

TROTTOIRS DE BUENOS AIRES: JULIO CORTÁZAR
AND THE TANGO NATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Tango and the national narrative of Argentina are inextricably connected. Tango, which rose from its déclassé origins at the dawn of the twentieth century to become the nation's symbol, has mirrored the roller-coaster trajectory of Argentina, from political crisis to economic prosperity and cataclysms. Tango, hence, has become the well from which Argentine intellectuals and artists have sought for the meaning of *argentinidad*. Julio Cortázar, who left Argentina in a self-imposed exile in France in the 1950s, also takes part in this practice. What is more, for Cortázar, tango was intimately linked to the history of Argentina. My study examines the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project, a term I employ to refer to a collection of tango songs written by Cortázar and released in 1980 in France and the eponymous tango salon that operated in the center of Paris. The study of this tango project, which was crucial in the genre's second renaissance in France, demonstrates that the relation between tango and Cortázar, two Argentine icons that are conventionally disconnected, is stronger and more profound than previously thought. Most importantly, the central argument of this thesis contends that the Trottoirs project constructs a space in diaspora where an alternate narrative of Argentina, which was suffering the ravages of the military junta and the Dirty War (1976-1983), can be articulated. In order to construct this space, the Trottoirs project defines tango in its own terms: by foregrounding the imperialist forces embedded in the genre, the project demystifies tango to establish a common ground between Paris and Buenos Aires; and

Trottoirs exoticizes tango again in a mimicking gesture of the cultural empire. This double operation renders tango and Buenos Aires in excess (and therefore, invulnerable to appropriation) and establishes the dialectics of positioning (based on the triadic dance paradigm of tango) that allows Trottoirs to not only build an imagined community in diaspora but also to contest the notion of nation. The main achievements of the Trottoirs project is producing an ambivalent and elusive concept of identity as well as creating a heterotopic space where diasporic subjects can participate in the narrative of nation.

To my parents,
and to Beatriz and Serenity

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INTRODUCTION

Stories about a legendary but defunct tango salon and the famous writer who godfathered it hovered around me during my research of the Parisian tango scene for a travel article. It had been about two decades since the salon closed in 1990, but its presence among the tango community in Paris was palpable. In 2009 when I visited, tango in Paris appeared to be at a crossroads: Stylistic differences in the dance form caused division among the community; some venues for tango dances such as the iconic *milonga* at the Seine's riverbank were threatened by city ordinances; and a fear that the "essence" of tango was slipping away was latent. Though the present state of tango was a source of worry and debate, the tango historians, musicians and dancers I talked to seemed to always look into the past in search of a referent onto which to anchor their ruminations on the future of the genre. Discussions and conversations of tango in Paris, perfunctory or profound, often veered toward the topic of Trottoirs de Buenos Aires and Julio Cortázar.

The stories and the salon's ubiquity in the tango lore of Paris surprised me, especially because of the incongruence that Cortázar and tango, together, presented. The writer's attitude toward the quintessential music of Argentina was tumultuous, as far as I knew. Cortázar was known to have admired jazz to the extent that his writing emulated the cadence of the rhythm. Tango, on the other hand, occupies a more nuanced and subtle space in his works, and has been often regarded as of minor significance. What is more, Cortázar had expressed his consideration of tango's lesser artistic value when compared

to jazz.

Hence, the existence of the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project, a term I employ to refer to a collection of tango songs written by Cortázar and released in 1980 under the record label Polydor, and the tango salon that opened in 1981 in the center of Paris, presents a paradox and a testament. It is a paradox because the album's lyrics and sound, as well as the space of the salon reunited two conventionally disconnected icons of the Argentine culture whose bond has been scarcely studied even though it was fully manifested in Trottoirs. It is a testament to Cortázar's participation in the discourse of nation from diaspora. Trottoirs is also a cultural object that exemplifies the symbiotic and problematic relation between Buenos Aires and Paris in the fashioning of Argentina's national narrative.

As more pieces of the story of Trottoirs started to emerge during conversations with Parisian *tangueros*, more questions began to arise. Mainly, I wondered how Cortázar and tango joined their path to produce a project that is now little known outside the tango circle of Paris, had left sparse material remnants, and yet its story and presence are as tangible and current as tango. Two things seemed certain: Trottoirs has undoubtedly become a living memory that occupies a crucial space in the imaginary of the tango world and has shaped the path of the current tango scene in Paris. And, in a way, Trottoirs has also become the repository of not only the memories of tango's second renaissance in France but also of a certain nostalgic *argentinidad* that survived the cataclysm of Argentina's Dirty War (1976-1983). These statements reflected the Trottoirs project's influence on tango as a genre and as a national symbol, its effect on the articulation of *argentinidad* from diaspora and on the reading of Cortázar's body of work.

Hence, the overarching question driving this thesis is, in a larger scope, how does Cortázar participate in the discourse of Argentina, and, in a particular instance, how does the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project treat the notion of nation through tango. As I demonstrate in the study of the Trottoirs project, the molding of tango becomes the shaping of the national narrative and identity, and likewise, the questioning of tango becomes the challenging of nation and *argentinidad*.

In Chapter 1, I trace the travels of tango, from its status as a lowly cultural product of the *porteño* demimonde to its adoption as Argentina's national symbol by way of Paris, and of Cortázar, from an expatriate to an exile. This exploration establishes the basis and the parameters in which I understand and approach tango and Cortázar. Tracing the separate (hi)stories of tango and Cortázar until their point of conjunction sets the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project in context and elucidates the characteristics of tango (such as nostalgia and simultaneity of time and space) that aid Cortázar and Trottoirs in the construction of home from a displaced position.

In Chapter 2, I perform a close reading of the Trottoirs project: from a study of the album, which contains the songs as well as cover art and liner notes, to an examination of the Trottoirs salon. In this chapter, I argue that the Trottoirs project creates a space for the diasporic community to articulate an alternate narrative for a nation that languished in the grips of the military junta. Each one of the Trottoirs project's iterations performs a specific function that results in the creation and materialization of a space where an alternate national discourse can be voiced. Thus, the album is read as the blueprint of this space and the salon as the materialization of the site envisioned by the album. I study the album in the first section of this chapter. Through the lenses of postcolonial theory and

Foucaultian thought on space, I argue that Cortázar with a double gesture of demystification-exotization constructs an imaginary Buenos Aires, a heterotopic site that subsists and sometimes supplants its “real” counterpart.

Lastly, in Chapter 3, I examine how the Trottoirs project is both an affirmation and a challenge to the notion of nation. If the Trottoirs project is considered a successful attempt in creating an alternate Buenos Aires, then the possibility of the constitution of an imagined community beyond the physical borders of the nation-state is not only an attainable feat but also a subversive act against the idea of nation. Through theories on transnationalism and deterritorialization, this chapter examines how the Trottoirs project challenges the concept of nation by rearticulating the national symbol in an “other” space. By deterritorializing and thereby decontextualizing tango, the Trottoirs project foregrounds the traditional hierarchies that govern tango to reverse, diffuse and rearrange them. This operation renders the highly-codified tango an empty signifier, and renders the highly-complex and elusive *argentinidad* a contradictory construction that seeks for purity amid its hybridity, for the national in diaspora.

The analysis of the Trottoirs project can open new possibilities of signification in the interpretation of Cortázar's work, and to a larger extent, the study of Trottoirs foregrounds Cortázar's project as a complex text that would perhaps lead to retrace and revise the dialectics and discourses of national identity from the position of displacement. In the space(s) of diaspora, the ideas and paradigms employed to think about identity and nation acquire a different signification. With the peril of oversimplification, for Argentines in diaspora, tango has an added complexity. Tango is not only the sound, the gesture or the feeling that takes them back home, but tango itself becomes the body/site

that is (a)temporal, (a)historical and transbordering. That is, in the voice of the displaced, tango is home, and in the hands of Cortázar, Trottoirs becomes nation.

CHAPTER 1

TANGO AND CORTÁZAR: THE TRAVELS OF TWO ARGENTINE ICONS

The Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project joined the paths of two conventionally disconnected icons of Argentina: tango and Julio Cortázar. The Trottoirs project,¹ a term I employ to refer to a collection of tango songs written by Cortázar and released in an album titled *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* in 1980 and an eponymous tango salon that operated in the center of Paris, is Cortázar's most direct incursion into tango and a testament not only to the depth of his connection to the genre, but also to his participation in the discourse of nation. This chapter, therefore, aims to trace the separate yet parallel (hi)stories of tango and Cortázar, as oftentimes incongruous and dissonant symbols and metonymies of Argentina, that result in the creation of a cultural object that exemplifies the symbiotic and problematic relation between Buenos Aires and Paris in the fashioning of Argentina's national narrative. The survey of the separate trajectories of tango and Cortázar in regards to their pattern of travel, their experience with distance and displacement, and most importantly, their relationship with nation, contextualizes the Trottoirs project as a crucial and significant cultural product of tango and diasporic tango.

¹ Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project is a term I employ to refer to the album and the salon as a whole. For the purposes of clarity, throughout this thesis I refer to the album as *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* or the *Trottoirs* album, to the café-concert as the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires salon or the Trottoirs salon, and to both as a whole as the Trottoirs project. The album was Cortázar's main contribution to the project.

Furthermore, the study of the parallelism between tango and Cortázar establishes the importance of these two icons in the discourse and narrative of nation. On one hand, tango, as a national symbol of Argentina, has mirrored the nation's historical vicissitudes. On the other hand, Cortázar, as an iconic figure in Argentine literature, exemplifies and articulates in the Trottoirs project the paradigm and paradox of displaced subjects.

Tango and the national narrative of Argentina are inextricably connected — sometimes in synchrony, other times in dissonance. That is, the historical trajectory of tango runs parallel to Argentina's history, from socioeconomic prosperity to political implosions. The parallel between the (hi)stories of nation and its national symbol can be observed, for instance, in two major junctures of Argentina's roller-coaster trajectory: During the country's recovery from its worst economic crisis in 2001 tango emerged as the omnipresent star in the booming tourism industry, and more than half a century ago the cataclysm of the military junta not only tore the nation but also its national symbol. In the period between the 1950s and 1980s, as Argentina was ruptured by dictatorship and the Dirty War, tango endured a fissure of its own: From being revered and exalted as the national symbol, it left Buenos Aires with the thousands of Argentines displaced in Paris. Like the thousands of Argentines in exile, tango's home was fractured into two main loci: Buenos Aires and Paris.² Its life was diverted into two currents and two spaces that have not, and perhaps will not ever, converge and reconcile: in Buenos Aires, tango stalled; in Paris, tango progressed. In Argentina, tango served in the articulation and preservation of

² The loci of tango's diaspora are many and are located in urban centers such as Berlin, Tokyo, Medellín and Madrid, which have been important places in the history and development of tango. The study of these loci and their relationship with Buenos Aires, however, is beyond the scope of this project, which will focus on Paris. The French capital has played a pivotal role in the rebirth, development and, most importantly, the legitimation of tango on the world stage.

a national identity that reflected the country's hybrid genesis and cosmopolitan ambitions. In diaspora, on the other hand, tango acquired a new and different gesture, a new life, as it absorbed the reality of its new home(s). The travels of tango, between Argentina and France, between periphery and center, and its bifurcated life between Buenos Aires and Paris not only closely mirrored the experiences of displaced Argentines but also have become a central aspect in the narrative of nation.

Cortázar experienced a travel path and rupture similar to tango's when he, disenchanted with the regime of Juan Perón, left Argentina for France in 1951. Despite their incongruities, tango and Cortázar share similarities and common denominators in their pattern of travel and experience with distance. Like tango, Cortázar saw his home fractured into two main sites: Buenos Aires and Paris. Like tango, Cortázar found a new life in Paris. And like tango, separation from nation had profound effects on Cortázar's development as an artist. During his transplantation in France that lasted four decades until his death, Cortázar flourished as a writer producing his best-known works and saw his relationship with Argentina and its national symbol transform and fluctuate between disdain and affection. Most importantly, Cortázar's separation from nation had significant and lasting effects on his political views, his identification within the spectrum of displacement and his participation in the discourse of nation.

This chapter, therefore, traces the separate yet parallel paths and (hi)stories of tango and Cortázar prior to the production of the Trottoirs project to establish the foundation and parameters from which I read and understand tango and Cortázar and which I employ to perform a close reading of the Trottoirs project in Chapter 2 of this thesis. At its core, this chapter demonstrates that Cortázar's relationship with nation and

distance is mediated through tango and channeled through Trottoirs. Henceforth, to develop my argument, I first present a brief history of tango as a genre that traveled from a low-class musical object to an exotic cultural product that thrived beyond the borders of its motherland to a national symbol. In these travels and movements from place to place, from Buenos Aires to Paris, and from the *arrabal* to elite circles, I argue that tango acquired not only the traits that characterize the genre (such as nostalgia) but also the capacity to embody and reproduce nation in diaspora. Secondly, I study how Cortázar's leaving of Argentina in the 1950s affected his view and connection to home, his fluctuating identification within the spectrum of displacement, and his relationship with tango. Lastly, I briefly introduce the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project to provide a foundation and context for my close analysis of the project in Chapter 2.

1.1. Tango: Between here and there

A story of trans-Atlantic comings and goings, the history of tango³ has been a point of much contention and long debate, perhaps because it is so closely associated with national identity, and any attempt to categorize and characterize the birth and life of a national symbol is an attempt to historicize the character of a nation. That is to say, that in this section it is not my intention to historicize tango but to foreground the characteristics of the genre that in my reading attracted Cortázar to employ it in the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project. In order to do this, I will inevitably delve into some of

³ There's no contention that tango originated in the *arrabal porteño* (however, there's controversy over which side of the Río de la Plata region it emerged; most say Argentina, some say Uruguay). Some versions claim tango was born in the brothels, when traveling musicians from the Pampas, European immigrants and prostitutes converged — strangers in a room, nostalgic for better times, better places, distant sounds. Other versions point to the origin of the tango dance when men tried to emulate the movements of knife fights. Others say it originated when upper-class white Argentines domesticated and tamed the movements of the dances of African slaves.

the historical facts of tango that perhaps help explain its poetics of the margins, dynamics of location and its inherent out-of-placeness. To achieve this, I will broadly survey tango's voyage from Buenos Aires' slums to Parisian upper-crust salons, its consolidation as a national symbol and the characteristics that serve Cortázar's project.

Cortázar's exilic voyage paralleled that of tango, which itself became an exile in Paris in the dawn of the twentieth century. Looked down in its native Río de la Plata region, tango gained vindication in the French capital with its adoption by the Parisian high class, which regarded it as an exotic novelty. Tango was born and bred in the Buenos Aires slums at the end of the nineteenth century when the city was undergoing a gargantuan transformation with a growing economy and an equally expanding immigration.⁴ The immigrants, who came from the countryside and overseas, settled in the margins of the city — the *arrabal*. The *arrabal*, as a site, was a place where poor people from Argentina's interior, immigrants from Europe and freed African slaves converged. The *arrabal*, thus, became fertile ground for the birth of tango. Parented by the Cuban *habanera* and the *milonga gauchesca*, the tango became a musical expression that embodied the immigrants' hopes and fears but mostly the sorrow of displacement and uprooting, according to tango historian Nardo Zalko.⁵ Tango, therefore, reflected and embodied the conditions and realities of the people and place where it was born, and

⁴ Tango came to life in a time when the population of Argentina grew six-fold. According to J.N.F.M. à Campo, from 1860 to 1910, the population grew from 1.5 million to 7.5 million, 3 million of which were immigrants (116). Tango historian Nardo Zalko states that by 1906, the year of the first tango voyage to Paris, Buenos Aires had 1.5 million people (24).

⁵ Zalko explains: “El tango logró paulatinamente una simbiosis entre las esperanzas y las nostalgias depositadas en la ciudad por los hombres de campo y por los extranjeros: ambos aportaron ante todo el dolor del desarraigo” (24). My translation: “Gradually the tango achieved a symbiosis between the hopes and nostalgia deposited in the city by the men from the countryside and from overseas. Both of them injected into tango the sorrow of uprooting.”

eventually the genre started to create its own mythology and develop into its own culture. On one hand, musically and lyrically, tango was conditioned by the events that surrounded the genre's development in the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century. An instance of this parallel can be seen in the thematic shift of tango lyrics when the socioeconomic situation in Argentina deteriorated in the 1930s. During that period, tango lyrics and mythology developed from the actuality of everyday life in the *arrabal* to a more reflective, less picaresque and more sensitive form (à Campo 118). On the other hand, tango, as a sociocultural expression, began to produce its own mythology populated by iconic figures that would eventually become archetypes not only in the tango world but also in the *porteño* culture.

As Buenos Aires and its population expanded, and the borders between city and countryside started to touch and merge, the iconic figures of the tango mythology began to form: the *compadrito*, the *malevo*⁶ and the *canfinflero*. The *compadrito* is of special interest for the purposes of this thesis⁷ because of two reasons: The *compadrito* is credited with the creation of the *milonga* dance, the antecessor and driving force of tango, and he is known as an avid imitator that copied, fused and bridged the character, customs and language of the marginal figures that inhabited the *arrabales* to construct his identity. Prominent tango historian Blas Matamoro notes that the *compadrito*, a low-middle class figure who inhabited the *barrios* surrounding the docks of Buenos Aires, was well known

⁶ In *lunfardo*, *malevo* means criminal and *canfinflero* means pimp.

⁷ Like the thematic shift in tango lyrics, the *compadrito* also experienced a transformation that would render another central figure in tango mythology: the vulnerable *abandonado* (à Campo 118). It is the tone of this reincarnated *compadrito*, this vulnerable *abandonado* that registers the most in *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires*' enunciative position, its poetic voice.

in his ability to tread the margins.⁸ Zalko adds that Matamoro saw the importance of the *compadrito* and his hybrid culture in his ability to copy the traits and customs of the ruffian and the *malevo*, from their dress code, to their language (the *lunfardo*, the dialect of the city's margins), to their music, the tango.⁹ Likewise, the *compadrito* copied in a burlesque gesture the *candombe* dance of the Afro-Argentines. The result of that copy, according to Zalko, was an improvised dance based on crudely imitated steps accompanied by the music of the *milonga*.¹⁰ Reflecting on the observations of early-twentieth-century Argentine writer Vicente Rossi, who bases the origins of tango on black *milongas*, tango scholar Marta Savigliano suggests that the transference and appropriation of the dance movements and techniques of the blacks was performed clumsily in its mocking attitude by the “pardos and whites” (41). Savigliano, echoing Rossi, qualifies the black *milongueros*' feet movements that formed geometric figures on the floor as scribbling: “This illiterate way of dealing with writing, mimicking with body movements the mastery over drafting scripts, was unsuccessfully imitated by both pardos and whites” (41). The tango, hence, can be read as the product of a process of mimicry and appropriation of the exotic in a constantly and rapidly changing Buenos Aires.

According to most historical accounts, the tango, which was first danced among blacks, then among white males in street corners and then saw the incursion of women in

⁸ Matamoro explains: “El compadrito era el habitante masivo de la orilla, el proletario, hombre de la clase media pobre, orillero por excelencia” (quoted in Zalko, 30).

⁹ Matamoro observes that the *compadrito* copied “los rasgos externos, los usos y las costumbres del rufián y del malevo, su manera de vestir, su lenguaje – el lunfardo, o sea el idioma de las márgenes de la ciudad – y el tango como expression” (Zalko 30).

¹⁰ Zalko explains that Afro-Argentine dancers “al son de los tambores, la pareja bailaba separada... El compadrito parodiaba grotescamente los pasos del negro, y creó una coreografía improvisada, mientras, para acompañarse con una música, iba silbando una milonga” (30).

the form of prostitutes, reveled in the *conventillos* (overcrowded tenements that lingered on the city's borders), *peringundines* (run-down bars where patrons enjoyed drinking, tango dancing and picking fights), brothels and streets of the *barrios* of a nascent metropolis under the disdainful watch of *porteño* high class and the censuring hand of authorities.¹¹

This is the tango that emigrated to Paris.¹² And its arrival in France in the early-twentieth century was met with extreme reaction. Writing about tango's advent in the French capital, Parisian journalist and cartoonist Sem noted that tango was welcomed in Paris by puzzlement and fascination:

¿Como consecuencia de qué malentendido este baile descarado, que aprovecha la oleada de prestigio que tiene todo lo que llega de América Latina, fue adoptado de manera descontrolada por París? ¿Como resultado de qué aberración el tango, cuyo simple nombre hace enrojecer en Buenos Aires a una demi-mondaine de segunda categoría, es acogido entre nosotros con los brazos abiertos por la mejor sociedad y bailado en los salones más puristas? ¡Alegre enigma!¹³

The mythical and unlikely triumph of tango – a devalued art form in its native Argentina – fostered and was buoyed by the influx to Paris during the 1900s of Argentine tango musicians and dancers who saw a way to transform their hobby into a career. Dance halls, dance academies and tango songs authored in Paris started to spring up. Aristocrats and artists, princes, princesses and presidents danced tango, which had seeped

¹¹ Zalko notes that Buenos Aires issued an ordinance in 1916 banning the dance among same-sex dancers (30).

¹² The exact date of tango's arrival in France is still contested. Some place it in 1906, when it docked in the ports of Marseilles with Argentine sailors traveling in ships that were exporting frozen meat. According to Beatrice Humbert's account, tango's incursion into Parisian high class might have happened a couple of years later when Argentine aristocrat and writer Ricardo Güiraldes, author of *Don Segundo Sombra*, danced tango before the fascinated and perplexed gaze of the Parisian upper crust during a small fête.

¹³ Sem, as quoted by Zalko, 76.

into every corner of the Parisian social scene just a few years after its appearance in an exoticism- and novelty-starved France. The news of tango's triumph in the capital of culture rippled back to Buenos Aires.

In Argentina, a second look was granted to tango. The popular magazine *Caras y Caretas* signaled the beginning of tango's vindication in its birthplace and issued a subtle call to reappropriate tango "to bestow upon it the honors of an aristocratic dance in order to correct and properly introduce it in the salons."¹⁴ Additionally, the magazine detailed that the growing clientele of tango dance schools was composed mostly of *porteños* who were planning to travel to France, believing their knowledge of tango would be required if they claimed to be Argentine.

In Paris, tango was sanitized. As pointedly and ironically observed by French cartoonist Sem, Paris granted Buenos Aires' vulgar and lascivious production the veneer of sophistication by stripping it of its picaresque and street sensibility, as evidenced by the renaming of tango songs (i.e., songs such as "La Laura" named after a brothel madam were rebranded with French monikers with a more benevolent tenor such as "Loulou" or "Primerose"¹⁵). In dance, tango was denaturalized when its steps and figures were set to conform to the standards of decency of the Parisian aristocracy. According to tango scholar Beatrice Humbert, the carnal eroticism, assertiveness and inherent improvisation

¹⁴ My translation. The article in *Caras y Caretas* read: "Nosotros que no sabíamos del valor de este baile y lo teníamos para usufructo de compadrito y demás gente orillera, nos hemos apresurado a dignificarle y hacerle los honores de danza aristocrática para que adquiera corrección y pueda presentarse dignamente en los salones" (as quoted by Zalko, 78).

