I use the term *not-for-export* to refer to spaces and practices where the social and artistic aesthetics of tango performance are primarily created by and for audiences of community members and local regulars, and not designed especially for foreign audiences.

formal tango training programs in the city, these bars, venues and cultural centers not only make tango meaningful, they also act as invaluable formal and informal tango schools and professional networks for many young tango artists-in-training.

In recent years, both Argentine and international tango scholars have worked to legitimize and document the cultural practices of these other tango spaces, producing scholarship about counter-cultural collectives oriented at tango as an expression of politicized youth culture (Luker 2007, 2016), queer tango scenes (Cecconi 2009; Kanai 2014; Liska 2017), neighborhood tango bars and circuits (Cecconi 2009; Gubner 2014, 2016), new dance spaces (Carozzi 2011; Liska 2013), new tango sounds (Cambra and Raffo 2014; Link and Wendland 2016) and volumes of scholarship dedicated to representing the voices of new tango scholarship (Liska ed 2012; Liska and Venegas 2016; Miller 2014). Although a deeper exploration of this material lies beyond the scope of this article, the quantity and breadth of recent tango scholarship dedicated to localized tango practices speaks to the resurgence of the genre as a meaningful not-for-export practice over the past two decades.

My research for the past ten years has been about this *other* side of tango culture, with a focus on local bars and neighborhood spaces where tango is shared as a participatory musical form and not danced. Interested in the ways neighborhood tango music bars and scenes acted as a counter-imaginary to tango-for-export industries, I conducted fieldwork primarily in Almagro, a residential middle class neighborhood known for its late-night circuit of not-for-export tango music venues. First, I studied “neighborhoodness” in the context of late-night spaces of musical socialization, exemplified in *A Common Place*, the film that accompanies this article. Over time, my research expanded to explore the ways artists drew on localized emotional economies of “neighborhoodness” in building politicized grassroots neighborhood-based music initiatives and festivals to advocate legitimacy and visibility for not-for-export local tango scenes (see Gubner 2014).

My work has never intended to argue that the culture of neighborhood tango bars is somehow more “real” or “authentic” than that of what locals call tango-for-export. Instead, my goal has been to take very seriously the things that happen in small neighborhood tango bars, and to argue that these kinds of places – alongside official government policies, tourist industries, and international declarations like that of UNESCO – have played a vital role in revitalizing tango as a form of urban popular music in Buenos Aires today. In a city where live music bars are routinely shut down due to corrupt politics regarding urban noise regulations, where artists receive little government support for poor working conditions in tourist industries, and where local tango venues are rarely legitimized within the tango narratives of the city government, my ethnographic work focuses on places that have helped young artists reclaim a sense of connection and belonging to this genre in the 21st century.

Realizing early on in my research the disconnect between the scenes where I conducted my fieldwork and exoticized global tango narratives, I became invested in finding an experiential way to study the production of locality in neighborhood tango

bars. In particular, I wanted to find a multi-sensory mode through which to evoke the symbolic and geographic experiences of “neighborhoodness” – or *lo barrial* – a recurring theme throughout my fieldwork and something that I saw as characteristic of this particular side of tango culture.<sup>7</sup> Beyond finding a way to analyze how certain physical spaces, people, lyrics, and modes of performing and listening produced feelings and experiences of *lo barrial*, I also wanted to find a medium through which to create ethnographic representations where local artists could feel and see themselves represented. So why film?

## Studying Neighborhood Tango through Sensory Filmmaking & Multimodal Research

Dominant stereotypes of tango culture, as is the case for many globalized popular music genres, have and continue to be disseminated through powerful audiovisual modes of representation (photos, films, advertisements, live shows). For this reason, I turned towards what I call sensory filmmaking as an experiential (visual, aural, evocative) mode of knowledge production to contest and diversify these narratives and aesthetics. I categorize my research as multimodal because, within an academic context, I am not interested in making stand-alone films. Instead, I aim to draw on the layered strengths of written text and film to convey my research objectives. In this project, academic writing has been helpful in interrogating the exoticization of music genres as they enter into global markets of circulation and in raising awareness about the uneven power dynamics behind tango’s Othering stereotypes. Writing is also a more effective mode through which to connect my work with that of other scholars. Film has offered me a different set of tools, equally important in destabilizing and complicating exoticized global narratives of tango. Not only are digitally shared films more accessible to general audiences and across linguistic boundaries, but film offers an evocative and experiential mode through which to combat audiovisual stereotypes by producing new sonic, visual, sensory vocabularies through which to ‘know’ tango.

