

# 1 THE JOCKEY CLUB

IN *ANTES DEL NOVECIENTOS* (BEFORE the 1900s), Adolfo Bioy identifies urban social spaces with the streets of Buenos Aires: “I would look at a house and understand . . . what the life of the family [that lived there] was like.” He must have been very taken with this game and relates a personal experience from when he was nine years old, and he caught out a classmate who claimed to live at Belgrano 1045, recognizing that “that number did not exist [and that] the Plaza de Montserrat occupies the place corresponding to it.” Bioy continues: “They had us write out . . . our name and address. I was able to see through the screen made by his head and arm, behind which Forcadas was trying to hide what he was writing on the paper. I read 86A Street, no. 59. In a fit of indignation I told him: ‘You’re a snob, don’t ever talk to me again!’ He went quite red and said nothing. We never spoke again. Poor Forcadas. He lived on a backstreet and was ashamed to admit it” (Bioy 1958, 11). For Bioy, then, urban space is an identitary mechanism. Indeed, in the Buenos Aires of 1900, very precise boundaries set apart the backstreet area of the barrio of Montserrat, and Bioy put his finger right on them.

Urban space is in one sense a map, profusely imbued with the meanings and criteria of social stratification that become especially visible during times of disorder and confusion, when categories of classification and representation go into crisis. Modern cities are broad points where innumerable interpretative communities converge, where different forms of representation are constantly endeavoring to make the city comprehensible and map it cognitively. These cognitive maps configure criteria for understanding the social dimensions of space, identitary strategies, and degrees of sociocultural separation or proximity (“proxemic distance”) arising from the “use man makes of space as a specialized product of culture” (Hall 1985, 6). But the city is also a place inviting diachronic slippage, a juxtaposition of pasts and presents—“frozen forms of energy fixed at different times in the past and around which the busy kinetic energy of the present swirls” (Pike 1996, 243). Every city, then, is a palimpsest created by many different hands at many different historical moments, although the fact that these moments coexist becomes much more evident and interactive during periods of transition.

The Buenos Aires of the earlier twentieth century was essentially in a state of constant transition. The never-ending transformations of its internal relations and its urban and cultural substance made its citizens into empirical semioticians, experts in observing, comparing, recognizing, and ordering their perceptions. Every inhabitant of the city was a potential agent of representation who organized the labyrinth of the near and the far, the self and the other, the private and the public: the city’s streets, squares, and public spaces; its passageways, bodies, dwellings, lodging houses, mansions, and bordellos; its paradises and infernos.

This study is largely a symbolic undertaking, intended to recover the intersection of literary texts, photographs, letters, urban chronicles, and other writings left behind by inhabitants of Buenos Aires. But how should we approach the evolution of the city’s material fabric between 1900 and 1930 and the many languages through which the city expressed itself? Henri Lefebvre would begin by warning us that, although “nature’s space is not staged,” capitalism partitions urban space and gives it, in contrast, an “active—operational or instrumental—role . . . as knowledge and action” (1995, 70). The Buenos Aires that we are examining was a spatial/symbolic site of tensions and representations, in contact and contradiction with one another, all expressing the intense class struggle that marked Argentina’s first stage

of modernization. We will begin, then, by examining Buenos Aires's representational complexity, as well as the meanings communicated by its buildings; the layout of its streets; the design of its public spaces and means of transportation; the rise and fall of real estate values in different areas of the city; and the locations of its ports, parks, residential areas, and commercial centers.

The representation of every city is articulated around rhetorical commonplaces, constructed on the basis of archetypes, and destroyed or forgotten in relation to new social paradigms and the rituals they generate. Compared to the *Gran Aldea* (Great Village), as it was called in colonial times, Buenos Aires seemed during the first period of industrialization to have just been founded. Everything still remained to be done, but the city's paradises and infernos first had to be designated. The official representation of Buenos Aires enjoyed great visibility because of the city's privileged discursive position compared to the nation's backward areas. The city would become the surface on which the elites of 1880 and the Centennial would write their most emblematic version of modernity. As if by a stroke of magic, a new and spectacular city emerged, destined politically and culturally to legitimize the Argentinean oligarchy.