¹⁵ Sem wrote: "Dejadnos estallar de risa pensando que los tangos que, en Buenos Aires, llevan por títulos los nombres de madamas, 'La Laura', 'la Queca', o propósitos de alcoba de este tenor: '¡Mordeme la camiseta!' son bautizados en París con nombrecitos dulces y gentiles como Loulou o Primerose" (as quoted by Zalko, 76).

in tango were deflated into a courtesan dance of evasive sensuality and lethargic voluptuousness in the French salons.¹⁶ Writer Gómez Carrillo described such tango as follows:

El tango argentino, como se practica en París, es un baile lento, elegante, distinguido, aristocrático, decente y complicado. Las parejas cuentan los pasos con una atención extraordinaria. Sólo un pequeño error, y todo está perdido. Cada gesto corresponde a una regla estricta e inalterable. Y no hay uno solo de sus movimientos que no pueda ser ejecutado por la más puritana de sus señoritas.¹⁷

This is the tango that returned to Buenos Aires.¹⁸ Stylized, sterilized and sanctioned with the seal of good taste, tango ascends from the *bajofondo porteño* to the circles of the Argentine elite by way of Paris. The return of tango to Argentina signified the streamlining of the production and consumption of the genre and ushered in tango's Golden Age in Argentina (1940s and 1950s). According to Humbert's study, the *porteño* tango scene transformed after the Paris-approved genre arrived in its birthplace. For instance, Humbert observes that tango orchestras left the neighborhood parties in the *arrabales* for the salons and dance schools in downtown Buenos Aires, the improvisational element in tango was diminished as dancers sought to master steps with the help of instructors and music composers became more meticulous and circumspect in

¹⁶ Beatrice Humbert, 107-108

¹⁷ As quoted by Humbert, 144. "The Argentine tango, as danced in Paris, is a slow, elegant, distinguished, aristocratic, decent and complex dance. The dancing couples count the steps with extraordinary attention. Just a small mistake, and everything is ruined. Each gesture corresponds to a strict and inalterable rule. And all its steps can be performed by the most proper and pure young women" (my translation).

¹⁸ Eventually, Argentina has made strides and have strived to differentiate its tango, being doubly specific to the point of being almost redundant in its marketing of what is now known as *tango argentino*, which has gone back to the choreography of the *tango del barrio, del arrabal*.

songwriting (145).¹⁹ These instances show that tango went from a cultural object to a marketable product. That is, Paris had a strong influence in how tango is produced and promoted, from the foregrounding of dance over music, to packaging tango dance lessons with recitals and concerts. Thus, Paris not only gave tango an international projection but it also set the parameters for the production and consumption of tango. On one hand, Paris made the production and marketing of tango more exhaustive, complex and streamlined; and on the other hand, Paris established a set of standards of quality with which to consume the genre as well as a knowledgeable and critical audience.²⁰ Thus, the dynamics of cultural power were established: Paris was the empire that set the coordinates for taste, and Buenos Aires became the colony that mirrored and mimicked Paris.

Paris' effect on tango was not received without question or opposition. According to Zalko, even during tango's apogee in Paris, Argentine diplomats and the press in the early 1900s were scandalized by Paris' affirmation of such low-brow production of the *arrabal porteño*. In 1910, the Buenos Aires newspaper *El Diario* was appalled by the use

¹⁹ “La burguesía de Buenos Aires que no juraba sino por París, le abre sus puertas; fascinada, a su vez, lo pide de nuevo; las orquestas dejan los pequeños bailes de barrio por las academias de baile del centro; no más improvisación, los pasos se aprenden con los maestros, los compositores escriben sus partituras hasta el menor detalle: notas, ritmos, tiempo, matices, para una orquesta típica compuesta por lo menos de un violín, piano, bandoneón, y un contrabajo. Después de la música se escriben las letras. Comienza la edad de oro del tango, estamos en los años 1925-1920, una nueva etapa se anuncia con la llegada de Carlos Gardel” (Humbert 145).

²⁰ France and the United States have become centers of production, marketing and distribution of what music scholars Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid term “world music.” These large metropolitan centers of the Western World, which function as the new hubs of world music production, become key in the development of the postnational, they assert. In these spaces the means of production and technology, for instance, infused the exotic musics from the Third World with a sense of familiarity. Corona and Madrid write: “The resulting product was a diversity of hybrid musical forms with elements of Western genres, which made them palatable both to Western audiences and — sung in local languages — in the scenarios back home, where the musicians' success abroad validated their work locally” (15). But perhaps most importantly, in these spaces national boundaries are blurred as musics become hybridized and, though ironic, the ideas and images of nation are “packaged as prepared fantasy escapes” (18).

of tango as a symbol of Argentina and argued that the creators of tango (the *negros*, the freed slaves, the *compadrito* and immigrants from Argentina's *interior*) were incapable of producing a national music. *El Diario*'s argument, constructed on the basis of race, claimed that the originators of tango were the product of hybridity and therefore were sterile and lacked the virility to produce a national music.²¹ In its scathing consideration of tango and its creators, *El Diario* was denying not only the hybridity constitutive of Argentina's population and identity, but also the voices of marginal subjects in the articulation of the national narrative. Nevertheless, despite some pointed criticism from its motherland, tango, distorted and refashioned by Paris, flourished in Europe and sprinted from its firm footing in the French capital to other metropolises around the world: Tokyo, Berlin, Torino. Tango, from Paris to the world, became a metonymy of Argentina; it became the symbol of a nation.²²

1.1.1. A national symbol

Tango's winding path to recognition and legitimization in Argentina is as complex as its evolution and role as a national symbol. The adoption of tango as a symbol of Argentina was partly the result of its triumph in Paris and subsequent recognition as a representative of Argentine culture in the international arena. However,

²¹ The newspaper *El Diario* wrote of tango: "Los ingenuos que pretenden ver un germen de música argentina en este aire africano, cuyas tonadillas hacen ver plásticamente el requiebro curvo o la gambeta provocativa del compadrito chamberguero olvidan que los híbridos son estériles y no ofrecen la virilidad de los tipos capaces de crear una música nacional" (as quoted in Zalko, 60). My translation: "The guileless who pretend to see a seed of Argentine music in this African sound, whose melodies show the compadrito's flirtatious nature and provocative gait, forget that hybrid men are sterile and lack the virility of those capable of creating a national music."

²² To read more about tango in diaspora, please see *Tango Nómade: Crónicas de la diáspora*, edited by Ramón Pelinski, and *Tango: The Political Economy of Passion*, by Marta Savigliano.

tango's ability and suitability to represent nation is more nuanced. Intricately woven into the history of nation, tango has mirrored the historical vicissitudes of Argentina throughout the decades: from the beginning of the twentieth century, when tango was born as a result of the confluence of peoples and cultures that would constitute the nation's demographics; to the end of the century, when tango becomes crucial for a nation attempting to recover from its worst economic crisis through the tourism industry. As shown in the previous section, tango was born and formed at the crossroads of class, space and time: originating amid an amalgam of peoples and classes, in the in-between space that is the *arrabal porteño* at the turn of the century. These same crossroads and junctures are pivotal points in the history of Argentina. The nation was undergoing a period of massive immigration that has come to constitute the country as it is known today. In the beginning of the 1900s, Argentina moved to populate and develop its massive territory in its jolt to become an economic world power. Tango is a product, or a mirror, of those formative changes in Argentina. Long after its inception as a national symbol, tango's presence appears to grow stronger in times of crisis. For instance, after the *cacerolazos* protesting the government during the 2001 economic implosion,²³ Argentines would go to dance tango, according to anecdotal accounts.²⁴ Tango is not merely an omnipresent soundtrack to the nation's historical upheavals but a witness that reflects and embodies the changes Argentina has endured. This is the predominant reason the genre serves as a national symbol, according to scholar Juan Vicente Peiró. He

²³ To read more about how tango was used after the 2001 crisis, see "Tango Renovación: On the Uses of Music History in Post-Crisis Argentina," Luker, Morgan James, *Latin American Music Review* 28. 1 (2007): 68-93

²⁴ Pineda, Suan. "Return after the Storm: Argentina Recovering from Its Biggest Economic Crash." *The World and I*. 21 (October 2006)

explains that tango "assume como ningún otro signo la Argentina: es capaz de reproducir con exactitud las contradicciones nacionales en una suerte de relación de amor y odio y solamente comprensible para el testigo de sus avatares históricos" (72-73).

For these reasons, it has become common practice among thinkers, writers and artists, from Jorge Luis Borges to the founder of tango-rock band La Chicana Acho Estol, to believe that the key to Argentine identity lies in tango. However, this practice, which has been exercised since the birth of the century-old tango, has not yielded a definitive answer. Furthermore, the very notion of finding *argentinidad* in tango has been widely contested and problematized.²⁵ But whether or not tango contains the key to define *argentinidad*, the selection and acquisition of the genre as a national symbol lies at the center of Argentina's identity formation.

In the face of modernity, a fledgling Argentina acquired tango as a national symbol at the dawn of the twentieth century. Some scholars have placed tango in opposition to the gaucho; that is, tango is said to have replaced the gaucho when Argentina, in the midst of social and economic transformations, chose to leave behind its rural and primitive image and adopt a cosmopolitan product already validated by Paris. Other scholars claim that tango emerged as a national symbol along with the gaucho in a two-pronged response to modernity, one complementing the other, each one satisfying a different political faction of the nation. In his insightful look into Argentina's national

²⁵ There are several arguments that view tango as a national symbol as a problematic proposal. One of the most salient arguments states that tango does not represent Argentina as a whole but the relatively small and yet dominant *porteño* culture. Another argument pertinent to the scope of my project is that the tango that was adopted as a symbol of the nation was significantly altered by foreign influences. To read more about tango's status as a national symbol, see Bockelman, Brian. "Between the Gaucho and the Tango: Popular Songs and the Shifting Landscape of Modern Argentine Identity, 1895-1915." *The American Historical Review*. 116.3 (June 2011): 577-601.

symbols, historian Brian Bockelman points out that socioeconomic transformations of the world capitalist system in the beginning of the twentieth century prompted renewed quests to define the nation, which resulted in a split view of where national identity should be found: one stressing a backward look in search of identity in the past, and the other favoring the creation of new cultural forms. In Argentina, Bockelman argues, both operations were performed simultaneously: "... the turn of the century was a time of reinventing old traditions like the heroic gaucho and creating new ones such as the steamy tango – perplexingly parallel yet divergent responses to the local experience of modernity" (581). Contrary to previous scholarship, which has viewed tango as the antithesis and replacement of the gaucho in Argentina's iconography repository, Bockelman sustains that the tango and the gaucho both emerged around the same period though at different rates as national symbols, and each has nurtured the other. The adoption of each served different political purposes in the shaping of the nation's narrative. The artificial antagonism of tango and the gaucho is a result of the struggle between political forces that sought to take the reins in the definition of Argentina's identity, one looking at an idealized past and the other projecting into an illusory future.

At the center of the tango-gaucho binary is an even larger dichotomy that has dominated the Argentine narrative: civilization and barbarism.²⁶ In the shaping of Argentina's image and identity in the beginning of the twentieth century, the political elite anxiously wanted to rid the nation of any signs that would associate Argentina with

²⁶ The civilization and barbarism dichotomy was coined by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in his seminal work *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (1845). In this work, which established the parameters from which to think about development and modernization in nineteenth-century Latin America, a clear division and regional categorization was established: Europe and North America belonged to the civilized world, and Latin America and Africa to the barbaric world.

the “primitive,” the “savage” and the “barbarian.” The nation, thus, undertook an Europeanization process that resulted not only in the composition of the nation’s demographics with the influx of southern and eastern European immigrants, but also in Buenos Aires’ architectural aesthetics.

In Argentina’s push toward development to claim a place in the world as an economic power,²⁷ the divide between the civilized and the barbaric was accentuated. The gaucho and the tango as national symbols were caught in the middle of a struggle that sought to define and classify to which camp, civilization or barbarism, these symbols belonged. In hindsight, it appears clear: Tango is a product of the metropolis and therefore it is classified as a product of the civilized world, and the Pampas-roaming gaucho belongs to the barbaric world. However, this perspective is heavily influenced by a national discourse that, as Bockelman noted, had fabricated an artificial antagonism between the gaucho and the tango. Therefore, the classification of these symbols is not as simple and clear-cut as it appears. On one hand, the gaucho, iconicized in *Martín Fierro*, which intellectuals had rediscovered and deemed the nation’s greatest epic poem in the early 1900s, was favored by the common people as well as by Argentina’s intellectual and political elite as an idealized character of the country’s great plains that symbolized the enterprising spirit of the white settlers that tamed, civilized and lived off the land of the New World. Bockelman explains that the resurgence of the gaucho was a “nationalist, elitist, and anti-modern reaction to the influx of foreign customs, both real and imagined, that accompanied Argentina's rapid transformation” into a cosmopolitan country in the

²⁷ In the 1930s, thanks to the country’s beef exports, Argentina boasted one of the strongest economies in the world, paralleling that of France. (“Q&A: Argentina’s economic crisis.” *BBC News*. Web. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/1721061.stm>)

1900s (588-589). Therefore, the gaucho in the hands of the nation's elite was granted the status of a civilizing and civilized figure within a specific moment in the history of Argentina. On the other hand, the city-dwelling tango, favored only by the popular classes, was seen by the elite as barbaric and primitive because of the genre's African roots and disreputable beginnings. Seeking to promote a "civilized" image of Argentina, the country's ruling class saw its control of the national narrative shaken when Paris accepted tango. With Paris' selection and manipulation of a cultural product to symbolize Argentina, Savigliano suggests, the Argentine elite perceived that "its representativeness was being questioned and the popular culture was being misrepresented" (140).²⁸ Hence, tango, in the first decades of the twentieth century, was considered not only a product of barbarism by the Argentine ruling class, but also an instance of cultural imperialism. The eventual reversal of the tango-gaucho binary was heavily, if not completely, effected by Paris' nod to tango. The approval of France changed how tango was perceived within Argentina and determined which factions of the country the genre came to represent. That is, if in a pre-Parisian-approval time tango represented the low and marginalized classes, in a post-Parisian-approval moment tango represents the nation, which includes the ruling class and a sanitized and exoticized image of the Buenos Aires *arrabaleros*.

Although France's validation of tango played a significant role in the genre's ascending status in Argentina, there are several reasons specific to the history and internal developments of the nation that led to the adoption of tango as a national symbol. Tango

²⁸ Savigliano states: "Argentinean identity was being manipulated first through the projection of a 'popular' image of the national culture – an image that challenged the 'civilized' image the Argentinean elite wished to project – and second by the simultaneous appropriation and distortion of the practice... the elite's representativeness was being questioned and the popular culture was being misrepresented" (140).

was the first cultural and autochthonous product created in a rapidly growing nation that was searching to establish its uniqueness – its difference. From its constitutive characteristics to its narrative of origin, tango not only paralleled and mirrored the narrative of a nation that was undergoing profound changes in its demographics, culture and economy during the first decades of the twentieth century, but also represented a growing faction of the population. Bockelman contends that tango represented the emerging urban popular culture “capable of fusing the traditions of locals and immigrants, of the poor and the middle class, into an anti-elite discourse that straddled nostalgia and resistance” (589).²⁹ Furthermore, the historian suggests that another reason tango gained traction was that because of the modernization of the countryside, the gaucho had become a “cultural fossil” whose symbolism and flexibility of signification was crystallized. Tango, on the other hand, was still novel and developing its mythology, and its “symbolic content was still being created in relationship to the new experiences of the growing metropolis” (590). Because of these two main reasons, in addition to France’s approval of tango, the genre emerged as a fitting cultural object to symbolize the nation.

The adoption of tango as a national symbol, however, was plagued with contradictions: while Paris’ manipulation of tango was seen as another episode of cultural

²⁹ Bockelman expands: “The tango appeared intimately connected with the internal social history of Buenos Aires, reflecting the difficult adjustments of the lower classes to new kinds of work and sociability in the modern city. Frequent expressions of elite prejudice toward the tango also confirmed for many historians and sociologists its inherently popular character, further distancing the subject from traditional intellectual history. In some cases, studying the tango became a cultural adjunct of inquiries into the formation of Argentina’s vigorous urban labor movement between 1900 and 1930. It thus inspired a separate historical narrative, one that stressed the emergence of a new urban popular culture capable of fusing the traditions of locals and immigrants, of the poor and the middle class, into an anti-elite discourse that straddled nostalgia and resistance” (589).

imperialism, the recognition from the capital of culture put Argentina in the threshold of the developed world. By the time tango was adopted as a national symbol, the genre – already transformed and morphed in its stay in Paris – had gone through a process of selection and reappropriation in Argentina. The Argentines restored some elements that were lost in France, such as improvisation and the close embrace, as well as accentuated other characteristics that were augmented in Europe, such as exoticism, or as Savigliano has detailedly described as autoexoticism.³⁰ In other words, the tango that is known today as the national symbol of Argentina is not the same tango that was born in the *arrabales* or the same one that reveled in the French capital.

What elements were selected to constitute this tango? Were the lowly origins of the tango concealed or were they romanticized and idealized, mystified to a point of sanitation and sterilization? By the Golden Age of tango (from the late-1930s to the mid-1950s³¹), the traits of tango had become universal and yet local: nostalgia, rootedness, lost love and childhood neighborhood, odes to the *bandoneón*, a thematic heritage from the Nueva Guardia (or new school), a more sophisticated use of literary devices (such as synesthesia and personification) and poetic language. Left behind were the “vulgar” lyrics that reflected the life of the popular class (à Campo 117). However, the humble origins of tango were not concealed but idealized, and the vulgar figures that plagued the lyrics of early tango songs such as the *compadrito* and the prostitutes became mythical and literary icons whose experiences and misfortunes were employed to construct a

³⁰ Savigliano, Marta. *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*. Ch. 4 Scandalizing National Identity.

³¹ The ascension of the military junta in 1943 happened in the midst of tango’s Golden Age. Although greatly affected by the military junta, which issued legislation such as “la ley seca” aimed at curtailing and controlling the genre, tango still enjoyed great popularity among the popular masses. The genre, however popular, was greatly manipulated by the political regime to appeal to the people and further its message.

discourse of morality.³² This version of tango, sanctioned by the international tastemakers as well as by the domestic ruling class headed by president Ramón Castillo, thrived in almost every corner of the nation's social spectrum.

However, the popularity and stability of tango as a national symbol did not last long. The military coup of 1943 marked another significant shift in the development, or stalling, of tango. The regime, which rejected foreign influences and focused on native culture and national values, did not recognize tango as a national symbol because of its hybrid origins and success overseas.³³ Despite the regime's attempt to undercut tango with censorship legislation such as "la ley seca," the genre's popularity was undiminished among the growing urban working class — an aspect that Juan Perón would work to his advantage. During his time in power (1946-1955), Perón employed the tango and the gaucho to advance his political message and his vision of the nation.³⁴ In "Choreographing National Identities: The Political Use of Samba and Tango," Amy Hill argues that Perón employed both the tango and the gaucho to promote his ideology of native values and Argentine exceptionalism. With tango, Perón appealed to the urban

³² This discourse of morality can be seen in the development of the role of women in tango lyrics. The prostitute or *milonguita* in early tango songs was later replaced by the figure of the *pebeta* and *papusa*, a young woman who abandons the *barrio* in pursuit of social and economic well-being (for example, 1925's "Pompas de Jabón" and 1919's "Flor de Fango," both songs belonging to the Nueva Guardia phase). Her enterprise invariably ends tragically. The recurrence of this narrative signals not only an underlying patriarchal discourse that cannot contemplate another path for women's movement within the socioeconomic spectrum but one that depends on her betrayal — of class, of principle, — but also affirms a system of deep socioeconomic divisions. To read more about women's role in tango, please see: Viladrich, Anahí. "Neither Virgins nor Whores: Tango Lyrics and Gender Representations in the Tango World." *The Journal of Popular Culture*. 39.2 (2006): 272-293.

³³ Hill 56.

³⁴ Juan Perón's vision of what he deemed a New Argentina was based on three principles: social justice, economic independence and political sovereignty. Historian Bockelman observes that tango was used by Perón in his political speeches to appeal to the urban working class (578).

masses of Buenos Aires, and with the gaucho, he appealed to the country's interior in his push to develop Argentina's rural areas. In Perón's hands, tango was greatly altered. Hill states that Perón considered the reflective and solitary nature of tango lyrics to run counter to his political doctrine, which favored collectivity over individuality. For this reason, Hill argues, Perón reversed the traditional hierarchy of tango and favored the dance over the music (66). The Perón regime thus put a strong emphasis on the dance form and danceable songs (because of the form's collective aspect as well as its apparent detachment from tango songs' social commentary component), and stifled the production of tango lyrics that otherwise did not favor him or his political ideology. In his book *The Argentine Tango as Social History 1880-1955: The Soul of the People*, Donald Castro states that tango lost its power and impact as a source of social comment during Perón's years in power: "The close ties of the tango poets to Perón and their apparent sense of social loyalty to the regime created a new tango focused on nostalgia and dance form... Thus ended the tango as a useful source for Argentine social history" (251).³⁵ Perón's manipulation of tango not only had immediate implications in that period's production of tango but also long-term effects on the relationship between tango's dance and musical iterations. The lasting effects of Perón's altering of tango, I argue, also influenced how the Argentine diaspora would approximate and employ the genre. Although I will explore this subject in depth in the next section, it is pertinent to mention one instance in which the Argentine diaspora has responded to Perón's influence on tango. In diaspora, the long-standing rivalry between the dance form and the music is reversed. Argentine communities in diaspora and particularly the audience and authors of the Trottoirs project

³⁵ As cited by Hill, 66.

valued tango's musical form over the dance. This reversal can be read in several ways: in an anti-regime gesture, the Trottoirs project intended to rid tango of Perón's stamp; or Trottoirs attempted to evoke a time devoid of the dark episodes of the military junta. These instances, Perón's use of tango to propagate his message or the diaspora's employment of the genre to articulate an alternate national narrative, demonstrate that the manipulation and reappropriation of tango to accommodate and advance distinct discourses of nation render the genre a malleable, flexible and problematic symbol of Argentina.

The status of tango as a national symbol is problematic in several fronts. First, its adoption as such is heavily influenced by Paris, which not only shaped and transformed the genre, but also, as a result, exerted control over the articulation of Argentina's national narrative. Henceforth, the return and ascent of tango in Argentina was the product of cultural imperialism. Second, the rise of tango as a symbol means the crystallization of a cultural object that is by definition and origin unfixed and nomadic.³⁶ Thirdly, the "story" of tango, which spans beyond the physical confines of the nation, is the product of a collaborative historical narrative between Buenos Aires and Paris. In other words, pinning down tango as a national symbol, encasing it within the artificial and physical borders of an imagined community, limits the diasporic subjects' voices in the articulation of the national narrative. This last aspect is especially important in Cortázar's Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project, which seeks to create a space where the diasporic community can articulate an alternative national narrative.³⁷

³⁶ The third and last chapter of this thesis deals with the concept of nomadic tango.

³⁷ This is the subject of the second chapter of this project.

Whether or not tango fairly and fully represents *argentinidad* is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the selection and adoption of the genre as a national symbol sheds light on what the molders of national discourse conceived their nation to be. The dynamics of tango's formation and development undoubtedly mirror pivotal events that shaped modern Argentina, and it is this affinity, this nearness that led Cortázar, like many others before and after him, to employ tango when speaking of Argentina.

