RESHAPING THE NEOLIBERAL CITY:
THE POLITICS OF COOPERATION AND THE
MOVIMIENTO DE OCUPANTES E INQUILINOS IN
BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

A Dissertation in
Art History

by
Kristin V. Dean

©2011 Kristin V. Dean

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2011
The dissertation of Kristin V. Dean was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Craig Zabel  
Associate Professor of Art History  
Dissertation Adviser  
Chair of Committee  
Head of the Department of Art History

Madhuri Desai  
Assistant Professor of Art History and Asian Studies

Sarah Rich  
Associate Professor of Art History

Peter Aeschbacher  
Assistant Professor of Architecture and Landscape Architecture

*Signatures are on file at the Graduate School.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates low-cost housing cooperatives produced by the Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos (MOI, Movement of Squatters and Tenants), a small non-governmental housing organization in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Since its founding in 1991, MOI has constructed its cooperatives in the sociopolitical context of neoliberal political reforms, forces which have been largely disadvantageous to the city’s poor populations. The hypothesis of this dissertation is that if MOI cooperatives are an example of a creative alternative for low-cost housing that appeals to neoliberal ideology, then it stands to reason that analyzing the forms, styles and spaces of MOI cooperatives can correspondingly elucidate new attitudes towards urban space, housing and the working poor, effectively identifying how this non-governmental organization has contributed to the reshaping the neoliberal city. To test this hypothesis, this dissertation analyzes the architectural forms of MOI cooperatives within the context of neoliberal Buenos Aires. Each chapter takes on one MOI cooperative for case study, and asks the following questions: How were urban space and its uses affected through shifts in politics, economics and public policy? What was the discourse around low-cost housing that emerged in this context? What were the kinds of choices regarding architectural form and style that were made in designing these new cooperatives? How have existing and new forms of social identity for the working poor been mediated through MOI’s adaptive reuse of abandoned property? Through archival, field and ethnographic research, this dissertation elucidates the conditions that engendered MOI’s creative rethinking of low-cost, urban housing. In the current context of housing policy reform, this dissertation serves to define a more inclusive history of housing and a broader definition of the neoliberal city in Buenos Aires, in Latin America and abroad.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .............................................................................................................. VI

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................................................. X

DEDICATION ................................................................................................................... XII

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................... 1
Reshaping the Neoliberal City: The Politics of Cooperation and the
Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos in Buenos Aires, Argentina .......... 2
The Early History of MOI ......................................................................................... 4
Objectives and Organization of This Dissertation .............................................. 14
Historical and Theoretical Framework ................................................................. 20
Research Methods, Scope and Limits ................................................................. 25
Chapter 1 Figures ........................................................................................................ 28

CHAPTER 2: ANTECEDENTS ..................................................................................... 35
The History of Low-Cost Housing in Buenos Aires and Cooperative Perú ..... 36
Cooperative Perú, From Casa Chorizo to Housing Cooperative ..................... 38
The Conventillo (tenement) and Casa Chorizo (sausage house) ................. 42
Public Housing under the Administration of Juan Domingo Perón ............. 51
Villa's Miseria (informal settlements) ............................................................... 67
Chapter 2 Conclusion ............................................................................................. 75
Chapter 2 Figures ........................................................................................................ 79

CHAPTER 3: SPACE ..................................................................................................... 91
Cooperativa Yatay, Neoliberalism and Urban Space in Buenos Aires, 1976-2010
................................................................................................................................. 92
What is neoliberalism? ......................................................................................... 95
Cooperative Yatay and Changes in Neoliberal Buenos Aires Urbanism ...... 100
Buenos Aires, Neoliberal City ........................................................................... 113
Chapter 3 Conclusion ............................................................................................. 138
Chapter 3 Figures ........................................................................................................ 141

CHAPTER 4: FORM ..................................................................................................... 151
Architectural Form and Theory, Housing and Cooperative La Fábrica ....... 152
Modern ..................................................................................................................... 158
Urban ....................................................................................................................... 164
Factory ..................................................................................................................... 170
Home ....................................................................................................................... 173
Chapter 4 Conclusion ............................................................................................. 176
Chapter 4 Figures ........................................................................................................ 179

CHAPTER 5: CONSTRUCTION ............................................................................... 187
The Building of Cooperative El Molino and the Class Politics of Labor ....... 188
The Founding of El Molino, Counter-logic to Neoliberal Capitalism? ........ 191
Design-Build: Education and Self-Construction at El Molino ................. 195
Rebuilding: Recycling and Adaptive Reuse ..................................................... 200
Chapter 5 Figures ........................................................................................................ 207

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION ..................................................................................... 216
APPENDIX A – MAPS ........................................................................................................... 225
APPENDIX B – LAW 341 .................................................................................................... 229
BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................................. 237
LIST OF FIGURES

1.1 “En el ex Padelai, una experiencia de gestión colectiva del hábitat.” [En Ex-PADELAI, an experiment in the collective management of housing], Pagina12 (10 November 1989): B6. .................................................................................................................28

1.2 MOI Cooperative La Unión, façade, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c.1998) .................................................................................................................29

1.3 MOI Cooperative La Unión, little boy in central courtyard before construction, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c. 1995) .......................29

1.4 MOI Cooperative La Unión, architects Nestor Jeifetz and José Barbagallo meet to discuss plans in the central courtyard, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c.1995) .................................................................................................................30

1.5 MOI Cooperative La Unión, central courtyard showing first floor balcony, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c. 1995) .................................................30

1.6 MOI Cooperative La Unión, interior elevation, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c.1995) .................................................................................................................31

1.7 MOI Cooperative La Unión, construction of planter and flooring for central courtyard, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) .................................................................................................................32

1.8 MOI Cooperative La Unión, construction of central courtyard, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) .................................................................................................................32

1.9 MOI Cooperative La Unión, construction, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) .................................................................................................................33

1.10 (left) MOI Cooperative La Unión, plan for central courtyard, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) .................................................................................................................34

1.11 (right) MOI Cooperative La Unión, photo of central courtyard immediately following construction, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) .................................................................................................................34

2.1 MOI, Cooperative Perú, outside of Cooperative Perú along Avenida Perú, begun 1994/photo c. 1994, (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) .................................................................................................................79

2.2 MOI, Cooperative Perú, interior corridor of Cooperative Perú before construction, (photo by author, 2009) .................................................................................................................79

2.3 MOI, Cooperative Perú, small patio outside of first floor apartments of Cooperative Perú before construction, (photo by author, 2009) .................................................................................................................80

2.4 MOI, Cooperative Perú, drawing of scheme for changes to the plan of Cooperative Perú, (from Rodríguez, MOI: Movimiento en Movimiento, 127) .................................................................................................................80

2.5 MOI, Cooperative Perú, plan and interior elevation, CAD drawing (courtesy of José Barbagallo) .................................................................................................................81

2.6 MOI, Cooperative Perú, outside of Cooperative Perú along Avenida Perú, begun 1994, (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, photo c. 1994) .................................................................................................................81

2.7 MOI, Cooperative Perú, outside of Cooperative Perú along Avenida Perú, under construction, begun 1994, (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c. 2006) .................................................................................................................82

2.8 MOI, Cooperative Perú, outside of Cooperative Perú along Avenida Perú, begun 1994, (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, 2010) .................................................................................................................82

2.9 MOI, Cooperative Perú, rooftop terrace under construction, (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c. 2006) .................................................................................................................83
2.10 MOI, Cooperative Perú, Cooperative President Leonor discussing construction schedule with MOI advisor and architecture student, (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c. 2006) .................................................................83

2.11 MOI, Cooperative Perú, door leading to new street-facing apartment near completion, May 2010 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) .................................................................84

2.12 MOI, Cooperative Perú, kitchen of street-facing apartment under construction, 2010 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) .................................................................84

2.13 MOI, Cooperative Perú, living room of street-facing apartment near completion, May 2010 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) .................................................................85

2.14 The interior of a conventillo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, c. 1900 (from Scobie, Buenos Aires, From Plaza to Suburb) ..................................................................................................................85

2.15 Avenida Santa Fe in the barrio of Recoleta, Buenos Aires, c. 1900 (from Scobie, Buenos Aires, From Plaza to Suburb) ..................................................................................................................86

2.16 Barrio Eva Perón, just outside of the Federal Capital, Buenos Aires, c.1952 (from Aboy) .................................................................................................................................86

2.17 Barrio Las Perales, Buenos Aires, c. 1955 (from Aboy) .................................................................................................................................87

2.19 View of a villa miseria, 2009 (photo by Thomas Locke Hobbs) .................................................................................................................................88

2.20 Flea market inside a villa miseria, 2009 (photo by Thomas Locke Hobbs) .................................................................................................................................88

2.21 Antonio Berni, Juanito Goes to the City, multimedia collage on wood, 1963 (from M.C. Ramirez & H. Olea, Heterotopias: Medio siglo sin-lugar, 1918-1968, 2000) ..........................................................................................................................89

2.22 Antonio Berni, Great Temptatio, multimedia collage and painting on wood, 1962 (from Maria Carmen Ramirex, Cantos paralelos [exhibition], 1999) ..........................................................................................................................90

3.1 MOI, Cooperative Yatay, street entrance of original casa chorrizo, founded 1990/construction begun 2000 (photo by author) ..........................................................................................................................141

3.2 MOI, Cooperative Yatay entrance gate, July 2008 (photo by author) ..........................................................................................................................141

3.3 MOI, the pouring of the foundations at Cooperative Yatay, Buenos Aires (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) ..........................................................................................................................142

3.4 MOI, plan of Cooperative Yatay, founded 1990/construction begun 2000 (image courtesy of MOI) ..........................................................................................................................142

3.5 MOI, axion drawing of Cooperative Yatay, founded 1990/construction begun 2000 (image courtesy of MOI) ..........................................................................................................................143

3.6 MOI, 3D elevation drawing of Cooperative Yatay, founded 1990/construction begun 2000 (image courtesy of MOI) ..........................................................................................................................143

3.7 MOI, courtyard of Cooperative Yatay, founded 1990/construction begun 2000 (photo by author, July 2008) ..........................................................................................................................144

3.8 MOI, apartments overlook courtyard of Cooperative Yatay, founded 1990/construction begun 2000 (photo by author) ..........................................................................................................................145

3.9 MOI, apartments under construction at site of Cooperative Yatay, 1990/construction begun 2000 (photo by author) ..........................................................................................................................145

3.10 MOI, completed apartments from first stage of construction at Cooperative Yatay, Buenos Aires, photo 2010 (photo by author) ..........................................................................................................................146

3.11 View of surrounding neighborhood from inside apartment in Cooperative Yatay, Buenos Aires, photo 2008 (photo by author) ..........................................................................................................................146

3.12 View of surrounding neighborhood from inside apartment in Cooperative Yatay, Buenos Aires, photo 2008 (photo by author) ..........................................................................................................................147

3.13 Lofts constructions opposite Cooperative Yatay, 2008 (photo by author) ..........................................................................................................................147

3.14 Calle Lanin, just around the corner from Cooperative Yatay, 2008 (photo by author).148

3.15 (left) Pasaje Icalma, Buenos Aires, June 2010 (photo by author) ..........................................................................................................................148
3.17 (top left) View of Puerto Madero docks, featuring Santiago Calatrava’s Puente de la Mujer (Women’s Bridge) and new skyscrapers, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 2009 (photo by author) ................................................................. 149
3.18 (top right) View of Puerto Madero docks, featuring Santiago Calatrava’s Puente de la Mujer (Women’s Bridge) and grain silos highlighting juxtaposition of new building and historic preservation in the area, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 2009 (photo by author) ......................................................................................................................... 149
3.19 (bottom) Restaurants and apartments lining Puerto Madero dock area, this building was adapted from an old warehouse, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 2009 (photo by author) ......................................................................................................................... 149
3.20 Abasto Shopping, exterior, Buenos Aires, Argentina (photo courtesy of John Harris) 150
3.21 Patio Bulrich, interior, Buenos Aires, Argentina (photo courtesy of John Harris) .... 150
4.1 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica exterior, begun 1999 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) ................................................................................................................................. 179
4.2 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica interior elevation of east-facing apartments, begun 1999, CAD drawing (photo by author) ........................................................................................................... 179
4.3 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica interior elevation of west-facing apartments, begun 1999, CAD drawing (photo by author) ........................................................................................................... 180
4.4 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica, plan of ground floor of individual apartment, begun 1999, CAD drawing with color pencil (photo by author) ................................................................. 180
4.5 Structural members exposed and preserve through adaptive reuse project........ 181
MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica, exposed structural members kept for adaptive reuse of structure, begun 1999, CAD drawing with color pencil (photo by author) ......................... 181
4.6 Le Corbusier, Maison Domino, 1914-15........................................................................ 181
4.7 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica, plan of central courtyard and green space, begun 1999, CAD drawing with color pencil (photo by author) ................................................................. 182
4.8 MOI, three-dimensional rendering of projected interior courtyard at Cooperative La Fábrica, Buenos Aires (image courtesy of Marcelo Cataneo) ......................................................... 182
4.9 MOI, three-dimensional rendering of projected interior courtyard at Cooperative La Fábrica, Buenos Aires (image courtesy of Marcelo Cataneo) ......................................................... 182
4.10 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica before construction (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) ................................................................................................................................. 183
4.11 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica courtyard, June 2010 (photo by author) ....................... 183
4.13 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica, bricks retained from structure of old factory, begun 1999 (photo by author) ........................................................................................................... 185
4.14 Door and window frames produced by MOI, workshop located at Cooperative El Molino, 2008 (photo by author) ........................................................................................................... 186
4.15 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica photo illustrating installation of steel door and window frames, as well as brick façade, 2010 (photo by author) ........................................................................... 186
5.1 MOI, Cooperative El Molino north wing (stage 1 construction) elevation and future adult education center, 2008 (photo by author) ........................................................................... 207
5.2 Cover of CTA Newsletter, July 2008 ........................................................................... 208
5.3 MOI, presentation panel displaying plans for Cooperative El Molino, Buenos Aires (image courtesy of José Barbagallo) ................................................................................................. 209
5.4 MOI, Cooperative El Molino elevation for adult education center (stage 4 of construction), Buenos Aires (image courtesy of José Barbagallo) ......................................................... 210
5.5 Equipment inside MOI workers’ cooperative workshop, Cooperative El Molino, Buenos Aires, 2008 (photo by author) ........................................................................................................... 210
5.6 Equipment inside MOI workers’ cooperative workshop, Cooperative El Molino, Buenos Aires, 2008 (photo by author) ................................................................................................................. 211
5.7 MOI, Cooperative El Molino Jardín de Infantes (nursery school), 2008 (photo by author) 211
5.8 MOI, Cooperative El Molino Jardín de Infantes (nursery school), 2008 (photo by author) 212
5.9 (left) MOI, Cooperative El Molino exterior elevation (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) ........................................................................................................................................ 212

5.10 (right) MOI, Cooperative El Molino original chimney from flour mill (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) ............................................................................................................................. 212
5.11 MOI, Cooperative El Molino southern wing (phase 3 of construction) photo showing sorted piles of raw building materials for recycling and sale, 2009 (photo by author) 213
5.12 MOI, Cooperative El Molino, exposed steel supports preserved for use in construction of new apartments, 2008 (photo by Kristin Dean) .......................................................... 213
5.13 MOI, Cooperative El Molino southern wing (phase 3 of construction) photo showing sorted piles of raw building materials for recycling and sale, 2009 (photo by author) 214
5.14 The pouring of the foundations of El Molino, 2004 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo) ............................................................................................................................................. 214
5.15 Construction at El Molino, 2008 (photo courtesy of the CTA) ............................................. 215
5.16 Construction at El Molino, 2008 (photo courtesy of the CTA) ............................................. 215
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would be possible without the valuable guidance of Professors Craig Zabel, Madhuri Desai, Sarah Rich and Peter Aeschbacher, all of whom are members of the committee overseeing this dissertation. Each of these professors aided me to establish the historical and theoretical framework for this project prior to my departure from Pennsylvania, and have contributed only the most constructive and thoughtful feedback throughout the research and writing processes.

The majority of the research that contributed to the execution of this dissertation was conducted in Buenos Aires between July 2008 and June 2010, with the invaluable support of the Waddell Biggart Graduate Fellowship, The Francis E. Hyslop Fellowship and The Pennsylvania State University Department of Art History Dissertation Fellowship. While in Buenos Aires, I conducted field and ethnographic investigations that were complemented by archival research within various collections. The most important of these archival collections was that of MOI. MOI’s archives hold administrative, design, and construction documents, as well as MOI’s demographic census, and a collection of documentary photographs. Architects Néstor Jeifetz and José Barbagallo granted me full access to MOI’s archives, and additionally invited me to attend MOI meetings, and visit sites. Although the materials collected from MOI’s archives are featured more prominently throughout this dissertation, I also perused the archives of the City of Buenos Aires and the National Archives of Argentina for documentation of the original construction and use of the sites of MOI cooperatives, and to confirm the data reported within the organization’s documents. Outside of these government archives, the public archives of local newspapers,
including Clarín, and a museums, the Buenos Aires City Museum, hold additional historical photographs and documentation which contributed to the shape of this dissertation.

Outside of this archival research, I also conducted ethnographic and field studies by holding interviews, attending MOI’s administrative meetings and visiting the sites of MOI cooperatives. Speaking with MOI architects, advisors, cooperative presidents, and other MOI members, I inquired into the role of these cooperatives in the expression of new identity for MOI members. All interviews were conducted following guidelines and approval of the Office of Research Protections at The Pennsylvania State University.

Another invaluable resource to this research has been MOI advisor and University of Buenos Aires (UBA) professor, María Carla Rodríguez. Professor Rodríguez met with me frequently throughout my time in Buenos Aires and helped me to establish the framework of the research. She invited me to attend seminars at the Gino Germani Institute for Urban Studies at UBA. The scholars who work at the Gino Germani Institute and those invited to speak at these seminars are leading experts in the field of urban studies, and each of whom specializes in the study of Buenos Aires. For example, UBA professors and researchers including Beatriz Cuenya and Rosa Aboy also research urbanism in Buenos Aires. Their work has shaped the analyses presented within the following chapters, and are featured prominently throughout this dissertation.
DEDICATION

Dedicated to my families.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Reshaping the Neoliberal City: The Politics of Cooperation and the Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos in Buenos Aires, Argentina
Reshaping the Neoliberal City: The Politics of Cooperation and the Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos in Buenos Aires, Argentina

The relationship of architecture to low-cost housing, at sites such as the city plans for Oscar Niemeyer’s Brasilia (Brazil) and Le Corbusier’s Chandigarh (India) or Minoru Yamasaki’s public housing at Pruitt-Igoe (St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.), has often involved the masking of poverty and the failure of utopian goals. In these cases, architects and government agencies worked together throughout design and construction, leaving those housed to act solely as recipients of the needed shelter. Within the modern city, the (mis)perception is that those in need of low-cost housing are limited to two options: government provisions or self-help. Outside of this paradigm, the Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos (Movement of Squatters and Tenants, MOI), a non-governmental organization in neoliberal Buenos Aires, has developed a creative alternative for low-cost housing by linking architecture, self-help and the limited assistance of government and private enterprise. By transforming housing recipients into participants in the design and construction of their new homes, MOI’s housing cooperatives are physical evidence of recent revisions to the physical and ideological space of the neoliberal city, as well as the location of the working poor therein.

This dissertation is an analysis of the role of the architectural form, style and space of MOI cooperatives in the construction of a new identity for the working poor in neoliberal Buenos Aires. Founded in 1991 by architect and professor Néstor Jeifetz, MOI unites families in need of housing into cooperative groups. With the legal and administrative assistance of a technical advisory board, composed of professional architects, sociologists, accountants and lawyers, MOI helps its cooperatives to collectively purchase abandoned property, usually factories, through government-endorsed, private home loans. MOI architects and families then collaborate to design the adaptive reuse of these structures, and contribute time and labor to reduce building costs.
Certainly, MOI can be placed within the context of the Argentine economic crises of 1989 and 2001, when national political trends towards neoliberalization gave rise to rapid inflation, mass layoffs, and consequently, a greater need for low-cost housing. MOI leaders, including Nestór Jeifetz, outrightly define the organization as a movement of resistance against neoliberalism, a dominant political ideology that has been so disadvantageous to the poor. Yet, MOI has relied upon the ideological tenets of neoliberalism in order to construct its new cooperatives. This organization assists poor families to enter the housing markets as owners of property and holders of collective mortgages. The completion of MOI cooperatives relies upon the entrepreneurialism of groups of families working together.

Herein lies an apparent contradiction: regardless of the organization’s claims of resistance, MOI cooperatives may be interpreted as appealing to the ideological tenets of neoliberalism. A similar contradiction is observed in the Buenos Aires government’s support of this new housing. While the neoliberal government has defunded its public housing program, leaving the creation of housing to the free markets, local politicians have also created new laws to assist non-governmental organizations, like MOI, in their efforts to build new low-cost housing.

These contradictions are the foundation of this investigation. The hypothesis of this dissertation is that if MOI cooperatives are an example of a creative alternative for low-cost housing that appeals to neoliberal ideology, then it stands to reason that analyzing the forms, styles and spaces of MOI cooperatives can correspondingly elucidate new attitudes towards urban space, housing and the working poor, effectively identifying how this non-governmental organization has contributed to the reshaping the neoliberal city. This research investigates MOI cooperatives as products of, and mediators for, a shifting identity for the working poor in response to both larger political changes, and a series of smaller political
forces: the discourse surrounding the production of low-cost housing in the region, the politics of the architectural profession, as well as the class politics of labor.

To test this hypothesis, this dissertation analyzes the architectural forms of MOI cooperatives within the context of neoliberal Buenos Aires and asks the questions: How were urban space and its uses affected through shifts in politics, economics and public policy? What was the discourse around low-cost housing that emerged in this context? What were the kinds of choices regarding architectural form and style that were made in designing these new cooperatives? How have existing and new forms of social identity for the working poor been mediated through MOI’s adaptive reuse of abandoned property? Through archival, field and ethnographic research, this dissertation elucidates the conditions that engendered MOI’s creative rethinking of low-cost, urban housing. In the current context of housing policy reform, this dissertation serves to define a more inclusive history of housing and a broader definition of the neoliberal city in Buenos Aires, in Latin America and abroad.

The Early History of MOI

Over the course of recent decades, the adaptive reuse of existing structures through the mediation of non-governmental organizations, like MOI, has grown to be the most prevalent form of legally produced, low-cost housing in Buenos Aires.¹ Since the 1940s, the national government had acted as the principal provider of low-cost housing through a series of public housing programs. More recently, however, a significant political shift towards

neoliberalization has led the Argentine government to disengage from the production of housing, particularly within urban centers.

As will be discussed in detail later in this dissertation, neoliberalism is a political ideology that involves the government’s simultaneous deregulation of the economic marketplace and the scaling-back of social services and welfare programs in the belief that entrepreneurialism and free markets best accommodate the needs of society.\(^2\) In its foundational ideological exchange of entrepreneurship for government programs, neoliberalism has opened the cast of actors within the field of low-cost housing to feature the non-governmental organization in a prominent role.\(^3\)

The importance of non-governmental organizations within the field of low-cost housing production in neoliberal Buenos Aires has grown slowly over time. The first experiment in grassroots, low-cost housing in Buenos Aires was named for its appropriated home, the Ex-Patronato de la Infancia (Ex-Childhood Services Foundation), or Ex-PADELAI (fig. 1.1). Ex-PADELAI began in 1987 with a group of 120 families who had been illegally occupying a building owned by the local government for nearly three years. Since this was the first of its kind, the planning, design and construction processes associated with Ex-PADELAI were long and evolving.

Out of necessity, the families of Ex-PADELAI relied on the expertise and involvement of a wide variety of outside organizations. For example, beginning in 1987 groups such as a neighborhood branch of the Peronist political party, the Centro de Estudiantes de Ingeniería (Center for Engineering Students) and the historic Colegio Nacional Buenos Aires


\(^3\) Since the effects of neoliberalism on urban space, and consequently low-cost housing, in Buenos Aires are so vast and complicated, and since these shifts have consequently influenced the practices, architectural forms, materials and construction methods that MOI employs, much more attention will be paid to this political ideology in subsequent chapters.
(National Buenos Aires High School) helped the families to register their group as a cooperative with the government and began planning the adaptive reuse of the structure. Between 1989 and 1991, the group was augmented by a student design studio from the Department of Architecture at the University of Buenos Aires and a pair of non-governmental housing organizations, *Programa Habitat* (PROHA, Housing Program) and the *Fundación de Vivienda y Comunidad* (FVC, Housing and Community Foundation). These groups helped the families to navigate the bureaucratic avenues through which they were seeking to garner support, and assisted the cooperative in the final design of the future housing complex.

Several of MOI’s future advisors were involved in the initiative at Ex-PADELAI. Architects Nestor Jeifetz, Jose Barbagallo and Marcelo Cataneo were professors at the University of Buenos Aires in the late 1980s, and were leaders of the design studios that gave new shape to the Ex-PADELAI building. Along with a team of other advisors and volunteers, the architects founded MOI in April 1991. From their experience in working with the Ex-PADELAI initiative, Jeifetz and Barbagallo insisted that the interdisciplinary nature of the team working on the project was the key to its success. The architects found that this interdisciplinary team allowed the group to achieve more than the architects could do themselves: to not only facilitate access to resources, but also to build community within and beyond the cooperative. As a result, MOI now requires all of its cooperatives to work with its interdisciplinary advisory board. Aside from its board of advisors, MOI incorporated three additional components from the experiment at Ex-PADELAI into the new housing organization: a two-part organizational process, a work contribution scheme wherein those

---

housed contribute labor to limit building costs (also referred to as ayuda mutua), as well as a prescribed participation with international housing organizations.

In essence, the formula adopted from the experiment at Ex-PADELAI was a two-part process. First, the families needed to organize, plan their project, obtain legitimate legal rights to the space and obtain the financial support necessary for the purchase of the property and construction materials. Only after legal, organizational and financial activities had been completed could the second stage begin: the physical construction and adaptation of the existing space. MOI now refers to the two stages of cooperative construction “construyendo sin ladrillos,” (constructing without bricks) and “construyendo con ladrillos” (constructing with bricks).

The manner in which families constructed Ex-PADELAI, and subsequently MOI cooperatives, incorporated the concept of ayuda mutua. Under this scheme, families contribute equal amounts of labor, approximately sixteen hours per week, in order to limit costs. Ayuda mutua was a key in allowing the families to achieve their goals within their own financial limitations, but this idea was not their own. Rather, a similar housing organization based in Montevideo, Uruguay—the Federación Uruguaya de Cooperativas de Vivienda por Ayuda Mutua (FUVCAM, Uruguayan Federation of Housing Cooperatives through Mutual Aid)—had facilitated the construction of low-cost housing through ayuda mutua since 1971.

In 1990, FUVCAM was celebrating its twentieth anniversary and invited other housing organizations, including Ex-PADELAI, to Montevideo for a workshop to discuss creative alternatives in low-cost housing. The gathering generated excitement amongst those in attendance and served as a springboard for new creative thinking in the field of low-cost housing in Latin America. So much so that the participants decided to found a new

5 Rodríguez and Barbagllo, 102-103.
international non-governmental housing organization to continue this work, the Secretaría Latinoamericana de Vivienda Popular (SELP, Latin American Secretariat of Popular Housing).