The 1880 and Centennial elites used both political and urban discourses to emphasize Buenos Aires's Parisian character, especially in Barrio Norte, the oligarchy's residential area, where the buildings' architectural homogeneity, the urban planning, and the artistically designed use of space were instrumental in marking this area as superior to the city's other cultural geographies. This was especially true with respect to the untidy, awkward "other" Buenos Aires, growing from an organic demographic expansion. The elite's Parisian urban archetype was turned into an icon that stood for Buenos Aires as a whole, stripping all value from the disordered appearance of the grotesque city. Barrio Norte was equated with a place of enchantment, a landmark for the entire nation. However, the boundary between the two cities was a strange one. Although Barrio Norte was founded on economic exclusion, it was nonetheless able to enlist admirers and imprint its paradigms of urban uniformity on the national imaginaries in consort with the tight political monopoly of the Conservative Order. How did it win the cultural allegiance of groups who had no share in the symbolic capital of the elite, represented by a Parisian Buenos Aires?

The Jockey Club, its original building on Calle Florida an initiative of President Carlos Pellegrini (1890–92), provided a model for Buenos Aires’s social life that was based on an apparent paradox—the possibility of being aristocratic and heterogeneous at the same time: “It will be an aristocratic club, if by aristocratic we understand what can only be understood in our times . . . a wide and open selection of members from society that includes . . . all educated and honorable men” (Newton and Newton 1966, 109). And indeed, the club’s membership list embraced the city’s heterogeneity, including both third-generation Argentines and foreigners (English, Irish, Basque, Scottish, and German). But not just any foreigner who reached the port of Buenos Aires could be nominated for membership. Jockey Club members were all linked to farming and ranching—that is, to the great Argentinean landholdings at the turn of the twentieth century. Membership, in reality, restricted heterogeneity by class origin, and thanks to this constraint, the Jockey Club’s members developed a closed esprit de corps, aware of belonging “to a superior political stratum composed of a particular kind of individual: an outstanding one” (Botana 1977, 73).

The modern elite thus replaced the patrician elite by consolidating its economic and cultural position. It became the intermediary for foreign (especially British) capital and brought the country into the new global order through the industrialization of farming and the exportation of cattle and agricultural products. With respect to culture, the members of the new elite became insatiable devourers of the sumptuous styles of modernity, imported from Paris, which they emulated so uncritically that the old patrician class was scandalized, viewing them as a noisy gang of Frenchified spendthrifts. I can find no better way to illuminate the rift between the two oligarchies—between the Gran Aldea and cosmopolitan Buenos Aires—than through the objects that furnished their respective sacred spaces. While the austere patrician realm of Jorge Luis Borges featured sabers and daguerreotypes of the Founding Fathers, the spaces of the modern oligarchy were marked by chinoiserie, mistresses, ostentatious stairways, and statues bought in Paris and loaded aboard transatlantic liners bound for Puerto Madero.

In fact, what drew the most attention in contemporary accounts of the spectacular ball held to inaugurate the Jockey Club, on 30 September 1897, were a Diana sculpted by Falguière and a staircase. Teófilo E. Díaz, writing for *El Diario* in Montevideo, was overwhelmed: “I have seen three giant

staircases: one in the Paris Opera, another in the Berlin Art Gallery . . . and the staircase of the new Jockey Club mansion with green marble handrails” (qtd. in Korn 1983b, 55). The staircase would shine even more brightly because it was located in a sacred place: “‘We could see the effect,’ Pellegrini explains to Miguel Cané. ‘It was immediate. With overcoat collars turned up, hats on their heads, and their pants rolled up, men . . . pushed through the inner door and came in off the street without any ado, took a few steps, and were struck dumb, slowly pulled off their hats and looked around in amazement’” (Newton and Newton 1966, 110). Miguel Cané and Carlos Pellegrini, these two prominent politicians from the new elite, were delighted to verify that the persons whom the architectural discourse of the Jockey Club staircase was meant to address—the people whom they expected to be struck dumb—were indeed taken aback so completely that they stood with their hats in their hands and their eyes wide open. These dazed spectators were not members of the club, but people off the street, from the *other* Argentina, as Pellegrini’s letter to his colleague Miguel Cané goes on to explain: “As soon as [he saw the staircase], even the most brutish Indian was overcome and dominated, and all he wanted was for no one to realize he was out of place” (Newton and Newton 1966, 110–11).

Indeed, once they were inside the club, the inhabitants of the other Buenos Aires would be totally displaced by a transculturizing, sublimating experience that established the boundaries of exclusion and privilege in silence, with no need for words. That moment when the staircase held these outsiders spellbound was enough to induce acts of reverence—they removed their hats, as if entering a sacred place—while also evoking feelings of being overpowered, dominated in the context of a class struggle now being fought with capitals and symbolic capital. And if some of those whom Cané and Pellegrini sought to hold spellbound did not physically enter these golden halls, the extended arm of the press and its florid society columns, placed at the elites’ disposal by modernity, would provide an opaque nation with imaginaries enlightened by the glitter of the club’s galas.