1.2. Cortázar: "Desde el lado de acá... desde el lado de allá"

In the latter years of his life, Cortázar, anchored for decades in Paris where he gazed into an Argentina ravaged by the horrors of the Dirty War (1976-1983), recited, in his calm cadence, against the elongated, solitary moan of the *bandoneón*:

Respire a fondo y dele,
cuénteme, cuénteme de ese Buenos Aires tan lejano para mí.
Cuénteme de mi propia vida de pibe y de muchacho.
Y gracias, che bandoneón.³⁸

Cortázar recited this monologue during the second renaissance of tango in Paris in the 1980s,³⁹ thousands of miles away from a nation caught in the grips of a dictatorship, so transformed from the home of his memories. "Buenas noches che bandoneón," his ode and plea to tango's quintessential instrument and a bow to the classic 1950 tango song

³⁸ The *bandoneón* is an accordion-like instrument that has become the centerpiece and oftentimes characteristic sound of tango music. "Buenas Noches Che Bandoneón" is played by J.J. Mosalini and recited by Julio Cortázar. To listen to this recording, visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9zEF9gyi3s>

³⁹ According to Ignacio Corona and Alejandro Madrid: "By the late 1980s, the 'world' had 'entered' the center of music production and consumption and the issue of fixed identities and national allegiances suddenly became more complicated as new forms of blending musical idioms were sought and promoted. The resulting product was a diversity of hybrid musical forms with elements of Western genres, which made them palatable both to Western audiences and – sung in local languages—in the scenarios back home, where the musicians' success abroad validated their work locally" (15).

“Che bandoneón,” was an exercise in nostalgia for the writer who left his native Buenos Aires in 1951 in a self-imposed exile following his disenchantment with Perón’s regime.

For Cortázar, tango was visceral. It is the sound that transported him back to his youth and had become part of his consciousness. In a 1984 interview with *The Paris Review*, Cortázar, describing a youth imbued with the sound of tango and a hindsight veiled by sentiment, revealed his ambiguous feelings toward the genre:

I’m a good Argentine and above all a *porteño* ... The tango was our music, and I grew up in an atmosphere of tangos. We listened to them on the radio ... and right away it was tango after tango. There were people in my family, my mother and an aunt, who played tangos in the piano and sang them... the tango became like a part of my consciousness and it's the music that sends me back to my youth again and to Buenos Aires... I think tango on the whole, especially next to jazz, is a very poor music. It is poor but it is beautiful.⁴⁰

In considering and appreciating tango, Cortázar frequently contrasted the genre with jazz, drawing a clear line between intellect (in which terms tango was considered “poor” and jazz technically richer) and sentiment (in which terms tango was considered “beautiful”). For Cortázar, the sentimentality of tango was the genre’s most powerful and poignant facet as well as its most perilous weakness. This debility became especially apparent when tango was employed to further political discourse, an action that in Cortázar’s view appealed to emotion and clouded the people’s judgment. That is, to link tango to politics, and hence to a nationalist discourse is, in Cortázar’s view, deceptive.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Cited in Weiss, 185.

⁴¹ Cortázar once wrote: “Nuestra autocompasión presente en la poesía bonaerense de ese tiempo plagado de elegías, que en el fondo eran tangos con diploma de alta cultura, el mismo amargo regusto de nuestras frustraciones locales que se travestían con la involuntaria ayuda de los Diors o los Cardine importados por las modas poéticas del momento” (Cortázar, Julio. *Salvo el crepúsculo*. Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1996: 337).

Cortázar's position on the subject, though sometimes emphatic, is oftentimes contradictory. That is, while he argued that politics and tango should not be brought together, he also affirmed that tango is fundamental in the articulation of national identity, which is a central subject in politics. Perhaps in his wavering critique of tango's association with politics and nation is a latent belief that however contradictory and mistaken, tango and nation are inevitably linked. To further understand Cortázar's view of tango and politics, it is necessary to examine a more general and fundamental binary, Cortázar and nation, which invariably and inevitably contains the shade of distance and diaspora. Bifurcated between "here" and "there," Cortázar's life was divided not only by a palpable, physical distance but also by a changing of positionings and perspectives that resulted from that physical separation. At the root and as a product of that separation is politics, a force whose intensity fluctuated in the writer's life and whose role (in its absence or presence) is pivotal in the analysis of the *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* project.

1.2.1. "Desde el lado de acá": Cortázar in Argentina

Cortázar's relationship with Argentina was ambivalent: Sometimes the writer treasured the rhythm and texture of life of Buenos Aires, but oftentimes Cortázar had thought and attempted to leave the country of his youth definitively. This ambivalence seemed to have been mainly based on his ideological stand in relation to the nation's politics and government. However, through interviews and texts, we can also see that this unease with the place where he grew up was manifested from a young age.

The suburb where Cortázar spent his boyhood years is the typical *barrio* so often depicted in tango songs: unpaved roads transited by horses and milk carts during the day and nondescript corners sporadically and poorly lit by streetlights at night. The suburb of

Banfield sprung and spread out of a railway station in the late-nineteenth century. Skirting the city of Buenos Aires, Banfield was full of ruggedness, darkness and the characteristic liminality of the marginal *barrios* that surround the city. Banfield was also fertile ground for clandestine acts of love and crime, the writer had said, an environment that not only filled his childhood with fright and foreboding but also with introspection and wonder. For the first seventeen years of his life, Cortázar lived in this middle ground where city and country met amid a seemingly perpetual hue of grayness and dust.⁴²

The incongruity and perplexity of Cortázar's love for the sleepless city whose underbelly never ceased to bewilder him and his apprehension of a town rapidly transforming under the grip of political oppression eventually transformed into disdain, anger and frustration. In one of his several comings and goings before his definitive uprooting, Cortázar discovered a strange city, a Buenos Aires he no longer belonged to.

In a foreword to a collection of poems titled *Razones de cólera*, Cortázar wrote:

Desembarqué en un Buenos Aires del que volvería a salir dos años después, incapaz de soportar los desengaños consecutivos que iban desde los sentimientos hasta un estilo de vida que las calles de un nuevo Buenos Aires peronista me negaban. ¿Pero para qué hablar de eso en poemas que demasiado lo contenían sin decirlo?⁴³

The excision with *Peronismo* is often cited as the reason Cortázar left Argentina and settled in Paris in 1951. Before that, Cortázar had made several attempts to leave the

⁴² Banfield has had a great influence in the writer's work, serving as a source of inspiration for short stories such as "Los Venenos" (1956) and "Conducta en los velorios" (1962). In an interview, Cortázar said his writings have always somehow returned to the place of his youth. He observes: "Siempre he vuelto a él, lo he evocado en algunos cuentos porque aún hoy lo siento muy presente" (cited in Calegari, Rodrigo. "Banfield fue mi reino, un paraíso en el que yo era Adán." *Clarín*. Web. http://lomasdezamora.clarin.com/ciudad/Banfield-Julio-Cortazar-primeros-escritor_0_761323861.html)

⁴³ Cortázar wrote: "I arrived in Buenos Aires, a city I would leave two years later. I couldn't withstand the constant disappointments ... a lifestyle that the streets of a new Peronista Buenos Aires was denying me. But why talk about this in poems that already express this without articulating it? (my translation). Cited in Cortázar, Julio. *Salvo el crepúsculo*. Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1996: 329.

country where he felt stifled. In 1932, after he obtained his teaching degree, the writer along with some friends attempted and failed to travel to Europe in a ship. For the Cortázar of those years, “Buenos Aires era una especie de castigo. Vivir allí era estar encarcelado,” he explained years later in an interview.⁴⁴ However, by the writer’s own admittance, his leaving Argentina had more to do with personal reasons than with politics, a field in which he had participated in a “theoretical” manner. “Me fui porque me dio la santa gana,” he said in an interview with Televisión Española. In hindsight, Cortázar said his political conscience was awakened but not active, up until the Cuban Revolution.⁴⁵

Therefore, I propose that the foundation of Cortázar’s political ideology was formed during his years in Argentina, but it only became active in diaspora.⁴⁶ That is, the possibilities of involvement and effecting change only unfolded after he left Argentina, a nation whose problems he considered unsolvable. During his years in Argentina (1919-1951), Cortázar, by his own admittance, was indifferent to politics and more focused on literature. His writing during this period seemed to have been largely apolitical, and his antagonism toward *Peronismo* appeared to be the result of a line of thought the Argentine

⁴⁴ Interview with Luis Harss and Bárbara Dohmann, p. 262.

⁴⁵ In an interview in Mexico’s Librería El Juglar in 1983, Cortázar said: “Mi participación en la historia ... era una participación de tipo teórico... durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial naturalmente yo defendía la causa de los aliados contra los nazis, durante la Guerra de España defendía la causa de los republicanos contra los franquistas, pero lo que yo llamo ahora defensas de café porque eran conversaciones de amigos en cafés, a lo sumo algún incidente en la calle cuando había una manifestación. Pero no hubo ninguna participación directa. Nunca se nos ocurrió que podíamos hacer mucho más por la causa que defendíamos”. ElJuglarCultura. “Entrevista a Julio Cortázar 1983.” YouTube. Web. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bOlv-04-3I>

⁴⁶ Cortázar’s political awakening once he had settled in Paris is of significant importance in the reading of the Trottoirs project, especially when the poems were written a couple of years after his arrival in France and chosen to be part of the project about three decades later.

intelligentsia had subscribed to and not the product of a solid political position or view. Cortázar felt he was “antiperonista pero nunca [se integró] a grupos políticos... que pudieran tratar de llegar a hacer una especie de práctica del antiperonismo.”⁴⁷ Cortázar showed his discontent with *Peronismo* by protesting,⁴⁸ but his views hadn’t materialized in a concrete political stance in his writings. Surveying Cortázar’s political inclinations throughout his life, Peter Standish observes that although the Argentine writer possessed a precocious political conscience he had limited active forays into the field. During the 1950s, the years prior to his transplantation to France, “su conciencia política no llegaba a influir de manera significativa en sus escritos ni en sus actividades sociopolíticas” (Standish 465). Standish affirms that it is in the European phase of his life where Cortázar started to take part in the political arena when he stood behind the Cuban Revolution and Nicaragua’s Sandinistas, and wrote the book *Libro de Manuel*, perhaps the most political of his works. (I address this point in more detail in the next section.) However, even in the more political period of his life, Cortázar felt unease delving into this subject. He returned to Argentina in 1977 to promote *Libro de Manuel* where he emphasized: “Yo no he nacido para escribir literatura política ... Puedo ver una situación y puedo tomar partido y puedo decir a mi manera lo que siento ... Mi manera es una manera literaria”.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Cited by Peter Standish, 466.

⁴⁸ More than a decade after his arrival in Paris, Cortázar, looking back, recounted his actions against *Peronismo*: “En los años 44-45, participé en la lucha política contra el peronismo y, cuando Perón ganó las elecciones presidenciales, preferí renunciar a mis cátedras antes que verme obligado a ‘sacarme el saco’ como les pasó a tantos colegas que optaron por seguir en sus puestos” (Interview by Luis Harss and Bárbara Dohmann. “Julio Cortázar o la cachetada metafísica.” *Los nuestros*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana. 1966: 262)

⁴⁹ Soler Serrano, Joaquín. “Entrevista a Julio Cortázar”. *Grandes personajes a fondo*. Archivo audiovisual de RTVE. Madrid: 1977. *Youtube*. Web.

Through a literary perspective, Cortázar appeared to have sought to examine the effects of politics on an individual's personal and intimate spheres: from the forces that lead one to leave his country to the forces that hinder his return. This search would gradually and inevitably permeate the writer's life and work as the conditions and categorization of his displacement fluctuated with Argentina's volatile political scenario.

1.2.2. 'Desde el lado de allá': Cortázar and diaspora

For Cortázar, distance not only became a source of sorrow, but also a crucial position from which to view and understand Argentina. In the years since his transplantation to France, Cortázar had articulated the double-edged effect of distance: while the pain of separation is always present, distance eventually becomes a privileged position from which clarity can be obtained. Hence, this attitude towards distance, which throughout his life had been refined and recalibrated though never changed, can be observed since the beginning of his uprooting. In Paris, a newly arrived Cortázar expressed his anger, frustration and love for Argentina in the poem "La Patria."⁵⁰ The poem⁵¹ mirrored his "estado de ánimo en la época en que decidí marcharme del país."⁵² In this poem, Argentina is depicted as a battered nation, devoid of hope and plagued by insurmountable problems. However, what is most significant for the purposes of this thesis is Cortázar's treatment of distance. In a fragment, the poem reads:

⁵⁰ The poem was published in 1955 in a collection titled *Razones de cólera*.

⁵¹ Cortázar had said that he had published few poems because he had written them mostly for himself. "Yo siempre publicaba muy pocos poemas porque son siempre muy para mí," he had said in an interview with Televisión Española.

⁵² Cortázar, Julio. *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos*. México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1968: 195.

La tierra entre los dedos, la basura en los ojos,
ser argentino es estar triste, ser argentino es estar lejos.⁵³

In Cortázar's view, distance and exile were integral parts to being Argentine because it allowed for a clearer perspective of the motherland and it contextualized one's nation against and amongst all others.⁵⁴ For the Cortázar of "La Patria," identity is tightly tied to and conditioned by historical circumstances rather than "natural facts,"⁵⁵ such as race, blood or soil. This position also signals another of Cortázar's stances with respect to the concept of nation, which sees the link between nation, identity and culture to state or a territorially defined space as artificial, and an inclination to search for continental unity. (I explore this subject in depth in the third chapter of this thesis.) For the purposes of this section, I concentrate on the writer's treatment and reflection of distance. His approach to distance had fundamentally remained the same throughout his life – the younger Cortázar taking a more critical position and his older self conceding a more contemplative and forgiving tone. Some scholars have noted that Cortázar's treatment of distance and exile possesses an underlying tone of redemption that perhaps was fashioned to appease criticism and guilt over a feeling of desertion and abandonment of Argentina. In fact, according to Diana Sorenson's insightful observation, for Cortázar, separation and distance were the precondition to revelation. Sorenson sustains that Cortázar kept going back to the question of exile "so as to fashion it in a way which would strip it of the notion of disloyalty and voluntary separation" (358). Indeed, Cortázar had kept circling

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ "A los ojos de Cortázar, el alejarse de la patria le había abierto paso hacia una perspectiva nueva sobre ella" (Standish 467).

⁵⁵ Appadurai, Arjun. "Patriotism and Its Futures." *Public Culture*. 5.3(1993): 414.

and recalibrating the concept of exile in the latter years of his life. In 1983, a year before his death caused by leukemia, the healthy looking writer with his distinctive thick black hair and beard reflected upon the “positive” side of the exilic experience, which he said provided him with a broader and deeper understanding of Argentina and Latin America, and extracted him from what he deemed an “insular” existence. For this reason, he considered an important task of his to foreground, amid the sorrow and arresting nostalgia, what he perceived to be the benefits of distance and displacement.⁵⁶ I argue that in Cortázar’s statement and yearning to create a “positive” side of displacement is an underlying attempt to articulate an identity and create a space for the displaced community, an attempt that is materialized in the Trottoirs project.

Arguably one of the positive sides of his particular self-imposed exile was the awakening and exercising of a political conscience that simultaneously became more transnational and regional, and led him to embrace the ideas behind the Cuban Revolution, the *Sandinista* movement in Nicaragua and to the writing of *Libro de Manuel* in 1973. Widely criticized by leftists and conservatives for its political ideology and by the author himself for its literary value, *Libro de Manuel* was published to denounce the Argentine military junta’s exploits in the late 1960s and early 1970s as well as other similar actions throughout South America that led to a period of state terrorism in the region. *Libro de Manuel* marked two important junctures in Cortázar’s work and life: it

⁵⁶ In an interview at Librería El Juglar in 1983, Cortázar said: “El hecho de irme de mi país me llevó a conocer mejor la realidad latinoamericana en su conjunto... una de las crueles paradojas del exilio es que de todas maneras te saca en algunas casos de una visión un poco provinciana, un poco insular cuando sumergido en tu contexto y solamente en tu contexto, y de golpe te muestra que el mundo es más complejo y por lo tanto tu propia pequeña isla lo es también más compleja... eso sería el lado positivo de una cosa tan negativa y tan desgarradora como es el exilio. Es por eso que en estos años a mí me pareció elemental y necesario crear una especie de visión positiva del exilio, llevar un aliento a quienes a veces por no haber reflexionado demasiado en este problema se hunden en la nostalgia, se hunden en la tristeza”.

was his first significant work in which literature was directed by a political cause, and it sealed his condition as an exile when the Argentine regime headed by Alejandro Agustín Lanusse considered the book an open affront against the government.

Cortázar, who had always reiterated his uprooting was the product of a free and personal decision, realized at that moment, shockingly, that he was indeed in exile. Since then the notion of exile loomed more prominent in his thought and work, in an attempt to understand it, refashion it, redeem it and, perhaps most significantly, to find his place within it. In a 1977 interview with Televisión Española's "Grandes Personajes A Fondo", Cortázar told host Joaquín Soler Serrano he had come to realize that he was at that point in time (a year after the beginning of the Argentine Dirty War and four years after the publication of *Libro de Manuel*) indeed an exile "en el sentido más patético y más terrible de la palabra."⁵⁷ Cortázar's conception and definition of exile was in constant flux, perhaps in an attempt to reconfigure the word, to divest it, as Sorenson points out, of the notion of desertion. According to Sorenson, the writer emphasized that "geographic separation did not preclude strong affiliation and commitment" (358).

Cortázar's efforts were contradictory nonetheless. While ideologically he seemed to have leaned toward a postmodern thought of nations as imaginary communities, he also showed signs, especially in his attempts to reconfigure the concept of exile, of a modernist conception of nation. That is, within his thought of distance and exile is a struggle between the denial of postmodernity and the affirmation of the modern nation. This dichotomy and development of his thought on nation are exemplified in separate interviews, two decades apart. In one, a younger Cortázar considered that mankind

⁵⁷ Interview in Televisión Española.

should embrace *mestizaje* and the fusion of borders in order to eliminate “los patrioterismos, los nacionalismos de frontera absurdos e insensatos.”⁵⁸ A decade later, Cortázar, much different from the one who was advocating for the erasure of artificial borders and hence for the dissolution of nation, considered the return to the homeland a vital part in the journey of an exile:

... todo exiliado que sigue trabajando, que sigue luchando, que se sigue perfeccionando en el exilio lo está haciendo para perfeccionar su país porque el regreso está contenido en su plan de vida. Él no va a suponer jamás que él va a morir en el exilio. Él va a volver a su país. Y yo estoy seguro que vamos a volver todos.⁵⁹

Cortázar’s notion of nation – still an imaginary community but one rooted in a certain physical territory – started to transform into a concept in which postmodern (fragmentary) and modern (whole) ideas of nation were confronted as his condition of exile and the impossibility of a return to the home he left materialized.

What results from this friction and struggle is not a total cancellation of each idea but a series of realizations that would come to shade and even permeate his most sentimental work, *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* (1980). In this work, notions of distance, exile, nostalgia and nation undergo slight and subtle changes that contribute an insightful and even innovative tone to the discourse of diaspora.⁶⁰ In this work, clues emerge to aid in the understanding of Cortázar’s categorization within the spectrum of displaced subjects. Although Cortázar identified himself as an exile after years of eluding the term, this category does not envelope all of the writer’s movements and displacements nor the

⁵⁸ Interview with Televisión Española.

⁵⁹ Interview Librería El Juglar.

⁶⁰ The discourse of diaspora can also be termed exile discourse, to employ scholar Hamid Naficy’s concept.

position changes displayed and played with in *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires*.⁶¹ I argue that Cortázar's positions and identification cannot be fixed nor contained within one category as he traveled between nomadism, diaspora and exile. In fact, what is most intriguing and interesting about Cortázar's movement between these categories is an inherent refusal to remain fixed (just as he could have been labeled as an exile, he displayed the characteristics of a nomad; just as he was dismissed as a tourist, he would assert his love and commitment to the idea of nation) and hence an attempt to diffuse the arbitrary link between nation and state, between nation and physical territory becomes apparent. The writer's movement within the spectrum of displacement can largely be attributed to the political upheavals and social changes that hit Argentina and Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century and that influenced Cortázar's worldview and his political participation.

Amid this fluidity and elusiveness, this chapter attempts to locate, though not pin down, not only the different positions Cortázar has occupied within the spectrum of displacement but also to identify the loci from which the subject of this study, *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires*, was composed. The question of positioning and unpositioning becomes crucial in the context of nation when viewed from the perspective of Stuart Hall. In his essay "Cultural identity and diaspora," Hall proposes that national identity and cultural identity are "not an essence but a positioning." That is, national and cultural identities are discourses that are constructed within and against a context and enunciated from a

⁶¹ The second chapter of this thesis argues that the *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* album employs the tango dance dialectics to parody, examine and contest the imperialist forces in tango. I rely on tango theorist Marta Savigliano's reading of the dance which employs the triadic configuration of the dance (the dancer in the leading role, the dancer in the following role and the observer, or as Savigliano calls it, the gaze) to establish an analogical model of cultural imperialism: the colonizer takes the position of the gaze, and the dancers occupy the position of the colonized.

specific location. Hall argues there are two ways of thinking about cultural identity: one posits “a shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’” and another suggests that while there are “many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference” (394). In other words, cultural identity can be understood from a position of oneness and wholeness, and from a position of fragmentation. Following these ideas, I argue that Cortázar, who grew up in the margins of the city, who moved from the periphery to the center, had always traveled between the positions of oneness and fragmentation. I further argue that even before Cortázar permanently moved to Paris his language was contained within some sort of exile discourse, which “must therefore not only deal with the problem of location but also the continuing problematic of multiple locations” (Naficy 2). However, Cortázar’s movement cannot be viewed only as a ceaseless changing of locations. His is an experience of perpetual displacement, which can be characterized as nomadism. Cultural studies scholar Caren Kaplan defines the nomad as “one who can track a path through a seemingly illogical space without succumbing to nation-state . . . organization. . . . the nomad represents a subject position that offers an idealized model of movement based on perpetual displacement” (66). Greg Richards and Julie Wilson expand this concept further to assert that the nomad also practices “an idealized form of travel as liberation from the constraints of modern society. The global nomad crosses physical and cultural barriers with apparent ease in the search for difference and differentiation” (Richards and Wilson 5).

