

Meat-milieu: medicalization, aestheticization and productivity in Buenos Aires and its Pampas, 1868–1950

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ABSTRACT: Between 1868 and 1950, when meat production facilities were expelled from the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina became one of the largest producers of meat in the world. Beginning in 1945, bringing the city into the countryside and the countryside into the city, agriculture was instrumentalized as an urban function. Revealing the convergence of two usually separated movements – hygenics and eugenics – the meat industry in the province of Buenos Aires created a scientifically supported arena for the biopolitical appropriation of human and non-human resources, bearing out a unified ideology of medicalization, aestheticization, urbanization and productivity.

The first one who, having enclosed a field or bit of land, decided to exclude everything there, was the true founder of the following historical era. Agriculture and culture have the same origin or the same foundation, a white spot that realizes a rupture of equilibrium, a clean spot constituted through expulsion.¹

Between 1868, when the *saladeros* (or meat-salting plants) were closed by decree from the city of Buenos Aires, and 1940, Argentina became one of the largest producers of meat in the world.² In the last five years of this period, motions were made on several fronts to turn agriculture into an urban function, bringing the city into the countryside and the countryside into the city.³ Revealing the convergence of two usually separated movements – hygenics and eugenics – the meat

¹ M. Serres, *The Parasite* (Minneapolis, 1980).

² In 1868, a state decision was made to close the then operating meat-salting plants (*saladeros*) within the city of Buenos Aires, and this was the antecedent to the decrees of 1869 and 1871 which, along with the opening of the *frigoríficos* (freezer meatpacking facilities), transformed the industry and the city. G. Silvestri, *El Color del río: historia cultural del paisaje del riachuelo* (Quilmes, 2004), 156.

³ Various papers presented at the 'Primer congreso argentino de urbanismo' ('First Argentine Urbanist Conference') in 1935, addressed the need to incorporate urban ideas into rural areas, and agriculture into the urban form. See the presentations by D. Iribarne, F. Marquez and I. Grunberg in Obras Sanitarias de la Nación, *Primer congreso argentino de urbanismo*, vols. I–II (Buenos Aires, 1937).

industry in the province of Buenos Aires created a scientifically supported arena for the biopolitical appropriation of land and resources, including human and non-human animal bodies, bearing out a unified ideology of purification, medicalization, aestheticization and productivity. The movement to eradicate blood, offal and stench from the city's waterways and streets was paralleled by industrialists' desires for productive land in the Pampas, the large grassy lowlands surrounding Buenos Aires, cleansed of its native 'unproductive' inhabitants by General Julio Argentino Roca's Conquest of the Desert (1878–84).⁴ Appropriating the iconic gaucho (or cowboy) traditions of the Argentine Pampas, a globalized appetite for meat worked, almost invisibly, to transform the city of Buenos Aires and the natural resources of the countryside into an industrial commodifying machine of global proportions. The division of human and non-human animals required for the bulwarking of culture, alongside the dual processes of taming and bestializing populations undergirded Argentine elites' civilizing agenda which begins this story of modernization through pastoralization.

Analysing the escalation of capital, focusing on the augmentation of productivity in human eugenics and its correlate in animal husbandry, specifically in Buenos Aires and the surrounding Pampas, this study explores the contradictions between modernization and the raw materials and primal exigency of the meat industry. By exploring the contradictory forces at work between the circulation of bodies and capital's territorial fixity – its necessary dependence on the built environment – our work contributes to a body of scholarship that evaluates the power dynamics underlying the production of urban space, seeing the countryside as a critical component of urban history. It is impossible to evaluate the historical development of the city of Buenos Aires without considering its dynamic relations with the countryside. While modern discourses on the built environment often focus on urban development and architectural icons, a careful examination of the meat industry within Buenos Aires and its surrounding Pampas makes clear that modernization does not always take place where things look modern: it takes place in the perceived vacancies of so-called nature, in the open and seemingly deserted areas which offer the raw materials for modernity.⁵

Selective breeding

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, during the governments of Domingo F. Sarmiento, Nicolás Avellaneda and Julio Argentino Roca,

⁴ 'Our self-respect as a virile people obliges us to put down as soon as possible, by reason or by force, this handful of savages who destroy our wealth and prevent us from definitely occupying, in the name of law, progress and our own security, the richest and most fertile lands of the Republic', Julio Argentino Roca quoted in K.M. Roth, *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide* (Berkeley, 2002), 45.

⁵ T. Morton, *Ecology without Nature* (Cambridge, MA, 2009).

three simultaneous movements of people and animals changed the face of the city of Buenos Aires and the surrounding Pampas. First, ploughing the territory for modernization, the military operation known as the Conquest of the Desert displaced and killed thousands of native peoples along with rural strongmen, known as *caudillos*, and the so-called racially inferior gauchos who were considered obstacles to the progress of the country.⁶ Simultaneously, following Argentine political theorist Juan Bautista Alberdi's call to think of populations in agricultural terms, equating immigration with grafting, politicians, scientists and technocrats were readying the soil of the cities for the growth of a new, more industrious imported northern European population.⁷ Third, a series of laws were implemented to prohibit further unhygienic meat processing operations within city limits and to re-route incoming undesirable immigrants to both the countryside and the meatpacking district in the south of the city, in the interest of eliminating all living bodies thought to carry pests and diseases, both physical and ideological.