As a forum for the exchange of ideas and a support network for organizations throughout Latin America, SELVIP asserts that the production of low-cost housing is not just a local concern. Since its founding, MOI has been a member of SELVIP, along with the families of Ex-PADELAI. MOI’s continued active role as a leading organization amongst the members of SELVIP illustrates the importance of international exchange to this organization.

From their experiences with Ex-PADELAI, and inspired by the lessons of other housing organizations allied through SELVIP, MOI advisors established a set of five goals for each of its new cooperatives: to establish legal ownership of property for the cooperative; to define a program for the cooperative that involved housing, community and commercial pursuits; to elaborate the technical, architectural, social and legal-administrative requirements of the project; to execute the project through self-management; and to create a team destined to help others in similar circumstances, with few resources.⁶

MOI’s first opportunity to realize these goals came in the form of its first cooperative, La Unión (figs. 1.2-11). Housed within what once was a factory owned by the national government that produced waterproof goods, La Unión is located not far from its Ex-PADELAI in the barrio of San Telmo, near to the border of the barrio Puerto Madero (maps 1-3). San Telmo is among the oldest of the Buenos Aires barrios and is located just south of the city’s downtown area, which is the home to the Argentine national government and the center of the nation’s financial industry. Around the turn of the twentieth century, San Telmo was the center of Buenos Aires industrial production and was home to thousands

⁶ María Carla Rodríguez, “El nacimiento del MOI [The Birth of MOI],” in MOI: Movimiento en Movimiento, eds. Rodríguez and Barbagallo, 43.
of poor immigrants. Today, San Telmo is a tourist zone, and residents of this barrio enjoy easy access to public transportation and services.

San Telmo’s neighbor barrio, Puerto Madero, is just a couple blocks from Cooperative La Unión and contrasts greatly from all other Buenos Aires barrios. Puerto Madero was originally founded as an industrial zone surrounding the city’s main port at the end of the nineteenth century. The city’s commercial port has since moved further north to Retiro. Thanks entirely to a development commission created by the neoliberal administration of Argentine President Carlos Menem, Puerto Madero has become an affluent part of Buenos Aires and is today the home to some of the city’s most famous luxury hotels, fine dining establishments and corporate headquarters.

The transformation that Puerto Madero has undergone since the early 1990s comfortably fits most descriptions of the neoliberal city: poor populations have been pushed out in order to make way for large capitalist enterprises housed in gleaming glass skyscrapers. The residents of Puerto Madero are the city’s wealthiest. Its neighbor San Telmo, on the other hand, has left the architectural forms built at the turn of the twentieth century relatively untouched. Today, San Telmo is residence to an economically diverse population, reflective of the zone’s historical roots as the home to the city’s port and factory workers. It is at this boundary where Cooperative La Unión rests.

As will be discussed further in Chapter 3, a variety of different terms have been used to describe the neoliberal city, such as the postmodern city and the post-industrial city. While these terms designate varying impetus for the transformations of cities—be they shifts in architectural trends, changes to economic production or changes to dominant political ideology—each have been used to describe the changes to late-twentieth-century cities. Most of these accounts observe the drawing back of government and the opening up of urban space to further capitalist development. In turn, these shifts have disadvantaged poor populations and gentrified major urban centers. For more on the neoliberal city, by any other name, see: Manish Chalana, “Slumdogs vs. Millionaires: Balancing Urban Informality and Global Modernity in Mumbai, India.” Journal of Architectural Education 63, no. 2 (March 2010): 25-37; Jason R. Hackworth, The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Steven Miles, Spaces for Consumption: Pleasure and Placelessness in the Post-Industrial City (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010); Nan Ellin, Postmodern Urbanism [revised edition] (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999).
La Unión was founded in 1992 by a group of families who had been illegally occupying the abandoned factory. In 1989, a group of mothers from the building organized a kitchen to prepare and distribute food provided by the government to alleviate the strain put on poor populations throughout the 1989 crisis of hyperinflation. The mothers had been working with a group of students from the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires, who were familiar with the experiment at Ex-PADELI. The students helped the mothers to make contact with the founders of MOI, and the group decided to begin the process of founding a cooperative.

Not all of the families occupying the old factory in San Telmo were inspired by the story of Ex-PADELI. After Cooperative La Unión was established several families were either suspicious of the new non-governmental organization or unwilling to ascribe to the cooperative’s savings plan, and elected to leave. Meanwhile new families who had been illegally occupying other buildings in the area decided to join the cooperative. Due to internal fluctuations, the families needed a great deal of time to save money for a down payment on the property and to plan the adaptive reuse of the factory. La Unión continued “construyendo sin ladrillos” (constructing without bricks) until 1995 when the national government’s Ministry of Economy agreed to sell the building to the cooperative for a price of $150,000 (US dollars). This purchase was made possible through guidelines set forth in Law 24.146 (1992), which was a part of a privatization program established under President Carlos Menem in the early 1990s. Although the economic crisis of 2001-02 prolonged this payment process, the property at Azopardo 920 was officially transferred to the cooperative in 2005.

---

8 Ley 24.146, Ministry of Economy, La Nación Argentina, 24 September 1992. According to this law, private entities may purchase government-owned industrial spaces. Prices are determined as of the date groups provide ten-percent down payments, and signed an agreement to pay the remaining balance over the course of eight years. The government retains legal ownership of the property until the full price of the property was paid. Meanwhile, groups—such as Cooperative La Unión—receive full
Once the cooperative gained legal ownership of the structure, the group was ready to realize the design and construction of their new cooperative. As conditioned by Law 24.146, the cooperative was required to begin renovation activities within a period of no more than two years. In light of this requirement, the cooperative had already begun to plan for the building’s adaptation prior to its purchase. Although Law 24.146 required the cooperative to begin construction, the law did not supply additional financial or material provisions to help groups to achieve this goal.

This situation required MOI and the members of Cooperative *La Unión* to divide their efforts: one group took on the task of locating necessary resources—financial, material, and specialized labor—while another took charge of planning the design and construction of the new housing. Working together with architect Jose Barbagallo, the members of *La Unión* determined that they would recycle the office spaces within the factory into 24 apartments of 1, 2, 3 and 4 bedrooms, all of which opened to a central patio.

With this plan in mind, the technical team took action and sought the resources necessary for the construction of the units. For the purchase of materials and technical assistance, the cooperative obtained a subsidy from the now defunct “Program 17,” a low-cost housing upgrade program operated by the national government’s Sub-secretary of Housing. Individual members of the cooperative also registered themselves with the national government’s “Plan Trabajar” (Working Plan), which provided training for specialized vocational professionals and subsidies to help the cooperative to hire them to help in the construction process. The third, and most important resource that the technical team included in this process was ayuda mutua (mutual aid), to take care of the unqualified labor necessary for the construction of the new housing. Under *ayuda mutua*, each family was

---

property rights, taking responsibility for any necessary renovation or construction activity, as well as any additional bills for utilities and operation.
required to contribute sixteen hours of labor per week to construction. Aside from simply sharing labor responsibilities amongst cooperative members, however, *La Unión* also partnered with the Uruguayan FUVCAM Cooperative *Leandro Gomez y Covitea*. In 1998, fifteen members of *La Unión* traveled to Montevideo to participate and learn while helping in the construction of the cooperative in Uruguay. Later that year ten members of the Uruguayan cooperative traveled to Buenos Aires to do the same (fig. 1.9).

Although the resources obtained did not allow for extravagance, they were sufficient to complete the construction of the new cooperative. Beginning in July 1997, the group set to work. Construction continued until July 1999 when the final apartment was complete.

The general plan for the new cooperative included twenty-four apartments—two one-bedroom units, eleven two-bedroom units, nine three-bedroom units and two with four bedrooms—with each opening onto a central patio (figs. 1.10-11). To access the structure, all families and visitors entered through a central portal along Azopardo, which led to the central patio.

As will be discussed more thoroughly in chapters 2, 3 and 4, the central patio is a form that is common within vernacular examples of residential architecture in Buenos Aires, as it is appropriate to the regional climate. At Cooperative *La Unión*, the central patio is the space shared by cooperative members. Originally, this space was the factory floor. During the renovation process, the cooperative removed heavy metal supports that once anchored machinery, and recycled those supports into door and window frames. Rather than using this space to increase the size or quantity of apartments contained within the cooperative, the families of *La Unión* who all had participated in the design process agreed that this space should be reserved as a shared space for leisure, for meeting space for the members, and as a space for children to play.
When viewed from above, the decorative motif of the patio is clearly visible. For this decorative motif, MOI architects elected to embed the triangulations of the golden ratio within the patio floor. The golden ratio—or golden section—is a system of proportions that has been used by architects since Ancient Greece. The appearance of the golden ratio here at Cooperative *La Unión*, beckons reference to the system’s strength and endurance whilst making reference to a more recent figure in the history of architecture: Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier used the golden ratio in his development of his Modulor System. As used in the Swiss architect’s work on projects such as the Unité d’habitation (1947, Marseilles, France) this system of measurements are present in the structure’s ground plan, elevation and inner structure, with each closely approximating the golden section.

Each apartment within Cooperative *La Unión* has been equipped with bedrooms, living spaces, a bathroom and a kitchen. These are the dwellings of the nuclear family, not the traditional extended family. The decision to provide each unit with its own kitchen in particular is an important feature, and highlights the goals of each family in the construction of a new place to live, and a new identity for the cooperative and its members. Prior to construction, the group of mothers who had first contacted MOI in an effort to create a cooperative in the style of Ex-PADELAI had built a rudimentary, shared kitchen to receive and prepare food provided by government welfare programs. While the families were illegally occupying the building, they shared the kitchen space, and as a result, the

---


10 Shared kitchens have also been included within examples of low-cost housing in other countries, such as Stalinist Russia. For more on these outside examples, see: Peter Lizon, “East Central Europe: The Unhappy Heritage of Communist Mass Housing,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 50, no. 2 (Nov. 1996): 104-114; Hugh Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood: The Stalinization of Soviet Architecture, 1917-1937* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and William Craft Brumfield and Blair A Rubel, eds., *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
responsibilities of cooking and cleaning. As described by La Unión member Kena, the decision to equip each apartment with its own kitchen reflects the resentment of some of the mothers for having to take on more responsibility than their fair share of kitchen work.\(^{11}\) Is this simple response the only answer to the question of why La Unión, as well as the other MOI cooperatives, has taken on the form that they have?

Through investigations conducted in Buenos Aires between July 2008 and June 2010, I discovered that the answers to questions such as this are complex. What I learned while in Argentina is that MOI cooperatives can be best described as non-governmental, low-cost housing that are simultaneously the products of, and mediators for significant changes in the identity of the working poor corresponding to a series of political shifts, including the history of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires, national and local governmental politics in Argentina and Buenos Aires, political fluctuations of the architectural profession in the region, as well as the politics of class and labor.

Objectives and Organization of This Dissertation
Since its founding in 1991, MOI has constructed new housing cooperatives according to a formula that first establishes ownership to legitimize, in social, legal, as well as visual terms, the presence of the poor within the city.\(^{12}\) Second, MOI architects and members

\(^{11}\) Kena, interview by author, Buenos Aires, Argentina, June 2009.

\(^{12}\) Information regarding MOI’s construction of cooperatives in Buenos Aires is most abundant within text published by university professors who also are active members of MOI’s technical advisory board, including: María Carla Rodríguez and Jose Barbagallo, eds., MOI: Movimiento en movimiento: La lucha por la casa en la ciudad de Buenos Aires, una experiencia autogestionaria (Buenos Aires: MOI, 2007); Néstor Rolando Jeifetz, and María Carla Rodríguez, “The Self-managed Cooperative Movement in Buenos Aires and the Construction of Popular Habitat Policies,” Trialog 78 (2000): 32-39; María Carla Rodríguez, Como en la estrategia del caracol: Ocupantes de edificios y políticas locales de hábitat en la ciudad de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires: Ediciones El Cielo por Asalto, 2005); María Carla Rodríguez and María Mercedes di Virgilio, et al, Políticas del hábitat, desigualdad y segregación socioespacial en el área metropolitana de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2007); and Valeria Procupez
collaboratively design and build dignified housing that accommodates basic needs, and future growth. Since MOI’s progress was initially very slow at sites including La Unión, MOI partnered with a prominent workers’ rights organization, the Centro de Trabajadores de la Argentina (Center for the Workers of Argentina, CTA) and employed the tactics of labor activism to convince local policymakers to pass Law 341 in 2000 (appendix 1). This law outlined provisions for government-endorsed, privately financed home loans that recognized informal employment as income and legalized the collective purchase of property. Upon the enactment of Law 341, MOI’s endeavors immediately grew in scale and quickened in pace, with the founding of its largest cooperatives, La Fábrica (with fifty families) and El Molino (with one hundred families).

Within the physical boundaries of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, recent political, social and economic shifts have initiated a series of changes in the attitudes towards urban space, low-cost housing and poverty. These transformations have certainly affected MOI’s activities and shaped both the architectural forms and goals of this organization. In order to identify the shifts that have occurred over the course of recent decades, and to best analyze the manners in which these changes have precipitated the construction of MOI cooperatives, it is important to first investigate the historical discourse surrounding low-cost housing production in this city. Through a series of three examples of low-cost housing types from Buenos Aires’s history—the casas chorizo (sausage houses) and conventillos


This is the first text to be written by a scholar not personally inscribed as a MOI member or advisor which dedicates the entire study to the subject of MOI cooperatives. MOI has appeared, however, as a selected case study within more broader-reaching texts including: Marisa Carmona, Exploring Collaborative Urban Strategies (Delft: Delft University Press, 2004); Nancy Powers, Grassroots Expectations of Democracy and Economy: Argentina in Comparative Perspectives (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2001). It is worthy of note here to mention that none of these smaller accounts have come from the field of architecture or architectural history.
tenements), government-built housing projects, and the *villas miseria* (informal settlements)—Chapter 2 investigates the construction of Cooperative *Perú*. Through the comparison of the architectural forms and history of Cooperative *Perú* to these antecedents, this chapter identifies important changes in attitudes towards low-cost housing throughout the history of Buenos Aires. Furthermore, this chapter provides the foreground for investigations presented throughout subsequent chapters by answering the questions of: How do previous forms of low-cost housing illustrate changes in attitudes towards urban space? Towards poverty? How has the history of housing served to influence the architectural forms and activities of MOI?

After distinguishing the specific historical context from which MOI emerged, the participation of families, professionals, policymakers and private financial institutions in these building initiatives must be analyzed within the more recent physical and sociopolitical space of Buenos Aires. In the years leading up to Argentina’s restoration of democracy in 1983, the national government instituted neoliberal policies that privatized public industry and deregulated state engagement in private enterprise, in effort to enhance the nation’s presence within the global economy. These policies succeeded initially in attracting international corporations to the region and increasing productivity. These triumphs were brief, however, as the shifts eventually precipitated economic crises in 1989 and 2001 that

---

diminished the middle-class through rapid inflation, tempered wages and increased unemployment.

The aftermath of these neoliberal reforms instigated changes in the use of, and sentiments toward, urban space. For instance, the Argentine government made space for private enterprise by closing many of its factories and decommissioning most government housing. In the wake of economic crises, however, factories were abandoned and thousands left without work. The simultaneous increase in unemployment, decrease in low-cost housing and dissemination of vacant space resulted in a rise in squatting. These sites of illegal occupation, a material environment created by neoliberalization, are the physical territory of MOI cooperatives. Since MOI’s cooperatives appeared within Buenos Aires over the course of a period characterized by the conditions, opportunities and limitations created by neoliberalization, Chapter 3 takes on the example of MOI cooperative Yatay (b. 1993) and identifies how this cooperative is both a mediator for, and a product of, changes in public policy, as well as the transformations both neoliberal political policies and the actions of this non-governmental organization have initiated within the urban landscape of Buenos Aires.

Throughout my investigations, I found that MOI’s largest cooperatives, La Fábrica and El Molino, retain the façades of the former factories. This maintains both the memory of the buildings’ original functions, as factories built during the industrial and economic boom 1940s Argentina, that were later abandoned upon the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 90s, whilst retaining memories of their more immediate pasts as sites of illegal building occupation. These industrial and eidetic exteriors contrast with their interiors. Both contain central courtyards, a part of the Argentine vernacular, and an expression of regional identity. Surrounding these courtyards are stacks of modest, single-family apartments designed
according to the geometric minimalism of Early European Modernism, marking the presence of professional architects as designers.

Noting the patchwork of references built into MOI cooperatives, Chapter 4 provides visual analysis of Cooperative La Fábrica in order to discern changing attitudes toward, and within the architectural profession. The investigations presented within this chapter stem from the premise that while government has reconsidered its role in the construction of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires, professional architects have elected to remain. Through their selection of architectural references, which at once evoke the aesthetics of region, industry, poverty, as well as international architectural theories and ideologies, this chapter reveals the manners in which this cooperative has imagined its own identity in comparison to alternatives, as well as how the construction of La Fábrica serves as physical evidence of shifts within the architectural profession.

Chapter 5 looks to the construction processes through which these cooperatives were built. As mentioned earlier, ayuda mutua—MOI’s requirement of all member families to contribute sixteen hours of labor per week towards construction—is one of the keys to this organization’s success through its reduction of building costs. My research has revealed that by requiring poor families to learn the trades associated with building production, MOI housing cooperatives have not just created new housing, but has initiated the transformation of these poor families to working class. To more thoroughly support this claim, Chapter 5 investigates the processes and procedures that helped to build Cooperative El Molino, from its founding through its near completion in 2010.

My findings throughout this dissertation suggest that the decisions made in the design and execution of these structures are responsive to a range of factors: MOI’s location in the material environment of neoliberalizing Argentina, the historical discourses of housing
and architectural practice in the region, its members’ lived experiences of poverty, and the politics of labor and class. It is my premise that these works must be analyzed at the intersection of global, national and local political forces. The investigation of the changes in the attitudes towards and use of urban space, and the choices of architectural forms, styles and materials discussed throughout Chapters 2-5 identify and analyze the ways in which MOI cooperatives have mediated a new form of identity for the working poor within Buenos Aires.

To conclude, Chapter 6 reflects upon the claims made throughout this dissertation and seeks to once again place MOI within the larger discourse surrounding low-cost housing production and neoliberal cities. MOI cooperatives are not architecturally stunning, they are not monumental and they have never been investigated by an architect or architectural historian outside of Buenos Aires. Some may say that they are not—architecturally speaking—extraordinary in any way. In fact, as converted factories, as apartment buildings, they are entirely ordinary. My conclusion takes cues from other architectural historical literature about vernacular production, and ruminates upon the arguments made throughout this dissertation, placing the emergence of MOI within the discourse regarding the production of vernacular architecture. 14

**Historical and Theoretical Framework**

Recent developments in architectural history, Latin American studies, and critical studies of housing, urbanism, globalization and neoliberalization, make this dissertation particularly timely. Investigations of twentieth-century Latin American architecture have tended to either investigate the work of European architects in the region, or the adaptation of European ideas. The latter argument was made for Buenos Aires specifically by Alvaro Bravo (2001), and more generally for the region by Valerie Fraser (2000).\(^{15}\) The theoretical framework of these accounts mirrors earlier publications from the Museum of Modern Art, which lauded Latin American architects for their innovative utilization of European Modernist forms.\(^{16}\) These accounts have subsequently influenced discussions of these works as proof of the broad geographic reach of European Modernist architecture within survey texts, such as William Curtis’s *Modern Architecture since 1900* (1996).\(^{17}\)

These perspectives are valuable in describing the appearance of European forms in Latin America, but they do not adequately address how these exchanges served to redefine identities under the particular social conditions of locale. Discussions of Regionalism have problematized architectural trends that traverse borders. In “Towards a Critical Regionalism” (1998), Kenneth Frampton argued that while modernism in architecture and urban form has facilitated a proliferation of universal civilization, architecture must not deny

---


its capacity to cultivate a “resistant, identity-giving culture.”

Scholars have since enumerated how architecture has served to construct distinctive identities for non-western nations in times of great political, social and economic change. Until now, such analysis has yet to be conducted for Buenos Aires.

The discourse on Regionalism parallels investigations of the effects of globalization on urban space. Through technology and commerce, globalization has at once heightened senses of territory and place through the concentration of urban populations and blurred cultural boundaries. Neoliberalization has further heightened globalization’s complication of identity construction within cities. With the dissolution of public services, policies, and institutions—particularly public housing—neoliberalism has instigated changes in urban space and architecture that privilege the individual, the market and the noninterventionist state. Recent scholarship has investigated the effects of these forces on urban space, but has not yet examined the architecture of non-governmental housing within this context.

Architectural historical literature on housing tends to focus on either government-initiated or politically motivated housing production. Some of the most frequently studied sites are examples of the failed utopian goals of internationally renowned architects, such as


21 David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Le Corbusier’s Chandigarh or Oscar Niemeyer’s Brasilia.\textsuperscript{23} Others, such as the Moisei Ginzburg’s workers housing constructed in Soviet Russia, or Rationalist housing constructed in Fascist Italy, have been analyzed to formally reflect, or even dictate, living patterns that mirror of political ideologies.\textsuperscript{24} Although other disciplines have illuminated the myths of marginality of self-built dwellings and the ingenuity of informal settlements, architectural historical studies have left non-governmental and self-built housing largely unexplored.\textsuperscript{25} Similar to the emergence of counterculture settlements, such as Drop City, Colorado (1965), or the emergence of occupied buildings in post-unification Germany, MOI’s self-built cooperatives emerge as a movement opposed to the negative effects of neoliberal political policies.\textsuperscript{26}

In a method similar to that employed by Nancy Steiber and Eve Blau in their studies of social housing in Amsterdam and Vienna, this dissertation benefits from the theoretical

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
framework set forth by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1974).\textsuperscript{27} By integrating social, political and urban history into the analysis of the architectural forms of MOI cooperatives, this study reaches beyond the art historical territory of stylistic analysis, to illuminate the manners in which the new housing acts as an emerging component within real and imagined spaces of the city.\textsuperscript{28} The relation of the cooperative to the city is further complicated by the involvement of a series of actors, architecture, the urban poor, government and private enterprise, who all correspondingly respond to and challenge established class meanings ascribed to architectural form and uses of urban space. Building from Lefebvre’s arguments that physical space reproduces the social relations of production, this dissertation carefully acknowledges and investigates the interrelation of social, physical and appropriated spaces within the territory of neoliberal Buenos Aires.

Inspired by other architectural historical studies of vernacular architecture, such as *Common Places* (1985), this dissertation takes cues from figures such as Dell Upton and Paul Groth and, like other studies of vernacular architecture, considers the methods and literature of a variety of fields, ranging from anthropology to urban geography.\textsuperscript{29} In doing so, this project seeks to make helpful connections between ordinary buildings, the people who use them, their locations, as well as important connections these common places hold with the high-style buildings more commonly discussed in the classroom.


\textsuperscript{28} This analysis benefits greatly by the groundwork Lefebvre established in *The Production of Space*, looking to the transformations enacted upon the real space of the city through the construction of MOI cooperatives in order to identify the manners in which the member families imagine transformations to their own identity with in that same physical space.

\textsuperscript{29} See note 12.
Although they are, architecturally speaking, quite ordinary, MOI’s cooperatives are extraordinary in that they challenge common suppositions about low-cost housing, architectural theory and practice in Latin America, and class politics in Buenos Aires. Within the context of modern, neoliberal Buenos Aires, (inter)national politics augmented the need for low-cost housing, but did not build these homes. With Law 341, Buenos Aires is now home to a unique set of conditions where MOI can act as chief facilitator of the construction of low-cost housing.

By providing information on this distinctive organization—which incorporates equity and the construction of human capital as key components of a housing equation that is both architectural and social—this project provides a more inclusive history of housing, and broadens definitions of the neoliberal city. Previous definitions have focused on neoliberalism’s tendency to exclude poor populations through gentrification and newly emphasized boundaries between public and private. Recent studies of changes to urban space at the end of the twentieth century, such as Manish Chalan’s studies of Mumbai, India or Jason Hackworth’s investigation of neoliberal cities in the United States, highlight how neoliberalism has allowed large corporations to appropriate larger portions of urban space, effectively pushing out poor populations. While this certainly has been the case in parts of Buenos Aires, such as Puerto Madero, the construction of MOI cooperatives in other parts of the city illuminates a broader narrative in the history of the neoliberal city. Therefore by analyzing the forms, styles and spaces of MOI cooperatives, this dissertation expands the definition of the neoliberal city, illustrating how the appearance of public-private

partnerships between government and non-governmental organizations can serve to integrate, rather than exclude the poor.

**Research Methods, Scope and Limits**

The physical area of this research is the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. This is the material environment within which all of MOI’s cooperatives have been built, and an ever-present protagonist within the history of low-cost housing. In deliberate effort to sharpen the focus of the arguments made throughout this dissertation, I have limited the selection of outside comparisons drawn upon within this text. For example, in Chapter 2 only historical housing types constructed within the physical territory of the city of Buenos Aires have been selected for comparison with Cooperative Perú. Since architectural production in Buenos Aires over the course of the period studied is in discourse with developments abroad, certain international examples have been used when appropriate. In an effort to clearly illustrate the forces involved in the construction of MOI cooperatives, however, I have elected to limit the comparison of MOI cooperatives to international architectural sites to only those most strongly related to the forms being analyzed.

In order to additionally strengthen the arguments made herein, I have elected to study only those of MOI’s cooperatives that had either commenced or completed construction activities when I first arrived to Buenos Aires in February 2009. Of the organization’s nine cooperatives, five are currently under way: Cooperatives *La Unión*, *Yatay*, *Perú*, *La Fábrica* and *El Molino*. With little visual evidence to rely upon, it is difficult to draw any certain conclusions regarding the relationship of unbuilt cooperatives to the city, to politics and most importantly to the identity construction of the working poor.
The following chapters each focus on a single cooperative in order to clearly present the findings of this research. Although each of the subsequent chapters limit discussion to a single MOI cooperative, the assertions drawn may easily be applied to other building sites. Each cooperative differs—to varying degrees—from the others in its specific location within Buenos Aires, as well as in its size, shape and the nature of the original appropriated structure. Aside from these slight variations, however, similarities amongst MOI cooperatives include the organization’s selection of architectural forms, building materials and construction methods, as well as their shared historical place amongst alternatives in low-cost housing, and more generalized locations within the social and physical landscape of Buenos Aires are similar enough that the assertions made in regards to the study of individual cooperatives often apply to the other MOI cooperatives, as well.

The research for this dissertation involved archival, ethnographic and field investigations in Buenos Aires between July 2008 and June 2010. The archives at MOI, as well as the archives of the City of Buenos Aires provided specific quantative data regarding MOI members, the sites appropriated by the cooperatives, as well as the city and its population. Most helpful to this dissertation, however, were site visits and ethnographic interview that I conducted with MOI advisors and members. Since MOI does not have an official archivist, their photo collection was small when I first arrived in Buenos Aires. Furthermore, the organization’s archives did little to help me learn of MOI’s building processes. Excerpts from interviews have been quoted throughout this dissertation, providing personal insights into how MOI families imagine the construction of their new homes as perpetuating a transformation in their own identities.

Perhaps the most invaluable resource that served to inform this dissertation was experience living in Buenos Aires over the course of more than one year. Although
published accounts helped me to understand the history of this city and the circumstances surrounding MOI’s construction of cooperatives, the greatest source of information on this subject was this city itself. While I was in Buenos Aires, I witnessed the mourning of a beloved former president, Raul Alfonsín, who died just months after my arrival. I witnessed the capital city as the country celebrated its bicentennial on 25 May 2010. Aside from these landmark events, I also felt personal frustration of living in the capital city, and observed the reactions of others: labor strikes closed down public subway lines for days, piquetero (picketer) demonstrations blocked major highways for hours on end, unreliable banking and a shortage of coins complicated even the simplest of daily tasks, inflation changed the prices of basic goods from day-to-day without explanation from businesses or action from government.