It is further remarkable that Pellegrini’s assessment is still firmly positioned within the discourse and ideological framework of the Frontera Sur, whose indigenous population Pellegrini equates with the mix of migrants in Buenos Aires.<sup>1</sup> Through the language of sophisticated stairways, Pellegrini achieves exactly what Julio Argentino Roca had accomplished with the

weapons of genocide. The language might have changed, but the purpose remained the same. Pellegrini's intended recipients were no longer Pampas, Guaiminíos, Ranqueles, Guenaquenes, Araucanos, Vorogas, Pehuenches, Huilliches, or Manzaneros, but urban toughs and proletarians, mestizos/as, blacks and mulattos/as, and European immigrants fleeing from hunger.

Carlos Pellegrini and Miguel Cané—the first a president of the republic, the second a senator of the Conservative Order—were elite cultural agents caught in the act of producing new talismans. And as their private correspondence reveals, they went about their task after carefully pondering every detail, one in Buenos Aires, the other in Paris, where Cané took notes on improving service at the Jockey Club by comparing it to such exclusive Parisian clubs as the Cercle de la Méditerranée and L'Épatant. Even the choice of chef concerned Cané, who invited Pellegrini to imagine the level of sophistication at L'Épatant: "It has the best service I know, and there is an extraordinary profusion of servants." The *mâîtres d'hôtel*, he remarks, wore especially tailored black tails, black knickerbockers, white stockings, and shoes. The *valets de chambre* wore dark brown or coffee-colored livery, while the *valets de pied* were clad in blue livery, white stockings, and shoes. All were spotlessly clean. Those *valets de pied* who did well were promoted to *valets de chambre*, and from among these the *mâîtres d'hôtel* were chosen (Newton and Newton 1966, 108). Significantly, Cané's insistence that all personnel wear shoes would have ruled out practically the entire serving class in the Gran Aldea. He elaborates further: "Here . . . at the Cercle de la Méditerranée, where 15 to 20 persons dine every day, they've been looking for and trying out chefs recommended [to them] . . . for six months. They have one now . . . who earns 600 francs a month, but he also has a *saucier*—someone to do the sauces—at 250 francs, [and] a *rôtisseur* at 300 francs" (Newton and Newton 1966, 108).

As Cané points out, L'Épatant wouldn't hire "a single servant below a particular height, and they have them submit to the *toise* [a measuring apparatus used for conscripts, etc.]. That's why you'll see quite a few well-formed, young, and very well-groomed *gaillards*" (Newton and Newton 1966, 108). He goes on: "You should be very concerned with the bearing of the service personnel at the club"—a concern that could be easily dispelled by strictly enforcing criteria for the *mâîtres d'hôtel*, *valets de chambre*, *valets de pied*, and the chef. Cané adds that "short, fat, ill-formed servants" should

also be avoided, “because service is an important matter; it conveys the essence of a club and *teaches* the habits of social culture to those who have none” (108; emphasis added). The social hierarchy of the connoisseur is clearly in evidence, as is the exalted discursive position of his teaching (Paris and the Jockey Club). Of course, these closed criteria implied discarding the entire workforce represented by the decrepit Fetente in Roberto Arlt’s *El juguete rabioso* (Mad Toy, 1926) or *El jorobadito* (Little Hunchback, 1933), or by the protagonists of Elías Castelnuovo’s *Vidas proletarias* (Proletarian Lives, 1934), as well as innumerable workers whose hands and arms had been mutilated as a result of the lack of safety measures in Buenos Aires’s unregulated factories.

However, we should not think that this exclusion was categorical. We have already seen how the Jockey Club’s socioarchitectural impact was calculated to induce a sense of captivation in the country’s economic and ethnic others, who were defeated and dazzled by the material and symbolic codes of an elite with a mind so close to Paris that many of them maintained a family residence there. But Cané wanted to establish unambiguous proxemic distances in Buenos Aires, to specify who could cross the new social borders, whether defined by the Jockey Club or by the nation he and his class imagined and built. As a senator, Cané had, after all, been the force behind an antianarchist law that permitted the deportation of undesirable foreigners with just three days notice.