From its inception as a nation-state, Argentina welcomed immigration. Its first constitution of 1853 stated, 'The Federal Government will encourage European immigration, and it will not restrict, limit or burden with any taxes the entrance into Argentine territory of foreigners who come with the goal of working the land, improving the industries and teaching the sciences and the arts.'⁸ Working an elaborate, embodied, agricultural metaphor, Juan Bautista Alberdi, one of the framers of the constitution and a core inventor of modern Argentina, wrote: 'Each European who comes to our shores brings more civilization in his habits, which will later be passed onto our inhabitants, than many books of philosophy...A hard-working man is the most edifying catechism...Let us bring living pieces of these qualities...and let us plant them here', After which, Alberdi announced, 'To govern is to populate.'⁹ Attempting to bring the continent of Europe to Argentina, 'on wings of commerce and industry' lured by 'the richness of our continent', between 1901 and 1910 over one million people immigrated to Argentina. While the majority of immigrants were Italian, thousands of people from Spain, Poland, Russia, France, Germany and Austria, as well as Greece, Portugal, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Ireland, England, Holland, Scandinavia, Syria and Lebanon also immigrated to Argentina's shores.¹⁰ With the construction of an elaborate system of transnational railways, many of these immigrants were drawn from the littoral regions of the country into

⁶ N. Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley, 1993), 144.

⁷ J.B. Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1938).

⁸ Article 25 of the *Argentine Constitution of 1853*.

⁹ Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina*, 155.

¹⁰ J.U. Balderas and M.J. Greenwood, 'From Europe to the Americas: a comparative panel-data analysis of migration to Argentina, Brazil and the United States, 1970–1910', *Journal of Population Economics*, 23 (2010), 1302–3.

the interior, and by 1900, 25 per cent of Argentine lands and 38 per cent of businesses in the country were owned by Italian immigrants.¹¹ From this rich international diorama, selective interbreeding, and more prudent immigration laws to root out political and ideological offenders, would, Alberdi and others hoped, produce higher intellectual and cultural yields for the new Argentine nation.

Recognizing that immigration had not been as selective as hoped, many of the Argentine elite felt threatened by these unpredictable crowds and called for more aggressive immigration policies and the medicalization of physical space – urban and rural. This sparked overwhelming support for the national institutionalization of eugenics – the biological and social movement that sought nothing less than the construction of a ‘perfect’ race. As Alberdi’s rhetoric made clear, a specific form of eugenics that emerged in France and was eagerly adopted in Latin America was revitalized as the human analogue of agriculture for the scientific cultivation of the human, using heredity and the environment as its primary tools.¹² Due to this reliance on the French notion of milieu – understood as a relational system that brings together space and society in a state of contingency – in Argentina, eugenics and hygienics collapsed into each other.¹³ Both were part of a new form of hygiene, social hygiene, which turned its attention to society at large as an integral part of modernization, and focused on the products of human capital: production and reproduction. As French natalist Sicard de Plauzoles defined it: social hygiene is an economic science, producing and reproducing human capital through eugenics and puericulture, conserving this capital through hygiene and medicine, while training and augmenting this same capital through professional and physical education, for the sake of ever-increasing productivity.¹⁴ Adding to the fear of yellow fever, cholera and other contagious diseases were two primary concerns, the contamination produced in the city by slaughterhouses and meat-salting plants, and a fear of degeneration, inherited from the French, which was thought to be remedied through selective immigration and the medical sciences.

Influenced by Social Darwinism, and reversing Alberdi’s position on immigration, José María Ramos Mejía, the physician and politician who

¹¹ H.S. Klein, ‘The integration of Italian immigrants into the United States and Argentina: a comparative analysis’, *American Historical Review*, 2 (1983), 306–29.

¹² J.E. Crisler, ‘Saving the seed: the scientific preservation of children in France during the Third Republic’, University of Wisconsin, Ph.D. thesis, 1984, 76.

¹³ For milieu, we use G. Canguilhem’s notion for which he follows Lamarck to identify the absence of an intrinsic harmony between living beings and their surroundings and a consequent mutual process of adaptation. G. Canguilhem, ‘The living and its milieu’, *Grey Room*, 03 (2001), 30–71.

¹⁴ ‘Social Hygiene is an economic science, having human capital as its object, its production and reproduction (eugenics and puericulture), its conservation (hygiene, medicine and preventive assistance), its utilization (professional and physical education) and its output (scientific organization of work)’, J. Sicard de Plauzoles, *La Police des familles* (Paris, 1920), 178.

was one of the first interpreters of European scientific ideas in Argentina, considered these 'modern crowds' to be endangering the 'quality' of Argentina's national population. Echoing Gustave Le Bon's 1895 book, *The Crowd (Psychologie des foules)*, Ramos Mejía conceived Argentine society as a collective organism that requires cultivation. As he argues:

When I was studying the admirable progression adopted by nature as it slowly developed organic types (from our modest Silurian ancestor, to the primitive fish, right up to man), it seemed reasonable to me that in the formation of this society something analogous must have happened. That at a certain stage in its development the first embryo, the immigrant, must have given the social order something like the anatomical structure of fish, later that of amphibians, and finally that of mammals. By that I mean that the immigrant would have followed a similar series of transformations in perfecting his intellectual and moral development.¹⁵

According to Ramos Mejía, the immigrant's amelioration was only possible through medical science and spatial order, as he explains: 'When he [the immigrant] first begins to walk on our land, he is, in part, the vigorous protoplasm of the new race. We must convince ourselves that this unpolished peasant does not feel as we, the Creole elite...But the *environment* works marvels on the moldable submissiveness of his almost virgin brain.'¹⁶ As in France, degeneration in Argentina was conceived as a national disorder, biologically and environmentally based, that could only be remedied through medicalization. Ramos Mejía criticized the optimism that embraced the large masses of immigrants but was still able to visualize a future Argentine race through the prophylaxis of those modern crowds – a selective intervention that sought to discriminate and eliminate so-called unpalatable characteristics of this new heterogeneous population.¹⁷ To do this, he not only conceptualized a systematic apparatus for identifying degenerate immigrants that effectively weeded out those he considered inherently pathological; but he also called for the re-engineering of those without criminal propensities who, with the help of science, could be re-bred into the nation.¹⁸ Insisting that the 'biology of the crowd' should be under surveillance, Ramos Mejía's ideology infiltrated the mindset of the

¹⁵ J.M. Ramos Mejía, 'The modern crowd', in G. Nouzeilles and G. Montaldo (eds.), *The Argentina Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham, NC, 2002), 183.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 184. Emphasis ours.