Buenos Aires is a major cosmopolitan center within the context of a developing nation. The daily trials and triumphs one encounters while living in Buenos Aires are the only way to truly understand this place. As those who have written about this city before, I have tried to accurately recount what I learned in Buenos Aires. I am most thankful for all of those who helped me to learn these lessons for myself, and can only hope that the research presented within this dissertation can portray the reality of this vast and diverse city.
1.2 MOI Cooperative *La Unión*, façade, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c.1998)

1.3 MOI Cooperative *La Unión*, little boy in central courtyard before construction, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c. 1995)
1.4 MOI Cooperative La Unión, architects Nestor Jeifetz and José Barbagallo meet to discuss plans in the central courtyard, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c.1995)

1.5 MOI Cooperative La Unión, central courtyard showing first floor balcony, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c. 1995)
1.6 MOI Cooperative *La Unión*, interior elevation, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991
(photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c.1995)
1.7 MOI Cooperative *La Unión*, construction of planter and flooring for central courtyard, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)

1.8 MOI Cooperative *La Unión*, construction of central courtyard, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)
The two women in this photo are members of Uruguayan FUVCAM Cooperative Leandro Gomez y Covitea. Through the international housing organization, SELVIP, the two cooperatives arranged a work exchange in order to help the new MOI cooperative members to learn more about building processes, and to gain help in the construction of their new home.
1.10 (left) MOI Cooperative *La Unión*, plan for central courtyard, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)

1.11 (right) MOI Cooperative *La Unión*, photo of central courtyard immediately following construction, Buenos Aires, Argentina, begun 1991 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)
CHAPTER 2: ANTECEDENTS

The History of Low-Cost Housing in Buenos Aires and Cooperative Perú
The History of Low-Cost Housing in Buenos Aires and Cooperative Perú

In her book, *Housing Design and Society in Amsterdam* (1996), architecture historian Nancy Stieber investigated the emergence of government-subsidized, low-cost housing in Amsterdam beginning in 1900.31 In its earliest instance as a public institution, Stieber found that housing relied upon the involvement of a cast of actors, which included politicians, architects, urban planners and citizens. Throughout her text she analyzed the architectural forms of public housing in order to illuminate how the ideological contentions of those involved throughout design and construction were products of, and mediators for, changes in attitudes towards urban space, the working classes, as well as architectural form and production.

Specifically addressing the early history of public housing in Buenos Aires, Rosa Aboy has argued that the architectural forms selected for government-subsidized housing in the region were created as ideological solutions to the perceived shortfalls of previous forms, the *conventillo* (tenement) and the *casa chorizo* (sausage house), which will be discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter.32 Similar to Stieber’s findings, Aboy, professor of urban studies at the University of Buenos Aires, argued that the diversity of forms constructed throughout the 1950s—which included communities of single-family houses, as well as large, multifamily blocks—were the products of political negotiations of contradictory ideological solutions to threats to the public good.

31 Stieber (1998), 3. According to Stieber, “The advent of a public forum on housing quality opened new fields of contention, a new institutional setting in which the forces of politics, class, and the cultural domain operated in constitutive tensions. With the introduction of housing reform into the public realm, the disciplines of urban planning and architecture participated in this new social theater, transforming it and being transformed in turn.”

As examples of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires that rely on government mediation, the participation of professional architects, urban planners, as well as citizens, MOI cooperatives bear important similarities to those works investigated by Stieber and Aboy. For example, like the multifamily blocks analyzed by Aboy, MOI cooperatives are large complexes of apartments suitable to the nuclear family. Taking cues from Stieber and Aboy, this chapter looks to the comparison of MOI cooperatives to its antecedents and inquires: What is the historical and architectural relationship between MOI cooperatives and their local antecedents? How does MOI’s inclusion, exclusion or transformation of certain building elements illuminate how attitudes towards government, urban space, architectural production and the urban poor have changed in the context of recent decades?

To answer these questions, this chapter looks to MOI Cooperative Perú as a case study (figs. 2.1-2.13). To aid subsequent comparison, the architectural forms of this early MOI cooperative will be identified and preliminarily analyzed within the context of emerging shifts in the production of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires. Investigating MOI’s place within the discourse surrounding the production of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires throughout the twentieth century, this chapter then turns to the comparative analysis of a series of low-cost housing types: the conventillos (fig. 2.14) and casas chorizos of turn-of-the-20th-century Buenos Aires; large-scale government housing projects constructed in the Perón era (1946-55, figs. 2.16-17); and the villas misería (squatter settlements, figs. 2.19-20), massive, self-built informal settlements located within the heart of the city.

These comparisons serve to identify the challenges confronted, or created by its antecedents that MOI seeks to alleviate through the construction of its cooperatives. Consequently, these comparisons also highlight the challenges that MOI confronts, or creates. By identifying the revisions, corrections, and limitations that Cooperative Perú
contributes to the history of housing in the region, this comparative exercise begins to illuminate the manners in which MOI cooperatives stand as physical evidence of a notable shift in the identity construction of the urban poor. Specifically, this chapter illuminates how the distinctive characteristics of MOI cooperatives—the architectural decisions made in designing their plans and façades, their appropriation of existing structures within the Federal Capital, as well as their ascription to *ayuda mutua*—can be interpreted as a tactic, motivated by morality, to transform poor families into working class citizens by means of new forms of participation in the city as consumers, and as entrepreneurs. This comparison will show that while previous forms differ from MOI cooperatives, earlier shifts in low-cost housing production share this moral motivation, as well as the strategy to at least visually encourage poor populations to participate in consumer society.

**Cooperative Perú, From Casa Chorizo to Housing Cooperative**

Cooperative Perú was founded in 1994 by a group of families illegally occupying an old *casa chorizo* on Avenida Perú in the barrio of San Telmo (map 2).\(^33\) The home enjoys a central location, with subway and bus stations within walking distance, and is just blocks away from two of the city’s most frequented tourist attractions, the Plaza de Mayo and Plaza Dorrego (map 3). Nestled between an old high school and a parking garage, the aging building stood abandoned for years, occupied illegally by a population of more than twenty families.

---

\(^33\) The information regarding the architectural form and history of Cooperative Perú was gathered through site visits, research conducted within MOI archives and interviews conducted between July 2008 and June 2010. Much of the information gathered through this research has also been included in: José Barbagallo and María Carla Rodríguez, *MOI: Movimiento en movimiento* (2007).
The story of what the building at Avenida Perú 770 was like before becoming a MOI cooperative was best told by Leonore, a single mother and the president of the cooperative.

"Vine con Leila, mi hija. Paramos en la casa de mi amiga, pero era una situación muy rara: no teníamos ni agua, ni luz y no había puertas. Ella me decía que no hable con nadie, que siempre siga directo para casa, algo pasaba pero no llegaba a darme cuenta qué...Se vivían abusos por parte de un ocupante que tomaba el rol de dueño del lugar, les alquilaba habitaciones a familias necesitadas y los hacía. Las mujeres del edificio estaban cansadas de esa situación."

[I came to Buenos Aires with Leila, my daughter. We stayed in a friend’s place (within the building on Avenida Perú), but the situation there was pretty weird. We didn’t have water, gas or doors. She told me never to speak with anyone, to always go straight home, something was going on, but I didn’t realize just what ...The people living in this house were all living with the abuses of another squatter who had taken on the role of landlord of the place. He rented out rooms to families in need and he just packed them all together like sardines. The mothers of the house were getting tired of the situation.]

Leonore came to Buenos Aires in 1987 from Salta, a province in northern Argentina. By 1994, she and the other mothers had heard of MOI and the work they had done at Cooperative La Unión, just a few blocks away. Several times Leonore approached architect Nestór Jeifetz, but the architect did not agree to help the group until late that year after the police arrived at the location of the squat with an eviction notice that revealed the identity of the owners of the property: the City of Buenos Aires.

With their first Cooperative, La Unión, Jeifetz and the other MOI advisors had learned how to negotiate the necessary bureaucratic avenues to purchase property from the national government. With Cooperative Perú, they would have to navigate how to do the same from the city. After three years of negotiations, the cooperative succeeded and the City

---


35 Nestor Jeifetz, interview by author, 10 October 2009, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
of Buenos Aires sold the property to the collective at a price of AR$105,000, with a 10% down payment from the cooperative.\(^{36}\) Aside from being a personal triumph for individual families, this sale was an important precedent for the city as it was the first sale of a government-owned building to a group that had previously occupied the same property illegally.

At the site of Cooperative Perú, MOI advisors, including architect José Barbagallo who is now in charge of overseeing the design and construction activities at the site, found a late-nineteenth-century tenement in decay (figs. 2.1-3). Like all casas chorizo the building stands on a long, narrow lot that measures 7.50 meters wide by 60 meters long (figs. 2.4-5). The house had a ground floor and one upper floor, both with six-meter-tall ceilings. The space was then very dark and very narrow with no windows or skylights to provide natural light to the ground floor, and only a few small patios open to the sky on the first floor. An extremely cramped corridor linked the rooms along a lateral axis, with portals to the street at either end.

According to architect Barbagallo, MOI’s intervention at the site of Cooperative Perú was focused on two goals.\(^ {37}\) First the group wanted to open up as much of the cooperative as possible to natural light and air. Second, they wanted to make changes to the building that made the space more comfortable, more livable, and most importantly, more conducive to community development within the cooperative and in relation to its neighbors.

To open the building to light and air, the group decided to widen the passageway that links the apartments, opening the ceiling above to natural light and air (figs. 2.4-2.13).

\(^{36}\) Details regarding purchase of property published in Rodríguez and Barbagallo, MOI: Movimiento en Movimiento (2007): 129.

\(^{37}\) I first discussed the limitations and goals of the work at Cooperative Perú in an interview with José Barbagallo in Buenos Aires, 28 July 2008, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
This forced a decrease in the size of individual apartments, a problem that was solved with the addition of mezzanine floors within each individual apartment. Along the widened corridors, MOI also decided to open up patio spaces to allow for more light, as well as to give families a place to dry laundry and grow plants.

While these small patios punctuate the corridor with light and fresh air, they are not large enough to serve as communal spaces for large gatherings. Therefore to achieve their second goal, the group was keen to include spaces where cooperative members and neighbors could intermingle. On the rooftop, the cooperative built a terrace. The terrace provides a space for children to play, neighbors to visit, a venue for the all-important asado (a weekly family barbecue traditionally held on Sunday afternoons). On the first floor, a multi-use salon was built and equipped with bulletin boards, a computer and other office supplies. Finished in 1998, the salon was the first finished room in the building, illustrating that community building was of top priority for Cooperative Perú.

After construction finishes in May 2011, Cooperative Perú will house eleven member families within eleven newly renovated, split-level apartments. Built from the skeleton of a century-old tenement, Cooperative Perú shares more than physical structure with its antecedent. In fact, this building and its builders hold an interesting place within the discourse of low-cost housing production in Buenos Aires. The comparison of this cooperative to previous examples of other housing types effectively reveals changes in attitudes not only to low-cost housing, but also to urban space and the poor.
The *conventillo* (tenement) and *casa chorizo* (sausage house)

Two of the earliest types of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires were the *conventillo* (fig. 2.14) and the *casa chorizo*. In articles published on their website, and within self-published texts, MOI asserts that not only do this organization’s cooperatives deliberately bear formal elements in common with these early housing types, but also MOI cooperatives share a spirit of cooperation and cohabitation with these earliest examples. Upon further investigation, however, the differences between Cooperative *Perú* and these earliest examples of low-cost housing reveal the manners in which the social, political and urban landscapes have changed over time. Furthermore, in its selective revision of the *casa chorizo*, Cooperative *Perú* is evidence of an important shift in the identity of the poor populations in Buenos Aires.

The *conventillo* and the *casa chorizo* are multi-family, low-cost housing types that simultaneously appeared in the southern *barrios* (neighborhoods) of Buenos Aires at the end of the nineteenth-century. Reflective of its name, the *casa chorizo* is a long, narrow dwelling, defined as a series of rooms in a row, which open up to a lateral patio. Within this housing type, families rented a single room, and share toilet facilities (typically an outhouse located behind the main building structure). Within that single room, or series of small rooms,

---

38 The *conventillo* and *casa chorizo* were certainly not the only types of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires throughout this period. Other options included: hotels or boarding houses, some lived within the factories where they worked, maids’ quarters in the homes of elites, as well as a variety of self-made houses. The *conventillo* and the *casa chorizo* have been selected for analysis here for the symbolic value which they have accrued over time, which has led MOI to also reference these structures within the construction of their cooperatives. For more on early 20th century low-cost housing alternatives, see: Ricardo Gonzalez Leandri, “La Nueva Identidad de los Sectores Populares,” in A. Cataruzza, ed., *Crisis Económica, Avance del Estado e Incertidumbre Política (1930–1943)*, vol. 7 of *Nueva Historia Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2001), 201–38.


families conducted all daily activities aside from evacuation, such as hygiene, sleeping, intimacy, cooking and entertaining.

Conventillos, alternatively, are multifamily dwellings with groups of rented rooms distributed around a central patio. Like the casa chorizo, outhouse facilities were located behind the main building structure, and were not supplied with running water. Also similar to the casa chorizo, families or groups thereof, performed all daily activities in the space of their shared, often cramped room.

Unlike the casas chorizo, which were purpose-built into narrow, empty lots within the already cramped urban fabric of southern Buenos Aires, the conventillos were originally built as the grandiose homes of porteño elite. Since most of these residences were originally built by those families who first settled in Buenos Aires after immigrating from Spain or Italy during or directly following the Spanish colonial administration of Argentina, most conventillos share important similarities to vernacular forms of southern Europe. In fact, these residential forms, with their open courtyard and central water collection cistern, can be compared to residential types as old as the Roman Domus. The appearance of this architectural form in Buenos Aires is logical, as this housing type is suitable to the climates of the Mediterranean, an environment not unlike that along the Rio de la Plata.

When first built, these mid-nineteenth-century homes were located at the heart of Buenos Aires’s commercial center, the southern barrios (neighborhoods) of La Boca and San Telmo (map 1). Near Buenos Aires’s original commercial port, this location was then the

---


hub of Buenos Aires meat and grain export and the first point of entry for immigrants and imported goods.

In 1867, and then again in 1871, Buenos Aires experienced two yellow fever epidemics centralized in these southern barrios.\(^4^4\) It was then when the affluent families that formerly inhabited this zone fled to higher ground in the northern neighborhoods of Barrio Norte and Recoleta (fig. 2.15). There, the families escaped the frequent seasonal flooding that catalyzed the spread of disease, and built even grander new residences in these barrios that today remain the home of porteño elite. Those families with the financial wherewithal were those to relocate, leaving those without behind in the south. This movement served to geographically segregate the population of Buenos Aires according to economic class. Over a century later, Buenos Aires remains a city geographically divided along these same economic lines.

The late nineteenth-century disappearance of affluent populations from this southern zone of the city additionally opened up the opportunity for large industrial enterprises to settle and further expand their facilities. During the 1870s, this part of the city witnessed significant shifts in its urban composition due to two important appearances: the railroad and the steel industry.\(^4^5\) Between 1870 and 1914, the British Empire financed railroad lines that ran throughout Argentina’s interior. As the new locus of industrial activity, these southern barrios were the ideal location for the termination point for these railroads (map 4). With the appearance of the railroad, which facilitated further growth of Argentine meat and grain export industry, came greater national wealth.

---


The most significant of the industries to be built in this region was the steel industry. Originally founded to provide the materials needed to create the railway lines and bridges throughout the country, the steel industry in Argentina was the only of its kind in South America until decades later. This industry grew quickly, as it was not only responsible for supplying the materials for construction of railways in Argentina, but throughout the entire continent.

With industrialization, and subsequent economic boom, came more than four million immigrants from European countries (primarily Italy, Spain and Germany), 60% of which settled immediately in Buenos Aires. With this mass immigration, the population of Buenos Aires doubled, and then tripled between the years 1880 and 1914. Most of these immigrants settled in southern Buenos Aires, in barrios including San Telmo and La Boca. Francis Korn has shown that between these years, twentyfive percent of the city’s population was living in the conventillos and casas chorizo.

Within a city that was geographically segregated according to economic status, a visible comparison was drawn between the upper and lower classes in the north and south, respectively. Aside from this boundary, comparative differences in the dwellings of the classes could not have been more stark. Affluent families living in the north owned single-family, detached homes, with individual dormitories, separate kitchens and service facilities, equipped with newly installed running water. The working-class immigrants in the south, however, rented rooms in overcrowded, multifamily dwellings with rooms that


47 The census data have been taken from the demographic analysis of Susana Torrado, Historia de la Familia en la Argentina Moderna, 1870–2000 (Buenos Aires: De la Flor, 2003).

simultaneously served as the spaces for sleep, food preparation, dining, entertaining, intimacy and personal hygiene.

The crowded and unhygienic living conditions within the multi-family conventillos and casas chorizo, along with the seasonal floods that inundated this southern region, exacerbated continued outbreaks of disease following those yellow fever epidemics in 1867 and 1871.\textsuperscript{49} Yellow fever is a disease spread by mosquitoes. Although mosquito-born diseases such as yellow fever were less common in Buenos Aires due to cooler climate conditions, ships carrying immigrants from Europe always stopped in Brazil where the disease was much more prevalent a threat. Immigrants who contracted yellow fever on their way to Argentina arrived five days later, just when they were beginning to show symptoms of the disease.

The immigrants arrived and typically found housing in tenements. Medical professionals in the nineteenth century had not yet learned of the correlation between yellow fever and mosquitoes. As a result, measures were not taken to prevent and contain the disease. Within the conventillos, large uncovered cisterns in central courtyards collected rain water for use in wash basins and in food preparation. The exposed standing water in the cisterns, as well as the low-lying marshes that lined the southern barrios, provided breeding ground for mosquitoes during the warm summer months. The appearance of infected individuals to these low-lying areas provided the impetus for the spread of the disease. In 1871, the National Medical Authority reported more than 16,000 deaths due to yellow fever, over 6,000 of which were Italian immigrants.

Yellow fever was not the only disease to trouble the tenement dwellers. Tuberculosis remained a threat throughout the turn of the twentieth century. Since tuberculosis is spread by inhaling the nose or mouth droplets of an infected person, the crowding of the conventillos

\textsuperscript{49} Liernur, “La ciudad enferma.”
and casas chorizo further exacerbated the spread of this disease, as well. That the majority of those infected with diseases such as yellow fever and tuberculosis were immigrants, living in crowded tenements without running water in the southern, poor and working class parts of the city, helped to further draw the contrast between the upper and lower classes in Buenos Aires.

Given the city government’s insufficient hospital facilities and hygiene programs, this threat of disease was a source of public unrest, and consequently, a platform for political action.\textsuperscript{50} In his book, \emph{Buenos Aires, From Plaza to Suburb} (1974), James Scobie described how the conditions of tenement dwelling provided impetus for social activism.\textsuperscript{51} For instance, the poor populations living within the tenements founded labor unions in the 1880s to protest long working hours and insufficient wages. By 1905, union members established new housing organizations to draw public attention to rents that continued to increase whilst crowding and living conditions continued to worsen. Organizations including the \textit{Liga de inquilinos} (League of Tenants) and the \textit{Liga contra alquileres e impuestos} (League Against Rents and Taxes) worked to encourage local newspapers, including \textit{La Protesta}, to publish the stories of the tenements to the general public. In 1906, a federal committee was formed to mediate the demands of the new housing organizations and landlords. The conflict culminated in the rent strikes of 1907, which resulted in the outbreak of violence at demonstrations and eventually the eviction of hundreds of tenants.

As also discussed by Oscar Yujnowski and James Baer, these collective protests were carried out on a public stage. Although the housing organizations were unsuccessful in achieving their goals, the formulation of social activist organizations served to galvanize

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid; and Scobie.

\textsuperscript{51} Scobie.
tenement populations. According to Yujnowski, this social activism served to foster a sense of collective identity amongst tenement dwellers, defining this group not only as residents or factory workers, but as consumers.\textsuperscript{52} Since populations infected with diseases such as yellow fever were concentrated within southern Buenos Aires, and since public efforts to thwart worsening living conditions had failed, the perceived identity of those tenement dwellers and the self-constructed identity emerging from within the tenements were at odds.

All of the following conditions contributed to a distinct identity construction for the working poor living in southern Buenos Aires: the architectural composition of the conventillos and casas chorizos, changes in usage patterns of buildings, changes in population demographics, and shifts in the use of public urban space. This comparison drawn between the residences located in the north of the city and the architectural forms of low-cost housing in southern Buenos Aires led to the construction of a perceived identity for the working class as poor, unhygienic, foreigners who did not own their own homes.\textsuperscript{53}

From within the conventillos and casas chorizos, however, the conditions inherited from these architectural forms lent themselves to other important cultural developments. These developments—such as Lunfardo, the tango and labor unions—aided in a construction of identity for the working poor distinct from external perceptions. Housing immigrants from Italy, Spain and Germany, these multi-family dwellings were the birthplace of Lunfardo, a synthesis of Yiddish, Italian and Spanish that is the dialect spoken in Buenos Aires today.\textsuperscript{54}

With open courtyards, a locus of communal activity for parents and children, the conventillos

\textsuperscript{52} Also discussed in: James A. Baer, “Tenant Movilization and the 1907 Rent Strike in Buenos Aires,” The Americas 49, no. 3 (Jan. 1993): 343-368; and Yujnowski.

\textsuperscript{53} The role of home ownership in the formulation of class identity of Buenos Aires has been explored within: Leandri, “La Nueva Identidad de los Sectores Populares,” 201–38.

\textsuperscript{54} For more on Lunfardo see: Mario Teruggi, Panorama del lunfardo: genesis y esencia de las hablas coloquiales urbanas (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Cabargón, 1974).
were the birthplace of today’s tango.\textsuperscript{55} Like Lunfardo, tango is the musical confluence of these immigrant cultures: Spanish flamenco, African percussion, and Italian tarantella. These courtyards were also the locations of the first discussions regarding growing anxiety and anger over working conditions and rent increases. From these courtyard chats, were born Argentina’a (and South America’s) first labor unions.\textsuperscript{56} Although at the time, Lunfardo, tango and labor unions were a part of the cultural divide between the upper- and lower-classes of Buenos Aires, these cultural developments have since become icons of Argentina, and specifically \textit{porteño} culture.

It is this combination of work, sacrifice, and creativity that is now a source of pride for \textit{porteños}. MOI embraces its inheritance of the legacy of the \textit{conventillos}, and openly recognizes that this earliest form of low-cost housing has influenced both the architectural form, and the social sentiment behind its constructions.\textsuperscript{57} The consistent inclusion of a central courtyard in its cooperatives—with the exception of Cooperative Perú, which has exchanged the central courtyard for a rooftop terrace and expanded internal patios to accommodate its long, narrow footprint—is the strongest architectural evidence of this legacy. Likewise, its appropriation and adaptive reuse of existing structures is another important parallel, marking the necessity to conserve both financial and physical resources. Most of all, however, MOI’s model for multifamily dwelling and its spirit of cooperation can been attributed directly to this oldest of antecedents.

Further comparisons between MOI cooperatives and these earliest examples of low-cost housing can be made by placing these housing types within their historical places in the


\textsuperscript{56} Frank and Scobie.

\textsuperscript{57} Rodríguez and Barbagallo, \textit{MOI: Movimiento en movimiento}, 3-7.
urban fabric of Buenos Aires. Today, Buenos Aires remains geographically divided according to economic class. As it was at the turn of the twentieth century, the Avenida de Mayo, a monumental boulevard that connects the Casa Rosada (the seat of Argentina’s Executive Branch of government) and Congreso (the national congress building), marks the divide between the upper and lower classes. Just a few blocks south of the Plaza de Mayo in the barrio of San Telmo, Cooperative Perú has been constructed to be a valuable part of its working class community.

The key difference between these historical moments, however, is that the turn of the twentieth century was a moment of rapid industrial growth, while recent decades have witnessed equally rapid de-industrialization. Nonetheless, the placement of low-cost housing within the same regions designated for labor had, and continues to play an important role in the identity construction of those living within those regions. While Cooperative Perú is located within the working class barrio of San Telmo, it is also very near to downtown Buenos Aires and the boundary between north and south. Consequently, Cooperative Perú enjoys easy access to public subways (just three blocks away) and a number of bus lines (within less than a block). The cooperative’s central location and access to transportation therefore benefits its residents with easier access to public hospitals, primary schools as well as employment. Since Buenos Aires was the first city in Latin America to build a subway, this access to transportation—and its associated benefits—is another element which the new cooperative shares with the conventillos and casas chorizo.

Cooperative Perú is not a tenement and MOI has not simply refurbished the old casa chorizo. For example, rather than providing individual rooms for families to share and

---

58 The location of low-cost housing within the urban landscape of Buenos Aires was explored by Oscar Yujnovsky, “Del conventillo a la villa miseria.”
conduct all daily activities, MOI has built eleven apartments, each with either one, two or three bedrooms, suitable to accommodate the nuclear family. Unlike the tenements, these apartments are equipped with bathrooms, kitchens and living space. While this decision limits the number of people this cooperative can accommodate, the apartment units avoid the conditions of overcrowding and unhygienic practices, which led to the spread of disease in the tenements. These individually equipped apartments, in fact, are more similar to another type of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires: the low-cost public housing first constructed between 1946 and 1955.

**Public Housing under the Administration of Juan Domingo Perón**

The living conditions within the *conventillos* and *casas chorizo*, a growing concentration of brothels within the southern *barrios* of Buenos Aires, and public health problems centralized within these regions resulted in the public perception of these housing types as a threat to physical and moral order.\(^{59}\) Consequently, these perceptions gave impetus for the state, as well as a series of public and religious organizations, to get involved in the housing problem.\(^{60}\) Although the first government housing organization—the National Commission for Low-Cost Houses (Comisión Nacional de Casas Baratas, or CNCB) a program proposed

---


\(^{60}\) As early as 1905, the Socialist party initiated the Worker’s Home Cooperative (*Cooperativa el Hogar Obrero*). In 1912, the Society of San Vicente de Paul built a workers colony with private funds. In 1915, the national government created the first public housing organization in Argentina, the National Commission for Low-Cost Houses (*Comisión Nacional de Casas Baratas*, or CNCB). As studied by historian Anaí Ballent, the Gran National Collective (*Gran Colecta Nacional*), which was organized by the Popular Argentine Catholic Union (*Unión Popular Católica Argentina*) in 1919. Ramón Gutiérrez and Federico Ortiz, “*La Arquitectura en Argentina, 1930–1970*,” *Hogar y Arquitectura* 97 (1970): 33-59.
by Catholic congressman Juan Cafferata—was created in 1915, a national housing policy was not officially set in action until the administration of Juán Domingo Perón (1946-55). The work of non-government organizations and the CNBC certainly made notable contributions to the production of low-cost housing in years leading up to the 1940s. Nonetheless, the scale and population affected by these housing projects paled in comparison to the public housing constructed under the Perón administration. Fueled by the interests of his wife, Eva, Perón’s ambitious housing policy not only instigated significant shifts in the architectural forms of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires, but also initiated changes in the uses of and attitudes towards urban space and the place of the lower classes within the federal capital.