Exile, diasporic, nomad. Cortázar is all and none. His categorization and positioning within the spectrum of displacement varies at different points in his life. His identification (voluntary or imposed) was dependent on the historical and personal

circumstances that surrounded and conditioned his traveling. The employment of different ideas of displacement – exile, diaspora, nomadism –, therefore, are not intended to categorize Cortázar but to shade and theoretically approximate not only the positions of enunciation he has occupied but also his act of traveling. I argue that in the act of traveling and the idea of displacement is an underlying notion of a home or a motherland as an ideal unit that provides an anchoring effect and, most importantly, a place (physical or imagined) of belonging for the diasporic subject. Cortázar's experience of displacement traveled many ranges: from the personal to the political, from the individual to the collective, from a city to the world. In these changes of the location of enunciation, the notions of home and nation appear to be the axis around which these travels revolve. Therefore, in the *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* project, the question of loci and changing of positions is pivotal in the articulation of a problematic national identity. In these movements between spaces and ideas, a unified and consistent concept of nation and of home is elusive — a proposition that is both heartbreaking and liberating because while it shatters the possibility of a homecoming, it also frees the idea of nation from the reins of politics and physical territory. The ideas of home and motherland, nonetheless, are critical in the imaginary of the displaced subject. In the case of Cortázar and of the *Trottoirs* project, home is not an actual physical space anchored within specific geographic coordinates, but a state of mind, a shared memory invoked from a distance. Nostalgia, then, becomes a pivotal device and a problematic instrument that Cortázar employs in the *Trottoirs* project to evoke and invoke home from diaspora. As elucidated in the following quote from Cortázar's interview in 1977, the Buenos Aires that is

recovered through distance and nostalgia becomes in the writer's eyes a truer and purer version of home:

No es que yo no amara Buenos Aires cuando estaba en ella... era un pedacito de Buenos Aires y la vivía. Y sobre todo en la juventud uno vive la ciudad muy especial... la ciudad noctámbula, la del puerto, la ciudad del bajo como decimos nosotros, los cafés... Es una ciudad muy hermosa, muy extraña... pero yo pienso que con la distancia hubo una especie de decantación, de purificación. Apareció en mí una Buenos Aires más íntegra, más total.⁶²

As travelers yearning for home, Cortázar and tango have relied on the diffuse hand of memory to recall and to remind of better times. Specifically in the *Trottoirs* project, Cortázar employs tango to reconstruct and materialize memory in the present. The writer, who used to receive photos of Buenos Aires (of a city where chickens roamed and wagons ran, of street corners and stone stairs), had observed that news of home often drifted into his life in Paris with the sound of tango: “Y poco a poco esos textos fueran viniendo como una especie de canto, un tango, un tango que acompañaba a mi Buenos Aires.”⁶³ Home, for Cortázar the displaced, would become a place that arrived in fragments (news pieces, photographs, songs) and that became whole only in the mind of the diasporic subject. Perhaps Cortázar found in tango a kindred traveler and nomad that like him had left home but never ceased to yearn for and recall it. Perhaps it was this affinity that propelled the writer to embark on the *Trottoirs* project in the latter years of his life. Their commonalities, however, go beyond and deeper. For Cortázar and for tango, distance and separation seemed to have been pivotal and painful factors in their

⁶² Interview Televisión Española.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

development as cultural icons and in their relation with nation. Both, as they have cemented as integral parts of Argentine culture, have undoubtedly become metonymies of the nation whose image is evoked when the sound of tango is heard or when Cortázar's texts are read.

1.3. Trottoirs de Buenos Aires: The confluence of Cortázar and tango

The Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project is Cortázar's most direct incursion into tango and his most exhaustive and profound usage of the genre. In the last section of this chapter I briefly survey tango's presence in the works of the Argentine writer and the manners in which tango has been employed in his works previous to Trottoirs. These two steps will establish the context and conditions in which the Trottoirs project was produced. Lastly, I briefly explore the origin and production of Trottoirs. Setting the Trottoirs project in context foregrounds the importance of this piece within Cortázar's body of work and approximates the place the Trottoirs project occupies within the production of tango in diaspora.

Music has played an essential role in Cortázar's life and writing. His love and admiration of jazz is evident in short stories such as "El perseguidor" (a piece that was inspired by one of Cortázar's jazz heroes, Charlie Parker) and the novel *Rayuela*, where jazz serves as the soundscape for the lives of the characters in "el lado de allá" and often acts as a subject that provides the paradigm with which actions develop and characters perform.⁶⁴ Cortázar's fascination with jazz was such that his writing was imbued with the rhythm to the point his prose had to sound like jazz, otherwise it was discarded. Tango,

⁶⁴ To read about jazz influence in "El perseguidor," please visit:
http://www.scielo.cl/scielo.php?pid=S0717-68482003002800004&script=sci_arttext

on the other hand, which served as a soundscape for *Rayuela*'s "lado de acá," seems to occupy a subtler,⁶⁵ substratum and niched space in the Argentine's artistic production.

Studies of Cortázar and tango are still few and mostly limited to recovery and unearthing efforts. However, inquiries into the role of tango in Cortázar's literary production have started to emerge, signaling that tango's presence in Cortázar's work is stronger than previously thought, and perhaps in a less traditional⁶⁶ and more nuanced way.

In *Las Músicas de Cortázar*, for instance, tango scholar Juan Vicente Peiró affirms that the presence of tango in the writer's work is more prominent than presumed. In a detailed overview of the presence of tango in Cortázar's work, Peiró brings tango to the fore and itemizes the instances in which the genre is mentioned or employed in the writer's pieces. Tango not only serves as the soundscape in short stories and poems, being "Las puertas del cielo" an emblematic one, but also provides the paradigms and the tropes — in its music, dance and cultural incarnations — for Cortázar's writings. Peiró notes that unlike other Argentine writers of his generation, such as Borges, who used tango as a sort of national symbol, "Cortázar no participa en esta mixtificación patriótica"; my project disputes this point.⁶⁷ Walter Bruno Berg, for his part, considers in his analysis of the *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* album that tango in Cortázar's writing is employed as an

⁶⁵ I should note, however, that this thesis project focuses not on the subtle touch of tango in Cortázar's writing but in the writer's more direct incursion into the genre.

⁶⁶ Cortázar's use of tango — especially in the *Trottoirs* project — deviated from the traditional use of tango in literature, which has employed the genre's mythology and vocabulary, as well as utilize it as a soundscape.

⁶⁷ This paper disputes this point, arguing that in Cortázar's most direct incursion in tango, the *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* project, he indeed participates in the mystification of nation.

instrument of rupture with the aesthetics of tradition. Leonardo Bacarreza, in his study of the word tango in Borges' work, traced a parallel between tango and the moral history of Argentina in Cortázar's writing.

Scholar Guillermo Anad performs a more profound reading of tango in the works of Cortázar, dating the writer's employment of and interest in the genre to a period prior to his exilic voyage to Europe. Anad argues that in Cortázar's poem "1950, año del Libertador, etc." the writer "parece revitalizar la vocación tanguera de la literatura argentina" (56). Furthermore, Anad suggests Cortázar employed tango in a decolonizing gesture by inserting *lunfardo* and the *voseo* – key traits of the language of Buenos Aires – into his poems. This move, which follows the steps of renowned Golden-Age tango lyricists such as Enrique Cadícamo and Homero Manzi, subverts the dominant paradigm of "proper" Spanish and affirms the specificity of *porteño* life and identity.

With tango, Cortázar appeals to the collective sentiment of a specific group of people who have undergone the same series of social, historical and political vicissitudes that have shaped the *porteño* experience. Anad notes that Cortázar had referred to tango as a sort of mnemonic device that recalls the better times in the past amid the dark present. This is especially relevant and poignant when considering that the composition of the opening track of the *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* album, "Medianoche aquí," was performed during Argentina's Dirty War. In that period, tango had become for Cortázar "la memoria traumática que acarrear esas maquinaciones nacionales" (Anad 82). Hence, tango transformed for the writer: from a mere sentimental sound that delves into the intimate and interior world of the *porteños* to a mnemonic device that figures as a

historical subject and a witness to the molding of national discourses and narratives.⁶⁸ For Cortázar, who often received news of a convoluted Argentina while listening to tango songs in France, tango was the link that hinged two spaces and two times together. The writer explained:

Y nunca viniendo solos, magdalenas de Gardel o de Laurenz tirando a la cara los olores y las luces del barrio [...] Nunca viniendo solos, y en estos últimos años tan pegados a nuestro exilio, que no es el del Lejano Buenos Aires de una clásica bohemia porteña sino el destierro en masa, tifón del odio y el miedo. Escuchar hoy aquí los viejos tangos ya no es una ceremonia de la nostalgia; este tiempo, esta historia los han cargado de horror y de llanto, los han vuelto máquinas mnemónicas, emblemas de todo lo que se venía preparando, desde tan atrás y tan adentro en la Argentina.⁶⁹

This statement sheds a clear light into the reasons that propelled Cortázar to work on the *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* project in the late 1970s and early 1980s, thirty years after he left Argentina and near the end of his life. In his most direct incursion into the genre, the writer along with two Argentine musicians exiled in Paris released a collection of tangos entitled *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires*, which was not coincidentally the name of the first tango salon in Paris where the second renaissance of the music genre and dance form took place and which Cortázar godfathered in 1981. Of the ten tangos in the album, Cortázar wrote six poems⁷⁰ which composer Edgardo Cantón set to music. Through the nasal and velvety voice of Juan “Tata” Cedrón, the songs exude an unabashed nostalgia

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Cited in Anad, 81-82.

⁷⁰ The *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* contains ten tracks, six of which have lyrics and four are instrumental. Cortázar wrote the following songs: “Medianoche aquí,” “Tu piel bajo la luna,” “Veredas de Buenos Aires,” “Java,” “La camarada” and “La Cruz del Sur.” The instrumental tracks are: “Guante azul,” “Tras su rastro,” “El buscador” and “Paso y quiero.” All music was composed by Edgardo Cantón.

for home and the resignation that returning is an impossible task — an impossibility that loomed more salient in the midst of the military junta in Argentina. The birth of the *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* project (a term I employ to refer to the album and salon as a whole) was simple and somehow mundane: A group of friends, sharing the same love for tango, decided to join efforts and create a piece of art. Cortázar’s account of the project’s birth is devoid of the veneer of mysticism that usually accompanies the anecdotes of the origin of artistic projects:

In recent years, friends of mine have played tangos here; the Cuarteto Cedrón are great friends, and a fine bandoneón player named Juan José Mosalini—so we’ve listened to tangos, talked about tangos. Then one day a poem came to me like that, which I thought perhaps could be set to music, I didn’t really know. And then, looking among unpublished poems (most of my poems are unpublished), I found some short poems which those fellows could set to music, and they did. Also, we’ve done the opposite as well. Cedrón gave me a musical theme to which I wrote the words. So I’ve done it both ways.⁷¹

The album, deemed a “more traditional, more standard” tango style by singer Cedrón, was released with a somber cover art reminiscent of the paintings of the *porteño* neighborhood La Boca by expatriate Argentine artist Antonio Seguí, a series of nondescript photos of the Buenos Aires landscape, photographs of Cortázar with Cantón and Cedrón, sitting around a table, drinking. A liner note essay by French journalist and writer Pierre Kalfon notes that the *Trottoirs* album is both a serious and playful exercise in nostalgia and a reflection of contemporary Argentina, where “il est toujours minuit” — where it is always midnight. Kalfon writes:

Si l’on y [album] prend garde, si on écoute attentivement la musique de Edgardo Cantón, on découvre autre chose un “tango

⁷¹ Interview with *The Paris Review*.

dans le tango”, un espèce de parodie amicale qui, sans trahir le modèle ancien, le modernise fortement, l’enrichit d’innovations rythmiques et mélodiques originales, de bourrasques de bandoneón, de mélancolie violonée, de contrebasse angoisse, mais aussi, comme dans “Paso y quiero”, par exemple, une allégresse totale, ravageuse, très audacieuse.⁷²

A year after the album’s release, the eponymous salon opened. The legendary café-concert nestled in the center of Paris became the stage for tango’s second renaissance in France and played an important role in shaping how tango is marketed and consumed.⁷³ During its nine years of operation, from 1981 to 1990, the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires salon hosted the most celebrated tango acts on both sides of the Atlantic, from Astor Piazzolla to Osvaldo Pugliese, and helped launch the European career of Argentine tango artists and orchestras such as Sexteto Mayor. In its inception, the Trottoirs salon set the spotlight on music, reversing the presentation order of tango’s most representative iterations and reshuffling the music-dance rivalry. Tango music and dance, though complementary, have a long and pronounced rivalry inside and outside the borders of its territorial landscape, each art form trying to stake its legitimacy and capture the spotlight as the superior representative of tango in export. Dance usually has been the tango iteration that captures the most attention in exoticism-starved places such as Europe, while the music was relegated as a mere accompaniment to the sensual and complex dance movements. One reason of this phenomenon is that the dance presents

⁷² “If we pay attention to the album, if we listen closely to the music of Edgardo Cantón, we will discover something else ‘a tango within the tango,’ a kind of amicable parody that, without betraying the traditional model, modernizes and nurtures it with rhythmic innovation and original melodies, the gusts of the bandoneón, the melancholy of the violin, the anguish of the bass. But, at same time, like in ‘Paso y quiero,’ it infuses tango with utter, devastating and bold joy” (my translation). Kalfon, Pierre. Liner notes. Cortázar, Julio. “Trottoirs de Buenos Aires”. Polydor. 1980. LP

⁷³ The salon set the scheme for how tango is taught and hence marketed today: weekly lessons with separate practice sessions and *milongas* or dance parties.

itself as the more accessible form of tango. Despite its difficult learning curve, the dance can be mastered and practiced by those incognizant of the tango language (which includes knowledge of Spanish and tango mythology, for instance). *Tango cantado*, on the other hand, is more hermetic because it requires knowledge and mastery of the tango language. Another reason the dance has claimed the spotlight is the alterations performed to the genre during Perón's time in power (1946-1955). The Argentine diaspora, whose displacement was mostly due to their opposition to *Peronismo*, contested the dance-music order and instituted a preference of music over dance. The favoring of dance or music, therefore, became a matter of national identity and political positioning for diasporic subjects: only those who truly belong, who truly speak the language of tango can appreciate and understand the music; and only those who speak the language of tango can articulate nation. This inclination is reflected, for example, in the tango musicians in Paris who have often complained that they are asked to play danceable music, pushing aside the performance of classics, which are usually not easily danceable.⁷⁴ In the case of *Trottoirs*, I argue that the project initially relegated the dance as a way to contest Perón's manipulation of the genre. That is, *Trottoirs* returns tango to its original and conventional paradigm in which music claims the prime spot. The *café-concert*, though, eventually incorporated dance into its repertoire and thus became the site where the relationship between the dance and music was rethought and reconciled.

The symbiotic relation between tango's most representative forms is undeniable. The dance cannot subsist without the music, and the music would not have had the

⁷⁴ For a short study of the rivalry between tango dance and music in Paris, please read, Apprill, Christophe. "De la musique à la danse, l'autre couple du tango". *Musurgia*. 6.2 (1999): 73-88.

eventual scope of international exposure without the dance. The Trottoirs salon's initial focus on the music reflected this divide, which was extrapolated to an even grander divide between those who were deemed to truly belong to the tango nation and those who dabble in it following their curiosity and thirst for exoticism. In general terms, citizenship in tango is determined by the subject's knowledge and capacity to appreciate the music. A couple of years after its debut, the Trottoirs salon, by popular demand, opened its doors to dance. Tango dance, which for the first couple of years was treated as an accompaniment to the music, was brought to the forefront of Trottoirs' repertoire when the salon started offering Argentine tango classes and held the first *milonga* in Europe.⁷⁵

One of the venue's founders, composer Cantón recalls that the advent of the dance in the then-music-exclusive venue was initiated by the audience, which requested a dance party. The orchestra, the Sexteto Mayor, had initially declined the idea because they didn't know how to play danceable tangos. However, eventually, the orchestra agreed to play a danceable tango between instrumental pieces. From then on, Cantón affirms, the Trottoirs salon began to organize *milongas*.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Hatem, Fabrice. "La danse aux 'Trottoirs de Buenos Aires' : quelques souvenirs de Victor et Carmen". *La Salida*. 29 (2002).

⁷⁶ "Le public venait pour la musique, mais réagissait toujours de manière très enthousiaste lorsque nous évoquions la danse. Par exemple, le Sexteto Mayor est venu à plusieurs reprises en 1981 et 1982 à notre invitation, ce qui a lancé leur carrière européenne. La deuxième fois, ils revenaient l'Allemagne et ont joué aux Trottoirs le 11 juillet. En les présentant, je dis au public, sur le ton de la confiance : "Et s'ils faisaient un bal tango pour le 14 juillet ?". La réaction a été si enthousiaste que les musiciens, qui ne comprenaient pas le français, m'ont demandé ce qui se passait. Je leur ai dit que le public voulait danser le tango pour le 14 juillet, mais que j'ai répondu que c'était impossible, car vous ne savez pas jouer pour la danse. J'avais réussi à piquer leur orgueil, et ils m'ont répondu immédiatement que, bien sûr, ils savaient le faire, et qu'ils allaient le montrer. Trois jours plus tard, ils jouaient au Palace, dans une salle comble: 30 thèmes, epris deux fois chacun: l'un en instrumental, l'autre pour la danse. Le public était ravi. A partir de là, on a commencé à organiser des stages et des bals le dimanche après-midi avec Carmen — qui venait de la danse contemporaine — et Victor. Il y avait beaucoup de monde. L'idée de la revue Tango Argentino est également née aux Trottoirs." Hatem, Fabrice. "L'aventure du "Trottoirs de Buenos Aires"". *La Salida*. 29 (2002).

In this renaissance of *tango argentino*, the steps were reappropriated and tango “as it once was” was taught, according to the salon’s first tango dance instructor, Carmen Aguiar. By stripping the tango genre of arbitrary hierarchies and rivalries, the Trottoirs salon not only reconciled and nurtured the relation between music and dance, between musicians and dancers, but it also began a process of decolonization⁷⁷ Although arguable, *Trottoirs’* songs are hardly danceable; they are tango songs for listening. This creates an interesting dynamic, not only in the dialectics previously discussed of the songs, but also in the angles from which *Trottoirs* attempts to subvert exoticization and to refashion the idea of Buenos Aires. The dance is “easier” to exoticize not only because of its eye-catching sensuality and otherness that puts it in center stage. The music, which lies in the background, is less accessible (because, in part, of the linguistic barrier) and, thus, more difficult to appropriate and exoticize. By focusing on music first, the Trottoirs project restores tango's social commentary aspect that was displaced by Perón's regime, establishes the terms in which tango is produced and consumed and, subsequently and consequently, takes control of a strand in the narrative of tango and nation. The introduction of dance in the project levels the status between the two art forms in tango, I argue, but it also gives the citizens of the tango nation a physical and material avenue to individually articulate an alternate national narrative within a collective and collaborative space.

Today, the album is little known and out of print; the salon, a legendary space, had been shuttered because of financial troubles. However, the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project is, in this study’s consideration, a profound treatment of tango and of nation. It

⁷⁷ This topic is addressed more profoundly in the second chapter of this thesis.

not only contributes to the diasporic shade in tango, but it also delves into the discourses and paradigms that govern the genre to question it and, in turn, to posit an even bigger project: to examine the notion of nation and its shortcomings. The Trottoirs project, in my view, foregrounds the postnational and transnational characteristics of tango, as artists such as Piazzolla did. By extracting tango from the nationalist paradigm, the Trottoirs project questions nation to approximate the idea that Argentina lies beyond its physical, territorial borders. In expanding or diffusing the borders of the nation, the Trottoirs project attempts to ameliorate the agony of exile and soften the sorrow of separation.

CHAPTER 2

PHANTOM OF BUENOS AIRES

In 1980, Cortázar alongside two Argentine musicians exiled in Paris, singer Juan “Tata” Cedrón and composer Edgardo Cantón, released a collection of tangos entitled *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires*, a work that exudes a pivotal and fundamental characteristic of tango: the two-way nostalgia for a lost home and time — nostalgia of those who immigrated to Argentina and yearned for Europe, and those who embarked on the reversed journey generations later. In 1981, a salon bearing the album’s name was opened under the artistic direction of Cantón, and with the blessing of Cortázar, who became the godfather of the salon. The venue was the first tango café-concert of its kind in Europe, and during its nine years of existence it became a mythical space for the Argentine and *rioplatense*⁷⁸ community and culture in Paris. Tango musicians and dancers, writers and intellectuals gathered in the Trottoirs salon, which played a pivotal role in the second renaissance of tango in the 1980s. Like seven decades before when a low-brow tango arrived in France to gain vindication and international projection, the genre once more had found in Paris a fertile ground from which to flourish away from the

⁷⁸ The term *rioplatense* refers to the inhabitants of the Río de la Plata region, which encompasses both Argentine and Uruguayan territories.

grips of the Argentine dictatorship that manipulated it to aid its political aims.⁷⁹ The Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project, a term I employ to refer to the album and the salon as a whole, became the site where tango as a cultural product and Buenos Aires as an imagined community⁸⁰ could grow free from the wounds and scars of the Dirty War that ravaged Argentina from 1976 to 1983.

Hence, this chapter analyzes the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project: the album, which contains ten tango songs (Cortázar wrote the lyrics of the six sung tango songs; the remaining four were instrumental songs) as well as the cover art and liner notes, and the Trottoirs salon. I argue that the Trottoirs project creates a space for the diasporic community to articulate an alternate narrative for a nation ravaged by the Argentine military junta. Each one of the Trottoirs project's iterations performs a specific function that results in the creation and materialization of a space where an alternate national discourse can be voiced. Thus, the album is read as the blueprint and model of this space, and the salon is interpreted as the materialization of the site envisioned by the album. I study the album in the first section of this chapter. Through the lenses of postcolonial theory, I argue that Cortázar with a double gesture of demystification-exotization constructs an imaginary Buenos Aires that subsists and sometimes supplants its physical and actual counterpart. This analysis will first study, through a close reading and listening of the poem-songs, how *Trottoirs* utilizes the tango dance and lyric dynamics to establish the politics of location in the construction of space; then, I examine how *Trottoirs*, from

⁷⁹ To read more how tango was utilized to further political discourse, please refer to the first chapter of this thesis.

⁸⁰ The concept of imagined communities, coined by Benedict Anderson, is addressed and studied in further detail in the third chapter of this thesis.

the locus of diaspora, assumes the postcolonial discourse to demystify Buenos Aires and later exoticize it (this section will focus primarily in the tangos “Medianoche, aquí,” “Veredas de Buenos Aires” and “La Cruz del Sur”). Next, I study the Trottoirs salon through a Foucaultian reading. I propose that the salon is a heterotopic site where the narration and construction of an alternate home takes place. Through this analysis, the Trottoirs project emerges as a profound and exhaustive treatment and study of tango that employs the genre’s fundamental characteristics to construct a space that could be called home in the absence of an actual possibility of return.