¹⁷ 'Sin embargo, mientras la noción de higiene estaba asociada al mejoramiento de las condiciones ambientales para evitar o minimizar la aparición de enfermedades o anomalías en la sociedad presente, la noción de profilaxis aludía a las intervenciones que buscaban a través de medios selectivos desterrar en el presente los elementos perniciosos para la sociedad futura (eugenesia)', A.M. Talak, 'Eugenesia e Higiene Mental: Usos de la Psicología en Argentina (1900–1940)', in M. Miranda and G. Vallejo (eds.), *Darwinismo social y eugenesia en el mundo latino* (Buenos Aires, 2005), 564.

¹⁸ Ramos Mejía, as the other member of the Generation 1880, was of a 'peculiarly divisive mindset...This ideological legacy is in some sense a mythology of exclusion rather than a unifying national ideal, a recipe for divisiveness rather than consensual pluralism', Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina*, x.

elites, orchestrating a nationalist movement fuelled by xenophobia, anti-Semitism, with class and gender prejudices.

Yet again, medicalization and immigration emerged as the principal regenerative agents of modern Argentina. Physicians were at the centre of a state bureaucratic machine aimed to consolidate a clinical view of the modern nation. The process of building Argentina's social hygiene infrastructure required the creation of government organizations. It was clear that 'the model chosen by Argentina's reformist elites in the name of progress and civilization was medical'.¹⁹ From 1880, the year in which Buenos Aires was declared the capital of the Republic under direct control of the federal government, new institutions were created to transform the city into a medical object and the countryside into a healthy productive machine. Focusing on the city, with the creation of two main public health authorities, the National Department of Hygiene (Departamento Nacional de Higiene) in 1880 and the Municipal Department of Public Welfare (Departamento de Asistencia Pública) in 1881, the Argentine government established the basis for the institutionalization of eugenics – the model that would 'normalize' Argentine society.²⁰ Worried that the city's development would drain the countryside of productive labour, a new institution, the Museo Social Argentino, launched a programme called *Hogar Agrícola*, which focused on agricultural development and worked to bring the so-called 'right kind of immigrants' into the sparsely populated countryside to run the nation's agricultural industries.²¹ Exploring the spatial dynamics of production and bodies, the conjunction of top-down actions in both the city and the countryside demonstrate how Argentina's nation-state formation was constructed by racialized ideas of progress and modernity, creating a nearly homogeneous clinical machine made primarily of human and non-human animal parts.

A silent laboratory for the social

Between urban and rural domains, seemingly mundane processes created to rationalize population and productivity contributed to the monoculturalization of the human population in early twentieth-century Argentina.²² The underbelly and perhaps the purest form of these processes of separation, hierarchy and control were realized in the

¹⁹ J. Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina* (Chapel Hill, 2006), 6.

²⁰ According to the Census of 1889, the National Department of Hygiene (Departamento Nacional de Higiene) was created by decree on 31 Dec. 1880 to replace the earlier national Public Hygiene Council (Consejo de Higiene Pública), and the Department of Welfare was created a month later on 31 Jan. 1881. See ch. XI, 'Gobierno Sanitario', in *Censo General de Población, Edificación, Comercio e Industria de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 1889), 194–8.

²¹ H. Miatello, 'El Hogar agrícola', *Boletín del Museo Social Argentino*, 3 (1914), 555–7.

²² In his 1969 publication entitled *Politics and Beef in Argentina: Patterns of Conflict and Change*, Peter H. Smith writes: 'Around the middle of the nineteenth century, Argentina started making significant strides along her road to "modernization," a general concept which

industrial workings of food production which resulted, in Argentina, from the simultaneous rise of the commodities export economy and the migration of rural subsistence farmers, in pursuit of manufacturing, construction and other trades, to urban climes. Increased urban density made the classical subsistence farming model impossible for urban populations with little land to farm, while also increasing the urban population in need of available and accessible food. Between 1870 and 1914, the population of Buenos Aires grew by 800 per cent to 1,576,000 and by 1940, to more than 3,000,000: each of these new mouths had to be fed.²³

As internal demands grew, new external demands for food and capital emerged from what we might soundly consider some of the earliest processes of globalization, predating the current concerns by at least a century. Some of the most important *frigoríficos* from Argentina's Golden Era (1880–1920s) were owned jointly by British public and private interests, with the support of French distributing companies, as well as by American cattle companies, with much smaller interests held by Argentine capital. After the so-called Meat War of the 1920s, the United States solidified legal rights to 54.9 per cent of meat distribution, while the British secured 35.1 per cent, and Argentina held only the right to the remaining 10 per cent of its own national production.²⁴ England's pursuit of Argentina's wheat and meat industries gave implicit economic impetus to military land razings, like the Conquest of the Desert, which opened up new farm and grazing land for the development of hybridized Argentine and continental livestock. While Argentine Criollo cattle were heartier and could reproduce at higher rates under intense nutritional constraints, European stock had been bred to produce fatter and more desirable meat.²⁵ So, as *estancieros* (or cattle barons) in Argentina began to import cattle breeds such as the English Shorthorn in 1826, and the Hereford in 1858, along with the Scottish Aberdeen Angus in 1879, to interbreed with the so-called native stock, brought to Argentina by the Spanish Conquistadors, the initial potential for cross-fertilization and increased diversity was sacrificed. In sync with the majority of commodity producing agribusinesses, which thrive on assembly line processing of like products for efficiency, the range of cattle breeds available to the market dwindled from 57 registered breeds to the active use of less than five dominating breed types (Figures 1–2).²⁶

refers essentially to the rationalization of human behavior', P. Smith, *Politics and Beef in Argentina: Patterns of Conflict and Change* (New York, 1969), 10.