Filmmaker and film theorist Aparna Sharma writes about her use of filmmaking in destabilizing homogenizing cultural narratives by saying:

[C]ommunities are all too often – particularly in postcolonial societies – perceived as homogenous and uniform. This can result in the quest for a singular and stable meaning/s or narrative/s. Apart from the apparent erroneousness of this quest for single meaning, what is more crucially at risk is cultural plurality: the disparate ways in which humans

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<sup>7</sup> This revitalized interest in neighborhood aesthetics can be read as part of a larger shift following the political and economic turmoil of the early 2000s when many young Argentines sought to identify with working class ideas of “lo popular” or popular culture. Argentine sociologist Pablo Alabarces uses the term neo-barrial (neo-neighborhood) to refer to this physical and symbolic return to neighborhood cultural practices as one branch of this renewed interest in “lo popular” (Alabarces and Rodríguez 2008: 46).

make meanings and representations from the very same stimuli [...]. Approaching documentary as a subjective and incomplete practice problematizes the will to speak totally or authoritatively about an *other*, and it ascribes validity to the multiple perspectives from which *others* speak. (2015: 7)

Filming from my position as a longtime participant and performer in these scenes, I aimed to remove tango from its totalizing web of commodified passion by focusing on sensory evocations that placed tango music in the context of intimate, local economies of feeling – a term I borrow from Lila Ellen Grey’s research on Portuguese fado music (2013). Instead of creating one long film, I chose to make a series of short films which could represent the plurality of stories, aesthetics, and emotions behind the everyday complex goings on of neighborhood tango music scenes, resisting the temptation to sum things up in an all-inclusive narrative. Following Sharma, I position my films as both subjective and incomplete representations of my ethnographic experiences, thus challenging and encouraging my viewers to interpret them as small pieces of larger, complex cultural frameworks.<sup>8</sup>

## Filming Social Aesthetics

Since my goal was to film and convey the local economies of feeling surrounding neighborhood tango music practices, I needed an approach to filmmaking that would allow me to explore the affective, sensorial, and multi-layered experiential elements shaping the production of meaning in these scenes. Ethnographic filmmaker and film scholar David MacDougall does a particularly good job of articulating the way film does things differently than writing and has profoundly impacted the way I have come to conceptualize my work with film. He writes: «Anthropological films present a genuine process of inquiry... They do not provide a ‘pictorial representation’ of anthropological knowledge, but a form of knowledge that emerges through the very grain of the filmmaking» (MacDougall 1998: 76). In *The Corporeal Image* (2006) MacDougall discusses filming what he calls “social aesthetics” as a way of producing knowledge about how aesthetic patterns shape the way we understand the world around us:

There are moments when the social world seems more evident in an object or a gesture than in the whole concatenation of our beliefs and institutions. Through our senses we

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<sup>8</sup> Representing ethnographic subjectivity through the traditionally objectifying lens of film is complex and an issue that deserves further consideration beyond this paper. One of the ways I encourage my viewers to understand the incomplete and subjective nature of my films is through the written texts that accompany the films on my website ([www.jenniegubner.com](http://www.jenniegubner.com)) or in multimodal publications such as this. The nature of such a platform allows me to frame the films as evocations of specific experiences and encounters from my fieldwork, and not as totalizing representations of a cultural Other. I invite viewers to experience the edited moments, scenes, sounds, and people in my films as an exploration of my research themes as well as material from which they can draw their own subjective interpretations.

measure the qualities of our surroundings – the tempo of life, the dominant pattern of color, texture, movement, and behavior – and these coalesce to make the world familiar or strange. (*ibidem*: 95)

MacDougall's, and in turn my own, interest in social aesthetics is not concerned with theories of aesthetics in relation to high art and beauty, but instead with aesthetics as the everyday sensory experiences and sensory structures that produce embodied histories of places and cultures. He describes this idea of aesthetics saying,

My working premise has been that the aesthetic dimension of human experience is an important social fact, to be taken seriously alongside such other facts as economic survival, political power, and religious belief. It is important because it often matters to people and influences their actions as much as anything else in their lives. (2006: 98)

When I first read MacDougall's work, I wondered how I could use my camera to produce ethnographic knowledge about the many subtle and often non-verbal elements shaping contemporary neighborhood tango music practices.

The idea of filming social aesthetics, alongside my developing interest in visual and sensory ethnography led by the writings of Sarah Pink (2007, 2009), ultimately gave me the freedom to step away from the temptation to create a unified narrative storyline, and to focus instead on sensory experiences of participatory music-making within neighborhood tango scenes. When I began to film tango culture in Buenos Aires, I was guided not by a script but instead by themes. Set in the neighborhood tango music scenes of the city, my goal was to film moments where tango music was used as an expression of: neighborhood life, bar culture, intimacy, participatory musical belonging, urban activism and locality. These themes informed the things that I shot, how I shot them, and why I shot them. They informed the kinds of aesthetics I sought out when filming and editing, and if I have succeeded, should now act as vehicles through which my audiences can experience tango culture as I have come to know it in these circumstances.