Reasonably, the government’s increased attention to low-cost housing in the 1940s was a response to significant shifts in the geographic composition of the country’s population. According to National Census data, the percentage of the urban population in Argentina had risen from 37 percent in 1895 to 62 percent in 1947. This shift in urban populations has principally been attributed to a drop in agricultural exports following World War I. The accelerated urbanization that occurred during this period was particularly intense in Buenos Aires. According to Gino Germani, who wrote one of the earliest and still most prominent theoretical analyses of Peronism, the new and growing urban population in Buenos Aires constituted the political base of Perón supporters.

---

61 As reported by Rosa Aboy, the CNCB constructed 1,062 united over the course of 30 years. Horacio Gaggero and Alicia Garro have reported that after 1946, a single government agency, the National Mortgage Bank (Banco Hipotecario Nacional) build 10,171 houses in ten years, and within the same period granted more than 300,000 home loans. See: Horacio Gaggero and Alicia Garro, Del Trabajo a la Casa: La Política de Vivienda del Gobierno Peronista 1946-55 (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 1996).

62 As reported within Susana Torrado (2003).

Perón’s rise to the Argentine presidency began with a military coup in 1943, when he
served first as an assistant to the Secretary of War and later the head of the Department of
Labor under the de facto government that ousted former president Ramón Castillo. Over
the course of just three years, Perón managed to build a political profile—principally
through public support for labor unions and less-public alliances within the Argentine
military—which allowed him to win the presidency in democratic elections in 1946.64 From
that date, Perón’s administration occupied itself with building housing for the most
impoverished as a manner to galvanize loyalty amongst those who had already given the new
president their political support.65

To accommodate the growing population of urban centers, the new national housing
policy initiated state intervention in the housing problem in two manners: first, through the
direct construction of public housing, primarily for state employees and workers; and

64 The historiography of texts analyzing the foundation and impact of Peronism upon Argentine government
and society is long and complicated. This statement is a brief summation of the complex web of forces which
constituted the appearance and proliferation of Perón’s political ideology. While Gino Germani’s text was, and
remains, a foundational historiographical text highlighting the role of populism in Perón’s political strategy,
subsequent texts have served to expand and enrich Germani’s analysis. Early interpretations often associated
Peronism with fascism, or even Bonapartism: José Luis Romero, Las Ideas Políticas en Argentina (Buenos Aires:
Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1956); Juan José Sebreli, Los Sueños Imaginarios del Peronismo (Buenos Aires:
Legasa, 1983); and Carlos Fayt, La Naturaleza del Peronismo (Buenos Aires: Viracocha, 1967). Germani’s Política y
Sociedad interjected corrective analyses to these early interpretations. Germani’s interpretations have been
expanded upon in fruitful and enlightening ways more recently within: Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos
Portantiero, Estudios Sobre los Orígenes del Peronismo (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1970); Mariano Plotkin, “The
(Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1998): 39-54; Peter Walman, El Peronismo, 1943-55 (Buenos Aires:
Sudamericana, 1981); as well as Juan Carlos Torre, La Vieja Guardia Sindical y Perón: Sobre los Orígenes del Peronismo
(Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1990 and Torre, ed., La Formación del Sindicalismo Peronista (Buenos Aires: Legasa,
1988).

65 Peronism appeared in Argentina at a time when, much like the first population boom, there was a housing
shortage for much of the country’s urban population, particularly the poor. The post-World War II political
climate favored popular social acceptance of government intervention in areas including education, health and
welfare, all of which were previously beyond the sphere of government invention. For both old and new urban
sectors, Perón’s tenure as president was an era of great state interventionism, social mobility and income
distribution. For example, Pablo Gerchunoff and Lucas Llach have shown that during these years real wages
increased notably, as rates in 1949 were 62 percent higher than in 1945. Pablo Gerchunoff and Lucas Llach, El
Ciclo de la Ilusión y el Desencanto: Un Siglo de Políticas Económicas Argentinas (Buenos Aires: Ariel-Sudamericana,
1998).
second, through the creation of a credit system for low-cost housing. Throughout the first years of the Perón presidency, 1946-49, the government’s efforts were focused more directly at the construction of single- and multifamily houses. Government revenues slowed again in the years following World War II, as agricultural exports again began to slow with the reconstruction of Europe. After 1950, the government’s efforts shifted in the direction of government support for affordable home loans.

The architectural form of the low-cost housing constructed in Buenos Aires under Perón carefully negotiated the existing politics of low-cost housing production in the city. The climate of the debate surrounding the form and production of low-cost housing that preceded the Peronist constructions was best defined within the presentations given at the Primer Congreso Argentino de Urbanismo (First Argentine Congress of Urbanism) in 1935 and the Congreso Panamericano de la Vivienda Popular (Pan-American Congress of Public Housing) in 1939. At these meetings, a general need to limit space within floor plans to conserve financial and physical resources ignited a major political-religious debate amongst those in attendance who argued the values of the single- versus the multifamily dwelling. Presenters with ties to social Catholicism, many of whom were founding members of the Corporación de Arquitectos Católicos (CAC, Catholic Architects Corporation) in the 1940s, advocated a slight variation of the California-style, single-family home (fig. 2.16). As asserted by Jorge Liernur, the advocates for the compressed, single-family homes sought to isolate families within one

---


house as a way to neutralize social conflicts, and simultaneously promote the conservative values of property, family and putting down roots.\textsuperscript{69}

On the other side of this debate, were the proponents of multifamily housing blocks, most of who were linked to progressive left-wing internationalism. Many of these architects, planners and engineers who argued this side of the debate had worked with Le Corbusier when he came to Buenos Aires in 1929 to create a new plan for the city.\textsuperscript{70} These professionals used the Central European workers’ neighborhood model, were inspired by the European socialism of the interwar period and aspired to create communities based on equality and solidarity amongst members. This group found the multifamily mega block as the ideal solution to the scenario of limited urban space and increased demand for low-cost housing.

While the congresses of 1935 and 1939 certainly served to ignite this debate within public forums, the conferences established no resolution. In order to efficiently and quickly begin construction within this contentious climate, Perón’s government did not take sides.\textsuperscript{71} Rather, the Argentine government’s initiatives reflected the heterogeneity represented within the congresses of 1935 and 1939, incorporated the types of housing and the technical teams that were already established when it took power, and built both neighborhoods of single-family, California-style dwellings, as well as communities of multifamily housing blocks.

To build neighborhoods of modest single-family homes, such a 1 de Marzo and Juan Perón, the government relied on professionals with previous experience working with the


\textsuperscript{71} Aboy, “The Right to a Home,” 503.
Catholic Architects Corporation, which had been incorporated into state bureaucracy during the previous Castillo administration, and a group of military engineers who produced housing with the Ministry of Public Works. These neighborhoods typically were composed of between ten and fifty individual houses, in which one family occupied each individual unit, and achieved relative independence from neighbors.

For these more conservative professionals, these single-family homes were linked to Catholicism, which saw a single-family house as the home of a Christian family, founded on enduring marriage. These neighborhoods were considered appropriate spaces for maintaining traditional roles of the male provider and the female dedicated to domestic and maternal tasks. Conservatives saw the single-family home as an instrument for providing a rising social class with places for leisure and comfort without threatening the traditional family model nor existing social order. Due to scarcity of open space within the federal capital, the single-family neighborhoods built by the Perón administration were all located outside of the limits of the federal capital.

Multifamily housing blocks were built within the city limits beginning in 1947. Settlements such as *Barrio Los Perales* (figs. 2.17), which is nestled in the *barrio* of Mataderos in southwest Buenos Aires (map 1), is located near Avenida General Paz, the major highway that encircles the federal capital, and along Avenida Eva Perón, a direct route into the city center. As a community of high-rise, multifamily housing blocks, implanted near major transportation arteries and within the fabric of a growing Buenos Aires, *Los Perales* achieved a greater visibility for the public housing initiated by the administration. Located along the

---

72 Ibid.

73 Aboy, *Vivienda para el pueblo*, chapter 2.
outer border of the federal capital, however, Los Perales is nearly fifteen kilometers from the city center, with little access to commuter train lines.

At Los Perales, as with other multi-family housing communities built within this period, each block was occupied by different families who shared the access portals, hallways and outdoor spaces, circumstances that ideologically favored social exchange between neighbors. The government-built housing was equipped with a well-developed infrastructure: running water, drains that emptied to sewers, gas connections, as well as hot water in the bathrooms and kitchen. Each unit within each block contained a kitchen, a bathroom, two or three bedrooms, and a living/dining room.

The new homes built by the government at Los Perales signified a notable change from previous living arrangements for inhabitants. For some, the move to Los Perales was a shift from a rural existence of extended-family cohabitation, the traditional family, to one that was limited to parents and children, the nuclear family. For others, however, the move to Los Perales was a shift from the living conditions of the urban slum without access to modern amenities, to a technologically modernized living space. As investigated by Rosa Aboy, alongside these changes in housing came a new construction of identity for these populations, signifying a new definition of self, of family, and of citizen.74

The bathroom was the first location of significant changes in identity construction for those living in Los Perales. Each bathroom was equipped with a sink, a shower and a toilet. Since most of the families in Los Perales had previously lived in conventillos, rural homes not equipped with hot water and electricity, or squatter settlements, the existence of a fully modern bathroom within the home changed the daily behaviors of families significantly.

74 Aboy, Viviendas para el pueblo.
With other forms of housing, toilet facilities were typically outhouses situated beyond the walls of the domicile. Hygiene was performed within the space of the bedroom, with water vessels carrying water from a pump located near the rear door. According to Aboy, for the families who moved into Los Perales, the modern indoor bathroom “shifted from being simply the locus for individual acts of evacuation and corporal cleansing to being a private space for ceremonies of primping and shaving, personal pleasure, and presentation for others.”\(^{75}\) Since the popular images in advertising, cinema and literature promoted new forms of personal hygiene were linked to these new bathroom rituals, the families of Los Perales began to participate within the system being promoted through images throughout the city. When combined with the modern technologies now at their daily disposal, comforts afforded by the space of the bathroom and throughout the house helped the families to participate more actively in the commercial system. As also reported by Aboy, these comforts, which made inhabitants more capable of participating in the growing consumer culture of the 1940s and 50s, helped these families to feel more as citizens of the city.\(^{76}\)

While the amenities equipped within each apartment, including those within the bathroom, shifted the identity of those living in Los Perales to that of a citizen of the city, and less of an outsider, some of the changes to the composition of families that architects had imagined the new living spaces would facilitate simply did not occur. For example, by equipping each apartment with either two or three bedrooms, the designers of Los Perales

\(^{75}\) Aboy “The Right to a Home,” 510.

\(^{76}\) Néstor García Canclini, Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflict (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). Although Canclini’s research focuses on the “post-modern citizen-consumer,” the framework established throughout Consumers and Citizens allows us to view the manners in which participation in consumer behavior serves as a means for citizens to construct identity. This phenomenon certainly spans the space of nationality, yet simultaneously builds a national culture that is positively transnational, multilingual and participative within broader systems of economy. For an example of how Canclini’s work has similarly provided the theoretical framework for similar studies, see: Katharine French-Fuller, “Genered Invisibility, Respectable Cleanliness: The Impact of the Washing Machine on Daily Living in Post-1950 Santiago, Chile,” Journal of Women’s History 18, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 79-100.
intended the largest of those bedrooms to function as the master, or matrimonial, bedroom. In their former homes, families who moved to Los Perales were accustomed to sharing one space, which functioned for sleeping, entertaining, hygiene and intimacy. In the new homes, the matrimonial bedroom emerged as a place of refuge for marital intimacy. Or at least that was how it was intended. Many of the families that moved into Los Perales already had multiple children, as many as eight according to Aboy. Out of necessity, the matrimonial bedroom continued to be shared with children. In this manner, the imagined shift from the traditional family to the nuclear family did not occur immediately. It is uncertain how long this transition took for the beneficiaries of the homes at Los Perales, but according to Aboy, the intimate and sleeping habits of the families did not immediately change.

At least at first, the modern living spaces afforded to the new families transformed their daily habits, concepts of self, family and citizen. The testimonies of those who lived in Los Perales allow us to observe the traces of social-mobility processes that took place throughout the Perón administration. The access to comfort provided within these new homes appears at the horizon in a framework from which the beneficiaries of the houses recognized themselves as citizens.

The effects of Peronism’s construction of a heterogeneous and imperfect welfare state were difficult for the other half of Buenos Aires society to assimilate, however. Peronism’s aggressive social demands and rhetoric contributed to a strengthening of the polarization between poor and wealthy, between Peronists and anti-Peronists. Although much of this social divide had existed in Buenos Aires for decades—as observed with the north-south divide at the turn-of-the-20th century—the acceleration of these processes

throughout Perón’s administration served to deepen the cultural conflict between urban society and rural migrants, between poor and wealthy.\textsuperscript{78}

The manners in which multi-family housing blocks were constructed, as well as their locations within the urban landscape of Buenos Aires, served to deepen this divide. In essence, these new communities of modest, single-family apartments became isolated neighborhoods for the poor.\textsuperscript{79} These blocks enjoyed access to public transportation, yet most public services, work as well as shops and educational institutions were located further away. Perón-era, government-built, low-cost housing complexes such as \textit{Los Perales} were constructed as locations of low-cost housing and not as communities equipped with spaces for commerce, education and recreation.

Most of the literature describing urban space in Buenos Aires throughout the Perón era focuses on the profound changes in use of public space as theatre for demonstration. For example, in his book \textit{Mañana es San Perón: A Cultural History of Perón’s Argentina}, Mariano Ben Plotkin describes how the growing working classes, particularly members of labor unions, gathered in the Plaza de Mayo to protest the Perón’s arrest in 1945.\textsuperscript{80} This was the first instance of a new Argentine cultural phenomenon, when the lower classes publicly influenced politics (fig. 2.18). In 1945, the massive demonstration led to Perón’s release and subsequent election to the Presidency. With the increasing popularity of movie watching, and film production in Buenos Aires, and the growth of news agencies and other print

\textsuperscript{78} Germani, \textit{Política y sociedad}.

\textsuperscript{79} Aboy, \textit{Vivienda para el pueblo}.

media, Laura Podalsky found that the images of these demonstrations served to concretize the support of a new and growing sector of voters.\footnote{Laura Podalsky, \textit{The Specular City: Transforming Culture, Consumption and Space in Buenos Aires, 1955-1973} (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).}

As discussed by Podalsky, public demonstration within the heart of downtown Buenos Aires projected images of the poor and working classes within the city center into the popular consciousness in a way never before seen.\footnote{Ibid.} These images were misleading, in fact, because this time was a moment when poor populations were pushed even further from the city center. Through the construction of new public housing, Perón succeeded in alleviating some of the overcrowding of tenement dwelling in 	extit{barrios} including San Telmo and La Boca, which continued to house a lower class population than 	extit{barrios} in the north. The new public housing, however, was built either along the outer boundaries of the city, as in the case of 	extit{Los Perales}, or in the Buenos Aires suburbs.

To alleviate problems regarding access to transportation and employment, Perón purchased the privately held railroads from French and British interests in 1948, which immediately decreased the price of fares on commuter rails.\footnote{David Rock, \textit{Argentina in the Twentieth Century} (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975).} Then more affordable, the public railways encouraged families to move to the suburbs helping decongestion. Regardless of affordability, however, the new public railways and existing subway system, were inadequate to accommodate the growing population of Buenos Aires. It was not until 1951 when Daimler-Benz (now Mercedes-Benz) built its first factory in San Martín, just beyond the boundaries of the federal capital. Daimler-Benz produced chassis for use in both large trucks for industrial shipping and a new line of \textit{colectivos}, or mass transit busses. Within five years, Daimler-Benz had sold more than 10,000 bus engines. The companies who bought the
new buses created a new network of buses, with hundreds of routes throughout the city. Before the appearance of these mass transit buses, the city’s *colectivos* were a small fleet of taxi-buses that accommodated between five and twelve passengers, and were too expensive for the lower classes.

The emergence of new affordable alternatives in mass transit helped to disperse the dense population of the southern zone of Buenos Aires. While residential construction, including the construction of public housing such as that at *Los Perales*, spread over a greater geographic area, public services—such as hospitals and schools—as well as work and industry remained concentrated in the central regions of the city, nearby ports and railway lines. Although public housing shifted the distribution of poor populations beyond the city’s southern *barrios*, the government did not build new facilities for public services on the outskirts at the same rate as it did in the center. This contradiction led to an increase in real estate prices within the city center, where those with the financial resources would enjoy easy access to public hospitals, primary schools and universities. The poor were increasingly excluded from the city center, regardless of their perceived presence through images of demonstrations in places like the Plaza de Mayo.

The Argentine government’s public housing created throughout the 1940s and 50s was a revision to previous alternatives in low-cost housing. By alleviating crowding, and by providing modern infrastructure to those previously without access to such amenities, the government invested in an increasingly popular ideology of the government’s responsibility to provide for the public good. Similar to public housing produced in Europe earlier in the twentieth century, this movement in Buenos Aires for improved urban housing catalyzed new patterns for public architectural patronage.⁸⁴ This experiment in creating architecture for

---

⁸⁴ As investigated within: Stieber (1998); and Blau (1999).
the public good is illustrative of issues central to both the modern welfare state and architectural production.

MOI’s formula for the construction of its cooperatives is comparable to that established under Perón, as it relies upon the involvement of government and professional architects. However, in the current context of neoliberal Argentina the government has stepped away from its role as provider of low-cost housing. Throughout the 1990s, the national government discontinued funding for the construction of new public housing. With the enactment of Law 341 (2001), the Buenos Aires city government has shifted its involvement in the field of low-cost housing production to that of facilitator, or mediator.\(^{85}\)

That the role of government has been shifted to that of mediator, rather than outright provider, is a significant contrast between MOI cooperatives and previous examples of public housing. This changing role of government within the field of low-cost housing construction is be attributed to the appearance of neoliberal political policies in Buenos Aires, which privilege entrepreneurialism over public welfare. The forces and effects of neoliberalism upon housing and urban space in Buenos Aires are complex and wide reaching, and will be discussed throughout Chapter 3.

Likewise the role of the professional architect within the social landscape of urban Buenos Aires shifted, as architects then emerged as an important component to the ideological composition of low-cost housing. Beginning in the 1940s, architects became not only the esteemed employees to wealthy clients, but also professionals with the capacity to improve public wellbeing. That professional architects are a crucial and legally requisite

\(^{85}\) For full text and translation of Law 341, see Appendix II. In brief summary, this law allows the government of the city of Buenos Aires to support the construction of low-cost housing through its backing of home loans for collective groups of the working poor, leaving the task of construction in the hands of the professionalized non-governmental organization and the populations in need.
element to MOI’s construction of its cooperatives is evidence that this shift in attitudes within and towards the architectural profession have been lasting. Unlike the architects who designed the public housing complexes like *Los Perales*, MOI architects, including José Barbagallo and Marcelo Cataneo, have worked for little or no remuneration whilst closely collaborating with MOI member families.\(^{86}\) The manners in which these interactions have reshaped the design and construction processes leading up to the completion of MOI cooperatives are profound and are reflective of new developments in architectural theory and education, and are explored thoroughly in Chapters 4 and 5.

Similar to the manners in which public housing sought to improve upon previous forms of low-cost housing, MOI cooperatives also strive to improve upon that established canon. In its efforts to improve housing conditions, public housing generated a set of new problems regarding economic diversity and access to employment and public services. It is in this regard, or disregard, for urban context that MOI architects are most critical.\(^{87}\) MOI architects are disdainful of government housing for its isolation from the surrounding city, which with time has transformed these communities into incubators for poverty, rather than open spaces for community building amongst housing recipients and neighbors. According to MOI architect, José Barbagallo, these communities have served to homogenize populations according to economic status in pockets throughout the city.\(^{88}\)

Although MOI is outspokenly opposed to the government’s neglect of urban space, the group’s decision to build Cooperative *Perú* as a multi-family block, composed of eleven single-family apartments best suited to the nuclear family, is an important component that

---


87 Rodríguez and Barbagallo, eds., *MOI: Movimiento en Movimiento*, 17-51.

88 Ibid, 43.
the two housing types bear in common. The architects responsible for the construction of earlier government-built housing adhered to the ideological foundations of the German *Siedlung* in its supposed capability to enact equality. The plans for Cooperative *Perú* indicate the organization’s preference for single family apartments that accommodate the nuclear family. This inclusion breaks with the tradition of the tenement and ideologically aligns the designers of the cooperative alongside those who fought for multifamily housing blocks in Buenos Aires in the 1940s. Rather than interpreting the distribution of space amongst families as a pure ascription to a now century-old architectural ideology, it is more likely that MOI’s plans for Cooperative *Perú* are the repetition of the common plans for upper- and middle-class apartment in Buenos Aires. It is worth noting that MOI members are faced with a similar transition to the new single-family apartments that the residents of *Los Perales* faced previously. Just like the families who moved into public housing, MOI families too transition from precarious, sometimes unhygienic and potentially crowded living arrangements. For these families, the transition is slow, and as it had in the past with the residents of *Los Perales*, their new dwellings are an important step in the construction of a new identity within the social landscape of central Buenos Aires.

Like their selective references to the *conventillos* and *casas chorizo*, MOI architects and families also have elected to include references to the public housing of the 1940s. Aside from the plans for individual apartments, the changes made to the façade of Cooperative

---

89 The capacity of the German Siedlungen to enact equality amongst residents has been succinctly summarized by Otto Neurath writing about Frank’s Hoffingergasse Siedlung in 1923, which states, “The individual house is a brick in a building…A new community evolves here out of the class solidarity of the working population. The uniformity of the typified dwelling units, the uniformity of the standardized building parts, follows from economic necessity, but also from a sense of equality…It is not the individual house, but the totality of the houses that is the object which is shaped.” Quote from: Otto Neurath, *Österreichs Kleingarten- und Siedlerorganisationen* (Vienna: Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, 1923): 34. This translation was taken from Eve Blau (1999), 125-127. For more on the German *Siedlung*, and other turn-of-the-20th-century housing in Europe see: Nicholas Bullock, *The Movement for Housing Reform in Germany and France, 1840-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
Perú reflect a familiarity with the geometric minimalism used in the designs for the earlier cooperative housing. In its plans for the new cooperative, MOI decided to add a new mezzanine floor to individual apartments. Since the group had decided to increase the width of the narrow lateral corridors to allow for increased natural light and ventilation, the second stories added to each individual unit added floor space that was decreased by the broadened exterior passageway. This mezzanine floor confused the exterior elevation, however, as the original façade was reflective of the building’s original composition. In addition to the mezzanine, the organization likewise built upon the original elevation with the addition of a rooftop patio. With the addition of this patio, the cooperative needed to build a new wall to the top of the building to ensure safety. The new five-, rather than three-part elevation required the cooperative to rethink the external façade.

The new façade incorporates a new stringcourse, devoid of ornament, which corresponds to the double classical portico of the neighboring school. This lack of ornamentation of Cooperative Perú’s exterior certainly harkens back to the German architects responsible for the Siedlungen and the porteño architects in charge of 1940s public housing. It is additionally important to consider this façade in relation to other MOI cooperatives. Most of MOI’s other cooperatives are located in former factories, and have retained the spare original factory façades. The minimal treatment of the façade at Cooperative Perú is therefore corresponding to its formerly industrial counterparts. As with MOI’s other cooperatives, the minimal treatment of the exterior elevation at Cooperative Perú is also a financial decision, reserving the group’s meager resources for use in the interior.

This variety of architectural references sustains the cooperative’s place within the history of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires, while trying to improve upon the conditions generated from former types. The correspondence of MOI cooperatives to their antecedents
is not limited to these two types, however. In its methods of construction, *Perú* and other MOI cooperatives correspond to one final low-cost housing alternative within the region: the *villa miseria* (informal settlement).

**Villas Miseria (Informal Settlements)**
Comparisons of now three types of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires—tenement dwellings, Perón-era public housing and MOI cooperative *Perú*—has illustrated how the architectural forms of new types have attempted to respond to the shortfalls antecedents. For example, through the space of the ensuite bathroom, public housing in the 1940s and 50s sought to provide new opportunities for residents to participate in the dominant visual culture of consumer society. Rosa Aboy has adeptly observed that these ambitions were only partially realized, as residents of *Los Perales* did not immediately conform to certain notions of the nuclear family, such as the matrimonial bedroom. Nonetheless, testimonies published within Aboy’s texts at least partially support the claim that the architectural forms of public housing provided the means for a shift in identity construction, in the sense that residents were provided the space to better participate in consumer society.

Public housing was not without its shortcomings, however. With limited financial resources, the very goal of encouraging the poor to participate as consumer citizens is, at best difficult, and at worst impossible to fully achieve. The location of public housing complexes—either beyond or along the city’s outer boundaries—left residents farther away from the city center, and consequently public education, health services, as well as work.

---

90 Aboy, *Viviendas para el pueblo*; and “The Right to a Home.”

91 Ibid.
Furthermore, with massive shifts in populations towards city centers, especially Buenos Aires, public housing was never capable of providing homes to all of those in need.

While the precarious, rudimentary, self-constructed dwellings of the *villas miseria* are not an ideal solution, these illegal settlements certainly need to be included in this history of housing in Buenos Aires as a revision to the shortfalls of this immediate antecedent. The growth of the *villas miseria* began in the years following World War II. The rudimentary materials used to construct these homes, often castoffs from other construction sites or materials left as waste, illustrates the contradiction of poor populations—families with few financial means—participating as consumers, a conflict that has been brought to the theatre of bourgeois art and literature in Buenos Aires by artists such as Antonio Berni and writers including Bernado Verbitsky. The locations of the *villas* in the margins of Buenos Aires, along railroad tracks, under bridges, aside highways, as well as on flood plains and near garbage dumps, provide somewhat easier access to public services and (often informal) employment within the federal capital (map 5).

The means through which the *villeros* (*villa* dwellers) have established their place within this history of low-cost housing is through self-construction, an entrepreneurial activity. However counterintuitive this use of the term, it is important to view these populations as entrepreneurs as they are taking on the risk of inhabiting land illegally, the responsibility of gathering materials and constructing their homes according to their own personal initiative. The goal of these entrepreneurs is simple: survival. Their dwellings lack access to modern technologies and infrastructure. Yet the residences do provide shelter, a basic need. The abject poverty that is present within the *villas* produces its own set of

---

92 In her groundbreaking text, Janis Perlman studied the formal economic and social structures within the *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. This dissertation has been written with Perlman’s theoretical framework for the rethinking of informal urban settlements in mind. Janis Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality* (1976).
obvious deficiencies: violence, crime and disease. Since MOI members were previously villeros or ocupantes (squatters), it is these shortfalls which MOI most urgently seeks to confront through the construction of its cooperatives.

MOI cooperatives share important commonalities with the villas: MOI cooperatives are self-constructed dwellings, with access to public transportation and within reasonable proximity to the city center. The comparison of Cooperative Perú to the villas likewise highlights how—as a moral response to this antecedent—MOI strives to mediate a correction by means of providing reasonable opportunities for its residents to participate within the dominant consumer culture. As the owners, rather than occupiers, of the previously abandoned casa chorizo, MOI families gain legitimate residence. Interestingly, villeros too consider themselves the owners of their homes. Although they are illegally occupying the land upon which their ramshackle dwellings rest, these families believe that their homes are their own as they built the structures themselves. The clear distinctions between these two types of low-cost housing can be made as MOI cooperatives achieve legitimate, legal rights to urban space, which provides avenues to the organization to access infrastructure and other amenities.