²³ T.C. Wright, 'The politics of urban provisioning in Latin American history', in T.C. Wright (ed.), *Food, Politics and Society in Latin America* (Lincoln, NB, 1985), 27.

²⁴ The 'Meat War' was a period of unrestricted competition, provoked by the dissolution of meatpacking unions and pools, which lasted from April 1925 until October 1927. Smith, *Politics and Beef in Argentina*, 112–13.

²⁵ H.M. Arelovich, R.D. Bravo and M.F. Martínez, 'Development, characteristics and trends in beef cattle production in Argentina', *Animal Frontiers*, 1 (2011), 37–45.

²⁶ *Ibid.*



Fig.1

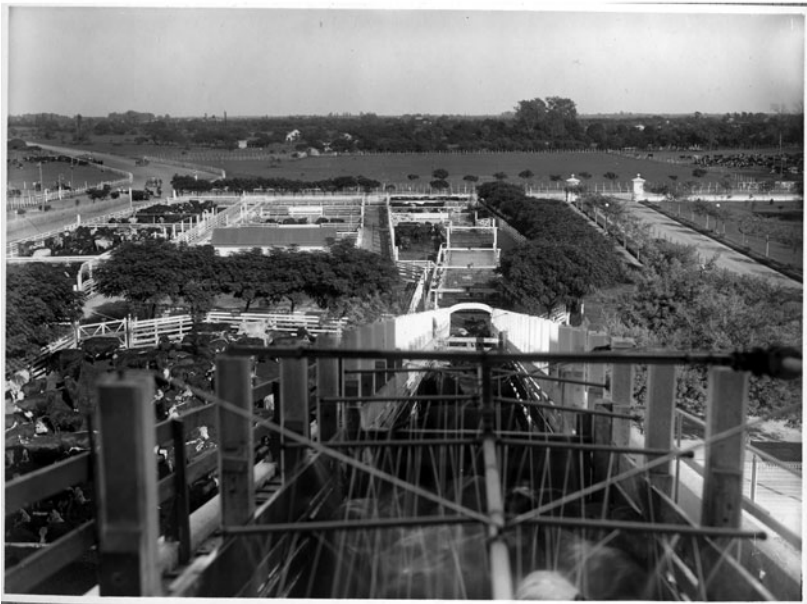


Fig.2

Figures 1–2: Photos from Dr Pedro Escudero's Album, c. 1940, Frigorífico Gualeguaychú, Ministry of Agriculture. FO.AR.01.3.07, Fototeca Benito Panunzi of the Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno de la República Argentina, Buenos Aires.

Much like the eugenic practices operative within the human realm, meat became a silent laboratory for the social. All of modernity's social experiments, be they eugenic, genetic, pharmacological, economic or political, after going underground in the human realm, continued to be enacted in food production, supply and distribution. Productivity was paramount in the modernizing of the meat industry. Performance testing, backfat probes and other selection tools were applied to ensure quality while railways, docks, storage facilities, fertilizers, improved ships and labour-saving machinery, provided by England first, and then the United States, also helped dramatically improve the calories per square kilometre cultivated on the Argentine plains.²⁷ The architectures of the meat industry were increasingly more efficient, moving away from the Parisian artisan model, where a single butcher processed every part of the animal himself, to the Chicago stockyard model in the mid-1880s, where cattle were purchased *en masse*, slaughtered *en masse* and then frozen, canned or packaged as bullion for foreign sale.²⁸ With the introduction of freezer cars and monumental refrigerated meatpacking facilities, known in Argentina as *frigoríficos*, the industrial prototype for all of Argentina's agro-exports emerged.²⁹ A triangulation of motion, consumption and spectacle, it was the meatpacking dis-assembly line within these *frigoríficos*, and their American counterparts, that first inspired Ford's mechanization of production, and allowed Argentina to slaughter, freeze, can and export more beef than any other nation worldwide by the 1930s.³⁰ And yet while the assembly line creates something new from an agglomeration of parts, the *frigoríficos* focused on a mechanical and clinical dis-assembly of a once living animal, breaking down the nation's traditions from within.

Taking a job which once belonged to a single, skilled butcher and dividing it up among more than seven discrete and repetitive jobs, each

²⁷ J.S. Pope, 'Animal science in the twentieth century', *Agricultural History*, 54 (1980), 67.

²⁸ For a more thorough discussion of the more artisanal Parisian abattoir and meat markets, see the work of P.Y. Lee, S. Watts and K. Clafin in P.Y. Lee (ed.), *Meat Modernity and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse* (Lebanon, 2008). For a comparative analysis of various slaughterhouse types from La Villette to Chicago, see D. Brantz, 'Recollecting the slaughterhouse', *Cabinet*, 4 (2001), www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/4/slaughterhouse.php. And for a detailed description of the Chicago style, see W. Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1992). For British examples, see A. Hardy, 'Pioneers in the Victorian provinces: veterinarians, public health and the urban animal economy', *Urban History*, 29 (2002), 372–87; and I. MacLachlan, 'A bloody offal nuisance: the persistence of private slaughter-houses in nineteenth-century London', *Urban History*, 34 (2007), 227–54.