The films I have made are personal and by no means represent tango culture as a whole in the city of Buenos Aires today. Each film emerges from meaningful moments in my fieldwork, some spanning the events in a day, others years. In retrospect, I realize that these films not only act as singular snapshots of neighborhood tango culture but, when ordered chronologically from first to last, become a collection that speak to the ways the neighborhood tango scenes of Almagro – and my position in the scene – has evolved over my years in the field. Chronologically, the films became more politicized over time, a shift involving both an increased politicization of neighborhood scenes in recent years and also my own ability to read more deeply into the messy micro and macro politics underlying neighborhood tango music-making practices and initiatives. In this way, the films can exist on their own, as a series of short films that tell a larger story, and as pieces that can be contextualized in larger academic presentations, like this one.

Each film seeks to evoke experiences I had and shared with other members of the Almagro neighborhood tango community in our personal and collective efforts to engage with tango as a meaningful participatory social practice in the fabric of everyday life in contemporary Buenos Aires. My intimate and transformative experiences with tango music in local, neighborhood bar settings – and the realization that I was not alone in these experiences – inspired this research. It is these feelings and experiences that I seek to evoke through these films and that I allowed to guide me through my filming and editing processes. Instead of framing the idea of “local culture” as a fixed designation in my work, I borrow from Arjun Appadurai’s flexible understanding of locality as a feeling continuously produced through complex rituals and ceremonies of social interaction (1996: 179). From this perspective, my films stand as sensory representations of the production of musical intimacy in modern cities – an intimacy capable of crossing national, generational, and cultural boundaries.



FIGURE 3. Screenshots from *A Common Place* showing Carlos Señorelli and Augustin Ortega performing a late-night set in “El Boliche de Roberto”.

## The Making of *A Common Place*

The social aesthetics of “El Boliche de Roberto” have much to thank to its longtime owner, Roberto Pérez. Until he passed away in 2006, Roberto devoted his life to this café/bar. He inherited the business from his father, Francisco Pérez, who had run a neighborhood bar and corner store. Roberto was a friendly man who greeted patrons by name, kept long hand written drink tabs for regulars, and had a deep appreciation for tango music. Every once and a while, late at night, he would sing a tango, but mostly he enjoyed listening, and would shush the crowd or bang his hand on the old wooden bar when people got too rowdy as a way of teaching them to listen. In my first year in Buenos Aires, Roberto taught me invaluable lessons about tango as an intimate and participatory form of urban socialization, and although he was no longer alive when I made *A Common Place*, I sought to translate many of his unspoken lessons through this film.

In making *A Common Place*, my goal was to evoke a sense of the bar, the intimacy and belonging that emerged through the nightly un-amplified music-making that took place within this small space, and the important relationships built within the bar between younger and older musicians. I also wanted to highlight the way certain artists were able to transform rowdy late-night bar audiences using techniques of singing and performance that command silence, respect, collaboration, and a shared sense of un-amplified musical togetherness. Finally, I wanted to highlight how Roberto's bar evokes and reinforces not-for-export neighborhood tango imaginaries through the combined sensory experiences of the physical bar and its location in the Almagro neighborhood, the performance style, sound and lyrics of the tangos sung, the relationships that emerge from this space, and the social atmosphere of the bar created both during moments of music making and moments of informal socialization.

I made this film in 2010 with a friend of mine, Natalia Marcantoni, a local photographer for Buenos Aires's public access television station who, despite her general dislike of tango, loved Roberto's bar. We had been friends since 2005 and had met through mutual artist friends who were regulars at the bar.<sup>9</sup> With a shared love for the intimate atmosphere of this space, she was excited when I told her I was returning to Buenos Aires for a month to make a film and offered to help. We shot the film in July 2010 over the course of a few nights in Roberto's bar, and also conducted a few interviews in nearby bars in the Almagro neighborhood. In our filming we used two Canon 7D DSLR cameras and an H4n Zoom audio recorder. I edited the film alone upon returning to the United States in August of 2010, but sent versions to Natalia and some of the participants for their feedback throughout this process.