Why then did these two celebrated politicians and writers invest so much energy as diligent administrators and punctilious decorators? Cané’s careful instructions are like those of a businessperson setting up a restaurant, but a businessperson under great stress, perhaps because he knows that this is not just any restaurant, but one that will stage refinement for the rest of the nation. In order to carry out their many self-imposed objectives, these new Founding Fathers would have to do everything themselves, from passing new national legislation to designing menus. As Cané explains, the menus of exclusive Parisian clubs were very particular. In a place like the Cercle de la Méditerranée, “it wouldn’t occur to anyone to order two steaks topped with fried eggs as a main course, then a plate of chitterlings, and finish off with an omelet” (Newton and Newton 1966, 107). Gourmet gastronomy is one of the most class-ridden, pyramidal institutions in the entire service industry, and Cané wanted nothing more than to reproduce its structure in Buenos Aires. At the same time, he wanted to educate his own class so that

its uncouthness and excesses would, with a bit of luck, be attenuated by the refinement of the great French bourgeoisie. Cané no doubt was gazing through a bifocal lens. He understood that he was speaking from the perspective of a country still afflicted by a “barbarism” that the sophistication of Paris was expected to correct, replacing it with proper manners and eliminating the uncouth behavior of an upstart elite unsure of the imported social graces it was both making its own and imposing on others. It was essential that the nation’s habits not be a source of embarrassment when brought under the severe scrutiny of French etiquette.

Cané, who seemed to be losing sleep over the pile of dilemmas yet to be resolved, committed himself to leaving no detail to chance: “Think it over carefully,” he advises Pellegrini, “and let me know if you are still keen on the idea of bringing in a chef; I think it better to look for a good one over there, one who already knows a bit about *our* habits” (Newton and Newton 1966, 107; emphasis added). “Here” and “there” define unsymmetrical cultural and identitary locations. While a standard has been set based on ex-centric metropolitan criteria, it still has to reach accommodation with the local. Why defer so much to Paris? And what does Cané mean when he says “our habits”? To begin with, “our” tradition will not stem from the popular gastronomy of Buenos Aires’s immigrant population, predominantly associated with the culinary culture of poverty sustaining Italian, Spanish, Russian, Yiddish, and Polish rural immigrants: casseroles, stews, pizza, pasta, garlic soups, tripe, potages, and sausages—“macaroni soup, meat stew à la Garibaldi with carrots, onions, potatoes, parsley, and cloves” (Bucich 1962, 118). Such staples defined the carbohydrate-laden menus of the many inns and food stands along the *cammin vegio* (old road) in the immigrant district of La Boca, a gastronomic heteroglossia beginning to make itself forcefully known alongside the bastardized Spanish spoken in Argentina. Nor could the Jockey Club envisage “our” tradition as coming from the tables of the creole proletariat, with their “corn stew with bacon and maté . . . noodles fried in fat with maté” (Castelnuovo 1934, 44).

Something quite different would emerge from the chef’s kitchens at the Jockey Club. This would be Cordon Bleu cuisine, approved by the cultivated palate of the French bourgeoisie, and now to be spread by the Argentinean elite not only “to the culture of the upper classes but also to the new middle classes” (Romero 1983, 16). This cuisine, more than ideal, was like a hand in

a glove, reinforcing gastronomically the power of the elite's ranching economy and its vast estates.

What kind of chef was finally taken on at the Jockey Club? The one who already knew "a bit about our habits" came from Mar del Plata, the exclusive summer resort of the elite. Thus, no matter how much Cané and Pellegrini strove to copy Paris cuisine, they could not, in the end, avoid negotiating between Paris and "our" ways, between purity and hybridity. It shouldn't be surprising, then, that Cané deemed it necessary to translate *saucier* for Pellegrini as "someone to do the sauces." In fact, Buenos Aires's proximity to Paris seemed to be characterized by dissymmetry and slippage.

And while it might be tempting, speaking of slippage, to conclude that Cané and Pellegrini had ended up in a traditionally feminine place—zealously controlling every household detail, cogitating obsessively on the servants' profiles and uniforms and the menu's contents—we should not imagine them sporting a kitchen apron. We must not lose sight of the fact that the Jockey Club was a strictly male preserve, a sanctuary for straitlaced men going about the serious business of putting the Nation House in order. Both Cané and Pellegrini were acting out of the conviction of their class's foundational role in a country where much still remained to be done.