²⁹ Silvestri, *El Color del río*, 237.

³⁰ In the World's Columbian Exhibition of 1893, Chicago hosted a 'bovine city' where, as in the municipal abattoir, cattle were led up a walkway and forced down a chute onto the disassembly floor. Visitors to the exhibition watched as these same cattle moved on a conveyer belt from one stationary knife-skilled worker to the next, with carcasses passing by like individual shots on film. Ford's many field trips to slaughterhouses in the North American Midwest lead directly to the so-called invention of the assembly line at the Ford Motor Company – that technology that escalated the time and simplified the means of production not just for the car industry, but for industries worldwide. N. Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis, 2009), 87–92.

worker became a single cog within a giant meat processing machine. The established system was as follows: first, a sanitary inspector checks each animal slated for sale for disease. If authorized by the veterinarian, the animals arrived to the *frigorífico* by rail, where they were placed in holding pens, called *bretes*. From the pens, they moved through a series of canals and ramps where they were cleaned off before entering the *frigorífico*. Once inside, one set of workers stunned the cattle while another hung them up onto the processing line by their hind legs. Another set of workers severed the carotid artery of each animal with a knife, and as the cattle moved through the facility, draining blood, they die from exsanguination. After death, a third crew of workers removed their head and feet, while a fourth cut around the very end of the digestive tract, attempting to prevent fecal contamination. A fifth crew removed the animal's hide while a sixth removed the internal organs which were inspected for parasites and signs of disease. A government inspector then evaluated the carcass for safety, and bacteria reduction processes, such as steaming or organic acid applications, ensued. The remaining animal, made meat, was then dissected into the prime cuts while bone and lard were separated for rendering. In contrast to the aims of this mechanized, medicalized process, it was impossible to get rid of the physicality and the grime of the work as the labourers, rooted within the rural Argentine gaucho tradition, resisted their own replacement in this modern machine made up of living and non-living parts (Figures 3–5).³¹

Pastoralizing the city, metropolizing the countryside

Drawing a permeable perimeter between the city of Buenos Aires and the surrounding countryside, the Matanzas River (literally the Slaughter river in English) and the south-western neighbourhoods of Mataderos and Liniers together formed an industrial L-shaped band around the south of the city – a zone of archaism and modernization, where rural, urban and globalized activities and products converged.³² In the 1870s, replacing an older form of animal processing, where the killing floor was used equally as the platform for slaughter, dissection and cut selection, with the skin

³¹ Silvestri, *El Color del río*, 237–48.

³² This permeable band mirrors the inexorable connection between the city and the countryside for which Raymond Williams creates a literary genealogy in his seminal 1973 book *The Country and the City*. Williams argues that the city and the countryside, as handed down to us through literature are formulations of capitalist ideologies, proliferated to maintain the status of the wealthy. Williams writes, 'I have been arguing that capitalism, as a mode of production, is the basic process of most of what we know as the history of country and city. Its abstracted economic drives, its fundamental priorities in social relations, its criteria of growth and of profit and loss, have over several centuries altered our country and created our kinds of city. In its final forms of imperialism it has altered our world. Seeing the history in this way, I am then of course convinced that resistance to capitalism is the decisive form of the necessary human defence.' R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford, 1975), 302.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Figures 3–5: Photos from Dr Pedro Escudero's Album, c. 1940, Frigorífico Guauguaychú, Ministry of Agriculture. FO.AR.01.3.07, Fototeca Benito Panunzi of the Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno de la República Argentina, Buenos Aires.



Figure 5: Continued.

of the animal serving as the only separation between slices of meat and the bloody contaminated floor, a new set of facilities and methods were mandated.³³ These older local meat processing facilities were expelled from the more central neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires, and slated for Mataderos, a new southern border neighbourhood far from the city centre, with easy access to the countryside.³⁴ Officially called Nueva Chicago, Mataderos took this second name to rival the modern North American meat processing city.³⁵

In 1871, architect Carlos Enrique Pellegrini provided the design for a new typology of meat facilities which became the model for all national

³³ O. Vecchio, *Mataderos: Mi barrio* (Buenos Aires, 1981), 50.

³⁴ M.T. Sirvent, *Cultura popular y participación social. Una investigación en el barrio de Mataderos* (Buenos Aires, 1999).

³⁵ F. Dubois and E. Mario, 'El barrio de Mataderos o "la pampa de asfalto"', *Boletín del Instituto Histórico*, 1 (1979), 37–48.

slaughterhouses. Within these facilities, the cattle pens, holding chutes and slaughter floor were arranged in a rationalized design, following the medicalized systems described above, making slaughter increasingly more efficient, hygienic and effective, if no less bloody.³⁶ In 1898, adopting Pelligrini's model, Adolfo J. Bullrich, the city mayor from 1898 to 1902, finished the construction of the new slaughter facilities in Liniers.³⁷ This new industrial complex became the centre of the neighbourhood – where a main plaza might have otherwise been built, meat processing facilities emerged. At the heart of these facilities, where the *playa de matanzas* (or killing floor) might have been, electric plants, hydraulic pumps and machine rooms took control.³⁸ The beating technological heart of the neighbourhood was soon permeated by trams and trains to transport workers to the new facilities, to bring animals in from the countryside and to deliver commodities to market.³⁹ Here in these new industrial neighbourhoods, as in Chicago, a capitalist landscape emerged, drawn equally from the rural grass covered outskirts of the Pampas, as from the modern machinery of the urban slaughterhouse.⁴⁰

From 1871 to 1902, prior to the construction of the new industrial meat complex at Mataderos and Liniers, Buenos Aires' largest meat processing facilities at the time, called Mataderos del Sur, were located in the south central region of the city. This area, known then as Corrales, newly devoid of its primary industry and shunned for its former filth, became an open field for hygienic practices and ideology. To re-develop this region, the well-known French landscape architect Charles Thays designed what was known as a new 'lung' for the city, the Parque de los Patricios.⁴¹ The idea

³⁶ J.F. Liernur and G. Silvestri, 'Diccionario histórico de arquitectura, habitat y urbanismo en la Argentina', *Sociedad Central de Arquitectos*, 1 (1992), 258.

