

Incidents (of travel)

Episode No. 8

Buenos Aires, Argentina

April 19, 2018

Itinerary by artist Diego Bianchi

Early start: Shoreline of the River Plate

We will begin at 10am at Parque de la Memoria ([Remembrance Park](#)), a large public park in the north of Buenos Aires created in 1998 to host the Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism, a selection of public art commissions and an exhibition space. This will be our formal entrance to access something that is almost inaccessible in Buenos Aires—the real shoreline of the city, as opposed to a built or obstructed one where there is no natural encounter between water and land. Just outside the park limits there is a small stretch of shoreline that is packed with rubble, iron, and all sorts of debris moved by the river. I go there to pick up stuff that I sometimes use for my work.

Rest of the morning: Visit to Velatropa village, through Ciudad Universitaria

I studied Graphic Design at the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Urbanism of the University of Buenos Aires, which occupies a large plot of land next to the Parque de la Memoria. It also borders the River Plate and neighbors what is now an ecological reserve (Reserva Ecológica Ciudad Universitaria). Next to the university campus there is a hidden village called [Velatropa](#) where people move to lead communal lives: they grow their own food and build homes with adobe or up the trees. Their stay there is usually temporary. We can access Velatropa through the university parking lot. The project was begun by a group of professors of Natural Science and Architecture in order to stop the land being used for more parking after a shanty-town was cleared around 2006. It was thus kept as a natural park, and it is place where you can still find the native flora of the region.

Velatropa functions as an experimental center for permaculture, sustainable development and environmental education. I sometimes dream of moving there. I have taken many of my students as well as my daughters there.

Mid-day: The neighborhood of Once

Even if the neighborhood of [Once](#) is not on the edge of the city, it functions as one of main entry points. It holds a very large train and underground [station](#) and numerous short and long distance bus routes transit the area or come in and out from all directions outside of Buenos Aires. This portal, this gateway, allows for lots of new information to enter the city, information that confronts us in the shape of race, culture, language, know-how, behavior, and which is often very distinct from the culture that once prevailed in Buenos Aires. Here, what Buenos Aires has ‘traditionally’ been—a mix of European and Jewish migrant communities—encounters a new migration wave that brings entirely different histories, cultures, looks.

The Orthodox Jewish community arrived here in the late 19th century. More recently, people from Nigeria, Korea, Peru, and Bolivia have settled here. Once is diverse and densely populated, especially during the daytime, and it has turned into an area that feels on the edge of control and less regulated than other more nondescript parts of town. It is also an area of tension and excess, in permanent readjustment. The situation of commerce seems disproportionate, both competitive and at the same time anchored in a deep sense of community. Here you can feel how much social relations are defined by

trade. Prohibitions such as the recent ban on street commerce bring in a state of anxiety but these restrictions are also ignored. You can also tell there is a struggle for occupying and using space, for finding alternative economies. Communities are figuring out how to make profit when physical space is lacking and how to find an economic equivalent to land or property ownership. I am also interested in this area because although it has a certain frontier spirit it is not on the limits of the city at all, but right in the middle of it, occupying its core.

Lunch: La Rica Vicky, Peruvian restaurant in Once, Calle Ecuador 467

We'll stop for lunch at a restaurant that has been in Once for quite some time. It is Peruvian yet it feels very much part of this neighborhood, very much in synch with what happens here in terms of economy, commerce, and street aesthetics. The cost of having lunch here is way below the average compared to other parts of town, it's almost as if they use a different currency.

Rest of the afternoon: City centre.

In stark contrast to the areas where we will have already been, the identity of what is commonly known as the city centre—although it is not, geographically speaking—rests on what we could call our European and modernist 'determination', also defined as a 'local tradition.' Most of the spaces we will visit are examples of this. We can stop for coffee at La Unión, a small contemporary café, browse independent bookshops, and end the day at the art foundation of [Federico Jorge Klemm](#). I am very fond of walking around this area to observe the eclectic architecture and see how the neighborhood is constantly changing, not only in terms of what is being built or rebuilt, but also in terms of its function and circulation.