At the time of the Centennial (1910), the elite were conscious of the importance of fixing their own scenario on the national stage, in order to display their symbolic capital. Thus, the Jockey Club served as an emblematic piece of the elite's *mise-en-scène*. *Caras y Caretas*, *La Nación*, and *La Prensa* would provide the means for spreading the new order of the modern elite's transculturation project to the public, with respect to cuisine, decor, and social functions. These mass publications served as bridges between the private and the public. Everything consumed, worn, and preferred within the elite's private sphere was transferred to the public domains by the *notas sociales* (society columns).

The Guatemalan Enrique Gómez Carrillo was the *modernista* chronicler par excellence of the Buenos Aires of the privileged and, without a doubt, also the most adept at negotiating the unstable professional space of the writer at the fin de siècle.<sup>2</sup> He was the perfect flâneur, observing the city and the new languages of modernity from a select, transitional discursive position "on the threshold of city life as of the bourgeois class. Neither has yet engulfed him; in neither is he at home" (Benjamin 1986, 156). In Gómez

Carrillo's *El encanto de Buenos Aires* (The Charm of Buenos Aires, 1921), modernist pure art is intertwined with consumer advertising. Carrillo caresses the new objects of consumption, conferring relevance and beauty on them like the best of window dressers. Nonetheless, his urban chronicles do not portray the social praxis of just any area of the city. In order to bestow style on the "the utilitarian vulgarity of money, . . . the 'gilt' (lexicon) of *modernismo* is applied to adorn the city" (Ramos 1989, 114).<sup>3</sup> Gómez Carrillo "adorns" Buenos Aires with Argentinean women walking lithely with "short, springy steps, swaying . . . with the *allure souple* of the latest fashions . . . as if they were paid by some great couturier to *make the world see* what the living poem of a beautifully worn toilette is like" (Gómez Carrillo 1921, 165; emphasis added).

Gómez Carrillo's chronicles, whether published in *Caras y Caretas* or *La Nación*, projected the *porteño* elite's desire to be looked upon as models of the new rituals that placed performers and their audiences in hierarchical order (Carrillo's women made the whole world *see*) and defined proxemic frontiers within the space of the city.<sup>4</sup> The swaying, studied gait of the women of the elite seems to inscribe a circle around them, a body bubble that shields them from physical proximity to the common breed of *porteños* and *porteñas*:

Oh, daughters of Palermo, you delightful dark-haired girls who stroll like mannequins from the Rue de la Paix, what a pity you don't resolve to give up your habits . . . [and] walk along the streets in the center as well! As you know, those streets are reputed to be ugly. If you were to enliven them, they would become delightful. . . . How can you not understand that you are patriots, that you can best give prestige to your city by adorning it with the constant gift of your graces? How can you not feel enough compassion to cast the beauty of your eyes on the terrible prose of a town devoted to business and struggle, tensions and envy? (Gómez Carrillo 1921, 166)<sup>5</sup>

The urban chronicler here contributes to the process of semanticizing the new maps of Buenos Aires's cultural geography. He asks the "daughters of Palermo" to distribute "the constant gift" of their "graces" more widely and more fully, to show compassion for ordinary people "devoted to business and struggle, tensions and envy," to "enliven" streets "reputed to be ugly." He must have known this was an impossible request. The daughters of Palermo did not tread the streets of the center, but Calle Florida and the

elegant gardens of Palermo. Proxemic distances are thus being recognized here, the preventive caution of Buenos Aires's exquisite beauties beginning to endorse invisible but zealously guarded frontiers in the city's imaginaries. These "daughters" adorn dioramas and sacred settings with their silky eyes and arrogant graces. It was not for nothing that Gómez Carrillo rightly compares them to "mannequins from the Rue de la Paix," strutting along the runway of the streets of Barrio Norte, showing off *ad honorem* the glamour of their class.

Why did Gómez Carrillo want the daughters of Palermo to venture into other sectors of Buenos Aires when it was vital to maintain the specificity and symbolic function of Barrio Norte as sublime? Calle Florida and Palermo would become expressly semanticized areas of privilege, marked by the comings and goings of the oligarchy's chic women. Their languorous strolling, therefore, would become a means of spreading cultural models—as well as political hierarchies—that every *porteño* would notice when walking along Florida. For cultural recruitment to be effective, in other words, the city's spaces had to be uneven, had to preserve proxemic markers and distances.