2.1. On the other side of the mirror: A brief story of Trottoirs

Sitting in an elegant café at the Parisian district of Les Halles, tango dancer and teacher Carmen Aguiar was flooded with memories. A legendary figure of the Parisian tango scene, Aguiar agreed to meet me and reminisce about the days she taught tango dance in the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires salon in the early 1980s, when the dictatorship-embattled genre revived and boomed once again. During my visit in 2009, tango, like three decades ago, seemed to have been at a crossroads: City ordinances threatened to shut down one of Paris’ most iconic *milongas* at the Seine’s riverbanks, stylistic differences caused division among dancers, regional and cultural idiosyncrasies fragmented the tango scene, and the fear that the soul of tango was slipping away was brewing. In the face of all this, Aguiar looked back, thirty years into the past, treading her memory to the birth and boon of Trottoirs de Buenos Aires.⁸¹

Trottoirs the Buenos Aires opened in 1981 and became a legendary venue for its

⁸¹ This information was gathered during research for an article published in *The Salt Lake Tribune*: Pineda, Suan. “Ghosts, love stories and tango in Paris.” *The Salt Lake Tribune* 7 Aug. 2009: H6. Print.

emphasis on live tango music and soon after for its dance. The salon was nestled in the old market district of Les Halles, often regarded as the belly of Paris. Located on the Parisian promenade Rue des Lombards, famous for its jazz clubs, the Trottoirs salon occupied until its closure in 1990 an unassuming space that spills onto a cobblestone street behind a church where Henry IV was assassinated. And today, squeezed between restaurants and bars, the spot that once harbored the salon is now the green-hued gay bar named Wolf. Standing at the entrance of the now-defunct Trottoirs, Aguiar described the bar's past life: the crowd that overflowed onto the streets to dance, the cracked wooden floors she helped fix. Aguiar explained the salon was enacted to resemble a *tanguería porteña*.⁸² The salon was simply decorated, devoid of gaucho memorabilia, unlike most Parisian tango salons, emphasized Aguiar, who noted the incongruity of adorning a cosmopolitan *tanguería* with rural objects. As I looked around me, a narrow street flanked by cafés, bars and clubs that are tightly juxtaposed, I realized that this little slice of Paris where Trottoirs resided among aging low buildings could be mistaken for a Buenos Aires street. The salon and the site it occupied in the French capital were highly evocative of the aesthetics of the album, which in turn attempted to evoke a slice and time of Buenos Aires. It's a play of emulation, reflection, evocation and enactment in which each action's boundaries are blurred and finally result in ambiguity. This ambiguity is, arguably, the main achievement of the Trottoirs project. Through ambiguity, travel across spaces, locations, positions and time is possible without an actual physical displacement. That is, through ambiguity the home of yesteryear — the one that no longer exists in actuality — can be returned to.

⁸² A salon in Buenos Aires where tango is played and danced.

For Aguiar, who continues to teach tango dancing more than four decades after she left a politically tumultuous Uruguay to set down roots in France, tango was crucial in her transplantation. Tango not only provided the familiarity of home in a new and sometimes hostile city, but it also worked as the vessel to remember, and, with that, it provided a space and a way to “travel” back home. However, Aguiar explained that her displacement had the inevitable effect of nostalgia inherent to immigrants, who metaphorically find themselves “al otro lado del espejo.”⁸³

For those stranded on the other side of the mirror, the Trottoirs project seemed to embark on the undertaking of creating, if not a reflection, a mirror image of Buenos Aires in which the city is not repeated but reproduced, reversed and contested. That is, the Trottoirs project does not create a replica of home in a diasporic space but a site where an alternate Buenos Aires can be articulated. In creating a mirror image of the city, the project is able to contest and question not only the general concepts of home and nation but also critique the negative impacts of the Argentine military regime by presenting a more hopeful scenario of a dictatorship-liberated home. In this chapter, I study how the Trottoirs project (composed of the album, which establishes the parameters and blueprint of home, and the salon, the materialization of the construction sketched in the album) attempts to conceive and create an alternate home and as a result provides the space from which an alternate national narrative can be articulated.

The Trottoirs project, hence, emerges as a space to preserve the Buenos Aires of Cortázar’s memories (and by extrapolation, the memory of those in exile) against the image of the city engendered by the Dirty War. In its effort of nostalgia and preservation,

⁸³ Ibid.

the Trottoirs project attempts to recover and reenact the city of the past with a return to the tango of yesteryear and the introduction of subtle innovations to the genre. The project also affirms the parallel between the narrative of Argentina and the narrative of tango as it dabbles into the concept of national discourse and identity⁸⁴ with the mystification of nation from a distanced and displaced space and time — from Paris looking into Buenos Aires, from 1980 gazing into 1950. However, despite Trottoirs nostalgic efforts of preservation, the project does not crystallize the recovered city of the past, as it does not *faithfully* recreate the sound of the Golden-Age tango. As journalist Pierre Kalfon notes in the liner notes of the album, a first listening of the songs would yield a sound reminiscent of the old-school tango, but a second listening would lead to the discovery of a tango within a tango, a “friendly parody that, without betraying past models, strongly modernizes, enriches with rhythmic innovations and original melodies [the tango].”⁸⁵ Neither a continuation nor a retelling of the tango discourse, the Trottoirs project could be qualified as a work that produces an alternate narrative for tango and for *argentinidad*. In a two-pronged operation, Trottoirs as an album delineates the contours of a space called home with a selective memory and a demystifying touch that foregrounds the imperialist and colonialist forces that constitute and are embedded in tango. In turn, Trottoirs as a salon is the materialization of the space sketched out in the album and where the articulation of an alternate national narrative (by musicians, dancers, spectators, exiles, displaced and diasporic subjects) can take place.

⁸⁴ This topic has been explored by many Argentine intellectuals, being Jorge Luis Borges and Ernesto Sábato the most notable.

⁸⁵ My translation.

In its mystification of nation and recreation of the home of Cortázar's memory, the *Trottoirs* album deploys a double gesture from the locus of diaspora: it demystifies home by liberating Buenos Aires from the domesticating gaze of Paris and it exoticizes the Argentine city, once again but in its own terms, to mimic Paris' imperial operation. To re- and auto-exoticize Buenos Aires, the album employs nostalgia, which allows it to select and recover the objects and signposts of a past home which in turn would constitute the building blocks for a refashioned Buenos Aires. The reconfigured city, up to this point an immaterial space, is effectively enacted in a heterotopic site that contests and inverts the image of Paris and the actual, physical Buenos Aires. This new home, the result of the aforementioned operations, becomes the stage on which a parallel national narrative is told through the narrative of tango. Through this analysis, the *Trottoirs* project emerges as a profound, multidimensional and exhaustive exploration of tango and its iterations that metonymically examines and challenges the concept of *argentinidad*. This topic is the focus of the next chapter. In this chapter I concentrate on the operations the *Trottoirs* project performs in order to create a space for an alternate narrative.

Here, I examine the *Trottoirs* project, which encompasses the album and the café-concert that opened in Paris a year after the album's debut, with an emphasis on Cortázar's songs, which were his main and most direct contribution to the project. In the study of the album, I focus on the lyrics, with a tangential examination of sound which plays a mirror-image role in relation to the lyrics, and the LP's cover art. The examination of the lyrics revolves around the employment of the dance dynamics to view home, and the play of the metaphor-metonymy binary as dual dimensions to articulate and mimic home. The *Trottoirs* salon and the album's cover art will take center stage

when analyzing the materialization of space, of a physical, real site where a utopic Buenos Aires is effectively enacted.⁸⁶

I employ theories on dance, postcolonialism, nostalgia and space to construct my argument. In the first section of this chapter, I use Marta Savigliano's ideas on the triadic configuration in tango dance. Savigliano, a political theorist and dance scholar, argues that it takes three to tango: the male dancer, the female dancer and the spectator that exoticizes the dancing couple. Homi Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry orients the analysis of the *Trottoirs* album's demystifying-exoticizing operation. Bhabha argues that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (126). By demystifying home, *Trottoirs* makes Buenos Aires recognizable to the spectator; by exoticizing Buenos Aires, *Trottoirs* renders home "not quite." But in the interstice between these two gestures remains an ambivalent excess. This is because the mimicry performed in the album, I argue, possesses a difference: *Trottoirs* mimics colonial mimicry, and yields not the exact Buenos Aires of the poetic voice's memories, but a reformed imaginary city that bears the tone of diaspora. The reconfigured city is constructed with signposts from the past that are partially rescued through nostalgia. The nostalgia of *Trottoirs* not only proposes to (re)build home but is also enamored of distance that renders the specificity of place ambiguous. Svetlana Boym's notions on restorative and reflective nostalgia will help deepen the characterization of *Trottoirs*' nostalgia and its particular capabilities. And lastly, for the second section of this chapter, Foucault's concept of heterotopia guides the study of space in the *Trottoirs* project's enactment of home in diaspora.

⁸⁶ Here, I am employing Michel Foucault's terminology on heterotopias.

2.2. Three to tango: Demystification and exotization of Buenos Aires

As hybrids, tango music and dance are the products of mimicry. An amalgam of different musical influences of African roots such as the *habanera* and *candombe*,⁸⁷ tango appropriated the traditional instruments and arrangement of classical music orchestras to reproduce a sound reminiscent of Europe but also reflective of its new hybrid reality. The introduction and elevation to principal instrument of the *bandoneón* is, I argue, a result of mimicry. As the unlikely member in a classical orchestra where the piano and violin usually claim the spotlight, the *bandoneón* produces the sound of "excess." The tango dance dynamics, though, provide a clearer paradigm and parallel of mimicry. Tango historian Nardo Zalko writes that the white upper-class observers domesticated the underground dances of the black communities, mimicking their raw sensual movements and transforming the dance into one of restraint, into one where the Other is recognizable.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ The *habanera* and the *candombe* are the two genres with the heaviest and most significant influence in tango. The former provided the rhythmic paradigm for tango's ancestor, the *milonga*, and the latter's rhythm and dance movements were incorporated into tango. Tango scholars concur that the *candombe*, a music and dance performed by Afro-Argentines that combined the practices and traditions from various parts of Africa, was an important source for tango dance steps. According to tango historian Simon Collier, tango borrowed several elements from the *candombe* and translated the movements from an individual's dance to a couple's dance. Hence, tango took from *candombe* the disassociation of the upper and lower body, walking with bent knees, and bending the knees to move closer to the ground. Most of all, tango was the product of the encounter of different and disparate cultures and peoples. Collier states: "The tango... was just a fusion of disparate and convergent elements: the jerky, semiathletic contortions of the *candombé*, the steps of the *milonga* and *mazurka*, the adapted rhythm and melody of the *habanera*. Europe, America and Africa all met in the *arrabales* of Buenos Aires, and thus the tango was born – by improvisation, by trial and error, and by spontaneous popular creativity." (Collier, Simon. "The Tango is Born: 1880s-1920s." *Tango: The Dance, the Song, the Story*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. 1995, 18-64). I would like to note that the blog, tangovoice.wordpress.com, which aims to explore how *tango argentino* is practiced in North America, has been an informative and helpful source for this footnote.

⁸⁸ To elaborate on Zalko's statement, I refer the reader to the section on tango history in Chapter 1 of this thesis. I also recur to Savigliano's analysis of the study of tango's "blackness" by Vicente Rossi, whose 1926 book *Cosas de negros* was the first text to mention the role of blacks in the origin of tango. For Rossi, Savigliano suggests, the appropriation by Argentine *pardos* of the movements mastered by black *milongueros* in Montevideo was a sign of decadence and loss. Techniques such as *cortes* and *quebradas*

While colonial mimicry repeats rather than re-presents, the *Trottoirs* album, produced in diaspora by artists who identified themselves as exiles, acquires the position of the observer, of the colonized gazing from the site of the colonizer, to reproduce. Through metaphors, in a demystifying gesture, *Trottoirs* draws a home by tracing broad strokes fashioned after the empire's image. Through metonymy, in an exoticizing gesture, *Trottoirs* reminds us that Buenos Aires is "the same, but not quite."⁸⁹

Sonically, *Trottoirs* assaults the listener with the piercing cry of the *bandoneón* and the density of the violin, setting the somber tone that predominates in the album. The elongated, dissonant and, to a certain extent, baroque melodies recall Astor Piazzolla's and Osvaldo Pugliese's compositions in their angular aesthetics. With the traditional and classic lineup of a tango quartet (*bandoneón*, piano, violin and counterbass), *Trottoirs* also bears a sound reminiscent of the orchestras of the 1940s and 1950s during tango's apogee in Buenos Aires. With the juxtaposition of savage aggressiveness and bleak tenderness, the soundscape of *Trottoirs* is an amalgam of counterpoints that mirror the lyrical dimension of the album. That is, I argue, the harmonious and caressing melodies are the normalizing sounds that demystify, while the dissonant and counterpoint strikes are the rupturing notes that exoticize and signal the presence of difference, of an excess.

(the former is a move that interrupts the trajectory of the dance; for instance, the lead dancer would set his foot in front of the follower's to cause a pause or to change direction; the latter is a displacement of the hips in order to change weight in place) that had the "capacity to enact 'true' maleness" when danced by black *milongueros* were transformed in the hands of the *pardos* into a "superficial and showy style contaminated by erotic preoccupations" (Rossi, quoted by Fernando Guibert, "The Argentine Compadrito." Translated by E. Gibson. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Promoción Nacional. 1972:63) (40). Rossi's essay, though praised for its effort to uncover and recover tango's black origins, is criticized for its patronizing perspective and tone that perpetuate the othering and marginalization of the Afro-Argentines in the story of tango. On the other hand, Savigliano, examining drawings depicting *milongas* in the late-nineteenth century as well as 1970s, notes that the *tango de negros* was depicted by white observers as animalesque, thus further reproducing the "racist association between blacks and 'primitiveness'" (33).

⁸⁹ Bhabha 126.

For instance, a first listening of the song would yield an instant feeling of recognition and familiarity for the tango listener. Adhering musically to the form and code of classical tango while performing subtle innovations, the *Trottoirs* lyrics rupture conventions with reversals and twists to the traditional thematic and narrative repertoire of tango lyrics. As one example of this occurrence, Walter Bruno Berg observes that in the album's opening track, "Medianoche aquí," the traditional theme of pessimism is suddenly countered with a glimmer of hope at the end of the song.⁹⁰

The *Trottoirs* lyrics, riddled with binaries and contradictory double gestures (such as exile-homecoming, man-woman, past-future), employ the dynamics of the dance to view and articulate the yearned home. In tango dance, two subjects gendered by their access to power struggle for space: The dancer in the male position initiates the step, while the dancer in the female position anchors it, the man starts, the woman ends, the man commands direction, the woman marks the destination. The meeting of these opposite forces produces a seemingly harmonious series of movements that mimics and disguises as progress with its circular trajectory. But this struggle is constantly monitored. Tango, hence, is not a dance of two but of three, according to Savigliano. Through a post-colonial perspective, Savigliano proposes that the gaze of a third party is as essential an element in tango as the dancers, who are exoticized under the stare of a spectator who invariably comes from a place of power and distance that others and domesticates (80). In other words, in her interpretation Savigliano traces the dance dynamics of tango to a storied origin whose pattern repeats itself through time and space: black *milongueros* dancing under the gaze of white Argentines in the late-nineteenth century, *compadritos*

⁹⁰ I analyze this song and this aspect of the lyrics further down in this chapter.

showing off their smooth steps before the eyes of well-to-do young men looking for adventure in the *arrabales*, Argentines performing *ganchos* and *volcadas*⁹¹ as the French admire the intricate dance in Parisian dance halls.

By using the dance dynamics of tango, the poetic voice of *Trottoirs* is not only able to switch localities and positions, from the dancing male, to the female dancer to the gaze, but it is also able to reproduce and therefore analyze and question the post-colonialist aspects that constitute tango. Therefore, the flexibility of movement is key for the simultaneity of the demystifying-exoticizing operation in *Trottoirs*. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the employment of the dance paradigm ultimately allows the album to find a common ground between Paris and Buenos Aires, to reconcile the incongruities of both cities for the diasporic subject and yet to firmly affirm a difference that denotes the specificity and unrepeatability of Buenos Aires.⁹²

Crucial in analyzing *Trottoirs*' double gesture of demystification and exoticization is the metaphor-metonymy dyad that establishes the contrapuntal dimensions that allow the demystifying-exoticizing gestures to operate in parallel but at different registers. Lyrically, *Trottoirs* demystifies at the macro level of metaphor and exoticizes at the micro level of metonymy. The title of the album itself contains this nuanced double operation: “*Trottoirs de Buenos Aires*” can be read as a “pure” French phrase or a hybrid phrase containing the French word *trottoirs* and the Spanish toponym Buenos Aires. However, there’s a moment of overlapping and intertwining: the preposition “de” —

⁹¹ The *gancho* is a tango step in which one of the dancers hooks his or her leg between the other dancer’s legs. The *volcada* is a falling step in which the leader causes the follower to lean forward and lose her axis before he catches her. The definitions of these terms are taken from tejastango.com/terminology.html.

⁹² As we will see in the third section of this chapter, the *Trottoirs* project does not repeat Buenos Aires, but it reproduces it.

understood in both languages, in both cultures, with no inkling of lexical difference — which serves as linkage between “el lado de allá” and “el lado de acá”, and ultimately as the “normalizing” agent in the process of demystification. Yet, the two terms that “de” links occupy different linguistic paradigms that render them other.

The songs, individually and in conjunction, are allegories of lost love and nostalgia, hope and melancholy. These experiences perform a “normalizing” effect between the lives of the colonized subject and the empire. That is, these allegories and metaphors level the differences between the colony/Buenos Aires and the cultural empire/Paris, smoothening the crevices created by translation and distance. At the metonymic level, on the other hand, *Trottoirs* exoticizes by naming and articulating the objects that make Buenos Aires familiar to the poetic voice yet different from his current reality, accentuating the otherness of the objects and, by extrapolation, the otherness of home.

For instance, seen through the metaphoric paradigm, the mundanity of actions and objects such as “morderé una manzana y fumaré un cigarrillo” in the song “Java” is an exercise in the enunciation of commonalities, not only between the periphery and empire, but also between memory and present. This occurrence can be observed throughout the album where two differing entities are juxtaposed and linked by a common element (a pattern and dynamic similar to the example of the “Trottoirs de Buenos Aires” phrase provided above). In the album’s opening track “Medianoche aquí,” for example, a series of binaries gallop out of Cedrón’s voice whose pitch fluctuates between the chiaroscuro tones of *medianoche* and *mediodía*. The despair of a never-ending midnight “aquí” and now, and the yearning for a lost daylight there in the past is linked with the universal call

for hope.

Es siempre medianoche, aquí,
 Vivimos en una honda oscuridad,
 lo mismo da llorar o reír,
 la noche cubre el campo y la ciudad.
 ¿Por qué no hay mediodía ahora aquí?
 [...]

 Un tiempo hubo de sol y de luz
 para vivir de pie, para cantar.
 Las calles en el norte o sur
 se abrían como manos de amistad.
 Hermano criollo, abrí
 grandes los ojos.
 La esperanza, vela aquí,
 jineteando un potro.

This call for hope, which ruptures the usually fatalistic trope in tango, is the demystifying agent that not only appeals to a universal feeling but also divests tango of its somber and enigmatic veneer. This call, enunciated from the position of the observer, who serves as the bridge between the doomed present and the promising future, comes from the locus of imperial power — it is the colonized who has crossed to the other side and articulates to the periphery what he sees. In other words, distance is crucial in the appreciation and reconciliation of opposite views of home. This is the distance of diaspora (though at the time, Cortázar had considered it the distance of an exile).⁹³ Specifically, “Medianoche aquí” seems to propose that from the distance of diaspora, the poetic voice is able to see that there is a common ground between the foundational dichotomy of the Argentine narrative, civilization and barbarism, and that this point of encounter and reconciliation is found in the *arrabal*, where city and country meet, where hope resides.

⁹³ In studying Cortázar’s diaspora, scholar Diana Sorensen sustains that the writer had regarded exile not as separation but as a “bridge mediating between hitherto irreconcilable positions” (386).

However, this persistent search for common ground, which is at the core of the demystification process, is continually subverted at the metonymic level where *Trottoirs* exoticizes Buenos Aires. Like the dissonant notes that rupture the harmony of the songs, the metonymies are disruptive parts that constitute the “normalizing” orchestration. As metonymies of Buenos Aires or Paris, the mundane objects constitute both signposts and crevices that signal difference. In the tango “Veredas de Buenos Aires,” whose translation to French became the album's title, the image of the street is injected with spatial, temporal and cultural specificities. “Vederas,” how Cortázar as a youngster used to call the *veredas*⁹⁴ and became a syllabic transposition in his memory, are constructed on the difference with *veredas*, which are in turn fashioned on the difference with *trottoirs*. Each transformation of the word, from *veredas* to “vederas” to *trottoirs* makes the image and its symbolic weight more specific. The “vederas” are a cultural signpost fashioned in nostalgia, molded and distorted by the diffuse hands of memory, which activates a series of recollections populated by object-metonymies of home: While whistling, the *pibes*⁹⁵ walked the *vederas* with their *tamangos*⁹⁶ and drew *rayuelas* on the sidewalks. This tango is thus an exercise in nostalgia where the *veredas* of Buenos Aires are reproduced in the *trottoirs* of Paris and incarnated as the “vederas” of Cortázar’s

⁹⁴ *Veredas* are paths that straddle the limit between the city and the countryside; the *veredas* are a symbol of the *arrabal*, a path where both people and cattle trod. By extrapolation, I can infer that the *arrabal* and the *veredas* specifically are the physical point of encounter between the foundational dichotomy of the Argentine narrative: civilization and barbarism. The *veredas* were a common sight for Cortázar, who grew up in the Banfield barrio, in the outskirts of Buenos Aires, where horses and milk carts would transit the unpaved roads by day and *compadritos* would walk the same dirt-covered *veredas* by night.

⁹⁵ *Pibe* is a *lunfardo* word that means kid, usually a boy.

⁹⁶ *Tamango* means shoes or sandals. According to the Real Academia Española, the word *tamango* is used in Spanish-speaking South American countries (specifically, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay) to refer to a rustic sandals made of leather that are usually worn by *gauchos*.

memory. What makes the "vederas" *veredas* are precisely these objects and occurrences that are absent from the *trottoirs* and that even in their translation remain in excess, "not quite" and to a point unutterable in the dimension where the observer is articulating it.

These metonymic references exoticize from the position they are uttered. In "Veredas de Buenos Aires," home is remembered while the poetic voice walks in his *tamangos* on the streets of diaspora. This gesture of recalling is performed in the position of the third party in the tango dance dynamics. But it is at the metonymic level, where the gaze reveals a particularity: He's the colonized gazing through the imperialist lens back at his own colony-home. Through this gaze, he exoticizes the scene he's contemplating — the memory of his childhood. The wearing of *tamangos*, though, is the telling object-metonymy that the subject, although performing this operation in the locus of power, still remains in the periphery, and in excess.

In these two tracks, we see specific instances in which the metaphoric and metonymic registers work simultaneously to both find a common ground between "here" and "there" while affirming identity and individuality by pointing out a difference between these two locales. In other words, these songs showcase the underlying operation in the album: by finding the commonalities between Paris and Buenos Aires, the album tries to "shorten" the distance between the two sites in a juxtaposing, but not overlapping, move. However, through exoticization, *Trottoirs* makes a point in signaling that despite these similarities neither Paris nor Buenos Aires will ever be home.