93 There is no architectural historical discourse covering the production of informal settlements in Buenos Aires. As a result, this section relies on information published within the fields of sociology, urban planning and geography. For more on the villas miseria of Buenos Aires, see: Eileen Stillwaggon, Stunted Lives, Stagnant Economics: Poverty, Disease and Underdevelopment (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Max Welch Guerra, Buenos Aires a la deriva: Transformaciones urbanas recientes (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2005); and Beatriz Cuenya, Ernesto J. Pastrana and Oscar Yujnovsky, De la villa miseria al barrio autoconstruido: cuatro experiencias organizadas de producción de hábitat popular (Buenos Aires: Ediciones CEUR, 1984).

94 Since villeros describe themselves as property owners, sociologists have noted that National Census data is vastly underestimated. As reported by Eileen Stillwaggon in Stunted Lives, Stagnant Economics, “In 1980, 1 percent of the population of the Federal Capital (about 30,000 people) lived in shanties as squatters, in 6,677 dwellings. By 1984, it was estimated that 35,000 people lived in villas in the capital. In the nine years after the military stepped down, the villa population of the Federal Capital grew to 50,000. That may be an underestimate, because by mid-1991, Villa 21 alone, the largest shantytown in the Federal Capital had 35,000 residents, including 18,000 children.” Much of this inaccuracy is clearly related to the phrasing of question on census forms. According to Stillwaggon, up to 9.7% of populations of each barrios of Buenos Aires may be housed in the villas. Stillwaggon, 52-55.
As dwellers of individual apartments within a multi-family block, with individual bathrooms, kitchens and dormitories, MOI families take on a lifestyle—and patterns of consumption—more similar to not only the families in public housing, but other middle- and upper-class families living in individual apartments throughout the city. Looking to the history behind the emergence and growth of the villas miseria, the extent of the moral dilemma surrounding the villas is brought to the foreground. This history serves to illuminate attitudes towards poor populations and elucidates the public perception of poverty within the city, a perception which MOI seeks to remedy through its careful negotiation of alternatives in low-cost housing.

In 1955, in yet another military coup, Perón was ousted from office and forced into exile. The three military juntas that succeeded Perón continued the housing programs created throughout his administration, and later founded the now defunct Fondo Nacional de Vivienda (FONAVI, or National Housing Fund) in 1972. This fund acted as the central financial institution for all government housing initiatives, which were then, and continue to be the task of a variety of governmental organizations.

Although the Argentine national government continued efforts in the construction and provision of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires, after Péron’s fall from power yet another type of housing began to grow in prevalence: the villa miseria (figs. 2.21-22). Since the dwellings throughout these settlements are built by residents with little architectural training, their architectural forms do not subscribe to, or even recognize, any esoteric form of architectural theoretical ideology. Rather, constructed of inexpensive or found materials—most often brick, corrugated steel and cardboard—the forms of these homes are as diverse as their residents.

---

95 Yujnovski, “Del Conventillo a la Villa Miseria.”
The patchwork construction of these heterogeneous dwellings, serving the function of shelter and without access to adequate infrastructure, is a challenge to the architectural historian in search of some sort of evolution in form. However, the growing presence of this precarious form of low-cost housing within the urban fabric of Buenos Aires—concentrated within the southern sectors of the city, along railroads and highways or under bridges and overpasses—certainly warrants mention in this brief summary of the history of housing in the region.

Of course, squatter settlements had existed in Buenos Aires since as early as the 1930s. As discussed by Laura Podalsky in *The Specular City* (2004), the economic, political and social changes that occurred throughout the 1940s and 50s, regardless of large-scale efforts to provide formal government-built low-cost housing, encouraged the growth of the *villas*.

According to Podalsky, Buenos Aires’s shantytowns grew rapidly during and after World War II. Migration had again intensified as a result of a decrease agricultural production and exports following the war. These migrants were attracted to urban centers, particularly Buenos Aires, as these centers were the loci of increased industrialization set underway throughout the Perón administration. This influx of migrants only served to exacerbate the low-cost housing shortage.

Although government assistance for housing reached a wider sector of the population than ever before, government housing policies also unwittingly constricted the market, which resulted in an increase in housing prices. Without access to credit, low-income families found it increasingly difficult to locate adequate housing. As a result, more

---


97 For example, Perón also reformed renters’ rights by creating a rental property law that prevented evictions and established a freeze on rents. This law was intended to benefit the working classes, yet by discouraging investment in rental properties, low-cost rentals became more scarce. Yujnovsky, (1983): 458.
and more families, mostly migrants, began to settle in the villas. Statistics culled from various sources illustrate the profound growth of the villas between 1955 and 1977, with populations doubling nearly every 10 years.\(^{98}\)

The initial government reaction to these growing informal settlements was to institute a plan for their eradication. After 1955, the Buenos Aires city government sought to replace settlements with highways while providing aid to help inhabitants find formal housing.\(^{99}\) Within the context of a Buenos Aires that sought to participate in 1950s consumer society in its advertising, literary and cinematic productions, a small, yet powerful group of artists and authors began to produce works in defense of the villeros.

In 1957, Bernado Verbitsky published his novel, *Villa miseria también es América*.\(^ {100}\) This book gave the settlements in Buenos Aires their name, previously known as asentamientos (settlements), and placed the living conditions of the villas within reach of the porteño bourgeoisie. In the early 1960s, artist Antonio Berni began creating prints, paintings and multi-media collages depicting life in the villas.\(^ {101}\) Berni’s representation of figures such as Juanito Laguna and Ramona Montiel won the artist high honors internationally—Berni won the Grand Prize for Printmaking at the Venice biennale in 1962—and like Verbitsky’s text,

---

\(^{98}\) Ibid.

\(^{99}\) For more on slum eradication under Argentina’s fourth junta see the introduction to: Cuenya, Pastrana and Yujnowski (1984).


forced the image of the villero into the realm of the art-consuming elite. Berni’s collages relied on the juxtaposition of images of these villa dwellers with the waste products of commercial and advertising images, such as the soda bottle, the tire branding. These compositions forced the contemplation of the presence of commercialism within a population of those incapable of consuming for lack of financial resources (figs. 2.21-22).

Since the 1960s the villa miseria had become the symbol of poverty in Buenos Aires, and had established its place within the realms of art and literature. Regardless, or perhaps because of, the increasing visibility of the villas within Buenos Aires art, literature and daily life, the government’s policies towards these illegal populations grew in vehemence. As investigated at length by Beatriz Cuenya, upon the establishment of Argentina’s military dictatorship in 1976, the government’s slum eradication policy took a violent turn.\footnote{Cuenya, Pastrana and Yujnowski.} Beginning in 1976, this fourth military junta began the process of physically bulldozing the villas to the ground without complementary programs to help inhabitants find other accommodation. Those who protested were either publicly taken into government custody, or disappeared.

After the fourth junta was ejected from power and democracy restored in 1983, the Argentine national and Buenos Aires city governments adopted a new policy of tolerance for squatter populations on public land. Today, the government places squatter populations within three categories: villas miseria, slums that by government calculations, with enough money and infrastructure improvements could conceivably be transformed into liveable neighborhoods; casas tomadas (taken houses), usually large abandoned buildings illegally
occupied by squatters; and asentamientos (settlements), which are conglomerations of primitive shacks appearing in vulnerable locations throughout the city.\textsuperscript{103}

In efforts to integrate portions of the populations living within informal settlements into the urban fabric of Buenos Aires, the city government has created agencies such as the Unidad de Gestión e Intervención Social (Unit for Social Intervention and Management).\textsuperscript{104} The Unidad de Gestión e Intervención Social specializes in slum upgrading, and works to install running water, sewers and electricity, as well as widen streets within the villas. The creation of this agency signifies a shifting attitude on the part of the government towards squatter populations, from eradication to urbanization.

Nonetheless, the scope of work conducted through this government organization is limited to the villas miseria, as those are the settlements where the government sees any possibility of hope. Government efforts to upgrade slums are slow. To further assist in efforts to improve living conditions and the residences of the populations forced to live within such illegal settlements, other non-governmental organizations have been created and work to help in the same efforts as the government to upgrade existing slums and otherwise assist populations living in casas tomadas or asentamientos, such as MOI.\textsuperscript{105}

The involvement and professionalization of non-governmental organizations such as MOI signify yet another important turn in the history of low-cost housing in the region. It was from the conditions of neoliberalization from which these groups have emerged, initially

\textsuperscript{103} Monte Reed, “In Buenos Aires, Neighborhoods of Misery,” \textit{Washington Post} (29 April 2007)


\textsuperscript{105} The daughter Jorge Hardoy, Ana Hardoy has continued her father's work with the International Institute for Environment and Development branch in Buenos Aires. She publishes texts analyzing the efforts of non-governmental organizations working with populations living in squatter settlements: Ana Hardoy and Ricardo Schusterman, \textit{Reconstructing Social Capital in a Poor Urban Settlement: The Integral Improvement Programme at Barrio San Jorge, Argentina} (London, IIED, Human Settlements Programm, 2996).
as movements of resistance. Interestingly, however, the entrepreneurialism so privileged under neoliberalism is the method through which MOI and other housing organizations have succeeded in garnering support for their building initiatives.

Literature discussing the affects of neoliberalization upon urban space often use the growth of informal settlements, both in Buenos Aires and abroad, as evidence of the manners in which this political ideology have been disadvantageous to poor populations. Yet, by inserting the history of MOI cooperatives into this discussion, the definition of the neoliberal city is expanded. Certainly, the increasingly deplorable living conditions within the *villas* are reason for concern. Yet, through the example of MOI, the remainder of this dissertation will analyze the manners in which this (and other) non-governmental organizations have creatively devised new strategies that strive to simultaneously correct the initially deleterious affects of neoliberalism through resistance, whilst maintaining the ability to reasonably negotiate compromises between political bodies and portions of urban populations otherwise overlooked in policy-making decisions.

**Chapter 2 Conclusion**

This comparative study of MOI Cooperative *Perú*, has established this organization’s place within long history of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires. With Cooperative *Perú*, MOI has adapted the existing space of an abandoned *casa chorizo* by building individual apartments that are in plan similar to the public housing constructed in the 1940s and 50s, with the same spirit of entrepreneurialism of the self-built dwellings in the *villas miseria*. Aside from architectural form, however, MOI’s ambitions in designing and building Cooperative *Perú* elucidate a commonality that all of these forms of low-cost housing share: a desire to provide
opportunities to poor populations to participate in the dominant consumer culture, though both production and consumption. With the moral aim of correcting the misgivings of antecedents, Cooperative Perú stands in discourse with its predecessors. A patchwork of architectural and ideological references, there is only one clear distinction between Cooperative Perú and its antecedents: cooperative members own this structure. This ownership is only achieved through collective means, and when combined with the variety of elements taken from other housing types, leads the cooperative to negotiate the shortfalls of these antecedents by marrying past successes and failures.

Just like the other housing types, however, Cooperative Perú is not without its shortfalls. Reliant upon the complicated bureaucracy of government mediation—rather than provision—the construction process is slow. Although it was founded in 1995, as of June 2010 the adaptive reuse was only completed through the first of three phases of construction, principally because of delays in the approval of loans. The cooperative likewise experiences delays in construction due to the living habits and culture of MOI members. For example, in June 2010 the cooperative was set to begin the second stage of construction at the site. This construction was put to an abrupt halt when a family that had been invited to stay a night in one of the rooms slated for demolition refused to move. José Barbagallo explained that such invitations are a relatively common custom amongst squatters, who can sympathize with families in desperate need of shelter.¹⁰⁶

MOI Cooperatives are likewise not an attractive solution to their access to housing because the commitment involves not only requisite ascription to the collective savings plan—which diminishes already scant financial resources for daily use—but also to the organization’s requisite of sixteen hours of weekly work at the building site. As also occurred

upon the founding of Cooperative *La Unión*, many of the families that had previously occupied the building that today is Cooperative *Perú* decided not to join the organization. Upon MOI’s purchase of the old *casa chorizo*, those families sought other options, many of who either moved outside of the city to live with extended family, or joined another squat.

These new challenges created through the emergence of MOI cooperatives as an alternative in low-cost housing are yet another point of comparison. While attempting to correct the deficiencies of other examples, all of these types of low-cost housing have simultaneously generated a new set of problems. In this regard, the comparative analysis of Cooperative *Perú* and the history of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires provides a foundation for further investigation, rather than providing a conclusive solution to the challenges presented throughout the history of low-cost housing in the region. Instead of drawing conclusion, this comparison has identified MOI cooperatives as physical evidence of further shifts beyond the realm of housing: changes in governmental politics, transformations in attitudes towards the shape and uses of urban space, as well as sentiments within and towards architectural production and building construction.

Years after Perón had claimed equal rights to a home for all Argentines, and following the eradication and subsequent proliferation of informal settlements, a third actor in the field has gained a strong presence in the production of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires in the late 1980s: the non-governmental organization. MOI is but only one of dozens of such organizations in Argentina, and hundreds worldwide. In Buenos Aires, these grassroots organizations principally specialize in the adaptive reuse of abandoned, derelict or disused spaces. These re-appropriated spaces are the newest forms of low-cost housing within the city.
Within the context of political shifts towards neoliberalization since 1976, the national and local governments have gradually deregulated and disengaged from the production of low-cost housing. Within this context, the adaptive reuse of old structures on the part of non-governmental actors has become the principal form of low-cost housing produced in Buenos Aires outside of the ever-growing *villas miseria*.

The increased importance and professionalization of the non-governmental organization is a political and social symptom of the neoliberalization that Buenos Aires has experienced over the course of the past three decades. Neoliberalization instituted a series of significant shifts in the physical environment of the city, the material context in which MOI cooperatives have been built. The next chapter takes on the example of MOI’s second cooperative, *Yatay*, and investigates how neoliberalization has served to reshape the physical environment of Buenos Aires, and thus, how MOI cooperatives have been both a product of and a mediator for such changes in urban space.
Cooperative Perú is recognized for its narrow façade (left). The building sits at one of the busiest intersections in the barrio of San Telmo and is near to stops for major bus routes and a subway station.

2.2 MOI, Cooperative Perú, interior corridor of Cooperative Perú before construction, (photo by author, 2009)
2.3 MOI, Cooperative Perú, small patio outside of first floor apartments of Cooperative Perú before construction, (photo by author, 2009)

2.4 MOI, Cooperative Perú, drawing of scheme for changes to the plan of Cooperative Perú, (from Rodríguez, MOI: Movimiento en Movimiento, 127)

Notice how narrow the passageway in the existing building was (indicated by grey) when compared to the widened passageway and patios in the projected scheme. Also notice the dramatic decrease in floor area of the apartments, which was compensated for with the addition of mezzanine floors to individual apartments.
2.5 MOI, Cooperative Perú, plan and interior elevation, CAD drawing (courtesy of José Barbagallo)

2.6 MOI, Cooperative Perú, outside of Cooperative Perú along Avenida Perú, begun 1994, (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, photo c. 1994)
2.7 MOI, Cooperative *Perú*, outside of Cooperative *Perú* along Avenida Perú, under construction, begun 1994, (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c. 2006)

2.8 MOI, Cooperative *Perú*, outside of Cooperative *Perú* along Avenida Perú, begun 1994, (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, 2010)
2.9 MOI, Cooperative Perú, rooftop terrace under construction, (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c. 2006)

2.10 MOI, Cooperative Perú, Cooperative President Leonor discussing construction schedule with MOI advisor and architecture student, (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo, c. 2006)
2.11 MOI, Cooperative Peru, door leading to new street-facing apartment near completion, May 2010 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)

2.12 MOI, Cooperative Peru, kitchen of street-facing apartment under construction, 2010 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)
2.13 MOI, Cooperative Perú, living room of street-facing apartment near completion, May 2010 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)

2.14 The interior of a conventillo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, c. 1900 (from Scobie, Buenos Aires, From Plaza to Suburb)
2.15 Avenida Santa Fe in the barrio of Recoleta, Buenos Aires, c. 1900 (from Scobie, Buenos Aires, From Plaza to Suburb)

2.16 Barrio Eva Perón, just outside of the Federal Capital, Buenos Aires, c.1952 (from Aboy)
2.17 Barrio Los Perales, Buenos Aires, c. 1955 (from Aboy)

2.18 Demonstration in the Plaza de Mayo, 9 October 1945 (from Aboy)
2.19 View of a *villa miseria*, 2009 (photo by Thomas Locke Hobbs)

2.20 Flea market inside a *villa miseria*, 2009 (photo by Thomas Locke Hobbs)
2.22 Antonio Berni, *Great Temptatio*, multimedia collage and painting on wood, 1962 (from María Carmen Ramírez, *Cantos paralelos* [exhibition], 1999)
CHAPTER 3: SPACE

Cooperativa Yatay, Neoliberalism and Urban Space in Buenos Aires, 1976-2010
Throughout history, major political and economic shifts have generated similarly significant changes to the forms and uses of urban space. Urban crowding and pollution that followed the invention of the railroad and the industrial revolution in nineteenth-century London gave birth to garden cities. A post-World-War-II economic boom, fueled by what was later termed by US President Dwight Eisenhower as the “military-industrial complex,” paved the way to the great American suburb and changed the physical and social composition of major American city centers. Similarly in Buenos Aires, significant shifts towards neoliberal economic and political policy since roughly 1976—involving the deregulation of financial markets, privatization of formerly public industries, and a state disengagement from welfare programs—has given way to new forms and uses of urban space.

This chapter illustrates how the architectural forms of MOI cooperatives are the historical products of neoliberal shifts in Buenos Aires, and the effects of these political shifts the urban landscape. Specifically, this chapter takes the example of MOI’s Cooperative Yatay (figs. 3.1-3.16). Located in the southern barrio of Barracas (map 2), a formerly industrial and low-density residential region of Buenos Aires, Cooperative Yatay provides evidence not only of the effects of neoliberalism on urban space within the physical environment of

---


Buenos Aires, but also illustrates how this cooperative has acted as a mediator for a significant shift in its immediate community, and consequently the perceived identity of the poor in this city. The transformations that MOI has initiated to the physical and ideological environments directly surrounding Cooperative Yatay are examples, therefore, of manners in which this organization has contributed to a reshaping of the neoliberal city.

Texts analyzing the effects of neoliberalization on urban centers, such as Jason Hackworth’s *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology and Development in American Urbanism*, have highlighted the inefficacy of non-governmental organizations in discouraging changes to public policy that negatively effect poor urban populations by stimulating gentrification.¹¹⁰ My investigations reveal that in Buenos Aires this is only partially true. By acting as an important part of the private-public partnerships now generally accepted as a definitive element of the neoliberal equation, MOI and other NGOs in Buenos Aires serve to legitimate the presence of poor populations within city centers in new and creative ways. The architectural forms of these cooperatives within the physical environment of the city furthermore serve to integrate these populations within existing communities. As a result, the research presented here serves to expand the definition of the neoliberal city in general, and to more accurately define the Buenos Aires dialect of the term.

After a brief discussion of the history and definition of the term neoliberal, this chapter looks to the history of Cooperative Yatay and investigates the conditions that brought this population to the *barrio* of Barracas, the decisions the cooperative made when planning the adaptive reuse of the old *casa chorizo* the group has appropriated and the changes that have occurred within the neighborhood since MOI’s arrival to the site. This

---

investigation reveals that the designs for Cooperative Yatay, as well as the presence of the cooperative group, have instigated notable shifts in neighbors’ perceptions concerning community, safety and ultimately towards the poor. The previous chapter discussed how MOI cooperatives stand in discourse with previous forms of low-cost housing in the region. While that study is helpful in identifying how the architectural forms of MOI cooperatives may be interpreted as a revision to previous alternatives, it does little to explain why MOI cooperatives had emerged when they did. After identifying the history of Cooperative Yatay within the immediate physical context of its own barrio, this chapter seeks to place the emergence of the cooperative within the physical and temporal space of the city, neoliberal Buenos Aires.

Simultaneous to MOI’s work with Cooperative Yatay, other parts of Buenos Aires experienced major shifts in urban space that appear, at first glance, unrelated to MOI’s activities. For example, while MOI was beginning work in Barracas in the 1990s, Buenos Aires’s first shopping malls were being built in the northern barrios of Recoleta, Almagro and Palermo. The concurrence of these two developments beckons the question: What do shopping malls have to do with low-cost housing cooperatives? Interestingly, this investigation finds that both are products of neoliberal political shifts in Argentina since 1976. By identifying the major changes that have occurred throughout Buenos Aires, both within and beyond the southern barrios where MOI cooperatives are located, this investigation illuminates how all of these shifts stand in relation to a series of political and public policy changes that have influenced changing attitudes towards and uses of urban space, broadening the definition of Buenos Aires as a neoliberal city.
What is neoliberalism?
The definition of neoliberalism, as David Harvey put forth in his book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), is really quite simple:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institution’s framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.\textsuperscript{111}

The use of the term neoliberalism is confused by two factors: first, the common use of the term liberal in popular news media and other texts; and second, the manners in which neoliberal policies are typically implemented are a form of mediated liberalism, not involving purely free markets and trade.\textsuperscript{112} To alleviate potential confusion, it is necessary to first briefly summarize the history and evolution of the term liberalism in its most common forms.

The root of this confusion is the varied use of the term liberalism. In its earliest incarnations, classical (or early) liberalism was used to describe a set of political ideologies


\textsuperscript{112}In Buenos Aires, protesters regularly gather in large public plazas to encourage governments to support state welfare programs and regulate the dominating economic grip of large financial corporations in the name of liberalism. Public protests of this nature are common in Buenos Aires. Recent instances of liberal public protests are reported in *Clarín*, one of Argentina’s largest newspapers: “Otro día de protestas cumplió el transito en los accesos y el centro porteño,” *Clarín* (23 March 2010); “La marcha K en el Congreso les complicó el lunes a los porteños,” *Clarín* (2 March 2010); “Cortes y demoras en el tránsito en la zona del Congreso,” *Clarín* (1 March 2010).

that were committed to limited government and liberty of individuals and markets.\textsuperscript{113} Liberalism of this sort did not reach a point of significant influence in Argentina until 1916, much later than the moments when similar ideologies had shaped politics in the U.S. and Europe.\textsuperscript{114} After leading a boycott of corrupt national presidential elections in 1912, Hipolito Yrigoyen was elected to the Argentine presidency in 1916.\textsuperscript{115} As the leader of Argentina’s liberal party, the Unión Cívica Racial (UCR, Radical Civic Union), Yrigoyen led the fight for universal male suffrage. As president, Yrigoyen also enacted liberal economic policies that opened the Argentine marketplace and profited the nation substantially upon the increased demand for beef after the First World War.

Today’s common use of the term liberalism often refers to a form of ideology that first found prevalence in the U.S. and Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century: Keynesian liberalism. Inspired by the theories of British economist John Maynard Keynes,


\textsuperscript{114} It is important to note that Argentina, although a sovereign nation with a constitution since 1816, was caught in civil war battles until 1886. This civil war was a feud over the location of the capital city, and whether that capital city would be an autonomous entity. The weakness of a centralized executive power in the nation in its earliest decades has contributed to its absence from the grand narrative of political world history within many texts. For more on the early history of Argentina see: Scobie (1974) and David Rock, Argentina 1516-1982 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

\textsuperscript{115} In Argentina, the liberal party is named the Radical party, rather than having an opposing conservative party, the second most dominant political party in Argentina is the Peronist party, which is addressed on the following page. For more on Hipolito Yrigoyen and the foundation of the Radical party in Argentina, see: Joel Horowitz, Argentina’s Radical Party and Popular Mobilization, 1916-1930 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008); Rodolfo E. Argañaraz Alcorta, Alem e Yrigoyen y la fuerza política del futuro (Buenos Aires: Platero, 1984).
this new liberalism presented a series of revisions to classical liberalism. As summarized by Richard Child Hill, this new breed of liberalism sought to soothe the ailments of classical liberalism and, “prescribed government regulation, demand management, and progressive taxation to ameliorate the excesses of free market capitalism.” In the context of two devastating World Wars in Europe and the Great Depression, heads of state implemented new interventionist programs, which used tax dollars to fund public welfare programs.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, a similar, although not identical, breed of liberalism appeared in Argentina with the election of Juan Domingo Perón to the presidency in 1946. Along with Perón came a new political ideology that is quintessentially Argentine: Peronism. Described at times as “pseudo-Keynesian” and at others “pseudo-Fascist,” Peronism is defined by three principal characteristics: a strong centralized government, nearing authoritarian control; economic policy that is neither socialist nor capitalist, but rather fuses the two in a national corporativist manner; and domestic policy that fuses nationalism and social democracy. Peronism takes on the qualities of Keynesian liberalism in its creation

---


119 Peronism, during the administration of Perón, was described as “pseudo-Keynesian” within: Mariano Scheinsohn and Cecilia Cabrera, “Social Movements and the Production of Housing in Buenos Aires: When Policies are Effective,” *Environment and Urbanization* 21 (2009): 109. Although Peronism is neither one nor the other, the Fascist nature of Perón-era Peronism is commonly discussed in relation to Fascism. A good analysis of the manner in which these terms coincide may be found in: Paul H. Lewis, “Was Perón a Fascist? An Inquiry into the Nature of Fascism,” *The Journal of Politics* 42:1 (February 1980): 242-256.
and expansion of national welfare programs, including the first national housing policy. Peronism differs from Keynesian liberalism because rather than creating new taxation programs to distribute capitalism’s excesses, Perón converted most major industries to institutions either owned or run by the state.\textsuperscript{120}

In Argentina and elsewhere, liberalism of the Keynesian—or pseudo-Keynesian—variety remained intact until roughly the late 1970s. It was then when the international monetary regime began to breakdown, alongside economic crises in mass production industries, and the appearance of fiscal contradictions in the welfare state came to light. These crises and contradictions provided impetus for world leaders to implement a series of government policies to remedy these situations. The policy changes world leaders instituted beginning in the 1970s constituted a trend. That trend today is generally referred to as neoliberalism.

Within the introduction to \textit{The Neoliberal City} (2008), Jason Hackworth succinctly defined neoliberalism as:

\textit{…an ideological rejection of egalitarian liberalism in general and the Keynesian welfare state in particular, combined with a selective return to classical liberalism.}”\textsuperscript{121}

In practice, the neoliberal policies instituted by leaders including Ronald Reagan in the U.S. and Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. ideologically favored the free market as the antidote to the world’s economic ills, and sloughed off the financial burden of public welfare programs, which were viewed as burdens to national budgets.\textsuperscript{122} By privatizing, deregulating, and in


\textsuperscript{121} Hackworth, 11.

\textsuperscript{122} For example, under Reagan the US government took steps to loosen government controls of industry, agriculture, and resource extraction, and liberate the power of the US finance industry both internally and on
certain instances entirely selling-off public programs, governments put faith in the open market to respond to the needs of the population.

This faith, however, was never pure, as governments have neither relinquished all involvement in public programs, nor entirely abandoned their ability to intervene in the open market. Rather, under neoliberalism governments shift roles from provider and regulator, to that of mediator and facilitator. As discussed by David Harvey, when governments step back from public programs and market regulation, they simultaneously institute new policies to encourage entrepreneurial activity in those areas through government mediation. Harvey termed this characteristic shift in policy “public-private partnership,” and identified it as a key component to neoliberal shifts.