Since my focus was on evoking the social aesthetics and experience of the bar, I chose not to subtitle the songs except in the second half when Stella, one of the singers, recites the lyrics of the tango "No Te Apures Cara Blanca" in an off-camera interview before singing. I felt that subtitles would detract from the filmic moments and the emotional content of the music, which can be experienced even beyond the boundaries of language. The lack of subtitles also is intended to mimic the way feelings of locality can be experienced on different levels and with different depths. Similar to my experiences in the bar, I wanted to reinforce the idea that non-Spanish speakers often feel deeply connected to the bar, the singers and the idea of neighborhood locality even without understanding the lyrics of the songs performed.

When the film was done, I circulated it through social media, Vimeo, my own website ([www.jenniegubner.com](http://www.jenniegubner.com)), and to the artists featured in the film. One of the more rewarding parts of making *A Common Place* was watching artists and tango fans from and beyond the local community commenting and sharing the film in the virtual world.

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<sup>9</sup> It was quite common among my friends who did not like tango to like the social aesthetic and intimate feel of Roberto's bar, a token to its unique atmosphere and ability to produce an ethos far removed from mainstream stereotypes of tango culture.

In their comments, people spoke enthusiastically about how they felt the film represented their experiences with neighborhood tango and Roberto's bar, how it allowed them to connect with the bar even if they now lived far from the neighborhood, and how it evoked the sense of intimacy and belonging characteristic of the music making practices of this bar. This kind of public circulation and public legitimacy and visibility – and the ability to make things that local and localized communities can access, understand and share – is central to my goals as a filmmaker and scholar.

Ultimately, Natalia and I agreed that our collaboration, though challenging, was a valuable learning experience. She brought beautiful cinematography to my work from her years of experience working in film, but we both realized how difficult it can be to collaborate coming from two different worlds of visual knowledge production. Her training was as a traditional journalistic filmmaker and she was looking to storyboard, script, and pre-plan the film, as well as alter the settings of the shots to allow for the best possible filming conditions. As an ethnographer trained in visual research methods, I was more interested in filming the themes that lay behind my research questions and figuring out how to build a story around the material later as the visual knowledge emerged through our work. I was also uncomfortable changing any of the settings to fit my needs, but instead was happy to adapt our shooting schedule to times when things naturally presented themselves for good filming conditions. Since I was the primary researcher on the project, she ended up following my lead on most of these issues, but not without certain moments of confusion and frustration.

While I am grateful for her generous dedication to my project, I decided to work alone on my subsequent tango films to have more freedom to explore my non-linear approach to filmmaking. I include this reference to our challenges because I believe they exemplify some of the complexities of collaborative film production in the field of ethnomusicology today, issues that many fellow ethnomusicologists have also experienced. If we are to advance theoretical and methodological discourse about digital filmmaking in 21st century ethnomusicology, we must admit and address the complexities of collaborative digital field partnerships openly in our writing. For me, this experience proved invaluable in pushing me to further articulate the values, methodologies, and aesthetics behind my own fieldwork goals.

## Sensory Filmmaking in Ethnomusicology

What I have come to call sensory filmmaking in ethnomusicology is not just the idea that cultural experiences with music are multi-sensorial, but that multi-sensory experiential knowledge allows us to “know” in different ways. These other ways of knowing empower local knowledge and give room for us to become acquainted with cultures and cultural practices without having those practices pre-interpreted or described for us. If

these kinds of alternative modes of knowledge production and dissemination are to gain legitimacy in our field, we not only need to improve our knowledge of cinematic language, but also must continue to develop linguistic vocabularies capable of articulating the rich potential of the encounter between cinematic and other ethnomusicological ways of producing knowledge about the world. By working to articulate this language and the particular kinds of ethnographic knowledge film evokes, and by breaking down the daunting format of full-length documentary films to make the field more accessible to colleagues and students without lengthy formal training in cinematic techniques, we can help give new and old scholars the confidence and tools they need to produce critical and engaging audiovisual work.

Through my research, filmmaking and editing processes, I have discovered that there are some stories better told through writing, and others through films. This realization has given me a deep appreciation for the ethnographic potential of multimodal work, not either or, but both. Ultimately, taking a multimodal approach to audiovisual ethnomusicology through a combination of text and embedded films offered me the most productive solution to my research questions. It allowed me to wholeheartedly embrace the in-between-ness that defines us as scholars in an interdisciplinary and evolving field. It gave me the freedom to approach audiovisual research as an ethnomusicologist interested in participatory music making practices, filmed sensory experiences, sentimental forms of urban activism, and musical experiences of locality and urban togetherness. Perhaps most importantly, it has given me tools through which to communicate and share my ideas not only to academic audiences, but also to broader general publics, taking advantage of the digital realm as an accessible platform for promoting dialogue, activism, and public scholarship about relevant cultural debates.

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