³⁷ *Memoria de la Intendencia Municipal 1898–1901* (Buenos Aires, 1901).

³⁸ G. Silvestri and F. Aliata, 'Continuidades y rupturas en la ciudad del Ochocientos. El caso de los mataderos porteños (1820–1900)', *Anales del Instituto de Arte Americano e Investigaciones Estéticas Mario J. Buschiazzo*, 26 (1988), 27–51.

³⁹ Vecchio, *Mataderos*, 68–70.

⁴⁰ William Cronon's analysis of the environmental history of Chicago, in *Nature's Metropolis*, in its reach across the Great Planes, shares many historical overlaps with the history of Buenos Aires. From the clearing of native inhabitants – the gauchos in Argentina and the Native Americans in the United States – to make prime grazing lands available, to the pride with which the modern slaughterhouses of Buenos Aires and Chicago marked the modern state of industrialization. Providing a broader environmental perspective, Cronon describes the ways in which migrants, lumber, grain, cows and pigs were appropriated, transformed or disassembled through Chicago's insatiable advance of capital across the North American Midwest. Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*.

⁴¹ Charles Thays, student and collaborator of Edouard André in Paris, travelled to Argentina specifically to develop an urban park for the city of Cordoba. However, Thays stayed in the country beyond his original plans and became the Municipality of Buenos Aires' director of parks and public promenades from 1891 to 1913. During these years, the French landscape designer developed innumerable public promenades and urban parks in Argentina's capital city, including El Parque del Oeste, which, although never built, embodies the connection between nature, pleasure and production. To be located within the Universidad de Buenos Aires' School of Agronomy and Veterinary, the park was conceived to combine recreational areas with facilities for scientific experimentation: areas

that urban parks could operate as ‘lungs for the city’ was one of the most prevalent metaphors used during this period by the Argentine elite. From physicians and scientific journalists using this metaphor in eco-medical utopias, to people in the government such as Torcuato de Alvear, the first mayor of the new national capital, many advocated the construction of green spaces that would serve as ‘lungs for the city’.⁴² It was a clear metaphor that brought one of the so-called social diseases – tuberculosis – immediately to mind. The correlation between the development of green urban spaces and the health of the city’s population was at the centre of both hygienic and eugenic discourses. Even Nicolas Avellaneda argued that the city’s green spaces were necessary to ‘soften, improve, purify and ennoble the sentiment of the multitudes’.⁴³ At the inauguration of the Parque de los Patricios, Bullrich addressed the young men recruited from the Correctional Prison to build and maintain the park, saying that their ‘instincts and perversions’ would be replaced with more desirable productive habits through the civilizing virtues of parks. According to the city mayor, the first beneficiaries of the Parque de los Patricios would be these prisoners now ‘converted into useful citizens for the country and the family’.⁴⁴ The hygienist Eduardo Wilde lobbied for the creation of urban parks because they ‘send surges of oxygen to the city, to regenerate our blood’, and because ‘every city needs, as an essential hygienic element, the proximity of a neighborhood jungle, a forest, a plain – that is, sites with trees’.⁴⁵ Although modern architecture’s clinical agenda was central to modernism at large, Argentina, obsessed with the struggle between civilization and barbarism, placed hygiene at the centre of its modernization quest. In this way, this central area, once the site of slaughter and animal processing, became the site of new regenerative green areas and

for the cultivation of indigenous and imported plants and for the exhibition of botanical collections were surrounded by examination and exhibition stalls for ‘fine animals’ (horses, sheep and cows) and by laboratories of vaccination and research. S. Berjman, *Plazas y Parques de Buenos Aires: La Obra de los Paisajistas Franceses 1860–1930* (Buenos Aires, 1998), 137–40.

⁴² Among the utopian texts that advocate the construction of green spaces in the city of Buenos Aires are: Achilles Sioen’s *Buenos Aires en el año 2080: Historia verosímil* (Buenos Aires, 1879); Enrique Vera y Gonzalez’s *La estrella del sur* (Buenos Aires, 1904); and Pierre Quirolo’s *La Ciudad Anarquista Americana* (Toulouse, 1914). See also G. Heffes, *Políticas de la destrucción / Poéticas de la Preservación: Apuntes para una lectura (eco)crítica del medio ambiente en América Latina* (Buenos Aires, 2013), 245–72; and F. López-Durán, ‘Utopía en práctica: Eugenesia y naturaleza en la construcción de la ciudad moderna latinoamericana’, in G. Heffes, *Utopías Urbanas: Geopolíticas del deseo en América Latina* (Madrid, 2013), 131–64.

⁴³ Congreso Nacional, ‘Diario de Sesiones de 1874’, Cámara de Senadores (Buenos Aires, 1874), 165.

⁴⁴ A. Bullrich quoted in *El Diario*, 11 Sep. 1902.

⁴⁵ ‘que nos mande a la ciudad bocanadas de oxígeno, para regenerar nuestra sangre...es indiscutible...que toda ciudad necesita como elemento esencial de higiene, la vecindad de una selva, de un bosque, de un prado, de un sitio, en fin, en que haya árboles’, Eduardo Wilde (1844–1913) was the Department of National Hygiene’s director during Sarmiento’s government. See Eduardo Wilde quoted in Berjman, *Plazas y Parques de Buenos Aires*, 45; or E. Wilde, *Curso de Higiene Pública* (Buenos Aires, 1872) and *Obras Completas*, vol. III (Buenos Aires, 1917), 21.

hospitals. As a result, natural and architectural space became a major constituent in the transformation of the city itself into an agent of the normative.