The changes that reshaped the physical environment of Buenos Aires since 1976 can greatly be attributed to neoliberal policies, particularly the effects of public-private partnerships upon this space. First looking to the history and architectural form of Cooperative Yatay, the following analysis identifies the manners in which MOI cooperatives can be understood as both products of, and mediators for, the reshaping of neoliberal Buenos Aires. After looking into the recent transformation of the small portion of the city that surrounds Cooperative Yatay, this chapter turns to those characteristics that are more commonly identified as neoliberal changes to the cityscape of Buenos Aires: the de-industrialization of production centers, the reconstruction of Puerto Madero, the appearance of shopping malls within the city center, and the restoration of the Tren de la Costa (Coastal... the world stage, all in the expressed effort to revitalize the US economy. For a further discussion of the more canonical examples of neoliberalism, see: Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005).


124 Harvey, 76-78.
Train, a leisure train route for tourists and holiday travelers). The comparison of MOI cooperatives to other more commonly noted changes to the urban environment will highlight the manners in which neoliberal political reforms have served to reshape urban space over the course of recent decades. By injecting MOI cooperatives into the discussion of these changes, a broader understanding of the neoliberal city will be gained.

Cooperative Yatay and Changes in Neoliberal Buenos Aires Urbanism

Regardless of claims made throughout materials published by the organization, MOI cooperatives ideologically appeal to the basic tenets of neoliberalism. Families freely, and upon their own initiative, join the organization. Their membership is a commitment to the entrepreneurialism of self-construction and ayuda mutua. As the history of Cooperative Yatay will tell, the role of government within the emergence of this new housing type was at first absent. In the year 2000, however, MOI succeeded in establishing a public-private partnership with Government of the City of Buenos Aires with the enactment of Law 341, legislation that that strengthened public-private partnerships between the government and non-governmental organizations by creating a system for the government endorsement of private home mortgages made to collective organizations. As will be discussed later on in

---

125 The research presented throughout this chapter was the result of interviews conducted between July 2008 and January 2010 with MOI cooperative members, advisors, as well as long-term residents who have lived in this part of Barracas before the appearance of Cooperative Yatay. Most of the findings reported within this section were reported first in Barbagallo and Rodríguez, MOI: Movimiento en Movimiento (2007), and confirmed again through interviews and site visits. Specific interviews will be cited when appropriate.

126 For example, in his introduction to the book published by the organization in 2007, MOI President and Architect Nestor Jefietz makes outright reference to both the work of MOI and its international partners, such as SELVIP, as comprising a “red sostenida en el rechazo a las políticas neoliberales” (a network sustained through the rejection of neoliberal politics). See: Barbagallo and Rodríguez, MOI: Movimiento en Movimiento (2007); 20.

127 MOI, along with the Central de Trabajadores Argentinos (Argentine Workers’ Central) and a variety of other smaller grassroots organizations, lobbied for the enactment of Law 341 successfully in 2000. Through this
this chapter, MOI advisors and members played an important role in the lobbying efforts that eventually resulted in the enactment of Law 341, legislation that has served to help MOI to expedite and expand the scope of their work.

Yet, this new neoliberal public policy is not the only manner in which MOI cooperatives stand in discourse with neoliberalism. Decades before Law 341, neoliberalism first appeared in Argentina while the nation was under the control of a notorious military junta. The policies set into place under the junta served to disadvantage poor populations by raising rates of unemployment, diminishing earnings and creating a crisis of low-cost housing. The emergence of MOI was a response to these crises in housing and unemployment, situations that were not being improved upon by government, as political leaders ascribed to an ideology that put its faith in the capability of free markets to alleviate such social ills. As a response to the negative effect of these public policies, MOI cooperatives are the physical products of a resistance movement against neoliberalism. Yet, as the producer of changes to the urban landscape within the specific communities in which they are built, and through the support of Law 341, MOI cooperatives are evidence of a more recent development within the history of neoliberalism, in which the non-governmental organization and the working poor have become important mediators to the reshaping of the neoliberal city.

---

legislation MOI cooperatives gained access to the financing necessary to expedite their processes. After 2000, MOI cooperatives grew immediately in size. For example, MOI Cooperative La Fabrica will house fifty families, more than three times that of Cooperative Yatay. The importance of Law 341 stems beyond MOI, as the legislation has similarly aided other non-governmental organizations, such as the Mades de la Plaza de Mayo, to commence similar low-cost housing initiatives. Law 341 did not impact the early history of Cooperative Yatay, but it was helpful to this cooperative when the group was in need of an equity loan in order to purchase materials for the construction of the new dwellings. Law 341 is an important piece of legislation that falls under the ideology of neoliberalism. It will be discussed at greater extent later in this chapter as an example of neoliberal policies in Buenos Aires that have come to affect changes to urban space. For the full text and translation of Law 341, see Appendix 1.
The history of Cooperative Yatay is particularly illustrative of the cooperative’s relationship to neoliberalism and the neoliberal city because of its timely emergence in 1990, just months after the election of Carlos Menem, Argentina’s most infamous neoliberal. The history of this cooperative began in the context of the negative aftermath of those early neoliberal policies first established in the late 1970s. As an experiment in low-cost housing, MOI has navigated the ideological tenets of the political ideology, generating a creative alternative in low-cost housing that simultaneously strives to alleviate the negative effects of neoliberal policies, whilst appealing to the sensibilities of the ideology.

The history of Cooperative Yatay began in 1990. It was then when a group of forty-two families which had been occupying a government-owned building on Yatay Street in the barrio of Almagro (map 1, a neighborhood near to the city’s center) over the course of the previous six or seven years approached advisors who were then in the process of founding MOI. The families wanted to form a cooperative group and begin the process of purchasing the property in which they were residing.

Although the families had together saved enough money to make a down payment on the property, and pleaded to the government and the banks through radio and television media, their proposal for the loan for the property was denied. The eight-story property was one of the many that were sold off by the government under the privatization scheme of the Menem administration. The government wished to sell the property to a large corporation, and had already issued an evacuation notice to the squatters. In early 1993, police carried out the evacuation.

The families dispersed. Some families moved to occupy another abandoned house on Córdoba Avenue, one of Buenos Aires’s main thoroughfares. Others relocated to
neighborhoods outside of the city limits, and others to the residences of their extended families. At this point, most of the families decided to leave the cooperative.

A small group of families dedicated to MOI’s collective solution to their housing problem remained. Shortly thereafter, the families were joined by others who were also living in illegal squats and government-subsidized family hotels. By April 1993, the group was comprised of fifteen families, and with the help of MOI’s technical advisory board, was in search of a new property. Advisors located a place in the barrio of Barracas that suited their needs well enough. The property took the form of a 1,100 sq. m. *casa chorizo* with an adjoining lot situated along a small passageway—named Pasaje Icalma—within a mostly industrial area (map 7).

Each of the families had saved between $2,600 and $3,000 (ARS), a value that varied according to monthly income and family size. With this collective down payment, and the assistance of MOI advisors, the cooperative successfully arranged for the purchase of the building without government assistance. The group’s payment covered half of property’s total price of $220,000 (ARS). The remainder of the price of the property was taken in the form of a loan from the Banco de la Ciudad. The final deed transfer was signed on 12 July 1993, and the property in Barracas became the official home to Cooperative *Yatay*, named for the location of the original squat where the founding families had met.

Given the poor condition of the house at the time of purchase, ten of the families moved into the property immediately and began to repair the existing house and partition its spaces into individual apartments. These initial efforts did not constitute the final refurbishment of the property. Rather, these initial repairs were made in effort to create a

---

128 In 1993, convertibility, a national economic policy that pegged the value of the Argentine peso to the US dollar, was in place. Convertibility is one of the economic policies that scholars indicate as a catalyst to the Argentine economic crisis of 2001-2002, which will be discussed later in this chapter.
transitional living space while the cooperative worked on the final construction project with
MOI architects and other advisors. At this stage, each individual family repaired their own
quarters as needed, and all contributed to a general house fund to make repairs that affected
the whole group, such as those needed to fix a leaking roof and the construction of a path to
allow families to access the house from its rear, through the empty lot next to the structure.

Throughout this early stage, Cooperative Yatay did not benefit from regulations in
emergency housing achieved through Law 341. By their own initiative, cooperative members
then were responsible for contributing to monthly mortgage payments, utility bills,
cooperative dues, as well as charges for outside services, such as roof repairs that were
immediately necessary for the families to live within the building. Each month the sum of
these financial obligations were more than $400 (ARS) per month. For most of the families,
this sum was more than 40%, and in a few cases more than 50%, of the family’s monthly
income. Although the required payments were certainly high proportions of their income, by
1995 Cooperative Yatay had made its final payment on the property, achieving full legal
rights to the space. Although the families had legitimately obtained full legal rights to this
space, the integration of this cooperative into its surrounding community, the barrio of
Barracas, took time and the assistance of MOI architects (fig. 3.1-2).

Originally, Barracas was an industrial zone. A decline in activity that began in the
1970s and continued throughout the last thirty years has left a considerable number of
abandoned or idle factories, warehouses and other industrial buildings. This part of Buenos
Aires has also been the home to a small population of lower and middle class residences. As
result of the privatization program enacted under President Menem, many of the factories in
Barracas were intended for sale to private enterprises, yet left unsold, remained abandoned.
With the closure of these factories, this part of the city witnessed increased unemployment.
This combination of abandoned space and unemployment led to a rise in squatting in the area. This district is located in the southern sector of Buenos Aires, a part of the city that has a lower level of development and quality of life than in the north. Even in light of these less desirable circumstances, Barracas is near to the downtown area of the city, with good access to public transportation, urban services and facilities.

Cooperative Yatay is located just a few blocks away from the Hospital Neuropsiquiátrico Dr. José and the Talleres Protegidos de Rehabilitación Psiquiátrica, government-owned psychiatric facilities (map 7). Also within four blocks of the cooperative reside the area’s main commercial and transportation area, a thoroughfare with access to shops, services and public buses. The immediate surroundings of the cooperative consist of factories and warehouses, which have fallen into disuse with some degree of obsolescence, with a small scattering of long-term residents. Although Cooperative Yatay appeared within this space through legal means, its poverty and the rudimentary means of construction used throughout their earliest years proved to be hurdles in the integration of the cooperative within its community. Challenges aside, this setting is not accidental. MOI intentionally began its work within this zone of the city as one of its first points of intervention.

According to MOI architect, José Barbagallo, intervention within Barracas was particularly appealing for its location, access to services and the potential for improvement. By contrasting MOI’s goals to the manners in which social housing has been implemented by the government, Barbagallo elucidated the goals of the cooperative in this area:

Los FONAVI han sido producciones de localizaciones externas, no han puesto en juego el tema de la ciudad. La ocupación de edificios desde el momento que no ponemos a pensar, pone en juego todo eso: recuperar la ciudad, los edificios, la
As Barbagallo emphasized, MOI’s interventions at a site are not limited to the buildings themselves. Rather, MOI seeks to improve the city through the construction of its cooperatives, and the recuperation of communities.

Reaching these goals was a long and arduous process. Logistical arrangements were major hurdles for the cooperative as they sought to commence construction. As early as 1994, Cooperative Yatay began to seek home improvement loans and other government subsidies to aid in the second stage of the construction of the final cooperative: the construction of permanent apartment units for the then sixteen families. The cooperative applied for a loan from the Banco de la Ciudad, but in the context of the Mexican economic crisis of 1995, which held heavy consequences for the Argentine banking industry, negotiations for these loans were slowed.

In light of the lack of progress being made with Banco de la Ciudad, Cooperative Yatay sought other options. During this period, MOI and the members of Cooperative Yatay sought opportunities to form alliances with other non-governmental housing agencies in an effort to share experiences and formulate strategies that could help to improve the group’s planning and construction processes. The most fruitful of these exchanges was with FUVCAM, a similar cooperative housing organization in Montevideo, Uruguay. By the late

---

129 This quote by Barbagallo was published in MOI: Movimiento en movimiento. Mr. Barbagallo referenced his own quote from this book in an interview conducted 5 October 2009.
1990s, FUVCAM had experienced greater success than MOI and had already completed nearly twenty cooperatives in Montevideo, all of which on a much larger scale than Cooperative Yatay. The members of Cooperative Yatay visited a FUVCAM construction site for three weeks in early 2000. While there, the families donated their time to help in the construction of the new cooperative, learned of the Uruguayan’s strategies to lobby legislators for support of their projects, and visited completed buildings. Learning of the Uruguayans’ strategies, and seeing the quality and scale of FUVCAM cooperatives inspired the Argentines. Upon their return, the group believed they were better equipped to achieve their goals.

That same year, after residing within the property in Barracas for seven years, the cooperative finally obtained support to begin their own construction work. Through a small subsidy granted by the Secretary of Social Services, Cooperative Yatay began a small series of *pre-obra* (pre-construction, fig. 3.3) processes, building reinforced concrete foundations, columns and under-flooring. The subsidy was dedicated to the purchase of materials for these initial constructions, and all other labor and consulting costs were the responsibility of the cooperative. In order to limit costs of labor, the cooperative engaged the idea of *ayuda mutua* (mutual aid) and each family dedicated sixteen hours per week to the process. *Ayuda mutua* helped the cooperative to limit the costs of labor to only 14% of the total for this stage in the construction of Cooperative Yatay.130

The successful and relatively inexpensive completion of this early stage in the construction of Cooperative Yatay was a useful example for MOI as they lobbied local legislators for the creation of Law 341. As physical evidence of the initiative poor populations are able, and willing, to dedicate to such initiatives, the foundations of

---

Cooperative *Yatay* helped to convince city legislators to support the legislation, which later aided this cooperative to obtain the finances necessary to move forward with the construction of the apartments. After Law 341 was passed in February 2000, Cooperative *Yatay* was finally able to obtain the financial resources necessary for the construction plans that cooperative members and MOI architects had been developing over the course of the previous six years.

Although construction of the new cooperative did not start until 2000, MOI’s plans for the new complex had aims to integrate *Yatay* into its immediate physical surroundings and its extant community from the very start. For this reason, MOI had sought out a part of this neighborhood that was not typical for social housing, but instead had the qualities that would, from its very beginning, stimulate a socially heterogeneous integration of the cooperative’s residents and the existing population of this *barrio*.

MOI’s plan to develop this property, given its trapezoidal plan and empty lot, was to construct two new buildings facing one another with an intermediate courtyard which would open to the street (figs. 3.4-10). This courtyard divides the cooperative in two pieces, allowing cooperative members to view activities below from within the housing units, while simultaneously acting as a communal space for cooperative families, neighbors and others from the surrounding community. For MOI, this courtyard is an essential part of the buildings’ plans, as it provides for integration, both physically and socially, with the rest of the neighborhood.

This courtyard is the most important component to Cooperative *Yatay*, and to all of MOI’s cooperatives for that matter. Such a communal space keeps the cooperative and its residents from being shut off from its surroundings and its neighbors. Quite to the opposite, MOI members and architects sought to incorporate such public and community spaces into
its cooperative in order to avoid the sort of enclave mindset that typically prevails within other low-cost housing projects.

The plan and positioning of the apartments within the plot of land reflected this desire for full social and physical integration, as well (figs. 3.8-13). The housing units took the form of duplexes, each overlooking the courtyard. Within each unit, the communal living areas (the kitchen and living/dining rooms) were positioned along the exterior walls of these units, with windows overlooking the courtyard below and the street outside. Differing greatly from the multi-family public housing blocks discussed in Chapter 2, the positioning of these common living areas allows for greater surveillance, as families may view activities outside, and at times when curtains are not drawn, neighbors may view the familial activities occurring within each home. Likewise, with access stairways to each unit rising from the central courtyard and left exposed, families and members of the outside community can view the comings and goings of residents and guests. The transparency established through this open site plan serves to integrate the cooperative within its surrounding community.

Prior to the arrival of Cooperative Yatay to this part of Barracas, most poor populations living in the area were illegal squatters living within abandoned spaces. Since the members of Cooperative Yatay are also very poor, and also since the group lived by rather rudimentary means within the structure for years before noticeable improvements to the property could be seen from the outside, the outside community perceived this group as yet another group of potentially dangerous squatters. MOI’s organization of this group into a legally recognized cooperative, and the subsequent construction activities that began in 2000,

---

131 Most of the members of Cooperative Yatay have found work as house cleaners, cooks or child minders and are employed informally. For more, see Ibid, 51-75.
may be one of the more interesting aspects of this history and its effects on the urban space of this southern Buenos Aires barrio.

Cooperative Yatay is located in a traditional Buenos Aires neighborhood, with a strong working-class identity and a long history. Barracas experienced its heyday in the 1950s, after the Perón administration built numerous factories and brought new activity to the area. Today, Barracas bears the marks of decay in its physical surfaces and has been experiencing a declining density of residents (some streets only have two or three families in residence). Yet, over the course of the last ten years the area of Barracas immediately surrounding Cooperative Yatay has shown signs of improvement (figs. 3.13-16). A series of interviews with neighbors who have lived and worked in the area near to the cooperative for decades revealed a changing perception of the population of this site since construction began.

When neighbors learned that the group of poor families had purchased the property on Pasaje Icalma, most of the neighbors reacted with skepticism. The neighbors’ initial reactions to the cooperative that was about to commence construction reflected, in a reasonably typical way, the conflict between the established and the marginalized people with regard to the settlement of a new social group previously considered alien to the community. From the neighbors’ point of view, this group was a part of a major epidemic within the urban center, an increasingly growing population of urban pariahs: the unemployed, the poor.

Remarkably, after work began at Cooperative Yatay, some of the neighbors’ perceptions began to shift. As a woman living around the corner from the cooperative recounted, she now believes that, “squatters had been a scab on the neighborhood previously. But now, and with their involvement with MOI, and MOI’s attention to the
community, they not only have improved those old ugly buildings, but have helped to bring more life to the neighborhood. Today more and more people come here and feel more safe. It is really a good change.”

The cooperative’s design, with its open courtyard, integrated the housing blocks consistently within its surroundings. The additional construction of community facilities—a public green space and community center—at another MOI cooperative, La Fábrica just a few meters from Yatay, allowed the neighbors to engage and interact with the cooperative members more frequently.

Some community members also appreciated the cooperative’s improvement of the sidewalks outside of the structure. Industrial activity in the area had damaged public walkways, and their abandonment left them in a helpless state of disrepair. Today, these pathways are fully functional and safe for public use once again.

To some extent, the manners in which MOI managed the formulation and construction of the cooperative helped to remedy the neighbors’ initially negative perceptions of the group. The general perception of MOI, as a relevant non-governmental organization with reasonable public exposure through their efforts in lobbying the city legislature for Law 341, served to facilitate the implementation of the project on behalf of the alien population. With the endorsement of a legitimate organization, MOI’s involvement in the construction of cooperative Yatay helped to alleviate concerns regarding the legitimization of a group of such foreign and poor elements.

In essence, once the initial distrust of both the population of poor families comprising Cooperative Yatay and of MOI was at least partially overcome, the NGO was perceived as an organized political mediator. Not only did MOI act as a mediator between

---

the cooperative and the state in its efforts to obtain ownership and assistance to build the new cooperative, but also MOI acted as mediator between the cooperative members and their neighbors, helping to integrate the new population into the established community. The manner in which the activities of the cooperative members can be viewed from outside, as is facilitated through the open site plan, is worthy of emphasis at this point, as well. The transparency afforded through this architectural decision has been well received amongst the local community, as this architectural feature helps to improve safety within the neighborhood and illustrates the organization’s genuine interest in the future of the area.

Interestingly, the expectations of the neighborhood’s future have also shifted amongst both cooperative members, as well as neighbors. After MOI had begun construction of Cooperative Yatay, and the previously alien population of squatters had been legitimized as valuable community members, real estate developers began to arrive in the area. In fact, just across the street from the cooperative, a developer has completed an adaptive reuse project that constructed twenty new luxury loft apartments from an old abandoned warehouse (fig. 3.13). Likewise, a community of artists has brightly painted the façades of older homes just around the corner from the cooperative, bringing new activity and public attention to this part of the city (fig. 3.14). In light of this continued change, MOI and Cooperative Yatay are now seen as the catalyst for improvements in the neighborhood. The same neighbor also recounted, “I believe that someday Barracas will become another Palermo. That part of town used to be just like this: only warehouses and a few residents.” Sentiments such as this indicate a new optimism for the southern Buenos Aires barrio, an optimism that did not exist until MOI’s appearance within this community.

133 Ibid.
Through this examination of the history of Cooperative Yatay as it emerged within the context of the barrio of Barracas throughout the 1990s has identified that the cooperative sought to integrate the poor member families into its surrounding community through the cooperative’s design. The appearance of Cooperative Yatay can be identified as a product of neoliberalism, in the sense that the space in which the cooperative inhabited had been abandoned due to the consequences of the government’s privatization program. Through its transformation of this space, the cooperative can be identified as a mediator to the reshaping of the neoliberal city, as the entrepreneurial actions taken on by the cooperative throughout the group’s history have initiated a series of changes within its immediate community. Next, this analysis places Cooperative Yatay within the broader context of neoliberal Buenos Aires, comparing the history of this housing cooperative—its formal and social strategies—to those utilized in other emerging forms within the city, such as the shopping mall, and the reconstruction of Puerto Madero.

**Buenos Aires, Neoliberal City**

In short, neoliberalism emerged in Argentina in two phases. First, under Argentina’s fourth military junta (1976-83), the national government enacted economic policies which lifted government controls of, and encouraged participation within international markets. Second, after a brief intermission during the administration of democratically elected Raul Alfonsín (1983-89), a president who spoke against neoliberal policies while doing little to change

---

134 María Carla Rodríguez is a researcher at the Gino Germani Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Buenos Aires and a leading member of MOI’s Technical Advisory Board. She also has served as an advisor to me as I have conducted research and written this dissertation. Professionally, Professor Rodríguez investigates changes in urban space within the context of neoliberal Buenos Aires. Her personal guidance, experiences and publications have helped to shape the analyses presented throughout this dissertation. Her publications have helped to shape the following section of this chapter in particular. See: María Carla Rodríguez, “Producción social del hábitat y políticas en el área metropolitana de Buenos Aires: historia con desencuentros,” *Documentos de Trabajo* 49 (2007).
those created under the *junta*, a second and even more fervent series of neoliberal policies were enacted throughout the administration of Peronist President Carlos Menem (1989-99). Menem’s policies opened Argentine territory to international corporations, pegged Argentine currency to the U.S. dollar, and aggressively privatized government industry. Both of these two phases in the history of neoliberalization of Argentina led to major economic crises: the 1989 hyperinflation crisis that led to Alfonsín’s resignation just months before the end of his term in office, and the most famous crisis of 2001-02 that greatly weakened the value of Argentine currency, diminished the middle class, and left the nation in turmoil. Since 2002 subsequent Argentine leaders have continued to favor neoliberal policies, but without the rigor and fanfare of Menem.

The history of neoliberalism in Argentina has served to greatly reshape the urban landscapes of this nation’s cities, especially Buenos Aires. Since its earliest emergence, neoliberal policies have resulted in the partial abandonment and decay of industrial zones, a significant influx of immigrants to urban centers, new forms of social protest, as well as new forms of public-private partnership with both large corporations and a notable series of non-governmental agencies, including MOI. The remainder of this chapter identifies transformations in the built environment of Buenos Aires since the emergence of neoliberal ideology within the sphere of Argentine politics. Cooperative *Yatay* is just one of several examples used throughout this study. By comparing Cooperative *Yatay*, as an example of

---

135 Using framework set forth within Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1974), the investigation of the neoliberal changes of the past decades focuses on the effects of neoliberal policies on urban space in its various manifestations: actual space, appropriated space as well as social space. I’ve found Lefebvre’s definitions of space to be helpful to establishing the framework necessary to the arguments herein, which are built upon Lefebvre’s comments on the inter-reliance of physical (absolute), social and appropriated spaces. Lefebvre’s findings provide a framework for understanding the relationship between government policy creation and the symptomatic shifts in both social production, new appropriations of space, as well as major significant changes in the forms and uses of absolute space. See: Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991).
self-constructed low-cost housing, to the emergence of other building types within the city, such as the shopping mall, a broader understanding of the varying manners in which these political policies have served to reshape the urban landscape will be established.

The previous chapter described how the conventillos and casas chorizo in the southern barrios of Buenos Aires contrasted dramatically with the grandiose single-family residences in the north. This is a dichotomy that began around 1880, when after decades of civil war, Argentina—a nation then in the process of becoming the permanent home to throngs of immigrants—turned its gaze towards Europe in the hopes of participating in what was then the dominant world economy. Similar to other Latin American cities, the porteño bourgeoisie was not only growing wealth through the exportation of Argentine agricultural products to Europe, but as a consumer was also devoted to the cult of all things European. Calling in Italian and French architects, the porteño elite built a new Buenos Aires between 1880 and 1910 according to the tastes, culture and manners of Europe. Broad avenidas, such as Avenida de Mayo, mimicked Parisian boulevards. Culminating in plazas designed by French architects, such as Plaza Lavalle and Plaza de Mayo, these avenidas became the playground of the flaneur, and produced a Buenos Aires that was branded “The Paris of the South.” Through its consumption and re-production of European imports, the porteño elite strove to establish Buenos Aires as a “civilized” enclave, surrounded by the disenfranchised


masses of gauchos (Argentine cowboys), indigena (native cultures), Afro-Argentines and immigrant workers.\footnote{Maristella Svampa, \textit{El dilemna argentine: Civilización o barbarie. De Sarmiento al revisionismo peronista} (Buenos Aires: Ediciones el Cielo por Asalto, 1992).}

The comparison of central and northern Buenos Aires, areas that today comprise the barrios of Montserrat, San Nicolás, Retiro and Recoleta, to its neighbors just a few city blocks to the south in San Telmo and La Boca, drew a stark visible line between classes. The upper classes in the north strolled through shops along Avenida Santa Fe, traveled by street car and subway, enjoyed leisure activities such as attending the opera at Teatro Colón, and relaxed in the quiet repose of their grandiose homes in the north. Meanwhile, immigrant populations to the south coped with the heavy smoke of steam engines arriving with raw materials and produce from the nation’s interior, labored strenuously in steel factories and meat processing plants, returning to the crowded conditions of the tenements periodically for a meal and a bit of respite. In 1930, the Great Depression reached Argentina and rendered this contrast of class lifestyles in shades of gray. Yet, the physical landscape of Buenos Aires retained its dramatic juxtaposition of dignity and decay from the booming preceding decades.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Juán Perón was elected President of Argentina in 1945. Through extravagant displays of public support for the Argentine proletariat, Perón energized the support of the working class and defined a new political ideology that gave greater power to the chief executive of the country while reconfiguring attitudes towards the role of government in the formulation of the public good. Perón introduced public housing as a government provision, appropriated telecommunication companies, and built new factories in southern Buenos Aires, revitalizing a part of the city that had suffered through the Depression. Perón’s administration purchased railway systems from French and British
interests, providing more affordable means for citizens to live beyond the increasing congestion downtown. At roughly the same time, automobile manufacturers Daimler-Benz and Chevrolet built factories just outside of the city’s borders. Producing family automobiles and a new fleet of buses, new forms of public and private transportation further served to disperse the dense central population to parts of the city further from the center, as well as beyond the bounds of the federal capital. Perón further cultivated the new automobile culture by expanding existing and building new highways, including General Paz a motorway, which now serves as the boundary between Buenos Aires city and the surrounding province. The new noisy and busy highway established a physical boundary that emphasized the contrast between cosmopolitan Buenos Aires and the rest of the nation.