2.3. 'Extraño ese callejón... que hoy me falta':

Distance and nostalgia in *Trottoirs*

At the end of his life, Cortázar had come to regard the distance of diaspora as a double-edged force that had the power to both sterilize and shatter stereotypes. But most importantly, Cortázar viewed the diasporic distance as an opportunity to redirect fate. Central to this discussion is Cortázar's vindictive and hopeful tone toward exile and distance in the collection of essays published posthumously, *Argentina: Años de alambradas culturales*. He wrote in 1984:

La simple verdad es que una noción y una praxis positivas del exilio tienen un doble valor; si por un lado pueden modificar estereotipos negativos y disminuir nostalgias comprensibles pero esterilizantes, por otro lado representan una estrategia y un arma de combate, en la medida en que no aceptan la negatividad con la cual tanto cuentan las dictaduras [...] hubiera bastado mostrar a tiempo la otra cara de la medalla para orientar positivamente toda esa negatividad inútil, para cambiar un destino de frustración y entrega, y devolverlo a su plenitud humana. (40)

Cortázar viewed exile and distance as a catalyst for union, for agora, according to Sorensen.⁹⁷ In diaspora, one can refocus and find clarity in the mist of nostalgia — distance preserves a Buenos Aires forever changed by political turmoil and gives room for the creation of a new fate, a new story for the yearned city. That is, in the removed space of diaspora change can be effected by creating a memory of better times, a memory worth transforming into reality. *Trottoirs*, which caresses and prods the contours of distance, relies on nostalgia to not only remember the pre-dictatorship Argentina but also to gather the memorial signs employed to reconfigure home in diaspora. *Trottoirs* relies

⁹⁷ Sorensen 388.

on tango — a quintessentially nostalgic genre— to rewrite the fate of Buenos Aires.

Nostalgia is a powerful force and medium that not only entails a dislocation in space but also a transformation in the perception of time. In her exploration of nostalgia as an incurable modern condition, Svetlana Boym identifies two kinds of nostalgia that “characterize one’s relationship to the past, to the imagined community, to home, to one’s own self-perception” (41). While restorative nostalgia proposes to rebuild the lost home and bridge memory gaps, reflective nostalgia is enamored of distance and not the referent itself. Where restorative nostalgia is serious in its endeavour to mystify and idealize the revived nation, reflective nostalgia is humorous and ironic in its awareness that a truthful and objective national revival is an impossible task. However, perhaps the most salient differences between these two kinds of nostalgia are the spheres within which they operate in the construction of identity. For instance, restorative nostalgia tends to operate in a public and collective fashion, while reflective nostalgia is a more private and individual endeavour. Boym notes:

Restorative nostalgia evokes national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory. The two might overlap in their frames of reference, but they do not coincide in their narratives and plots of identity. In other words, they can use the same triggers of memory and symbols... but they tell different stories about it. (49)

Between these tendencies, how can *Trottoirs*’ nostalgia be characterized? *Trottoirs*’ nostalgia is restorative in its proposition to rebuild Buenos Aires through a national symbol, tango. However, *Trottoirs*’ treatment of the national music is, while observing the standards of traditional tango, riddled with rhythmic innovations. Furthermore, the reconfiguration of home is not entirely complete and truthful to the referent, which is demystified and re-exoticized. On the other hand, *Trottoirs*’ nostalgia is

reflective in its awareness of and playfulness with distance that allows a certain flexibility of time, where the past can insert itself into the present and where the impossibility of homecoming is alleviated.

Although Boym's ideas cannot exactly pinpoint the type of nostalgia present in Cortázar's project, they can help elucidate the power and impact of *Trottoirs*' longing, which fluctuates between a return/re-enactment of home and a permanent deferral of homecoming. In the rearticulation of Buenos Aires from diaspora, the *Trottoirs* project rescues objects, moments and senses (such as the sense of smell) from the past through a kind of restorative nostalgic gesture. From the songs to the salon, the memorial landmarks of home are carefully selected from individual memory and placed subtly and sometimes fleetingly throughout the *Trottoirs* project. For example, Juan "Tata" Cedrón sings of the aroma of peaches perfuming a summer night in "La Cruz del Sur," the album's cover art depicts a man wearing a shirt from the soccer team River Plate, the modestly decorated tango salon in Paris is fashioned to resemble a *tanguería porteña*. The recovered objects and moments from the past, however, bear "the patina of time and history" (41) that sets these signposts in a distanced place and time from the position where the poetic voice articulates them. In a reflective nostalgic move, *Trottoirs* builds a fragmentary and inconclusive city with scattered memorial signposts that linger "in the dreams of another place and another time" (Boym 41).

The convergence of these contradictory nostalgic operations produces a home modeled in *Trottoirs*' terms. Following the analysis of the demystifying-exoticizing operation, *Trottoirs* employs reflective nostalgia to extract normalizing metaphors and uses restorative nostalgia to disrupt those metaphors with exoticizing metonymies.

Trottoirs in its depiction of home is inclined to select landmarks that bear a commonality between “there” and “here,” and then insert elements that mark a difference. Home is constantly evoked and invoked by the mention of its streets, the city and its iconic port (the “vederas” in “Veredas de Buenos Aires,” “ese siempre mismo Buenos Aires” in “La Cruz del Sur,” “los barcos y los puentes” in “Java”). Home is depicted through a series of fragmentary photographs of the city’s sidewalks⁹⁸ that are devoid of recognizably Argentine landmarks and yet dispersedly peppered with specifically Argentine objects that trigger only the memories of *porteños* (such as the *mate* of “La Cruz del Sur” and the *tamangos* of “Veredas de Buenos Aires”). These images, which are devoid of a solid frame of reference and context in terms of location, could well be snapshots of Paris. These images both locate and dislocate, position and unposition, are specific and ambiguous. Therefore, even though *Trottoirs* sets out to rebuild home, the resemblance established between both spaces and times renders the image described in the songs elusive to the fixating touch of a truthful or faithful national restoration. From this perspective, the nostalgia of *Trottoirs* tends to follow the reflective tendency through which the nostalgic subject, gazing into the past and its potentialities, is ultimately looking for a “rendez-vous with oneself,” to employ Vladimir Yankelévitch’s term,⁹⁹ when the self from the present encounters the self from the past, and specifically in *Trottoirs*, when the self in Paris-present encounters the self in Buenos Aires-past. This encounter produced by nostalgia renders a selective depiction of the past that is

⁹⁸ Please see attached photographs of Buenos Aires streets which were taken by Guillermo Cantón and are displayed in the *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* LP’s inside cover.

⁹⁹ As quoted by Boym (50).

reproduced as present.

Throughout the album, which strategically places its most nostalgic songs in the beginning (“Medianoche aquí”), middle (“Veredas de Buenos Aires”) and end (“La Cruz del Sur”) of its repertoire, the two kinds of nostalgia are at work, sometimes functioning separately other times overlapping. In this section I wish to foreground three of the nostalgic effects displayed in the aforementioned songs: the sense of distance, the dreamlike and fragmentary recovery of memorial signposts to rebuild home, and the poetic voice’s rendez-vous with himself.

In the album’s opening track, “Medianoche aquí,” the sense of distance is crucial for the telling of the poetic voice’s story and, by extrapolation, for changing the narrative of the city enveloped in darkness. Switching locations, hopping between times, the poetic voice plays with and savors the ambivalence of distance. Distance defamiliarizes the nostalgic subject from the home that lies in ruins and allows him to form relationships not only with the past but also with the future. *Trottoirs*’ creation of a more hopeful version of Buenos Aires — unlike typical tango songs — does not shy away from looking into the potentialities of the past to fashion a different fate, a better future for the the city of his yearning.

Harbored at the heart of the album, “Veredas de Buenos Aires” tenderly recalls youthful and such simple moments as walking the streets with friends and drawing hopscotches on the sidewalks. By remembering the feeling of the touch of “mi tierra” through his *tamangos*, the poetic voice syncretically enters into a virtual reality “where words and tactile sensations overlap” (Boym 50). Once in this reality, the poetic voice begins to extract the objects, moments and places from the past by recalling and

mentioning them. In *Trottoirs*, remembrance is recovery — not revival — as the city appears in fragments that are connected by the threads of shared memory.

In the closing track of *Trottoirs*, “La Cruz del Sur”, the poetic voice begins to rebuild home by recalling the moment and the place of his longing, a site that once again is presented as the threshold between city and countryside, the point of encounter between civilization and barbarism that the opening track “Medianoche aquí” alludes to, while acknowledging the ellipsis produced by translation and transplantation and which nostalgia helps fill:

Extraño ese callejón
que se perdía en el campo y el cielo
con sauces y caballos y algo como un sueño.
Y me duelen los nombres de cada cosa
que hoy me falta

From a distanced space and time, the poetic voice fixates and savors the details and memorial signs that are conjured in these ambivalent and dreamlike memories that as in “Medianoche aquí” characterizes place and home as the point of encounter between city and countryside. The naming of these objects, whose absence aches the poetic voice, opens up “mental maps in which space folds into time” (Boym 50)¹⁰⁰ and in which the poetic voice, excised by the very distance between places and years, encounters his ghostly self in the past, at home. This rendez-vous between the poetic voice’s two selves is placed as the opening image of “La Cruz del Sur,” which establishes from the beginning the flexibility and, to a certain degree, the interchangeability of time and space.

¹⁰⁰ Boym beautifully and poignantly elaborates on this idea with a reflection on the ending of Marcel Proust’s *Swann’s Way*: “What matters, then, is the memorable literary fugue, or the actual return home.... Homecoming does not signify a recovery of identity; it does not end the journey in the virtual space of imagination. A modern nostalgic can be homesick and sick of home, at once” (50).

Vos ves la Cruz del Sur
 y respirás el verano con su olor a duraznos
 y caminás de noche mi pequeño fantasma silecioso
 por ese Buenos Aires, por ese siempre mismo Buenos Aires.

Although “La Cruz del Sur” remains a somber cry for the moments and things lost, if seen through the lenses of reflective nostalgia, the song offers a glimmer of hope in its approach to the concept of distance that gives time and space the potential to transform within and between themselves. In other words, by recalling the past at the moment of the song’s performance, “La Cruz del Sur” warps time, inserting the past into the present, recovering fragments of the past that are granted new meaning by way of a new reality, by way of an attainable and reproducible experience: the aroma of peaches. The sense of smell, the act of breathing in the perfume of peaches, provides the physical and material facet of memory retrieval and reliving. That is, the aroma of peaches is the trigger that not only transports the poetic voice to the past, but also is the catalyst for the poetic voice to reproduce the past in the present,¹⁰¹ therefore the possibility of an actual reproduction of the past, and by extrapolation the possibility of an actual return home, is to a certain degree materially realizable.

The thematic progression among these songs seems to be an inversion of traditional narrative threads that set bleakness as an antecedent to hope. *Trottoirs*’ songs begin with a hopeful call for change that devolves into a mournful lament of things lost. And parallelly, there seems to be an inversion of locales and times in which “*aquí*” turns into “*allá*” and “*hoy*” transforms into “*ayer*.” From “Medianoche aquí” to “La Cruz del

¹⁰¹ In section 2.4, we will see this same dynamic in the salon, which reproduces the past with the employment of material and physical triggers.

Sur,” the poetic voice changes locations through nostalgia, from the city referred to as “*aquí*” in “Medianoche aquí” to a displaced site in “La Cruz del Sur” where home is regarded as “*allá*”. The shifts in location and positions can be viewed either as a constant return to home, a perpetual departure or a deferred homecoming. In other words, the effect of the shifts in location is the detachment of home from a physical territory. Home resides in memory; memory is home. Veined by jaded sidewalks and illuminated by an opaque moon, the home molded and inverted by the hand of nostalgia becomes a virtual reality whose fate can be redirected and reshaped. For *Trottoirs*, this memory is worth turning into reality.

In a period of Cortázar’s life when his writings centered on political causes, *Trottoirs* emerged as the visceral yearning for the motherland enunciated in the tone of tango from the locus of diaspora. In longing for home, *Trottoirs* reproduces Buenos Aires with the deployment of a double gesture that demystifies and exoticizes. This act of mimicking reveals the dynamics of cultural imperialism in which *Trottoirs* repeats home-Buenos Aires against/on the backdrop of the empire-Paris. Tango, in its nature of contradiction, multiple temporalities, spatial dimensions, and the overlapping of space and time, served not only as the vital link to a Buenos Aires that lived in Cortázar’s memory but also as the body onto which *Trottoirs*’ nostalgic gesture is performed. In *Trottoirs*’ operation to reproduce home in diaspora is the articulation of an ambivalence that remains in the interstices of the demystifying-exoticizing gesture. This ambivalence results from the impossibility of home; the Buenos Aires that *Trottoirs* yearns for doesn’t exist here nor there, now nor yesterday — it remains in excess, it exists in a memory triggered by the sound of a *bandoneón*.

2.4. Trottoirs de Buenos Aires: The phantom of a city

The impossibility of a physical return to the city harbored in memories doesn't preclude the prospect for one to be home. The question of space and location in the Trottoirs project is central to the understanding of how the subject can be home without a physical return to Buenos Aires. As discussed in the previous section, Buenos Aires is recreated from a Parisian space with the signposts that are recovered through nostalgia. This Buenos Aires, this utopic home, coexists as an "other" space amid all the sites that surround it. But so far in this analysis, this imaginary Buenos Aires has been regarded as an abstract, unreal place where the subject imagines himself to be but does not perceive himself there. In this section, I wish to demonstrate that the Trottoirs project not only creates an illusory space but also a real place, a site that is the result of an effectively enacted utopia that acts as a counter-site to the real Buenos Aires. As a heterotopia, the home in Trottoirs materializes, becomes both a real and unreal place. The analysis of the Trottoirs salon as a heterotopia will elucidate the dialectics of space that are at play in the reconstitution of home, emphasize the importance of the usage of tango as a medium for the fashioning and materialization of an alternate Buenos Aires from diaspora and, perhaps most importantly, examine the creation of a space where the displaced can continue the tango narrative, and by extrapolation, the articulation of an alternative national discourse.

To study the heterotopic characteristics of the Trottoirs project, I examine the songs as well as the album's cover art. However, the main focus of this section is on the tango salon that was named after the album and opened a year after the LP's release. Employing Michel Foucault's theory on spaces, I argue that the salon is the physical

representation of the utopic Buenos Aires delineated by the album's songs and cover art. The Trottoirs project, hence, can be viewed as an operation that attempts to materialize a version of home in a displaced space in which each of its three iterations (songs, cover art and salon) act systematically and complementarily. That is, employing an architectural analogy, the songs are the blueprint of the new home, the cover art becomes the model and, therefore, the salon is the fledgling material foundation of an alternate construct of nation.

Following this conception, the cover art comes to be the middle step in a three-phase process of space materialization. The cover art, read as a model in architectural terminology, provides a visual and tangible representation of what is depicted in the songs. As a partial materialization of the space evoked and traced in the songs, the dark-colored painting that serves as the cover art of the *Trottoirs* album depicts a seemingly mundane scene. Bent in the ways of a downward crescent, three sidewalks drift to nowhere. In these gray rings of dust and concrete, men and women orbit around two streetlights, like errant planets in a weakly lit system. Cloaked in a mist of grayness, people heading to different destinations converge in this snapshot of a small strand of the universe: a well-dressed man strolling pensively with downturned lips, another walking briskly away from the scene where policemen are beating a kneeled man while a person with an indigenous semblance whose gender is not established hides behind a bush. The juxtaposition of these subjects from all walks of life in a single place resembles the dynamics of the *milonga* scene, where civilization and barbarism, center and periphery converge. From these characteristics, I argue that the *Trottoirs* project can be qualified, employing the concept of literary scholar Tobin Siebers, as the utopia that

postmodernism envisions, a space in which differences are equally entertained.

In addition to this utopic facet, the painting by Argentine artist residing in France Antonio Seguí also displays a crucial characteristic for the purposes of this analysis: ambiguity of location. At first glance, this place could be anywhere; it could Paris, it could be Buenos Aires. A closer look, though, reveals small signposts carefully and subtly placed to indicate the specificity of location and sow a grain of difference to this space. A small inscription on top of a triangular construction in the background of the scene indicates the building is a restroom with the Spanish word “Baños,” and in the foreground, below the painting’s focal point, a man wears a shirt with the inscription “River Plate,”¹⁰² one of Argentina’s most successful and venerated soccer teams. As observed in the previous sections, these characteristics (the dance dynamics employed in the songs that recall the idiosyncrasies in a *milonga*; the elusiveness of a return to home, which increasingly becomes a utopia; the ambiguity of location that results from a friction between the specific and the universal) are core principles that are reproduced and reiterated in the cover art. A reflection and a progression of the content and aesthetics of the songs, the cover art synthesizes and visually materializes the images and moments delineated in the songs, and sets the parameters from which the salon can be constructed.

Each of the Trottoirs project’s iterations shares a principle in the enactment of place that mixes ambiguity and specificity, of “the same but not quite.” This principle, as

¹⁰² According to the soccer club’s website, <http://www.cariverplate.com/el-club>, the name River Plate was adopted after one of the club’s founders Pedro Martínez saw the name inscribed in ship containers at the docks of Buenos Aires in 1901. The name has some resonance with the Spanish toponym Río de la Plata, an estuary formed by the confluence between Río Uruguay and Río Paraná. River Plate seems to be more the result of a translation based on the affinity of sound than the accuracy of meaning. On the other hand, some claim that the British English moniker was acquired to vest the club with some international cachet and to link the club, at least linguistically, to the birthplace of the sport: Great Britain.

displayed in the painting's depiction of a utopic Buenos Aires, is also reflected in the salon. In decorating the salon, by purposely devoiding the place of overarching national visual markers that tie the space to Argentina, Trottoirs in its simplicity appeals to ambiguity and similarity with a space in Paris, but it also attempts to approximate a truthful recreation of a *tanguería porteña*. This ambiguity, I argue, allows for the interchangeability of sites, for "here" to become "there." Through tango, the slice of Paris that is the Trottoirs salon becomes a slice of Buenos Aires where the Argentine narrative can continue to be told in the tone of those in diaspora. As a heterotopic endeavour, the Trottoirs salon becomes the effectively enacted utopic Buenos Aires, a counter-site to Paris and to the actual, physical Buenos Aires — already morphed by dictatorship, forever changed and years apart from the city of Trottoirs' memories. The salon, as the materialization of the songs' utopia, exerts a counteraction on the position and image of Buenos Aires, and establishes itself as an illusory slice of Buenos Aires in relation to all the Parisian space that remains.

Michel Foucault addressed the question of space in his seminal essay "Of Other Spaces" and introduced the notion of heterotopia. Foucault views space as a set of relations among sites in which utopias and their counterpart, heterotopias, emerged as counter-sites to the rest of the space that remains. While utopias are places without a place — an unreal space — heterotopias are real,¹⁰³ physical sites where utopias are effectively enacted and "in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault

¹⁰³ I am employing the term "real" in the Foucaultian sense of the concept and not under Lacanian psychoanalytic terms.

24). To define these other spaces, Foucault delineates six principles: heterotopias exist in every culture and have a specific function (such as prisons and cemeteries), they are capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several sites that are in themselves incompatible, they are linked to slices in time, they have a system of closing and opening and they have a function in relation to all the space that remains. Although these principles' application to tango vary in terms of relevance, I argue that tango exhibits in greater or lesser degree all of these criteria. In particular, tango, as a site that revels in the gathering of strangers whose social circles and statuses clash, is capable of juxtaposing incompatible spaces in one physical, real site. And as an inherently nostalgic genre, tango is always linked to a slice(s) in time: to the time the songs are played, listened or danced to, but more importantly, to the time the songs evoke, which mostly reside in the past. These two principles, mainly, are reflected in the analysis of the Trottoirs project.

To better illustrate the difference and the relation between utopia and heterotopia, Foucault uses the notion of the mirror. The mirror is both a utopia and heterotopia inasmuch that the image one sees in the mirror does not exist — “it’s a placeless place” — but a real site “in so far that the mirror does exist in reality” (24). As a heterotopia, the mirror makes the space that the person who gazes into the glass “absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (24). Therein begins a dynamic trajectory of the subject’s gaze that travels to the image in the mirror and to the mirror where the subject begins to reconstitute himself there where he is. The mirror is the space where the real site is inverted; the mirror is the place where the unreal is materialized.

It is the example of the mirror that I wish to employ as a metaphor of tango, in general, and of Trottoirs, in particular, in the analysis of the reconfiguration of home and of the poetic voice, who perceives himself “over there” while being here. As a national symbol, tango’s powerful capacity to evoke home opens up and creates imaginary sites to which the yearning subject returns. Although the Buenos Aires created in Trottoirs has a referent attached to a physical territory, the utopian home itself has no real place. Through tango, the subject sees himself there where he is not; that is, tango enables the subject to see himself in a space where he’s actually absent. However, in this utopian function of tango, the subject’s absence from home is only accentuated by the fact that the imagined utopian home is unreal as a site.

On the other hand, in its heterotopian function, tango offers the possibility for the subject to reconstitute himself in an effectively enacted utopia — the *milonga*, a physical place to which tango is attached. That is, the utopia is materialized as a heterotopian site; it becomes a real place in the *milonga*. The *milonga* is an other site that is connected to a slice in time, reunites incompatible, (un)desirable bodies who share the contradictions that come with alienation, otherness and nostalgia. The *milonga* juxtaposes incompatible sites on a stage where social hierarchies are reshuffled, and codifies a space to determine who is allowed in and to which degree based on dancing abilities. When listening, singing, playing or dancing tango, the subject, to paraphrase Foucault, discovers his absence from the place he is since he sees himself in the place of his imagination and yearning, over there. This discovery splits the subject who is on both sides of the mirror and muddles the difference between “there” and “here.” In a heterotopia, where “there” is “here,” the split subject becomes whole again and present in the place where he’s absent.

That is, the nostalgic subject sees himself through the mirror of tango in the place and the time of his desire, which is made real in the heterotopia of the *milonga*. This perception, which is only attainable through a medium such as the mirror (or in this case, tango), leads the subject to reconstitute himself in this other site, which becomes both an absolutely real space since it is enacted in a *milonga*, and an absolutely unreal site since it comes to be and is perceived only through tango.

With a play in the perception of location, which not only entails the notion of place but also of time, the Trottoirs project gives the Buenos Aires that could have been a physical territory — “there” becomes “here,” “here” becomes “there,” the salon becomes Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires is the salon, “now” is “then,” time is space. In their essay “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference,” anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson observe that in a “world of diaspora” where people become increasingly mobile, and hence cultural products are less likely to stay fixed in a physical territory, the cultural distinctiveness of places becomes eroded (9). Furthermore, the scholars propose that because of people’s mobility and perpetual displacement and deterritorialization in the age of globalization and transnationalism, the lines between well-established *loci* binaries such as “here” and “there,” “center” and “periphery,” are diffused as “a dazzling array of postcolonial simulacra, doublings and redoublings, as India and Pakistan apparently reappear in postcolonial simulation in London, prerevolution Tehran rises from the ashes in Los Angeles and a thousand cultural dreams are played out in urban and rural settings all across the globe” (10). The same can be said of a dictatorship Argentina flourishing in the center of Paris. Taking this thought further, the Trottoirs project not only reproduces a fragment of a dictatorship nation,

but it also begins to set the foundation for the articulation of an alternative nation, of an Argentina that could have been. The blurring of the distinction between “here” and “there” becomes central, then, in the materialization of home.

Applying this thought in the analysis of the Trottoirs project’s treatment of place, the *Trottoirs* album and the salon play with the blurriness and interchangeability of sites and time. Particularly, in “Medianoche aquí” the concepts of space and time are placed on the same level to make them synonyms, to make them interchangeable.