On the other side of the industrial, L-shaped band framing the city, exactly as the geography suggests, the animal processing that took place along the Matanzas River was taken out to sea for international distribution, while the production emerging from Mataderos was used to supply meat to the local markets. Between the 1880s and the 1930s, some of the most important exporting *frigoríficos*, dealing with nine-tenths of Argentina's total meat output, were built on the Matanzas River, also known as the Riachuelo, including La Blanca, La Negra, Anglo and Wilson.⁴⁶ These modern and primarily monumental structures were built to exude the height of industrialization. Due to the brutal quality of the necessary slaughter within, no amount of circulation provided by the river or hygiene exuding the latest in technological and medical advances could wash away the actual messy, bloody killing done inside many of these modern white walls. Standing between the city and the countryside, supplying meat to the world's growing appetites, each facility participated in the metabolism of Argentina's human and animal populations, 'in an apparent victory over the limits of nature'.⁴⁷ In this convergence of the rural and the urban, it becomes clear that modernization does not take place where things look modern: it takes place in the perceived vacancies of nature, in the open and seemingly deserted areas, which offer the raw materials for modernity (Figure 6).

In an effort to appropriate these rural, open spaces, in the first decades of the twentieth century a group of physicians, architects and urban planners began to see agriculture as an urban function and implemented a new regional programme to colonize the Pampas. Making a slight change to the name of the late nineteenth-century military campaign known as the 'Conquest of the Desert', the so called 'colonización del desierto' (colonization of the desert) proposed by the influential group of technocrats, Los Amigos de la Ciudad, made vogue the idea that the countryside should be infused with metropolitan modernism.⁴⁸ In sync with this line of thinking, the conservative government of Manuel Antonio Fresco implemented a series of monumental and stylish architectural projects in remote towns in the Argentine Pampas. Fresco, a hygienist physician and 'orthodox eugenicist', modelling himself on Mussolini, constructed his governorship along a strictly fascist model.⁴⁹ Ruling by military force, Fresco's sovereign figure was singular, solid and unyielding. As was his approach to the modernization of the Pampas:

⁴⁶ Silvestri, *El Color del río*, 237–48.

⁴⁷ E. Bloch, quoted in Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 85.

⁴⁸ L.J. Francisco, *La Red Austral* (Buenos Aires, 2008), 172.

⁴⁹ M. Miranda and G. Vallejo, 'Los Saberes del Poder: Eugenesia y Biotipología en la Argentina del siglo XX', *Revista de Indias*, 231 (2004), 429.



Figure 6: Diagram: slaughterhouses and railways in the Argentine Pampas.

within a four year span, between 1936 and 1941, Francisco Salamone, just one of the architects set to work by Fresco in the Pampas, designed and constructed over 60 public works within a smattering of small towns that grew out of former military outposts used to advance on native populations during the 'Conquest of the Desert'.⁵⁰ Salamone designed three types of projects for Fresco's state: slaughterhouses, municipal buildings and cemeteries, located in various towns including Balcarce, Carhué, Guaminí, Coronel Pringles, Azul, Laprida, Vedia, Villa Epecuén, Saliqueló and Carlos Pellegrini. Built in a combination of Italian futurist and art deco styles, it is the rounded volumes of streamline design that most closely tie these projects back to Fresco's own

⁵⁰ A. Bellucci, 'Monumental deco in the Pampas: the urban art of Francisco Salamone', *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, 18 (1992), 92, 94.

association with eugenics. Consistent with the ideological underpinnings of the streamlining movement, recognized by art historian Christina Cogdell, the rounded, aerodynamic corners and details of Salamone's slaughterhouses reveal an underlying approach to buildings which mirrored and announced the state's own eugenic approach to bodies.⁵¹ Harnessing the energy of the primitive in art deco, and reaching toward a smooth flowing, perfectible future, as signalled through the streamline form, Salamone's architecture embodied Fresco's and Los Amigos de la Ciudad's aims for the continual improvement of both human and non-human animal populations and the built environment. Reflecting the tripartite programme of Fresco's governorship, labour–order–death, each of Salamone's slaughterhouses, municipal buildings and cemeteries gave the ideologies of masterful efficiency built form. In civic government, the inaccessible towers of Salamone's work signalled a height to be reached by a future, more perfect civic body. These same inaccessible towers, when they appear on Salamone's slaughterhouses, took on clear knife and sceptre iconography when seen from the flat lowlands of the Pampas, as if the state's future would be carved out of its animal past. Through death, monumentalized in the ostentatious gates of Salamone's cemeteries, the old unrefined populations die off to make way for the new, more evolved Argentina. Reinforcing the theme of territorialization but with an unparalleled nuance, these buildings, in direct antithesis to the panopticon, were built to be seen not only from all positions on the prairies, to stand in for the all-seeing eye and the monumental body of the state, but to be seen by future, more perfect generations (Figures 7–10).

The overall result of Fresco and Salamone's partnership in the Pampas is an intricate appropriation of the pastoral, set apart as the space to cultivate the pseudo-scientific height of modernism. As British theorist of ecology Timothy Morton writes, 'the way the land appears unoccupied is not a relic of an ancient or prehistoric past, but a function of modernity', which, in rural Argentina, gave form to the domestication, commodification and urbanization of the countryside through the promise of future transformation.⁵²

Epilogue: appropriations of the pastoral

Through the juxtapositions of cattle-raising traditions, the medicalization of cities and populations and the rise of global capitalism, Argentina became a fertile territory for massive change in the guise of the status quo. What was happening in Argentina between 1868 and 1940 under the rubric of local traditions was actually a radical transformation of the land, the city and their populations both human and animal, in the

⁵¹ C. Cogdell, *Eugenic Design: Streamlining America in the 1930s* (Philadelphia, 2010).