In the years following World War II, however, the demand for exports to Europe diminished, along with employment opportunities within Argentina’s interior. A second wave of migrants came to Buenos Aires in search of work. Government housing could not satisfy the need created by this post-war population boom, giving way to the growth of the villa miseria. While public housing sought to alleviate housing conditions of the tenements in the south of the city, the new informal settlements grew within the city center, drawing an even more visible comparison between poor and wealthy.

Beginning in 1976, and over the course of the following decades, neoliberalism emerged as a dominant political ideology in the region, once again reshaping the city. Neoliberal Buenos Aires retains the marks of its past while adapting its spaces by inserting (re)new(ed) constructions into its surface. Downtown Buenos Aires still holds dear its plazas and avenues recalling the moment when porteño elite sought to reproduce Europe, drawing the deliberate contrast between rich and poor, Buenos Aires and the Argentine interior, Argentina and the rest of Latin America. The southern barrios remain the home of the
working classes while areas to the north are the home to the upper and middle classes. Perón’s public housing still stands along the outer boundaries of the city, aging monuments to Peronism’s ambitions that confront automobile passengers as they speed along motorways. A “collage city” not dissimilar to that described by Colin Rowe, neoliberal Buenos Aires holds dear the monuments of its past, while shifting attitudes towards, and uses of, its physical environment in a manner that corresponds to new political policies.¹⁴⁰

The changes to the neoliberal city emerged slowly over the course of decades, shifting in step with the general two-stage history of neoliberalism in the region. Between 1976 and 1983, neoliberal policies only limitedly transformed the physical landscape of Buenos Aires, leaving industrial production, and consequently industrial zones, either stagnant or in states of decline. Yet, this early stage in the history of neoliberalism significantly shifted attitudes towards the city, generating new forms of public demonstration in response to the transformation of spaces and forms of production previously considered public, into private territory.

As mentioned earlier, the first stage in the history of neoliberalism in Argentina began in 1976 when the Argentine military staged a coup and a military junta took control of the national government. This date marked the beginning of what was named the “National Reorganization Process,” under a government that committed horrible genocidal acts over the course of the next seven years. The junta also commenced a series of economic reforms which signified the first step in the neoliberalization of the nation, and laid the foundations for significant changes to urban space in Buenos Aires.

The most significant of these early neoliberal reforms were measures enacted between 1977 and 1979 that removed government controls on finance activities and the

¹⁴⁰ Colin Rowe, Collage City (Boston: Birk Hauser, 1984).
mobility of capital. With the goal of establishing a greater presence within world markets for
Argentina, the government established itself as a mediator to facilitate such activity by
offering a full government endorsement—or guarantee—of international loans. These
endorsements gave private borrowers lower interest rates and alleviated risk, and were
successful in encouraging Argentine participation in global markets.

With the lifting of regulations that restricted the interactions between businesses,
established corporations—particularly within the agricultural and banking industries—began
to form large conglomerates, or grupos economicos. These firms took advantage of public-
private partnerships and together invested a great deal in foreign markets. This investing
activity was at the cost of jobs, as these new conglomerates hired fewer seasonal workers,
especially within the agricultural industry. Those workers, then, migrated to major city
centers with better access to public services and jobs. This further exacerbated a shortage in
low-cost housing within Buenos Aires, which once again led to the growth of the villas
miseria. Under the cold rule of the junta, however, these settlements were razed and poor
populations left with few options but to leave the city.

While private industrial production within Argentina’s interior began to stagger due
to the reallocation of resources, public industrial production declined. Since the Perón
administration, the boundaries between public and private endeavors in Argentina were
blurry because much of the nation’s industry was either owned or operated by the

---

141 The neoliberal economic policies of Argentina’s military junta have been thoroughly studied in English by
Miguel Teubal, and Eduardo Basualdo. These findings were published within Teubal, 177; and in Basualdo,
Sistema político y modelo de acumulación en la Argentina (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2001): 43.

142 Miguel Teubal has done extensive research of the impact of these grupos economicos on the economic health of
Argentina as a nation. Ibid.

143 Beatriz Cuenya, Ernesto Pastrana and Oscar Yujnovsky, De la villa miseria al barrio autoconstruido: Cuatro
experiencias organizadas de producción del hábitat popular (Buenos Aires: Ediciones CEUR, 1984).
government. With control of most of the country’s industry and production, the *junta* experimented with the free market ideologies set forth by its neoliberal policies. For example, as recounted by Miguel Teubal, the *junta* obliged public utilities and other state firms to increase their foreign debt and to transfer those funds—obtained for the improvement of industrial facilities—to the foreign exchange market.\textsuperscript{144}

These actions had deleterious effects on the urban fabric of Buenos Aires, as funds intended to help grow and improve industry were removed from the Argentine economy. In the short-term, this left industrial zones at best stagnant, and at worst declining.\textsuperscript{145} In the long-run, the loss of capital and foregone opportunities to upgrade industrial facilities resulted in underperformance. Underperformance later provided reason for Argentine President Carlos Menem to fully privatize government industry. Privatization, another characteristic of neoliberalism, changed the physical environment of Buenos Aires significantly, particularly in its southern industrial regions, the location of MOI cooperatives.

One of the most common criticisms of neoliberalism is its tendency to provide opportunities for the wealthier sectors of the economy, while deepening the disadvantages to the poor. The reforms most devastating to poor populations were those which tampered with the nation’s currency value. In 1978 the government established a system of predetermined exchange rates, a ‘crawling peg’ that increased at a rate lower than the domestic rate of inflation.\textsuperscript{146} This became a mechanism that helped wealthy Argentine borrowers, and thus the government as loan guarantor, to pay deficits. With increasing debt, however, this

\textsuperscript{144} Teubal, 178.


\textsuperscript{146} Discussed extensively in Teubal and Basulado.
also contributed to rapid inflation within Argentina, a consequence that the country’s middle and lower classes also had to pay.

By the time the junta’s successor, Raúl Alfonsín, was democratically elected to the Argentine presidency in 1983, the national debt was more than six times more than what it was in 1976 when the junta came to power. Although the regime change in 1983 began a new wave in social policy, Alfonsín did little to change the economic reforms enacted under the most recent junta. Over the course of the next six years, national indebtedness continued to rise. Meanwhile inflation rates grew at an alarming pace. By 1989, inflation was such a problem that prices for basic goods (milk, bread and eggs) rose incrementally over the course of any single day. This was a crisis of hyper-inflation, and was the direct result of neoliberal economic policies.

The root of this crisis was international borrowing initiated within wealthier sectors of the economy and large corporations. Those who suffered most from its consequences were the middle class and the poor. In 1980, the middle classes had composed approximately seventy percent of the Buenos Aires population. Throughout the 1980s, neoliberal reforms redistributed the classes into a contour resembling an asymmetrical hourglass. At the top of the hourglass was the small, extremely wealthy portion of the population that had benefited from neoliberal reforms. At the bottom of the hourglass were the increasingly unemployed working class and the ever-expanding poor. The imbalance of class distribution

---

147 Teubal, 175. “A new era of foreign indebtedness began and foreign debt increased from about $7 billion (USD) in 1976 to over $46 billion (USD) in 1983 at the conclusion of the dictatorship…Foreign indebtedness also acquired a renewed significance in the 1990s under the fully fledged SAP of the Menem administration increasing from about $61.3 billion in 1991 to $139.3 billion in 1998.”

148 Alberto Minujin and Gabriel Kessler, La nueva pobreza en Argentina (Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta Argentina, 1995): 21. The junta had made it an issue of public policy to physically raze all squatter settlements within and around major urban centers, this was particularly true in Buenos Aires. This income rate is therefore skewed, as the poor were forced out of the city center, and again returned after 1983.

in the city began throughout the eighties, resulting in the crisis of 1989. Although the
government managed to correct the conditions that led to hyperinflation, the imbalance of
class distribution continued throughout the 1990s. By 1999, just two years before
Argentina’s second major economic crisis, statistics reported by the Instituto Nacional de
Estadísticas y Censos (INDEC, National Institute of Statistics and Censuses) indicated that
about eighty percent of the porteño population was living below the poverty line, which in was
set at $1,030 (ARS) to support a family of four.  

The first crisis put such a strain on the population that massive demonstrations of
public upheaval resulted: grocery stores were looted, public plazas were filled with protesters,
and new activist groups were born, most notably the piqueteros (picketers). The principal
repertoire of the piqueteros involved the blocking of vehicular traffic on main roads and
highways in an attempt to interrupt the daily business of large industries, the institutions that
contributed to the building of national debt and increased rates of inflation.  The piqueteros
appropriated transportation arteries, and transformed these spaces into theatres of protest.
As a result, this group garnered attention from both government officials and popular media.
This form of protest succeeded in bringing attention to existing discontentment within
sectors of the population that were otherwise excluded from official state forums of decision
making. This style is now the dominant form of protest in Buenos Aires, and serves as a
model for other non-governmental organizations seeking state mediation, including MOI.

__________________________________________________________________________

150 INDEC statistics reported within Guano, 185.

151 Sonia Alvarez, Eveline Dagnino and Arturo Escobar, eds. Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re visioning
Latin American Social Movements (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); Oscar Oszlak, Mercar la ciudad: Los pobres y el

152 The piquetero movement focuses most of its energy on labor conditions and workers rights and will be more
thoroughly discussed in Chapter 6. Scheinsohn and Cabrera, 112.
Argentina’s hyper-inflationary crisis forced the resignation of Alfonsín. Alfonsín’s successor, Carlos Menem strengthened executive power and sought the full-fledged neoliberalization of Argentina. Shortly after his election, Menem instituted an aggressive privatization program, further deregulated the free market to make Argentine soil more welcoming to large international corporations and loosened labor laws.\footnote{Teubal, 174.} Under this president, the bulk of the state’s industries were privatized, a project that reached such diverse areas as: telephones and communications; airline companies; petrochemicals and petroleum; highways, railways and other transport systems; natural gas, electricity and water distribution; coal, iron and steel industries; hydroelectric dams; and other enterprises including television channels, hotels, port facilities, silos and horse-racing stadia.\footnote{For a thorough analysis of the privatizations that occurred throughout this period see: Daniel Azpiazu, \textit{Las privatizaciones en Argentina} (Buenos Aires: CIEPP Funcación OSDE, 2002).}

In her article, “Spectacles of Modernity, Transnational Imagination and Local Hegemonies in Neoliberal Buenos Aires” (2002), Emanuela Guano provided an anthropologists’ analysis of the neoliberal city during the Menem administration.\footnote{Emanuela Guano, “Spectacles of Modernity, Transnational Imagination and Local Hegemonies in Neoliberal Buenos Aires,” \textit{Cultural Anthropology} 17, no. 2: 188.} Using the examples of the rebuilding of barrio Puerto Madero (figs. 3.17-19), the shopping mall (figs. 3.20-21) and the renovation of the \textit{Tren de la Costa}, Guano argued that the urban transformations that appeared within neoliberal Buenos Aires implemented strategies of segregation and spectacularization in order to appeal to the sensibilities of the diminishing middle class, an audience who was not financially capable of consuming the good on display. While the middle classes were growing less and less capable of purchasing luxury goods in malls or bottles of champagne in Puerto Madero night clubs, Guano found that the emergence of these new private spaces, which explicitly excluded the ever-growing

\footnote{Emanuela Guano, “Spectacles of Modernity, Transnational Imagination and Local Hegemonies in Neoliberal Buenos Aires,” \textit{Cultural Anthropology} 17, no. 2: 188.}
population of the poor, provided citadels to the middle class that sheltered from the dangers associated with public space.

While Guano’s article is helpful in formulating a foundational understanding of this neoliberal city, her critique was limited to centers of consumption within the more wealthy parts of the city. Each of the case studies Guano selected for analysis were the products of only one portion of Menem’s political agenda: the opening of Argentine territory to international enterprise. As spatial transformations implemented by the wealthy, and for the upper and middle classes, these spaces took on the qualities of the citadel, and confronted Buenos Aires’s growing poverty through exclusion, an antithetical tactic to that employed at Cooperative Yatay. Although her selection of examples addressed only a limited portion of the city, and a limited portion of the city’s population, Guano’s analysis is helpful here, as it provides ground for comparison between the territory of MOI cooperatives and parts of the city more visible to the outsider.

Guano’s first case study analyzed the history of the reconstruction of Puerto Madero. Just blocks away from the Plaza de Mayo and the Casa Rosada, Puerto Madero was originally built in the early twentieth century as an industrial zone to service international trade routes, but quickly declined in the 1920s after the completion of the larger and better equipped Puerto Nuevo to the north. However, the decaying port community attracted the attention of real estate developers in the early 1990s. In 1991 the city government held a contest to elicit feasibility studies for the old port and by 1992, its first warehouse had been restored and was used in that year’s Exhibition of the Americas. Following the success of the exhibition, President Menem founded the Corporación Antiguo Puerto Madero (Old Puerto

\[\text{Keeling.}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
Madero Corporation) later the same year. Menem’s corporation encouraged development whilst establishing strict regulations to maintain the historic port and the old warehouses that had survived since the area’s early founding. Seemingly overnight, new glass skyscrapers were constructed along the port’s waters, while old warehouses were restored and found new life and hotels, restaurants and nightclubs.

While analyzing the history of the reconstruction of Puerto Madero, Guano argued that this case study reveals that much of the building undertaken during the 1990s resembled the architecture and urban planning of Manhattan, a clear departure from Buenos Aires’s old reputation as a simulacrum of nineteenth-century Paris. Guano’s observations are accurate, and easily identifiable even to the most pedestrian of visitors. Aside from the ever-present smell of asado (barbecue) from upscale steak restaurants, Puerto Madero certainly does not resemble Paris, and feels a world away from the rest of Buenos Aires. The tall buildings that now tower over Puerto Madero are atypical for the city modeled after Haussmann’s Paris. The adaptive reuse of the old port, which no longer functions as a port, but rather is the home to leisure ships which can be rented out for parties, and the old warehouses nod to the barrio’s past, but these references are overshadowed by the tall gleaming towers of the Buenos Aires Hilton (1999) and Renoir Tower (2008), Buenos Aires’s tallest building with fifty floors, standing 175-meters tall. Guano quoted some of the architects of Puerto Madero, who admitted to designing a space that deliberately contrasted with the rest of the city, and aiming to produce the illusion of geographic travel.⁵⁸ As a stage set for a momentary escape from the rest of Buenos Aires, and with the help of an independent police force established by Menem that is effective in forcing poor visitors away from the

---

⁵⁸ Guano, 192.
area, Puerto Madero is shielded from reminders of poverty and the threats of danger present in other parts of the city.

Guano argued that the same could be stated for the new shopping malls that appeared in Buenos Aires around the same time. Until 1990, independent vendors and large corporations rented street front spaces along Buenos Aires’s busiest avenidas. Aside from the occasional galería, a small embankment of shops nestled into the ground floor of apartment or office buildings, the closest resemblance to a shopping mall was pedestrian Avenida Florida, which is a street now closed to traffic to accommodate tourists and shoppers. After Menem raised the protectionist measures from the Perón administration, which prevented international corporations from opening sales outlets in the country, shopping malls opened at Galerías Pacífico in Retiro, Patio Bulrich in Recoleta, and Abasto Shopping in Almagro. Each the home of dozens of upscale shops, such as luxury handbag designer Prüne and sportswear producers Nike and Adidas and, of course, Starbucks, Guano described the Buenos Aires shoppings as guarded citadels of capitalist culture, and monuments to the arrival of international enterprise. The Buenos Aires shoppings are reproductions of the shopping malls of the United States, replete with polished marble floors, escalators, and security guards positions at each entrance. The pristine interior of the shopping, provides shelter from the world just outside its doors, which buzzes with pedestrian traffic, street vendors who sell trinkets along the sidewalks, taxi cabs that noisily and unhesitatingly honk horns amidst constant traffic, and the noise and smell of thick diesel fumes left behind by the city’s tremendous fleet of colectivos (buses).

Guano brought attention to the contradiction of the popularity of the shoppings within a city who’s population was throughout the 1990s growing increasingly incapable of purchasing the goods put on display. Through testimonies of shoppers, Guano concluded
that despite their diminishing ability to purchase goods in the shopping malls, patrons were products of, and mediators for:

…a game of desire and gazes: one where the visual and spatial experience of a vicarious consumption kept stimulating both the desire of the middle class for inclusion in (and its fears of exclusion from) the First World of modernity that has reterritorialized the cityscape of Buenos Aires.\textsuperscript{159}

Through the examples including Puerto Madero and shopping malls, Guano’s assertions regarding the transformation of urban space in neoliberal Buenos Aires could be extended to other contemporary emergences, including countrys (gated communities), the 	extit{Tren de la Costa} (The Train of the Coast, a leisure railway between Buenos Aires and Tigre, a suburb to the north), and even fast food restaurants. The spaces produced by the wealthy in Buenos Aires, all in the northern and more affluent zones of the city, reproduced North American forms of building and urban planning while serving to draw physical boundaries between public and private, thereby establishing boundaries between the classes.\textsuperscript{160}

Within the space of neoliberal Buenos Aires, the comparison of new building in the north to new building in the south, such as Cooperative 	extit{Yatay}, reveals that most—if not all—new building in Buenos Aires in the 1990s sought to confront the growing poverty of the city, but through differing tactics. These citadels of Puerto Madero and the 	extit{shopping}s, spaces guarded for the use of those perceived to be middle and upper class, confronted Buenos Aires’s growing poverty through exclusion. Cooperative 	extit{Yatay}, engaged a play of desire and gazes similar to those performed within shopping malls, but confronted the city’s and its residents conditions of poverty through tactics of integration. With its courtyard, which opens to the street and open stairways to visually display the activities of its residents

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid, 193.

\textsuperscript{160} As also observed by James Holston in his study of Brazil: Holston (1989).
to neighbors, rendered transparent the walls between this poor population and its community.

Interestingly, the comparison of MOI cooperatives to the case studies discussed by Guano reveals yet another similarity: all of these constructions are the transformations of existing urban spaces. Cooperative Yatay, when it is completed, will consist of entirely new construction from the site of the old casa chorizo. All other MOI Cooperatives, such as La Unión and Perú, are works of adaptive reuse and have converted the spaces of old factories or tenements into new low-cost housing. In Puerto Madero, Menem’s Old Puerto Madero Corporation set specific regulations to protect the old factories, which retain their external façades and gesture to the history of the barrio. The Buenos Aires shopping malls, too, are works of adaptive reuse. For example, Patio Bulrich in Recoleta was built from an old meat processing plant and Abasto Shopping in Almagro from an old produce market.

Although Guano did not draw attention to this similarity between her case studies, these too are evidence of the manners in which neoliberalism have come to bear upon urban space in Buenos Aires. As the result of the aggressive privatization program of Carlos Menem, and its associated deindustrialization of the city, the spaces of the old produce market in Almagro, the warehouses of Puerto Madero, and the casa chorizo in Barracas were left vacant. The simultaneous appropriation of these spaces by international enterprise to the north, and the non-governmental organization in the south, reveal new attitudes towards urban space, and the responsibility on the part of entrepreneurial citizens for its construction and transformation, its inclusions and exclusions. That representatives of both wealthy and poor demographic groups have opted to adapt these spaces, rather than raze existing buildings entirely, reveals general attitudes towards urban space in Buenos Aires. Each of these groups chose not to build a new city. Rather, these entrepreneurs have taken the
circumstances provided by the city’s history with bittersweet nostalgia, and using varying strategies, transform its spaces to accommodate the city through its social, economic and political undulations.

Aside from providing impetus for these changes to the built environment of Buenos Aires, the Menem administration’s privatization of government industry initiated significant changes to the economic and social landscapes of the city, as well. Since the government had not been improving its industrial facilities since the reign of the junta, and in the context of an economically unstable nation, the Argentine government was not able to sell all of its industries. Of those enterprises that were sold, such as public utilities including water, gas and electricity, new owners commenced processes of significant restructuring. In order to cut costs new parent companies reduced wages and workforce. In its wake, this changing of hands resulted in lower average earnings and higher rates of unemployment. At the same time, many of the government industrial facilities remained unsold. Those unsold factories were closed by a government, which had discontinued its industrial program. This has left behind thousands of unemployed workers, as well as abandoned and underused spaces.

While the Menem administration was busy privatizing the bulk of the country’s industry, it also was implementing its most (in)famous economic policy: the concept of convertibility. Convertibility pegged the value of the Argentine peso to that of the US

---


162 Convertibility is the frequently discussed as the quintessential component of Menem’s neoliberal economic policy, and as the most important factor leading up to the economic crisis of 2001-02. For example, see: Adriana Marshall, Políticas sociales: El modelo neoliberal, Argentina (Buenos Aires: FLASCO, Legasa, 1998). For an excellent account of the impact of such policies on urban space see, Keeling, Buenos Aires (1996).
dollar at a rate of 1-to-1. Convertibility is largely regarded as the instigator of the Argentine economic crisis of 2001.\textsuperscript{163} The importance of convertibility here lies in its effects on immigration to Argentina, and Buenos Aires in particular. With the strongest currency in Latin America, Argentina then became a magnet for immigrants in search of better wages.\textsuperscript{164} Recall that Buenos Aires was already the destination for thousands of rural-to-urban migrants because agricultural enterprises were struggling to compete in the global marketplace. Within the context of rising unemployment, an influx of poor immigrants from other countries, as well as rural-to-urban migrants from the country’s interior, led to an even greater crisis in low-cost housing.\textsuperscript{165} Although there were more opportunities in Buenos Aires to find work than in other parts of Argentina, at this time, there were fewer opportunities to work in the capital than in previous years due to industrial privatizations. With fewer opportunities and lesser earnings, a crisis in housing developed in Buenos Aires greater than ever before.

As mentioned earlier, between 1976 and 1983, the \textit{junta} had instituted a policy of slum evacuation. After the re-democratization of the country, however, the government adopted an unofficial policy of tolerance for illegal squatter populations as an act of reparation for the cruelty of the previous administration. With a government tolerant to illegal populations, a government that simultaneously was the proprietor of abandoned and unused space, squatter populations grew in the context of neoliberal reforms to levels

\textsuperscript{163} There is much to be said for convertibility that will not be discussed here, as the concern of this text is the effects of such policies on urban space.

\textsuperscript{164} The leading expert in the field of urbanism in Buenos Aires since 1976 is Beatriz Cuenya. See: Beatriz Cuenya, \textit{Restructuración del estado y política de vivienda en Argentina} (Buenos Aires: CONICET, 1997).
previously unseen.\textsuperscript{166} Under these circumstances, the abandoned industrial spaces, mostly in the southern zones of Buenos Aires, as well as empty lots scattered throughout the city, became the homes to the under- and unemployed.

Until the \emph{junta} came into power in the late 1970s in Argentina, social housing policy—under the auspices of the Fondo Nacional de Vivienda (FONAVI, National Housing Fund)—acted with the state as the provider of low-cost housing, and low-income families as recipients.\textsuperscript{167} Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, the national government in Argentina slowly reduced FONAVI’s funding, halted all new construction projects, and shifted its role in the provision of popular housing to that of mediator. Over the course of the last 30 years, a neoliberal housing system has developed wherein the government has passed legislation to help the disadvantaged obtain housing through the aid of non-governmental organizations, not to simply act as supplier.\textsuperscript{168}

It was within this context that MOI was founded in 1991. The abandoned and decaying industrial spaces created by neoliberal policies are the physical territories legitimately appropriated by MOI. The populations negatively affected by the increased unemployment, decreased wages, mass migrations, and the resulting housing shortage that

\textsuperscript{166} The 2001 national census reported that 196,940 people were then living in informal settlements. This number is double that recorded in the previous census conducted in 1991 (52,608 people), and triple the number recorded in the 1980 census. See L. Vaccarezza, “La situación habitacional en Argentina, año 2001, ciudad de Buenos Aires,” (Buenos Aires: Undersecretariat for Urban Development and Planning, Ministry of Planning, 2001).

\textsuperscript{167} Since its creation in 1972, the National Housing Fund (FONAVI) was created to complement the activities of the National Secretariat of Housing and Urban Planning (Secretaria de Vivienda y Urbanismo de la Nación), which was first established under Juan Perón in the late 1940s. FONAVI was a revolving fund for financing the large-scale construction of new public housing complexes. For an account of the evolution of FONAVI, see: Beatriz Cuenya, “Cambios, logros y conflictos en la política de vivienda en Argentina hacia fines del siglo XX,” Boletín Ciudades para un Futuro más Sostenible 29/30 (2005).

\textsuperscript{168} Charles Hale found that in the Central American context the “professionalized NGO” has become one of the defining elements to neoliberal policy implementation. The role of NGOs, such as MOI, has certainly grown in a similar manner within Buenos Aires. Charles Hale, “Does Multiculturalism Menace?: Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala,” Journal of Latin American Studies 34, n. 3 (2002): 374-525.
were the consequences of neoliberal policies were (and are) the members of MOI cooperatives. The tactics that MOI has employed in order to achieve its goals of creating dignified low-cost housing for these populations within this urban landscape, are the same tactics envisioned by other activist groups such as the *piqueteros*.

In fact, within the context of this neoliberal city, MOI has been a leader in establishing important public-private partnerships which benefit poor sectors of the population. Specifically, MOI was the principal organization in the efforts to lobby, protest and by any means convince city officials to pass Law 341 in 2000.\(^\text{169}\) Law 341, amongst other things, established a state-backed loan guarantee for those seeking to build, refurbish or improve low-cost housing. This loan endorsement program is similar in strategy to the policies created under the *junta* to encourage Argentine businesses to take out loans from international banks beginning in the late 1970s. Law 341 requires those requesting such loan endorsements to work with a verified non-governmental organization, such as MOI, with the capacity to provide professional advising and services to assist in the facilities of construction, accounting, law, and other necessary tasks.

In order to persuade city legislators to support this law, MOI engaged *piquero*-style tactics.\(^\text{170}\) In March 2000, cooperative members and MOI advisors blocked Route 3, a main artery into the Buenos Aires city center, in order to gain visibility for the urgency of this legislation. Throughout most of April 2000, MOI members and advisors, along with members of other labor and housing organizations, such as the *Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina* (CTA, Argentine Workers’ Central), staged a sit-in outside of the city legislature.


\(^\text{170}\) Full personal accounts of these protests are published in: José Barbagallo and Carla Rodríguez, *MOI: Movimiento en movimiento*, 32-51.
After days of peaceful protests, the law was passed. Since then, not only MOI has benefited from this law. Now, there are dozens of non-governmental organizations working to help reshape Buenos Aires to include dignified spaces, not simply run-down and illegally occupied spaces, for the poor to live within the city center.\footnote{171}{Accounts of other non-governmental organizations which have made use of the Law 341, and analysis thereof, have been reported within: Scheinsohn and Cabrera, “Social Movements and the Production of Housing in Buenos Aires: When Policies are Effective,” 109; and Karen Ann Faulk, “If They Touch One of Us, They Touch All of Us: Cooperativism as a Counterlogic to Neoliberal Capitalism,” \textit{Anthropological Quarterly} 81, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 579-614.}

Most texts focus on the more deleterious effects of neoliberalism on poor populations and their claims to territory within urban space. For example, in \textit{The Neoliberal City}, Jason Hackworth set out to identify changes to urban space that followed the enactment of neoliberal policies in the United States. According to Hackworth, his goal was to “use the physical, political and discursive space of the American inner city as a vehicle for understanding the nature of neoliberalism as it actually exists.”\footnote{172}{Hackworth, 13.} Throughout the first section of his text, Hackworth pointed out that as the state withdraws from welfare provision and lessens its role in areas including health care and social services—all fundamental components to Keynesian liberalism—governments become diminished in their capacity to care for the disadvantaged, leaving larger and larger segments of the population exposed to impoverishment.\footnote{173}{These are observations also sustained by: Harvey, 76; and Steve Herbert, “Book Review: The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism, by Jason Hackworth.” \textit{Urban Affairs Review} 43 (Spring 2004), 745.}

This observation certainly seemed to have held true throughout the first decade of neoliberal reforms in Argentina. This investigation has found that since 1989, with the proliferation and growing importance of non-governmental organizations such as MOI and the \textit{piqueteros}, social activism and the “professionalization” of the NGO have instituted a
series of corrective measures to the initial configuration of neoliberalism in Buenos Aires.\textsuperscript{174} For instance, with Law 341 the government maintains its role as mediator in the supply of low-cost housing. Yet, through the intervention of a “verifiable” NGO, this law provides avenues for those previously excluded from official government forums and programs—the poor in need of housing—to obtain those resources once again.