Es siempre medianoche, aquí
 Vivimos en una honda oscuridad,
 lo mismo da llorar que reír,
 la noche cubre el campo y la ciudad
 ¿Por qué no hay mediodía ahora, aquí?...
 Un tiempo hubo de sol y de luz
 para vivir de pie, para cantar.
 Las calles en el norte o sur
 se abrían como manos de amistad.

Two sets of binaries composed of a time and space element are established in the poem: “*hoy-medianoche aquí,*” “*ayer-medioidía allá.*” By linking a site to a slice in time, the poem attempts to transform these binaries to yield a hopeful “*hoy-medioidía aquí.*” With a call for hope and fraternity, the poetic voice encourages his compatriot to let his hope roam free on the streets of a promising and wondrous city (“*aquí?*”), which, unnamed, scarcely and diffusely described, appears as an illusory site. In the creation of this city full of hope and light, the bleak “*hoy*” of past stanzas transforms into an optimistic “*hoy,*” the yearned for “*ayer*” becomes a time that needs to be forgotten, and therefore the “*aquí?*” that is tied to “*hoy*” is no longer unreachable and unfulfilled. The establishment of these binaries and their reshuffling to create a new set connects time and space at a level where these two concepts can be exchanged so that the evocation and

invocation of one can bring about the other. That is, the evocation of time or the enactment of place can create, respectively, the place or the time of the subject's longing. The utopian "*hoy-mediodía aquí*" emerges as an other site that can be perceived when its constituting binaries are inverted.

The dialectics of location and movement between sites are broadly drawn in the album, which in its music and cover art hints to the existence of split and alternate spaces of illusion and ambiguity. As the album's most directly nostalgic evocations of home, "La Cruz del Sur" and "Veredas de Buenos Aires" present a utopian place where the subject senses and enacts/performs the actions he has longed for. Nostalgia in these songs is not just an act of remembering but an act of (re)living. In the first stanza of "La Cruz del Sur," a title that alludes to the smallest of the 88 constellations and is easily visible from the southern hemisphere but can also be interpreted as the burden and pessimism that has haunted Argentine culture,¹⁰⁴ this place appears immediate, vital, idyllic and unchanged. This place, which is sensually perceived and absorbed by a subject in the second person, appears present and yet tinged by a marker that destabilizes the notion of time (are the actions performed in the present — as is understood at first glance — or are they active recollections of moments passed?), the realness of place and the unity of subject.

Vos ves la Cruz del Sur
y respirás el verano con su olor a duraznos
y caminás de noche mi pequeño fantasma silencioso
por ese Buenos Aires, por ese siempre mismo Buenos Aires

¹⁰⁴ These two concepts and imageries can be associated if we consider that the Crux constellation, once visible to the center of civilization, the Ancient Greeks, eventually disappeared from the European horizon as the procession of equinoxes lowered the stars below the European horizon and the constellation was eventually forgotten by the inhabitants of northern latitudes (Ridpath, Ian; Tirion, Wil. *Stars and Planets Guide*. Princeton University Press. 2001).

The subject and time in this stanza are excised. This separation results in a split subject who as a tacit “I” sees and commands a “vos”/ “*fantasma*” to perform actions in a place called Buenos Aires. As a tacit subject, the poetic voice seems to hover over the scene of this stanza, where he’s absent, gazing from a displaced position and time into the image of his phantom who is able to return home and walk the streets of “*ese siempre mismo Buenos Aires.*” The city evoked and invoked through nostalgia emerges as a utopian place, unchanged by the passage of time, accessible only to ghosts and only perceived through this song, which renders the city both absolutely unreal (for the tacit “I”) and absolutely real (for the phantom, the image on the other side of the mirror). As an absolutely unreal space, “*ese siempre mismo Buenos Aires*” figures as an illusion that is conjured up in a nostalgic song. But as an absolutely real place, “*ese siempre mismo Buenos Aires*” comes alive in the space of the *milonga* where “La Cruz del Sur” is played, listened and danced.

Although the songs in *Trottoirs* construct a utopian city, they hint to the possibility of an other site where this utopia can be enacted. Without directly addressing the notion of a virtual space, the songs broadly draw a sort of dialectics of space perception resemblant of the mirror in which each site named and described appears to have a parallel site that hovers tacitly and subtly in the poems.

Elite Argentine tango acts such as Sexteto Mayor, Susana Rinaldi and Astor Piazzolla found in the Trottoirs salon a fertile ground to sow the seeds for tango’s second renaissance in Paris. Although its focus was on instrumental music, the salon opened its doors to dance in 1986 with the prerogative to teach tango dance as it once was, according to Aguiar. Thus, Trottoirs became a space where not only a certain and

particular measure of authenticity, a return to roots, was nurtured, spread, questioned and contested, but also where the two rival tango art forms, music and dance, reconciled. Although complementary, tango music and dance have a long and pronounced rivalry, each art form trying to stake its legitimacy and capture the spotlight as the superior representative of tango overseas. But the dance cannot subsist without the music, and the music would not have had the eventual scope of international exposure without the dance. In this context, Trottoirs de Buenos Aires' role in the reconciliation of both art forms is indicative of the project's detailed and exhaustive approach to tango and its renaissance, but most importantly, it reveals the project's conscious usage of all the iterations of tango, and their inherent dynamics and potential, to enact a utopic Buenos Aires. With the first *milonga* to be organized in Europe, Trottoirs placed *tangueros* in Paris on the other side of the mirror. The Buenos Aires that was longed for, the city full of promise, untarnished by the horrors of the Dirty War, came alive in Trottoirs in an individual yet collective form, in a material yet unrecordable manner. The *tangueros* in the heterotopic Trottoirs, who were listening, dancing and playing tango, could begin to reconstitute themselves over there here; in Trottoirs, they were home. As an inversion of the city engendered by the military junta and as a contestation to the French metropolis that others and alienates diasporic subjects, Trottoirs embodied the home where the Argentine narrative could not only continue to be told but where it was also refashioned, where the memory of the city is preserved and yet reformed to yield the home that should have been.

However, home is never fully materialized in Trottoirs, and an alternative national narrative is never completely articulated. The achievement of the Trottoirs project,

though, is the creation of a physical, tangible space where the displaced subject can engage in an intimate dialogue with the self in the past, and perhaps begin in the collectiveness of the *milonga* to articulate nation privately and individually. Therefore, the contours of this home and of this narrative remain blurry, elusive and unfixed, as ambiguous as the naked, white walls of the salon, and as fleeting as the aroma of peaches in a summer night.

CHAPTER 3

REVISING TANGO, RETHINKING NATION

The Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project performs through tango a profound examination of nation and identity. Specifically, I argue that the Trottoirs project employs tango (its tropes, its history, its prominent and characteristic features such as nostalgia, and mainly, its status as a transnational music) to revise some of Argentina's foundational narratives and consequently to posit a challenge to the very concept of nation-state that ties culture and identity to a specific territory. That is, Trottoirs proposes, in particular, that *argentinidad* is not concomitant of Argentina the state, and, in general, that nations are imagined communities that exist beyond and independently of the state and its territory.

Trottoirs reveals some of the shortcomings of the dominant contemporary thoughts of nationalism¹⁰⁵ with its very existence and relative success in evoking and invoking nation from a displaced space, and in building an imagined community in diaspora. Mainly, the Trottoirs project proposes that nations are not “eternal natural facts” but “tenuous collective projects,” to employ anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's terms (415), that can be detached from their physical places of origin and that lie beyond what

¹⁰⁵ Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai states that dominant theories on nationalism “see nations as products of natural destinies of peoples, whether rooted in language, race, soil, or religion. In many of these theories of nation as imagined, there is always a suggestion that blood, kinship, race, and soil are somehow less imagined, more natural than the imagination of collective interest or solidarity.” (414)

Benedict Anderson calls “official nationalism.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, Trottoirs suggests that nations are artificial constructs produced by the collective imagination (Appadurai 414). This particular view conceives “the nation” as a cultural product, and as such nation is placed within the same category as tango, a national symbol as well as a product of popular culture. Through this perspective, the act of narrating nation, henceforth, is no longer one reserved for the political and socioeconomic elite but is accessible to anyone who can speak the language of tango. Through tango, therefore, Trottoirs affirms and undermines nation. In tango, Trottoirs finds a vehicle that would not only take nation out of its territory and reproduce it elsewhere, but also a site where the institution of nation that has partially sustained tango and yet excluded portions of its people and history (specifically for Trottoirs’ interests, the exiled community) is questioned and contested. That is, Trottoirs posits a series of questions to the meaning of *argentinidad* and subsequently of nation and the nation-state: Is *argentinidad* defined by its containment within a territorially and politically delineated space? If so, are the notions of identity and belonging eroded for those residing outside the borders of the nation-state? What are the effects on the idea of nation if a national symbol is de/reterritorialized? What is nation if boundaries are taken out, or what is a territory if nation is extricated from the binary? In these questions, I argue, is Trottoirs’ attempt to fashion a new way of defining citizenship in order to stretch the boundaries of nation and find a place within it for the diasporic community.

¹⁰⁶ Anderson defines official nationalism as “an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups which are threatened with marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally imagined community.” (101)

Anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson observe that in a world of diaspora, migration and transnational flow, the experience of displacement is not exclusive to migrants, exiled and diasporic subjects. Gupta and Ferguson argue that in a time where “here” and “there” become blurred, “even people remaining in familiar and ancestral places find the nature of their relation to place ineluctably changed” (10). Therefore, they state, the illusion of a natural connection between place and culture is severed. Following this thought, this chapter examines Trottoirs’ impact on the discourse of nation and the tango project’s effect on the perception of place and positioning not only on the diasporic Argentine community in Paris but also on those who have remained in the “familiar and ancestral” place of Buenos Aires. In particular, I argue that Trottoirs, as a product of deterritorialized tango, diffuses the arbitrary links between fundamental binaries within national discourse (citizen and nation-state, nation and state, and nation and territory) to introduce an alternate type of citizenship based on tango. (I wish to clarify that Trottoirs itself does not perform the severance of these links, but instead reveals the artificiality of these connections.) Furthermore, I suggest that in the act of extricating tango from its territory of origin, of decontextualizing and deterritorializing¹⁰⁷ tango, Trottoirs is not only seeking a new meaning for nation and for *argentinidad*, but also attempting to diffuse the distance and difference between “here” and “there” to create a space of belonging for those residing beyond the borders of the nation-state. However, just as the articulation of an alternate home is left elusive and ambiguous in the salon (as discussed in Chapter 2), the new meaning of nation and Argentine identity remains similarly diffuse and fluid. As it achieved with the salon, the Trottoirs project as

¹⁰⁷ I examine this term further in the chapter.

a whole succeeds in the creation of a space where the institution of nation can be practiced, rehearsed, constructed and contested. In *Trottoirs*, nation becomes a “cultural dream” that is constantly played out (Gupta 10).

At the core of my argument are Anderson’s concept of imagined communities and theories on transnationalism and deterritorialization. In his seminal work *Imagined Communities*, Anderson argues that nations are communities that are constructed and imagined by people who perceive themselves as part of a group that is connected either by soil, language, religion or race. Another concept I employ in my analysis is the idea of transnational regionalism. Studying the Chicago-born *pasito duranguense*, musicologist Helena Simonett argues that *duranguense* musicians have reappropriated and resignified a national symbol in a space outside the sphere of the nation-state, a transnational space. Through *pasito duranguense*, Simonett demonstrates the power of a music genre to root an imagined community, constituted and defined by its regionalism (that is, by its affiliation and attachment to a culture rooted in a specific location), in a space beyond nation (123).¹⁰⁸ A similar process can be observed with tango and the Argentine diaspora in Paris. Lastly, my argument relies on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization developed in *Towards a Minor Literature* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. The French theorists’ concept of deterritorialization can be understood as a process of defamiliarization or decontextualization, where a cultural object, for instance, is taken out of its territory (what is considered its ontological site of

¹⁰⁸ “They have appropriated and resignified their regional music as symbol of their own cultural identity as transmigrants. Duranguenses’ regionalism, or rootedness in community, is of central importance to the music’s presence as well as to its success. Yet, it is a regionalism that spans across borders – a phenomenon that we might term ‘transnational regionalism’” (Simonett 123).

origin or birthplace) and placed in another context, where the cultural object (which transforms as it mingles with the cultural objects of its new setting) reterritorializes. My study of the Trottoirs project employs the cultural anthropological approach to Deleuze and Guattari's thought to describe the degree a culture or a cultural product is tied to a place in a transnational and transcultural scenario.¹⁰⁹

To develop my argument,¹¹⁰ I first examine Trottoirs under the lenses of transnationalism and deterritorialization. I argue that tango as a transnational and deterritorialized cultural product facilitates the creation of satellite “imagined communities” outside the borders of the nation-state, which, in turn, opens up a space where questions and challenges to nation can emerge. Secondly, I read Trottoirs as a national project that attempts to constitute a kind of “imagined community” away from the territory of the nation-state. Trottoirs, I propose, bases the affiliation to its community on a shared language (tango) and a shared history/memory that is preserved in and invoked by tango. And lastly, I examine how Trottoirs both affirms and destabilizes the institution of nation through tango. That is, on one hand, the employment of tango to construct a community in diaspora recognizes and therefore affirms certain tropes and discourses embedded in the national myth (for example, the civilization and barbarism dichotomy, the geographical, cultural and affective landscape of Buenos Aires). And on the other hand, Trottoirs notes the incongruity of categorizing as a national symbol a genre that is transnational by origin. Moreover, Trottoirs seems to recognize the

¹⁰⁹ Deleuze and Guattari's theory is employed through the lenses of cultural anthropology and hence the concept of “plane of immanence” is beyond the purview of this study.

¹¹⁰ In the study of the Trottoirs project in this chapter, I should note that the salon becomes the central text on which I base my analysis. The album, as the blueprint and model of the salon, is also considered but in a more cursory manner.

shortcomings of its enterprise. Just as Trottoirs proposes that culture can be detached from its physical territory, the sole employment of tango indicates the project's inability to break out completely of the system of national discourse. First, because it is able to invoke and reproduce nation elsewhere with a cultural product that is highly evocative of its cultural landscape of origin. Thus, the usage of tango to build nation beyond the state's territory indicates the project is "entrapped in the linguistic imaginary of the territorial state" (Appadurai 418).

3.1. Beyond nation: Tango, transnationalism and deterritorialization

In this section I argue that tango is a transnational genre, not only by origin but also by existence, that reproduces the locus of its birth as it de/reterritorializes in spaces beyond the nation-state. The travels of tango that take the genre out of its territory of origin, the Río de la Plata region, therefore deterritorializing it, open up spaces for new and alternate meanings of nation and identity. Furthermore, the decontextualization that comes with deterritorialization allows for the constitution of a space of belonging for displaced subjects, whom Simonett calls transmigrants and Caren Kaplan terms nomads. As a product of deterritorialized tango, Trottoirs seizes the defamiliarization and distance that result from tango's physical separation from its birthplace to contest and destabilize notions of nation and canon in Argentina's national narrative.

To develop my argument, I first establish a parallel between tango and Simonett's study of the Chicago-born *pasito duranguense*. I rely on Simonett's analysis to assert that tango is a transnational genre that takes and reproduces its regionalism across borders. Specifically, her examination of the club as a space "where migrants simultaneously live

in the old country and in the new... as an area of cultural experience and of creative engagement with the present world” (124) highlights how migrants negotiate, identify and reconcile their positionings in respect to their motherland and their country of destination. Through this analysis, *Trottoirs* emerges as a cultural product that pushes the boundaries of the nation-state and searches for a resignification of nation.¹¹¹ To further support this argument, I examine tango’s deterritorialization from Río de la Plata and its reterritorialization in Paris. Following musicologist Ramón Pelinski’s reading of tango’s travels and movements as a series of de/reterritorializing acts, I argue that the decontextualization of the genre and its interaction with cultural products in its new territory results in the creation of a space where the canons and myths of the territory of origin can be contested, destabilized and dismantled. In the case of *Trottoirs*, however, I believe a categorization of the project as an exemplary instance of de/reterritorialization cannot be asserted and sustained. Instead, I argue that *Trottoirs* exhibits – selects, even – some aspects of tango’s nomadism to construct a site where the institution of nation as a cultural dream can be performed.

Tango was already across and beyond the limits of the nation-state when it was born. Originated in Río de la Plata, a region that encompasses both Uruguayan and Argentine territories, tango is the reterritorialized product of a series of musical genres

¹¹¹ Music scholars Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid point out that current scholarship in the age of globalization is approaching the study of music from a postnational perspective. That is, in cultural formations in the age of globalization local and global “motivations coexist and avoid ‘reinstating fictitious cultural units [and] ignoring racial, ethnic, and sexual difference because it disrupts the national fantasy’” (4). The goal of postnational music scholarship “would be to question the very values that support these nationalist canons. If identities are unstable, continuously-changing processes, we must understand that fixed character of nationalist music historiography as well as their music canons as essentialist discourses that support larger nationalist and often colonialist projects” (7).

and dances that converged in Río de la Plata at the dusk of the nineteenth century. This suggests that tango was already a postnational and transnational cultural form when it was adopted as a symbol of a nation-state. The idea of nation-state, therefore, is problematized in Trottoirs through the foregrounding of the genre's transnational roots (the production of the Trottoirs project from Paris is an instance of tango's transnationalism) and its categorization as a national symbol. That is, the institutionalization of tango as a national symbol involved a process of selection, realignment and delimitation that conformed the genre to the parameters of a nation-state that sought to delineate the contours of its identity. Hence, tango the national symbol is a vetted and sanitized version of the genre that aimed to represent a community while excluding factions of it that did not support the national myth.¹¹² By foregrounding and appealing to tango's transnationalism, Trottoirs attempts to liberate the genre from the restraints of a national symbol and recover the parts of tango that were omitted by official nationalism. For example, as analyzed in the previous chapter, the song "Medianoche aquí" depolarizes perhaps the most crucial dichotomy in Argentina's national narrative, civilization and barbarism, and portrays them not as antagonistic ideas but as fraternal and complementary notions of *argentinidad*. In the case of the salon, the idea of *argentinidad* is not delimited by the coordinates of the nation-state; that is, the Trottoirs salon is in itself an instance of a transnational product. Tomás Barna, an Argentine essayist and one of the co-founders of the café-concert, explains that the salon's founding and managing group was composed of Argentine, French and South American members, and the musical repertoire was composed of Argentine, Uruguayan and French acts that

¹¹² To read more about the adoption of tango as national symbol, see Chapter 1.

aimed to “shine a light of *argentinidad* in Paris” (my translation).¹¹³ On the other hand, Trottoirs does find the advantage of tango’s status as a national symbol and relies on its power to evoke the specificity of the *porteño* space (its regionalism) and reproduce it elsewhere, across national and territorial borders.

In her study of the *pasito duranguense*, musicologist Simonett identifies a phenomenon known as transnational regionalism. Within the field of music, this phenomenon can be understood as the reappropriation and resignification of a regional music (one that is intimately tied and associated with a specific geographic and cultural region) by transmigrants, who employ their music to both evoke home from a displaced position and to articulate their own cultural identity in their new reality. This resignified regional music, thus, asserts a rootedness to a certain and specific community while doing so beyond the borders of the nation-state (123). Simonett foregrounds the space of the club as the site where the subjects who are taking part in the remembrance and recreation of “home” and the articulation of their new identity negotiate their seemingly irreconcilable positions, “here” and “there.” Simonett explains:

The club is a space where migrants simultaneously live in the old country and in the new. This space where migrants’ managing of experiences of loss and coping, or, as Roberto Ainslie has pointed out, as an area of cultural experience and of creative engagement with the present world.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ “Entre franceses, argentinos y otros sudamericanos llegamos a ser 23 los componentes del cuerpo activo y espíritu tanguero forjadores de ese templo de nuestra música ciudadana”, Tomás Barna explains. “... [Con Trottoirs] concretamos el sueño de irradiar una luz de *argentinidad* en París... con la certeza de que se repetiría la historia: si París, en 1913, había aceptado y consagrado al tango, lo cual permitió que en la Argentina se levantara la prohibición y se lo valorara en su justa medida, ahora -desde 1981- triunfando otra vez en París... renacería en Buenos Aires y -por ende- en todo nuestro territorio. Y -por qué no- este renacimiento podría llegar a tener alcance, repercusión universal”. Barna, Tomás. “La verdad sobre el origen del auge actual del tango.” Club de Tango. 20 (July-August 1996). Web. http://www.clubdetango.com.ar/articulos/origen_auge.htm

¹¹⁴ Simonett 124.

Applying Simonett's idea to tango in general and to Trottoirs in specific, the tango salon can be read as a site where the diasporic community, caught between places and times (here and there, yesterday and tomorrow), articulate a new identity and seek a place of belonging in a transnational space. Simonett observes that Appadurai had suggested that the spaces between nations, or transnational spaces, are in the process of being created from the diasporas and migrations of the contemporary world (123). In tango's and Trottoirs' case, this space of belonging is in the form of the tango gatherings, or *milongas*, that took place in the Trottoirs salon. Because the social codes that govern the *milonga* are different from those of the outside world, I argue that the *milonga* in Trottoirs becomes the scenario where national canons can be questioned. In the *milonga*, a set of codes different from those of the world outside tango governs and determines affiliation and belonging. Tango scholar Savigliano explains that:

... *milongas*, as sites of pleasure, are regarded as democratic, even revolutionary experiments that allow for age and class differences to blur, male and female differences to explode and yet seductively combine, self-interests to cede to the higher common purpose of keeping tango alive, reasserting the capacity to produce a local cultural form in the midst of bombarding foreign influences.¹¹⁵

The *milongas*, therefore, are sites where a certain notion of authenticity is preserved. Hence, I argue that because Trottoirs takes part in the project of nation, national codes, myths and canons were reshuffled in the *milongas* held at the salon. In this analysis I focus on two ideas of nation that Trottoirs undermines, one broad in scope and another specific: The first idea that Trottoirs aims to destabilize is the "natural" connection between nation and state, and nation and territory; and the second notion,

¹¹⁵ Savigliano, Marta. "Nocturnal ethnographies: Following Cortázar in the milongas of Buenos Aires." *Revista Transcultural de Música*. 5 (2000): 3.

closely associated to the former, is the reimagining of the terms of citizenship, of what it takes to belong to Argentina, of the meaning of *argentinidad*.¹¹⁶ To further explore these ideas, I employ Deleuze and Guattari's concept of deterritorialization. Seen through this theory, the depth of Trottoirs' impact on the subject of nation can be elucidated.