Countless texts at the close of the nineteenth century emphatically highlighted the unprecedented moment when women erupted into public space. However, there were public spaces of all kinds, some of which became stages for the display of the private. To produce differential spaces in Buenos Aires, Gómez Carrillo would turn to the marketing strategies of the fashion industry, mainly the concept of the feminine. The real runways for fetishizing the feminine—Gómez Carrillo's feminine worlds were linked to the women of the elite—were the society columns and the commercial advertising appearing in specialized periodicals, which exhibited mannequin bodies, festive women delicately dressed in luxurious objects of desire. In this respect, the chronicler did not exaggerate, for although he recorded the everydayness of the city, he managed to keep his focus on the exceptional. Thanks to Julio Ramos's remarkable study, we have learned that the most contradictory aspect of *modernismo's* texture surfaces in chronicles like Gómez Carrillo's. As a strategem of modernity, the chronicle must swing between the marketplace and art, between pure and applied art, between massive readership and the solitary artist. And what is necessary to join these two spheres together is a synthesis of the aesthetic of waste, which Gómez Carrillo pulls off to perfection: "Luxury . . . might be read as a subversion of the utilitar-

ianism of other discourses that are proper to capitalism (including information)” (Ramos 1989, 116).

I believe that the two-faced discursive position of *modernismo* might also be understood through a close examination of how it worked in relation to the production of urban space. Seen from this perspective, *modernista* aesthetics would provide a salve for the bourgeoisie’s anxiety over differential spaces. The city of luxury is an exceedingly differential space. Given that *modernista* aesthetics proposed progressively higher paradises, more inaccessible and further removed from the basic rituals and habitats of the masses, its models of the world were a perfect fit for the semantics of the capitalist economy: only the differentiated is profitable. In Buenos Aires, differential spaces were *produced* through social distinction and fashion, which are especially associated with the feminine. For this reason, Gómez Carrillo’s writing cannot allude to just any women. Only aristocratic women can semanticize urban geography and stigmatize the vulgar, ugly, dangerous spaces of the center, inhabited by men degraded by the mercantilism of money, strained by the effort of their muscles, soaked by the sweat of their labor, and not smelling too good either. This imaginary concludes that the feminine space of the city is located in the society galas held at the Teatro Colón, where the daughters of the elite wore glamorous diamond tiaras, or in the parks, where they moved “with swans . . . [and] smiles . . . [where] everything is light as air [and] has a soft touch of artificiality . . . where every detail is delicate, almost fragile” (Gómez Carrillo 1921, 166). The signifier *woman* is thus completely dissociated from work and attached instead to leisure, to an excess of artifice and sumptuous consumption—the cultural trademarks of the new elite. It is not hard, then, to foresee the unflinching tribulations that were the lot of working women, who, excluded from the gossamer of silks and satins, nonetheless desperately tried to fit into identity molds of femininity. During the Belle Époque, aristocratic women such as Magdalena Ortiz Basualdo de Becú (figure 2), Eugenia Huici de Errázurriz, Rosita Alcorta, and Victoria Ocampo were admired as much for their affiliation to haute couture as for their intellectual sophistication. After spending much time in their Paris residences, “they had been ordained to select and supervise what others ordered from dressmakers like Worth, Paquin, Doucet, and Poiret” (Moreira 1992, 180). But by 1914, several important Paris fashion

houses (Astesiano, Henriette, Jean et André, Palau, Tomé, Madame Suzanne) had opened *maisons* in Buenos Aires, in the same areas favored by the elite.

While Domingo F. Sarmiento wanted a homogenous country leveled by public education, Pellegrini and Cané resorted to monumental staircases, slim servants, and classes taught by Bavarian fencing masters to place high culture and the languages of social distinction at the top of a hierarchical scale. Their emphasis, therefore, was not exactly on the popular classes' access to public education; after all, they saw Sarmiento's dreams as the root of a vast liberal error, with alarming consequences. While 1884's Bill 1420, concerning public and universal education, was strengthened by the University Reform Act of 1911 and further broadened under Hipólito Yrigoyen, opening "university faculties and administrations, as well as the liberal professions and, hence, government services to greater middle class participation" (McGee Deutsch 1993, 48), the elites of 1880 and the Centennial were more excited by spectacle, by promoting their illuminated mansions, the iridescence of their velvets and the brilliance of their family jewels, than by cultivating Argentina's intellectual lights. The effect of this emphasis on spectacle was pure gestalt, like window dressing: the spaces and objects of privilege were illuminated, while the other Buenos Aires and the other Argentinas sat in the dark, against the light, in the background. Perhaps that is why all representations of these other Buenos Aires—whether Borges's Palermo, Gálvez's La Boca, or the tango's *arrabal*—are seen by the dim light of streetlamps or a *media luz* (in the half light), to use an expression from tango itself.<sup>6</sup>