⁵² Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 86.



Figure 7: Francisco Salamone, Carhué Municipal Slaughterhouse, Carhué, Argentina, late 1930s. © Photo by Mato, 2015.

interest of an international appetite for beef and profit. While relevant scholarship on the meat industry in Argentina tracks how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century hygiene movements created a series of technical and clinical apparatuses within what was once an artisanal sphere of labour and food production; our research shows how, as the site of the modern transubstantiation just described, the architecture of the meat industry provided the mechanisms for the deconstruction of this culture, utilizing the language and labour of tradition to do so. The very trope of the lone gaucho, driving cattle over the Pampas and living off the land itself, by which modern Argentine literature and the avant-garde movement was symbolically marked, arose as the artisanal cowboy culture of Argentina pitted itself against the mechanizations of North American and European cattle companies and their transforming technologies. The gaucho *Martin Fierro* – the lonely cowboy of José Hernandez’s famous poem – became a trope for the nation through the work of the avant-garde movement who took his namesake to emphasize the strength of Argentine values through a paradoxical embrace of universalism, in order to defy the pressures of imperialism.⁵³ While the surface of traditional life continued on in one tenth of the country’s meat production, the remaining

⁵³ In fact, the most important avant-garde manifesto in Argentina was titled *Martín Fierro*. It was written by Oliverio Gironde in 1924 and first published in a magazine of the same title, *Martín Fierro*. This magazine became a critical platform for the Argentine avant-garde. Among its contributors were: the artists Emilio Pettoruti, Xul Solar and Norah Borges; the writers Jorge Luis Borges, Ricardo Molinari, Leopoldo Marechal, Ricardo Rojas and the manifesto’s author, Gironde; the architect Alberto Prebisch, and the historian Ernesto Palacio, among others.



Figure 8: Francisco Salamone, Salliqueló Municipal Slaughterhouse, Salliqueló, Argentina, late 1930s. © Photo by Lucas Martin, 2012.



Figure 9: Francisco Salaomone, Azul Municipal Slaughterhouse, Azul, Argentina, late 1930s. © Photo by Christian Ostrosky, 2010.



Figure 10: Guaminí Municipal Slaughterhouse, Guaminí, Argentina, late 1930s. © Photo by Luis Beltrán, 2008.

nine-tenth operated at the behest of the *dispositifs* of a new form of sovereignty and species distinctions – one in which capital takes the place of the sovereign, while humans and animals fall to the status of bare life and labour, becoming the targets of control and exploitation.⁵⁴

It is not by chance that the site of this reformulation of the national trope, from the inside out, was also the site of persistent bloodletting. As both the literal and figurative sacrificial sites, within the walls of the *frigoríficos* that lined the Matanzas River, the Mataderos neighbourhood and the surrounding Pampas, Argentina gave up its only newly acquired national sovereignty for the sake of a more modern future. This was made possible through the rise and application of biopolitics – where life enhancement technologies became the concern of the state in order to harvest the productivity of populations as if they were natural resources. In Argentina's new capital and its surroundings, biopolitics took architectural form: first, along the Matanzas River, the monumental scale and competitive processing capacity of the two most active *frigoríficos*, La Negra and La Blanca, flanked each side of the river like gargantuan gates to the city and to the sea. Between them the river, the circulatory system for

⁵⁴ G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Palo Alto, 1998).



Figure 11: Transbordador Nicolás Avellaneda Bridge, 1913. Archive: Colección Museo Nacional Ferroviario.

this industrial zone, swept both blood and offal out with over one million tons of commodities annually (Figure 11).

Bridging this same river, the Transbordador Nicolás Avellaneda, marked by Le Corbusier as the emblem of his 1939–40s Plan Director de Buenos Aires, became part of an untouchable region, preserved in almost every master plan for the city.⁵⁵ Second, in the adjacent Mataderos neighbourhood, the stockyards, *frigoríficos* and meat market emerged in place of the traditional town square, replacing the square's social and political functions with spaces of productivity and commodification. Finally, in the Pampas, the use of art deco in slaughterhouse architecture, like streamlining in industrial objects in North America, shows how style and architecture embodied eugenic ideologies. In the quests for hygiene, efficiency and productivity, reformers and architects approached buildings in the same way that eugenicists approached human bodies, merging a vitalist past and a modern utopian future in pursuit of an ideal type. At the same time, these stylized buildings acted as marks upon the territory and signs of conquest.

⁵⁵ Le Corbusier's 'Plan Director para Buenos Aires' was published incomplete and without his authorization in the Spanish version of *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, edited by R.E. Möller, Apr. 1947.

Mapping out new signs of sovereignty on the body of the nation, architecture became a primary tool of social hygiene and its capitalist aims for the biopolitical conversion of both the city and the countryside. As Michel Foucault wrote in the *History of Sexuality*, the age of sanguinity, when privilege was written into the human anatomy by blood, gave way in modern times to a new form of biopolitics, activated through mechanisms of heightened control and surveillance of all the faculties and institutions of sex.⁵⁶ And yet what the history of the meat industry in Argentina continued to show is that as the human population became subjects of social hygiene through health, production and reproduction using heredity and milieu as its tools, just one rung down, in the non-human animal realm, blood continued to do the work of subjugation that it had done in humans for centuries prior.

⁵⁶ M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York, 1990), 135–68.