In his study of tango in diaspora, ethnomusicologist Pelinski views the trials and travels of tango through the lenses of deterritorialization, and proposes that tango, because of its turbulent history and bifurcated fate, leads a double – and most certainly a multiple – life, setting roots in its birthplace while inhabiting other locales around the globe where it comes into contact with each region's cultural influences. Pelinski formulates his theory upon Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. The French theorists' concept of deterritorialization can be understood as a process of defamiliarization or decontextualization, where a cultural object, for instance, is taken out of its territory, and placed in another context, where the cultural object, transforming as it mingles with the cultural objects of its new setting, reterritorializes. The decontextualization of the cultural object opens up possibilities and potentialities for new meanings, new functions and new products. In the words of transnationalism scholar Kaplan, the defamiliarization produced by deterritorialization “enables imagination, even if it produces alienation, to express another potential community, to force the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” as not only notions of value, canon and nation are dismantled but also the movement and travel between center and periphery involved in the process of deterritorialization are no longer

¹¹⁶ I should note that it is not the objective of this chapter to define *argentinidad* but to analyze the manner in which the Trottoirs project engages in this national discourse and creates a space for the displaced community where this dialogue can be performed.

regarded as imperialist but nomadic (188). In the field of anthropology (which is what most concerns us in this study), Deleuze and Guattari's thought has been employed to describe the degree a culture or a cultural product is tied to a place in a transnational and transcultural scenario.¹¹⁷

If the travels of tango, between Paris and Buenos Aires, between the city and the *arrabales*, between center and periphery, can be conceived as a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization as proposed by Pelinski, the "identity," the "self" of tango refuses the fixity of a unified meaning. That is, the meaning of tango in Buenos Aires may not be the same as tango in Paris. Therefore, Pelinski categorizes two "ideal" types of tango: tango *porteño* and nomadic tango. The first is defined as the genre that is rooted in its birthplace, that has been geographically territorialized in its homeland, and that articulates "un tiempo antropológico" (23). Therefore, the tango *porteño* is topical and chronological. Tango *nómade*, on the other hand, is the tango that left its place of birth and has never returned. It is, thus, reterritorialized upon other cultures, assimilating the style of other genres. Nomadic tango is, hence, utopic and uchronic. The origin of these categories, or the bifurcation of tango, can easily be located within the "history" of tango. In the dawn of the twentieth century the genre was deterritorialized from its birthplace, Río de la Plata (tango *porteño*), to be reterritorialized in Paris, where it became, in its new territory, amid a new context and the influences that come with it, a

¹¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari's theory is employed through the lenses of cultural anthropology and hence the concept of "plane of immanence" is beyond the purview of this study.

new incarnation of tango (*tango nómade*).¹¹⁸ The decontextualization of tango *porteño* opens up the possibility to dismantle canons, national narratives, and in Kaplan's words, it enables imagination to produce another potential community. Specifically in the case of Trottoirs, the attempt to dismantle canons aims to carve out a space within the paradigm of nation for the diasporic subjects.

The tango of *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* and the salon cannot entirely be categorized as nomadic tango, although it shows a tendency towards decontextualizing tango *porteño* while strongly invoking tango *porteño*'s symbolic territory.¹¹⁹ Rather, I believe, the tango of Trottoirs lingers in the threshold between nomadic tango and what Pelinski denominates tango *simulacro*, which is specifically directed to the *porteños* in diaspora and which, therefore, tends to follow the musical aesthetics of traditional and classic tango.¹²⁰ Nomadic tango, in contrast, builds its aesthetics and mythology on the commonalities that result from the encounter between cultures (between Parisian and *porteño* cultures, for instance); the audience of nomadic tango, therefore, is not necessarily rooted in the tradition and history of tango.¹²¹ Hence, the Trottoirs project lies somewhere between these two types of tango. On one hand, as keenly observed by

¹¹⁸ Tango is reterritorialized in other territories and metropolises such as Barcelona, Berlin, Medellín, Tokyo, in each place becoming something different from tango *porteño*. To read more about tango's settlements around the globe, see Marta Savigliano and Ramón Pelinski.

¹¹⁹ The salon featured acts such as Astor Piazzolla, who under Pelinski's model can be categorized as nomadic tango, and Osvaldo Pugliese, a quintessential example of tango *porteño*.

¹²⁰ Pelinski explains that tango simulacro "sirve por vocación a la 'comunidad imaginada' de la cultura porteña en la diáspora, reproduciendo originales porteños en anamnesias más o menos fieles a lejanos originales" (50).

¹²¹ Pelinski explains that *tango nómade* "vive de las afinidades que crea la intercultural en un proceso de interreferencia o intertextualidad. . . se dirige principalmente a una audiencia abierta que no pertenece a la herencia cultural del tango porteño" (50).

journalist Pierre Kalfon, the *Trottoirs* album is steeped in the tradition of *tango porteño* while introducing subtle musical and thematic innovations. On the other hand, the *Trottoirs* project envisions its community (its audience) as one with a shared memory and past that strives to create a new identity in a new context and reality.

A glimpse of this vision can be gleaned in the cover art by Antonio Seguí. The opaque-colored painting portrays a mundane and ephemeral snapshot of a sidewalk scene in which pedestrians heading in different directions share a space and a time. Glanced from afar, the painting of people transiting concentric paths that drift off the frame in a dynamic reminiscent of the *milongas* lacks obvious markers of location and specificity; the scene is decontextualized. That is, the scene is taken out of its territory (the physical Buenos Aires), is devoid of context (geographically, it is not clear where this scene takes place), and is granted a new one (framed within the physical boundaries of the LP and visually representing what the *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* title alludes, the scene is placed within the context and the territory of *Trottoirs*). Therefore, I argue, the cover art is the visual representation of the process of de/reterritorialization of tango, which would eventually be performed, enacted and materialized in the *Trottoirs* salon.

The *Trottoirs* salon prided itself in launching Argentine tango acts to the international sphere as well as a scenario where newer and more experimental tango was performed. The café-concert has featured traditional and classical acts of *tango porteño* such as Osvaldo Pugliese's orchestra and tango innovators such as Astor Piazzolla and Juan José Mosalini.¹²² This not only established further tango's transnational status, but

¹²² Juan José Mosalini, who plays the bandoneón in the *Trottoirs* album, is one of the key figures in *tango nuevo* and *tango nómade*, according to Pelinski.

also contributed to a constant process of de- and reterritorialization of tango *porteño* and tango *nómade*. That is, while tango *porteño* ventures out of its geographic boundaries to mingle in the Parisian scene, tango *nómade* encounters its core root in Trottoirs. A similar dynamic can be observed in the album. As suggested by Kalfon in the album's liner notes, the *Trottoirs* songs adhere to the conventional tango model as well as introduce innovations musically and lyrically. In the lyrics, for instance, traditional tango tropes and themes such as hopelessness, arresting nostalgia and darkness in "La Cruz del Sur" are juxtaposed to less common themes of hope, light and agency in "Medianoche aquí." Likewise, the scarce but present *lunfardo* words in *Trottoirs* songs such as *pibe* in "Veredas de Buenos Aires" or the *voseo* in "La Cruz" are juxtaposed to French phrases such as "Ce'st la java de celui qui s'en va..."¹²³ in "Java." The coexistence of these songs within the album signals the thematic convergence of tango *porteño* and *nómade*. The effect of the performance and encounter of these two types of tango in Trottoirs is that both are destabilized and decontextualized: Tango *porteño* is liberated of its context to encounter influences in a new territory, and tango *nómade* is rooted in its cultural tradition and imagined community. In this process, the nation-state is undermined through its national symbol, which is placed beyond nation, outside the topical and chronological boundaries of a national symbol, and is faced with the utopic and uchronic possibilities of its reterritorialized alternate self (selves). In other words, the notion of nation is destabilized in order to find a space for the diasporic community, and for the

¹²³ "Java" is a popular music and dance with waltz roots that was developed in France in the early-twentieth century. The phrase in Cortázar's song means: "It is the *java* of whom has left" or "It is the dance/song of whom has left."

possibility of a time and place where an imagined community, liberated from the grips of dictatorship, can exist.

3.2. Building nation: Trottoirs' imagined community

... occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realization of the imagined community... If we are aware that others are singing these songs precisely when and as we are, we have no idea who they may be, or even where, out of earshot, they were singing. Nothing connects us all but imagined sound.

— Benedict Anderson (145)

During its nine years of operation, the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires salon filled its program with musical guests, poetry-reading nights and dance soirées. The café-concert provided tango acts from the Río de la Plata region a platform from which to launch an international career, in introducing the European audience to “authentic” and contemporary tango and in supplying the diasporic Argentine community with a currentness and immediacy to their connection to their homeland. The salon became the site where the physical link between “here” and “there” was manifested, where a sense of peoplehood and citizenship was nurtured. In Trottoirs, imagined sound was materialized and made present by the live performances of Argentine tango singers and orchestras such as Susana Rinaldi and Sexteto Mayor. These artists were the living link, the common and contemporary sight and sound between those in diaspora and those in Argentina (the realization of watching and listening to the same acts is a powerful force and thought that connects people). As anthropologist Nicholas Harney puts it, these performances made “the physically distant, emotively near” (44). In the Trottoirs salon, the experience of these performances brought about a tangible and “physical realization of the imagined community” (Anderson 145) that spans across borders. In this sense,

also, the Trottoirs project was not only a product of deterritorialized tango but also aided in the creation of a new territoriality for diasporic, nomadic and traveling tango.

The analysis from the previous section yields the following questions: As the link between nation and territory, and nation and state become blurred with the travels and continual de/reterritorialization of tango, which national myths and canons does Trottoirs contest, and what kind of imagined community does Trottoirs create in diaspora? In this section I propose that the Trottoirs project builds an imagined community, a nation, through tango. This tango nation, like many others in different points around the globe where tango has reterritorialized, stands in parallel and in contrast to tango *porteño*, the national symbol. As part and parcel of Argentina's national narrative, the Trottoirs nation becomes a sort of mirror to the official nation-state and presents an alternate image that opens up possibilities for the destabilization and dismantling of national canons. However, delineating the contours of the Trottoirs nation or naming the specific national canons that are contested or dismantled in the project becomes a speculative, elusive and slippery task. The point here is to show that Trottoirs creates the possibility for challenges, contestation and subversion; and most importantly, Trottoirs creates the opportunity to imagine and live an alternate reality. As I have argued in the second chapter of this thesis, the Trottoirs project's achievement lies in the creation of a space where the collective articulation of nation by the diasporic subject can take place. Therefore, it is my purpose here to demonstrate how Trottoirs constitutes nation through tango, but not to describe, qualify and categorize this nation. Likewise, it is my aim to show that Trottoirs participates in the articulation of *argentinidad*, but not to comprehensively define or grant a fixed meaning to Argentina's national identity. The

attempt to fully describe the Trottoirs nation or how the project defines *argentinidad* undercuts the impact of Trottoirs' achievement to render identity unfixed and beyond the grasp of official nationalism.

In Trottoirs nation is conceived within tango, and nation exists through the collective act of narration that the subjects gathered in the salon perform. In his previous works, Cortázar had shown an inclination to the act of collective narration. A pertinent example for the purposes of my argument is a dialogue from his 1960 novel *Los Premios* in which the characters ponder about the notion of fatherland: Paula says that nation “No existe pero es dulce.” López says, “Existe pero no es dulce.” And Raúl says, “No existe. La existimos.”¹²⁴ Echoes of this dialogue are reflected and embedded in the Trottoirs project, especially in the *milongas*. Functioning in a different time from the “real world,” the *milongas* are sites of performance and sites of “enduring micro-history, composed of anecdotes rather than events, that run underneath grand, fast-spaced history,” according to Savigliano (6). Because of their capacity to create an alternate world, *milongas* become a crucial and powerful place during trying times. If seen through the paradigm of Augusto Boal's theater of the oppressed in which performances are regarded as a rehearsal of and prelude to effecting social change, *milongas* can be interpreted as the time and space where bodies train and prepare to subvert the “real world.”¹²⁵ Specifically in the *milongas* of Trottoirs, the diasporic subjects gather in the salon to practice what

¹²⁴ Cortázar, Julio. *Los Premios*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1995: 257.

¹²⁵ “Lo que propone la *Poética del oprimido* es la acción misma: el espectador no delega poderes en el personaje ni para que piense ni para que actúe en su lugar; al contrario él mismo asume el papel protagónico, cambia la acción dramática, ensaya soluciones, debate proyectos de cambio — en resumen, se entrena para la acción real. En este caso puede ser que el teatro no sea revolucionario en sí mismo, pero seguramente es un ‘ensayo’ de la revolución” (Boal 17).

scholar Hamid Naficy terms “exile discourse” and to rehearse and build “nation” as a cultural dream that subverts the “real” nation-state by presenting the possibility of a community and an existence untarnished by dictatorship.¹²⁶ Salon co-founder Barna recalls the sense of fraternity and of a collective though unarticulated understanding of *argentinidad* during the opening night of the salon in 1981. He writes:

En la noche de apertura (ese 19 de noviembre de 1981, inolvidable) la argentinidad adquirió proporciones universales. Argentinos, franceses, otros europeos y varios latinoamericanos se sintieron hermanados, plenos de fervor, sacudidos por una emoción extraña, latiendo al unísono bajo el conjuro de la música que expresaba el estremecimiento del ser humano con un lenguaje netamente argentino.¹²⁷

Barna’s statement indicates that *argentinidad* is not defined by the parameters of the nation-state, but by tango. Therefore, the Trottoirs nation is mainly constituted through the language and space of tango, which is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. On one hand, the album opens up spaces for narration to almost everyone who speaks and understands Spanish, but on the other hand, the project gives access only to those who know and practice the language of tango. It is in this duality where the Trottoirs project affirms and builds nation (by employing a national symbol and a language to not only determine membership but also to appeal to a common historical and cultural background) and undermines it (by foregrounding the artificiality of the bonds that tie members of a community together; in the case of tango, the level of

¹²⁶ The space of diaspora is particularly fertile for these kinds of experiments, according to Naficy. The scholar contends that displaced subjects are located “between the structural force fields of both home and host social systems, and as a result, they are in a position not only to question, even subvert, much of their previous authenticities, identities and cultural practices but also to forge new ones in their place” (9).

¹²⁷ Barna, Tomás. “La verdad sobre el origen del auge actual del tango.” Club de Tango. 20 (July-August 1996). Web. http://www.clubdetango.com.ar/articulos/origen_auge.htm

knowledge of the music and dance determines the degree of membership in the tango nation). So, although a certain kind of agora is obtained in diaspora, where the terms of citizenship and belonging to nation are reshuffled, divisions still exist. That is, although the lines of division and classification are redefined to dismantle codes that marginalize and exclude certain sections of the community, other paradigms arise to mark distinction (for example, if a marker of difference and exclusion in Buenos Aires was classism based on a socioeconomic status, the lines of classification in the Trottoirs salon are drawn based on the ability to dance). The result of Trottoirs' community building through tango shows the potential and possibility for change in the exercise of nation as well as the pitfalls of this operation.

3.3. Conclusion

Trottoirs de Buenos Aires constituted a space where the awareness of imagined sound became the physical connection to an imagined community. Yet, the contours of this home are diffusely defined, lying somewhere beyond the songs, spilling out of the salon. In excess, the home depicted in Trottoirs remains mysterious, slippery and purposefully ambiguous. It is from this imagined community where a new approach to *argentinidad* emerges.

The nation, ambiguously articulated and uncontainable within the boundaries of Trottoirs, is constantly searched for and narrated within the space opened up by the Trottoirs project. The result of this narration is impossible to pinpoint because of the ephemeral, transitory and improvised nature of tango dancing, and the diversity and privacy of an individual's interpretation and experience of a song.

Trottoirs' achievement, however, lies in the creation of an alternate platform — one constructed with the partially liberating awareness of the colonizer's and imperialist stamp — where the diasporic Argentine can articulate home amid a community who joins him in the same act. On the other hand, Trottoirs contests the notion of nation by foregrounding tango's transnational roots and the genre's successful de/reterritorialization in Paris. The distance and decontextualization concomitant of diaspora question concepts that are crucial to the narrative and discourse of nation (such as authenticity and origins), and allow for the possibility of dismantling national canons and myths. Ultimately, Trottoirs' formation of a community through tango aims to not only blur the link between nation and territory but also to include the voices of diasporic subjects in the narrative of nation.

CONCLUSION

The scarcity of scholarship on the *Trottoirs de Buenos Aires* project is perhaps a result of the ambivalent and complex relation between Cortázar and tango, and, in a broader scope, between music and literature. The connection between Cortázar and tango, in particular, is elusive and difficult to categorize partly because of the writer's estimation of the representative music and dance of his motherland that fluctuated between affection and disdain. This attitude is also reflective of Cortázar's feelings toward Argentina. One certainty about the relation between Cortázar and tango, as this thesis has demonstrated, is that the writer had undoubtedly accepted tango as a symbol of Argentina, however problematic. In fact, independently from Cortázar's estimation of tango, a parallel between the (hi)stories of tango and nation can be established. The genre's development has mirrored Argentina's roller-coaster trajectory since the dawn of the twentieth century, from political cataclysms to economic prosperity and implosions. Tango has become a witness to and a corpus onto which the history of nation is selectively and partially recorded and preserved. This attribute is perhaps the strongest reason Cortázar embarked on the production of a tango project in the latter days of his life. Tango, as the body and sometimes the agent of national narrative, has the capacity to simultaneously reproduce and contest nation from a displaced position. For a displaced Cortázar, who left Argentina in a self-imposed exile to France, tango had become the sound, the space and the gesture with which to evoke home.

The Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project, hence, is a profound study and treatment of tango and the concept of nation. In its exploration of these two overarching subjects, the Trottoirs project foregrounds the latent postcolonialist forces that are embedded in the nation's symbol and, therefore, in the nation's narrative, and consequently questions the concept of nation from the position of diaspora. Herein, lies the importance of this thesis. The achievement of my study resides broadly in the foregrounding of the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project as an important and worthy product within Cortázar's body of work, and proves that the relation between Cortázar and tango is deeper than previously thought. In particular, my thesis demonstrates that the Trottoirs project was a central product of the Argentine diaspora that has influenced the configuration of tango as it is known today.

In the first chapter, I trace the trajectories of tango and Cortázar to show a parallel in relation to their pattern of travel (Buenos Aires-Paris) and their relation and experience with distance. For both, distance had provided a new life. In Paris, tango had experienced two renaissances: one that propelled it to international fame, and another that sustained it during the military junta. In Paris, Cortázar distanced himself from *Peronismo* and wrote most of his major works. In fact, the writer had said that distance, however painful, allows for a clearer vision and a purer perspective of nation. This analysis shows that Cortázar's relationship with nation and distance is mediated through tango. Drawing a parallel between the writer and tango not only elucidates the affinities between two conventionally disconnected icons of Argentina, but also sets in context a tango project that sought to rearticulate from diaspora a nation ravaged by dictatorship and the Dirty War.

In the second chapter, a close reading of the Trottoirs project as a whole and as a collection of its individual parts (album, cover art and salon) demonstrates how the project creates a space where an alternate narrative of nation can be articulated. The construction of this space is the result of a two-part process: the first part, which consists of the album and its cover art, is interpreted as the blueprint of this space; and the second part, which consists of the salon, becomes the model of the space envisioned by the album. The function of the album and cover art is fundamental because it establishes the parameters in which the project conceives tango and home. An essential part of Trottoirs' conception of Buenos Aires lies in the city's difference in relation to Paris, and how the capital of culture has influenced the image of Buenos Aires. Trottoirs, therefore, sets out to reappropriate the articulation of Buenos Aires in a process of demystification-exoticization. Employing post-colonial theory, I argue that the album utilizes the dance dynamic to demystify and exoticize tango in an attempt to foreground the imperialist forces embedded in the genre and mimic the colonial gesture. The product of this double operation is an excess, a difference that signals not a repetition but a reproduction of an imaginary city. This imaginary place, hence, is materialized in the form of a heterotopic site. The heterotopic salon is the materialization of the album's utopia and establishes itself as an illusory slice of Buenos Aires in which nation and identity can be articulated anew.

The space created in Trottoirs, however, is elusive to any attempt to describe it in detail. Through nostalgia, fragments of the past are selectively recovered to construct the present. But these fragments do not amount to a whole picture; they are just enough to evoke metonymically a yearned place and time. This ambiguity lies at the core of the

Trottoirs project. In my view, the ambiguity of Trottoirs serves three main functions: It shortens the distance between “here” and “there” by smoothening (not erasing) the differences between Paris and Buenos Aires; ambiguity allows for a wide common denominator among the members of the Trottoirs community (those who play and listen to Trottoirs, and dance in Trottoirs); and ambiguity avoids easy categorization and appropriation.

The space created by Trottoirs can be viewed as an imagined community that is constructed through and with tango. As a national symbol, tango can reproduce nation in a space beyond the territorial borders of the nation-state. This ability, mostly comprised in the genre's heavy foundation on nostalgia, facilitates the constitution of imagined communities or national projects in diaspora. In the third chapter, I argue that the Trottoirs project is an affirmation and a challenge of the concept of nation. Relying on theories of transnationalism and deterritorialization, I argue that the Trottoirs project employs tango (its tropes, its history, its prominent and characteristic features such as nostalgia, and mainly, its status as a transnational music) to revise some of Argentina's foundational narratives and consequently to contest the very notion of nation-state that ties culture and identity to a specific territory. Trottoirs proposes, in particular, that *argentinidad* is not concomitant of Argentina the state, and, in general, that nations are imagined communities that exist beyond and independently of the state and its territory. By proposing that the terms of citizenship or belonging to a nation are not natural facts but artificial constructs, Trottoirs creates its own terms of affiliation based on tango. Thus, the Trottoirs community is constituted by anyone who is versed in the language of tango.

Beyond unearthing and recovery efforts, the focus of this thesis is to contextualize and highlight the importance of the Trottoirs project as a crucial, though lesser known, work in Cortázar's artistic output and as a significant product of diasporic tango. Perhaps the most important point that emerges from this study is that the notions of identity and nation become even more elusive and ambivalent in diaspora. The Trottoirs project illustrates this point excellently in its ambiguity of location and emphasis on collectivity both in the production of the album as well as in the consumption of the music and the salon. I have approached the analysis of the Trottoirs project from a cultural and literary perspective, which offers a profound reading of the work's significance and place within the writer's production and, in a broader scope, of Trottoirs' effect on tango and on the conversation of nation. However, further study of the Trottoirs project would benefit from an ethnomusicological perspective that examines and dissects the album's musical compositions to determine its position within the spectrum of Ramón Pelinski's model of nomadic tango. An analysis of the songs' tempo and the coloring of the singer's voice, for instance, can elucidate the specific musical innovations or conventional leanings of the songs. These approaches could provide specific instances in the musical composition of Trottoirs that further support my argument about the configuration of a new diasporic identity through tango.

Three decades after its production, the Trottoirs de Buenos Aires project has mostly become an object of nostalgia, a mnemonic device, a memory in itself, that is employed suitably to evoke a time and place (1980s Paris) where another time and place (an imaginary Buenos Aires, unbruised by the dictatorship) was recalled and reproduced. The echoes and traces of Trottoirs are few and yet ubiquitous. The depth of its legacy

oftentimes depends on the eye of the beholder. However, even a perfunctory visit to the Parisian tango scene would lead one to conclude that Trottoirs' footprint is undeniable: from the salon's first dance instructor Carmen Aguiar, who continues to teach tango classes in Paris and organizing milongas, to the dozens of tango gatherings that permeate the Parisian night life. The strong presence and memory of Trottoirs nowadays among Argentine tangueros in Paris is indicative of the need for more profound studies of this tango project within the context of tango and diasporic tango. As my thesis has shown, the study of this tango project not only illuminates a lesser known facet of Cortázar's artistic endeavors, but also shines a light on a cultural object from which to analyze further the writer's conception and treatment of distance and diaspora. And, perhaps most importantly, my study has provided a glimpse into the role Trottoirs has played in the evolution of Argentina's national symbol and, consequently, in the articulation of nation.

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