It is important to note that neoliberalism had established itself in Buenos Aires for more than 20 years before Law 341 was passed. The slow evolution of this legislation is an example of how poor populations certainly were not a priority in the neoliberalization of the nation. However, after decades of deepening poverty, increased activism, and with the government slowly easing into the mediation of public services, a third stage in the neoliberalization of Buenos Aires appears to have occurred: the re-entrance of the poor, through the “professionalization” of the NGO.

Hackworth’s version of the neoliberal city in the U.S. differs from that in Buenos Aires in his analysis of the impact of non-governmental agencies. In Chapter 9, Hackworth found that the strategies adopted by activists seeking to preserve public housing in the U.S. to be weak. Such efforts, Hackworth demonstrated, are frustrated by their very local nature, and are limited by their immediate environments and struggles.\textsuperscript{175}

This is not entirely the case in Buenos Aires. Certainly, the beginning of any struggle to establish new housing programs must, by the nature of the social uses and physical limitations of urban space, begin within the confines of individual cities. Through the example of MOI, it is possible to see how even within the space of a single city, the efforts of one organization aid in the growth and creation of others. For instance, MOI’s pioneering

\textsuperscript{174} As also observed within Hale, 475-525.

\textsuperscript{175} Herbert, 745.
efforts in the establishment of Law 341 facilitated the proliferation of other non-governmental organizations with interests in the construction of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires, and thus, the construction of new low-cost housing in the area over time. Through their experiments within the boundaries of Buenos Aires, MOI has likewise been able to establish a similar relationship with other non-governmental organizations on a larger scale.

Aside from MOI’s local work, the scope of this non-governmental organization’s activity in the field of low-cost housing stems beyond the boundaries of Buenos Aires, and even those of Argentina. Growing largely from an early alliance with the Federación Uruguaya de Cooperativas de Vivienda por Ayuda Mutua (FUVCAM, or the Uruguay Federation of Housing Cooperatives through Mutual Aid), a non-governmental housing organization in Uruguay, MOI was a founding organization within the Secretaría Latinoamericana de Vivienda Popular (SELVIP, or the Latin American Secretary of Popular Housing). SELVIP is an umbrella organization with member groups working for creative housing solutions throughout Latin America. Sharing a common value for ayuda mutua (mutual aid), the organizations belonging to SELVIP hold annual conferences in locations throughout the continent, and engage in labor exchanges throughout the calendar year. Together, the organizations devise strategies to grow collective housing initiatives, expanding the impact of each organization beyond the loci of their home cities.

Hackworth was critical of grassroots organizations in the U.S. for the limited territory of their initiatives within the broad scope of neoliberalism. The expanse of activities in which MOI is engaged illustrates how this criticism is not entirely true in Latin America, generally, and Buenos Aires, specifically. Since MOI’s team of technical advisors is composed of professionals who, in the vast majority, are university professors with analytical

176 Barbagallo and Rodríguez, 34-37.
experience in studies related to neoliberalism, this organization has been keenly aware of the
necessity for a larger initiative that stems beyond the boundaries of Buenos Aires.

One of the greatest defining characteristics of Hackworth’s neoliberal city was
gentrification. As demonstrated through a series of maps, Hackworth explained how
neoliberal policies have contributed to the replacement of suburbanization and inner-core
disinvestment with an increasing of outer-ring suburbanization, re-valorization of the inner-
core, and the decline of inner-ring Keynesian suburbs.177 Hackworth asserted that the result
of neoliberalization in major city centers was the gentrification of the urban core.
Hackworth’s observations and analyses made important observations about the effects of
neoliberal policies on urban space in the US. However, neoliberalism has again manifested
itself differently within Buenos Aires.

Certainly, gentrification of certain parts of Buenos Aires has occurred, particularly
within the northern barrios of Palermo and Belgrano.178 Yet, these parts of the city have
neither been the home to major public housing sites, nor the residences of large populations
of the city’s poor. Therefore, gentrification has not displaced large portions of those living in
the city, particularly in barrios such as Palermo and Belgrano, which have experienced more
of a refurbishment rather than a full-fledged gentrification. Instead, with the onset of this
third stage in the neoliberalization of Buenos Aires the city has seen an influx of poor
populations over the course of the past decades, most of which have taken residence in
southern parts of the city, and in the villas. Contrary to Hackworth’s findings in the U.S., my
research has found that activities of non-governmental organizations, specifically MOI, has

178 Shifts in population within this period have been thoroughly studied within Keeling, Buenos Aires.
helped to combat gentrification, carved out spaces for poor populations within urban centers, and served to legitimize the presence of these populations within the given territory.

In short, neoliberalism in Buenos Aires from its earliest appearances in 1976 has sought similar goals to neoliberalism in other countries. These political shifts have reshaped the physical and social spaces of Buenos Aires by leaving abandoned and deteriorating spaces, particularly in formerly industrial zones, by creating conditions which stimulated increased immigration and migration to the city center, by inspiring new forms of social protest and political activism, and finally by formulating new types of public-private partnerships that span economic class. Buenos Aires is similar to other neoliberal cities in its decrease in state regulations of markets and intervention in public services, and the resulting circumstances for these shifts upon urban space. Buenos Aires differs from other neoliberal cities, however, in its gentrification patterns, as well as in the forms of impact that non-governmental organizations have been able to achieve within its physical territory, and beyond.

Using MOI Cooperative Yatay as an example, the remainder of this chapter will explain how this grassroots organization has served to forge public-private partnerships that have considerably reshaped its place in Buenos Aires. Since its founding in 1990, Cooperative Yatay has experienced the struggles and the undulations of neoliberalism more than other cooperatives due to its age and its particular circumstances. This history illustrates both the disadvantages of neoliberalism on poor populations and their place within the urban fabric of Buenos Aires, as well as a turn in neoliberal policy in Buenos Aires, instigated by MOI, which has since turned to impact the physical territory of this city center noticeably.
Chapter 3 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated how neoliberal policies initially affected urban space in manners that were disadvantageous to poor populations. Economic policies set into place beginning in 1976 simultaneously instigated the underperformance and subsequent privatization of government industry, contributed to the abandonment and decay of industrial areas particular in southern Buenos Aires, as well as resulted in a decrease in average earnings and increase in unemployment. At the same time, these policies attracted a larger population of poor migrants and immigrants to Buenos Aires, resulting in a shortage of low-cost housing and a rise in the frequency of illegal squatting. Across the city, the transformations to the urban landscape that emerged over the course of this time period—as observed in the examples of Cooperative Yatay, as well as the barrio of Puerto Madero and the emergence of shoppings in Recoleta, Almagro and Palermo—were products of these neoliberal shifts and the vacancies created throughout the city. A new set of entrepreneurs, the international corporation and the non-governmental organization, enacted transformations to the cityscape that confronted increasing rates of poverty, although using different tactics. Through adaptive reuse, the transformation of existing space—rather than purely new construction illustrates a general attitude towards the neoliberal city which recognizes the city’s history with bittersweet nostalgia.

Through the example of Cooperative Yatay, this chapter has illustrated that MOI cooperatives have served to reshape the neoliberal city on many levels. MOI cooperatives have changed the physical space of the city by rehabilitating the decaying areas left idle after privatizations. These cooperatives have served to socially revitalize areas by legitimately integrating populations of poor families into the physical environment of the city, as well as communities and social forums from which they were previously excluded.
examined, the architectural form of Cooperative Yatay has reshaped the identity construction and perception of the urban poor from that of alien pariahs to valuable community members. Through the mediation of MOI as an official organization, and through the cooperative members activism in the construction of their own housing, Cooperative Yatay is an example of how the perceptions of such poor populations have shifted throughout this period of neoliberalization.

Through their efforts in the authorization of Law 341, MOI has further impacted the reshaping of neoliberal Buenos Aires by providing opportunities for other non-governmental organizations to do the same. By way of their engagement with other non-governmental housing organizations outside of Argentina, such as SELVIP and FUVCAM, MOI continues to share their trials and triumphs, as well as learn from those of others. The impact of this organization, and its cooperatives, on urban space both within Buenos Aires and beyond is potentially immeasurable.

This chapter has investigated Buenos Aires since 1976 as neoliberal city. What does this say for MOI, however? Can MOI cooperatives be viewed as neoliberal housing? MOI is strongly and publicly opposed to neoliberalism, a force which the organization sees as the source of its struggles. Although the effects of neoliberalism on Buenos Aires certainly were the territories of MOI’s interventions, the organization does not view its cooperatives as a part of the neoliberalization process. In light of such claims, the analyses presented in this chapter manifest a set of potential incongruencies with the stated ideology of MOI members.

These contradictions open ground for further investigation in following chapters. In this chapter, the forms of MOI cooperative Yatay have been analyzed within the context of neoliberal city and state policies in order to illuminate the manners in which neoliberalism,
and subsequently this non-governmental organization have reshaped urban space in Buenos Aires. The following chapters will look into the architectural forms, construction processes, and materials of MOI cooperatives in an effort to analyze whether MOI cooperatives are discursive products of corrupt neoliberal politics, or whether this organization’s constructions signify corrective measures to the neoliberal equation. Each of these analyses will lead to a further understanding of how these cooperatives, within the social and political space of Buenos Aires, have contributed to the identity formation of the urban poor.
Chapter 3 Figures

3.1 MOI, Cooperative Yatay, street entrance of original *casa chorizo*, founded 1990/construction begun 2000 (photo by author)

3.2 MOI, Cooperative *Yatay* entrance gate, July 2008 (photo by author)
3.3 MOI, the pouring of the foundations at Cooperative Yatay, Buenos Aires (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)

3.4 MOI, plan of Cooperative Yatay, founded 1990/construction begun 2000 (image courtesy of MOI)
3.5 MOI, axion drawing of Cooperative *Yatay*, founded 1990/construction begun 2000 (image courtesy of MOI)

3.6 MOI, 3D elevation drawing of Cooperative *Yatay*, founded 1990/construction begun 2000 (image courtesy of MOI)
Construction at the site of Yatay has been divided into two stages. First, the new apartments have been built into the empty lot. Second, the existing *casa chorizo* will be demolished (except for valuable support members) and recycled into a second wing of the cooperative, facing the first phase. In this picture, the nearly completed first stage of construction can be seen at right, and the patchwork residence being used by member families during the construction process is pictured on the left.
3.8 MOI, apartments overlook courtyard of Cooperative *Yatay*, founded 1990/construction begun 2000 (photo by author)

3.9 MOI, apartments under construction at site of Cooperative *Yatay*, founded 1990/construction begun 2000 (photo by author)

Staggered arrangement of apartment blocks allows all units to view activities in central courtyard.
3.10 MOI, completed apartments from first stage of construction at Cooperative Yatay, Buenos Aires, photo 2010 (photo by author)

3.11 View of surrounding neighborhood from inside apartment in Cooperative Yatay, Buenos Aires, photo 2008 (photo by author)
3.12 View of surrounding neighborhood from inside apartment in Cooperative *Yatay*, Buenos Aires, photo 2008 (photo by author)

3.13 Lofts constructions opposite Cooperative *Yatay*, 2008 (photo by author)
3.14 Calle Lanin, just around the corner from Cooperative Yatay, 2008 (photo by author)

3.15 (left) Pasaje Icalma, Buenos Aires, June 2010 (photo by author)
3.16 (right) Pasaje Icalma view towards neighbor and MOI Cooperative La Fábrica, Buenos Aires, June 2010 (photo by author)
3.17 (top left) View of Puerto Madero docks, featuring Santiago Calatrava’s *Puente de la Mujer* (Women’s Bridge) and new skyscrapers, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 2009 (photo by author).

3.18 (top right) View of Puerto Madero docks, featuring Santiago Calatrava’s *Puente de la Mujer* (Women’s Bridge) and grain silos highlighting juxtaposition of new building and historic preservation in the area, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 2009 (photo by author).

3.19 (bottom) Restaurants and apartments lining Puerto Madero dock area, this building was adapted from an old warehouse, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 2009 (photo by author).
3.20 Abasto Shopping, exterior, Buenos Aires, Argentina (photo courtesy of John Harris)

3.21 Patio Bullrich, interior, Buenos Aires, Argentina (photo courtesy of John Harris)
CHAPTER 4: FORM

Architectural Form and Theory, Housing and Cooperative *La Fábrica*
Throughout the twentieth century, governments emerged as providers of low-cost housing across the globe. As a result, the formal characteristics of public housing are reflective of the dominant political ideologies of the government leaders who took charge of such initiatives. For instance, in her analysis of public housing constructed in Vienna during the interwar period, Eve Blau pointed out that the government chose to feature collective elements of the housing facilities, such as laundries, child care centers, and health care clinics (to name just a few) as examples of modern proletarian life in propaganda publications promoting soviet *Arbeiterkultur* (a socialist workers’ culture).\(^\text{179}\) In her article, “Italian Architects and Fascist Politics: An Evaluation of the Rationalist’s Role in Regime Building” (1980), Diane Ghirardo found that Giuseppe Pagano’s plan for housing in Portoscuso, Sardegna (1940) to be, “a perfect urban rendering of the Fascist principle of *gerarchia*.”\(^\text{180}\) Through the provisions of housing and other welfare programs, governments took a more direct role in the lives of citizens previously overlooked or ignored. This in turn shifted attitudes towards, and expectations of, government as the entity responsible for public welfare.

Alongside the emergence of government-subsidized housing, architects emerged as professionals who no longer catered solely to the interests of the elite, but as citizens with a valuable skill set that could benefit the public good. The architectural forms selected for public housing certainly varied according to climate, geographic location, political context, as well as shifts in architectural style and theory. Architects responsible for housing design, regardless of location, promoted their works for its sense of modernity, seeking to correct the ills of antecedents in step with changes in governmental politics.


Like the architects studied by Blau and Ghirardo, MOI architects also view their role throughout the design and construction of these cooperatives in Buenos Aires as being valuable to public wellbeing. Government agencies no longer act as the patrons of low-cost housing in the region, however. Chapter 2 of this dissertation highlighted how, similar to the history of housing in other countries, public housing constructed during the Perón administration relied on professional architects to present a modernist revision to previous housing alternatives. In turn, the involvement of architects in the formulation of low-cost housing signified a shift in attitudes towards and within the architectural profession. The last chapter described that in the context of neoliberal Buenos Aires government stepped away from its role as a producer of low-cost housing. Stemming from this observation, this chapter beckons: If government has stepped away from low-cost housing production, why haven’t the architects working with MOI? This investigation finds that, not unlike Perón-era public housing, MOI cooperatives are reflective of changing attitudes within the discourse on architectural production and theory in the region, shifts which strive to integrate international architectural ideologies to the specific conditions of the city.

Thus far, this dissertation has addressed the manners in which the formal characteristics of MOI cooperatives correspond to the historical discourse surrounding low-cost housing production in the region, dominant political ideologies, as well as transformations in the uses of and attitudes towards urban space. The role of professional architects in the formulation of these cooperatives has yet to be explored.

Looking now to the example of Cooperative *La Fábrica* (figs. 4.1-15), one of MOI’s largest cooperatives with housing for fifty families, this chapter finds that the presence of professional architects can be detected through the analysis of this cooperative’s forms. Through the example of this modern urban factory home, this chapter looks to the history
of architecture and architectural theories that emerged in Buenos Aires, specifically, and in Latin America, generally, to identify the manners in which attitudes towards and within the architectural profession have shifted over time. For example, this investigation has found that the architectural theories of modernidad apropiada (appropriate modernity) and arquitectura ciudad (city architecture), two theories that serve to modify international architectural trends to accommodate the immediate context of the Latin American city, have directly influenced MOI architects in their selection of forms for Cooperative La Fábrica. Since these theories require architects to consider form as a component of urban space, this investigation then analyzes the manners in which MOI’s designs for La Fábrica are additionally reflective of two additional building types particularly prevalent to these sites: the factory and the home.

With the wellbeing of the larger city in mind, these architectural theories have perpetuated the notion of the architect as civil servant. The ideas published in these theoretical texts certainly reflect the involvement of MOI’s small team of professional architects and architecture professors, José Barbagallo, Néstor Jeifetz, Marcelo Cataneo and Sergio Molino, who have received little compensation for their work with the organization. As educators and writers, MOI architects are responsible for training the next generation of architects in Buenos Aires. Although it is far too soon to draw conclusions here, this study


The discourse regarding alternative modernities in Latin America, as described through the examples of texts written by Winograd and Gutiérrez, is not dissimilar from that described in better-known texts on the subject, such as: Bozdogan, Modernism and Nation Building (2001); Prakash, Chandigarh’s Le Corbusier (2002); Sassen, Globalization and its Discontents (1998); Appadurai, Modernity at Large (1996); Cancelini García, Consumers and Citizens (2001). As described in the introduction to this dissertation, these texts have provided theoretical framework for this dissertation. In order to focus attention on those theories most directly related to the production of MOI cooperatives in Buenos Aires, this chapter pays closer attention to the literature published in Argentina in the years leading up to, and throughout the construction of MOI cooperatives.
may well serve future investigations in the analysis of emerging forms of philanthropic architecture in Buenos Aires, as well as on an international stage.

*La Fábrica* is located just down the block from MOI Cooperative *Yatay*, at the intersection of Pasaja Icalma and Salmún Feijóo (maps 2 and 7).\(^{182}\) Certainly, *La Fábrica* bears certain similarities to its neighbor, including its central courtyard which is open to the surrounding community and its reliance on *ayuda mutua* throughout design and construction processes. As it was founded in 1999, a date just preceding the implementation of Law 341 in April 2000, the opportunities and resources available to this cooperative were far greater than those initially available to Cooperative *Yatay*. Due to this significant shift in regulations affecting these cooperatives, MOI considers *La Fábrica* the first cooperative founded within what it refers to as the second stage in the history of the organization.\(^{183}\)

The most notable difference between *La Fábrica* and earlier MOI cooperatives is its size. The building purchased for Cooperative *La Fábrica* in December 2001 sits on a 2,500-square-meter plot, and is the home of fifty families.\(^{184}\) When it was first built in 1952, the site of *La Fábrica* was the home of the textile producer Piccaluga. Later, the factory changed hands to the publishing company Editorial Amorrortu, and was used for the printing of new

---


183 Rodríguez and Barbagallo, 56.

184 Ibid, 137-139.
books. With its open central space, where once stood looms and later printing presses, this building was most appealing to MOI, as the central courtyard is an important element within the designs of most of its cooperatives (figs. 4.7-4.11). According to MOI advisor, Professor Carla Rodríguez, the purchase of this large building was only possible through the regulations regarding collective purchase of property and government mortgage guarantee established with Law 341 (appendix 1).185

MOI’s ability to convene a larger number of families was the result of an important change in the organization’s policies.186 From its founding in 1991, MOI began its work with groups already occupying abandoned buildings within Buenos Aires. MOI also limited membership to families with heads of household who were employed informally. This process resulted in smaller cooperative groups, and a high occurrence of families leaving the organization prior to the completion. In 1998, just one year before the founding of La Fábrica, MOI changed its policy regarding the establishment of new cooperatives. Since then, MOI began to require families to approach the NGO on their own freewill, established a minimum volume for new cooperatives of no fewer than thirty families and opened membership to those employed within the formal marketplace.

This increase in scale has helped MOI to more easily access the financial resources necessary for purchase of property and to acquire building materials. With larger groups, the cooperatives were better able to collectively purchase building materials at deep discounts through bulk pricing. For example, in 2003 Cooperative La Fábrica joined forces with

---

185 María Carla Rodríguez, interview by author, July 2008.

186 Rodríguez and Barbagallo, 54-58.
another Cooperative *El Molino* and together purchased 15,000 bricks to begin the *pre-obra* (pre-construction) processes for both buildings.\(^{187}\)

Since MOI began working with larger groups, government organizations have been more enthusiastic in their support of MOI building initiatives. In 2004, MOI received a grant from the *Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social* (INAES, or National Institute of Associativism and Social Economy) for the purchase of equipment to help the organization to recycle the metal harvested from the original factory structures into new supports, doors and window frames.\(^{188}\) Aside from using this equipment to build their now larger cooperatives, MOI has integrated the use of this equipment into a workers cooperative. Through this program, MOI advisors provide training to MOI members and others from the surrounding community in the fabrication of building materials. The workshop creates door and window frames for MOI cooperatives, and also sells its affordable building materials to outside companies.

This increase in the scale MOI cooperatives illustrates how neoliberal politics in Buenos Aires have grown more recently to consider the interests of the poor through the intervention of the “professionalized” non-governmental organization.\(^{189}\) To explain these cooperatives in the context of neoliberal politics alone would be negligent. Looking to the architectural forms of *La Fábrica*, this investigation finds that while this cooperative is also physical evidence of larger political shifts in the region, the forms of this (and other) MOI cooperative are also a product of changes in attitudes towards, and coming from within the architectural profession.

---

\(^{187}\) Ibid, 56.

\(^{188}\) Ibid.

MODERN
In 1980, Jurgen Habermas described modernity as an “Incomplete Project.”\(^{190}\) Perpetually seeking an ever-elusive \textit{Zeitgeist}, Habermas observed that modernity would never be fully achieved, as with time its demands would always change. Within the built environment, perhaps there is no better building type than low-cost housing to illustrate Habermas’s assertions. Chapter 2 of this dissertation illustrated MOI cooperatives stand in discourse with the history of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires, and that like previous types, these structures seek to correct the shortfalls of antecedents. MOI cooperatives are not the penultimate solution to low-cost housing’s problems. Rather, these structures respond to the changing demands on the building type within the context of recent decades, demands that will assuredly change again in the future. In this sense, MOI cooperatives certainly stand for a sense modernism, although this was never an expressed interest or intention on the part of MOI architects.

As published in texts about the organization, and as expressed in interviews with the professionals, rather than striving to produce new forms of modernist architecture, MOI architects are most concerned with creating plans which are feasible within the cooperatives financial and material means, while serving as a beneficial part of the larger city. Yet, as indicated within the elevation drawings for \textit{La Fábrica} (fig. 4.3-4), the housing units for \textit{La Fábrica} consist of neat stacks of modest, single-family apartments arranged as a series of austere, irregular geometries. Upon first glance, these elevation drawings easily recall the

basic tenets of International Style modernism, as was set forth by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson in 1932.\textsuperscript{191} For several of the architects featured within the \textit{International Exhibition}, low-cost housing was a preoccupation.\textsuperscript{192} For example, in \textit{Vers un architecture} (1923) Le Corbusier famously declared, “Architecture, or revolution,” believing that without low-cost public housing the growing proletariat would eventually revolt against government power. Meanwhile, architects such as Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe participated in German \textit{Siedlungen}, producing new forms of Modernist architecture that catered to the masses whilst adhering to left wing ideologies, the same ideologies invoked through the public housing of the Perón era in Buenos Aires discussed in Chapter 2.\textsuperscript{193}

In this sense, perhaps MOI architects evocation of the century-old forms of European Modern architecture was an appropriate reference, yet another nod to the history of housing. This investigation finds, however, that such an answer would be entirely too simple. Instead, these references must be analyzed in consideration of the manners in which knowledge of such monuments throughout architectural history are taught within the architecture studio in universities, as well as manner in which theories regarding modernism in architecture have evolved over the course of recent decades in Buenos Aires specifically. In the discussion of these simple geometric forms, it is also helpful to keep in mind the limited financial and material resources available to the cooperative.


\textsuperscript{192} Le Corbusier, \textit{Vers une architecture} (Paris: G. Crès et cie, 1923). This text was translated to Spanish as \textit{Hacia una arquitectura} in 1939, yet layouts were tightened, captions simplified and some illustrations were omitted in the original Spanish version. For more on the history of \textit{Vers une architecture} in Latin America, see the editors notes of 2007 version of the text: Le Corbusier, \textit{Vers une architecture}, trans. John goodman, ed. Jean-Louis Cohen (London: J. Paul Gerry Trust, 2007): 308-330.

\textsuperscript{193} Nicholas Bullock, \textit{The Movement for Housing Reform in Germany and France, 1840-1914} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
MOI architects are not only practicing designers, but are also educators. MOI President Nestor Jeifetz has been a professor at several universities throughout Buenos Aires for over twenty years. José Barbagallo served as the chair of the Department of Architecture at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina’s largest architecture program, until his retirement in 2008. Differing greatly from the manner in which the subject is taught in the United States, as a field within the broader history of art, architectural history is taught by architecture professors within the design studio in Latin America. As described by Susana Torre, students are more often required to generate a two- or three-dimensional model to demonstrate their mastery of the ideas presented in class, rather than having to produce a research paper. This teaching method presents subject matter as a set of formal principals with a rich theoretical a historical context, rather than the other way around. These training exercises encourage students to learn architectural history through sets of stylistic and formal elements, which are supported through ideology and history, an arrangement not dissimilar to the manner in which the International Style was described by Hitchcock and Johnson. This is not to say that the architectural studio in Buenos Aires lacks rigor, as it certainly does. Rather, since they have not only learned, but also taught the history of architecture in this manner, it is safe to assume that MOI architects have consciously made reference to the International Style in their plans for the cooperative. Yet, the appearance of these formal elements within these plans is not entirely dogmatic.

As architects working with cooperative members, Jeifetz and Barbagallo have further extended their experiences as educators, and their knowledge of European Modernist architecture, into the design process of the cooperative. It is important to note that the

---

The quotation of Modernist architecture is convenient to MOI, as these architectural forms are simple, the spaces created are flexible and the materials used in construction are economical. Yet, the parallels between Modernist housing constructions and MOI cooperatives can be analyzed as going a deeper than convenience.

For instance, throughout the design stages for each cooperative, MOI architects work with cooperative families in a studio environment. Similar to the Bauhaus education model used in the space of the university classroom, the group begins with a general set of restraints: the existing body of the building to be adapted, its immediate physical context, as well as the financial means, physical labor and importantly the collective interests of its members. The architects lead the cooperative through a design process that slowly compartmentalizes the components of the new cooperative: physical materials, tools necessary for construction, natural light and ventilation, the space of the site, and construction processes. Throughout this lengthy process the architects act as leaders and the cooperative members work collaboratively to find feasible solutions to meet their needs architecturally. While MOI families are important agents to final decisions regarding architectural form, it is important to note that for legal reasons it is the architects who take the time to render final plans and submit those plans to the city for approval. This is not to diminish the role of the family members’ roles throughout the design process, however. Having participated throughout design, and having a general understanding of the project and its requirements, the families together are better prepared to lead the process of building.

Outside the environment of the design studio, MOI architects have also found that the formal conventions of the International Style fit nicely within the parameters of the cooperative’s limited financial and material means. For example, by retaining the factory
façade of *La Fábrica* (fig. 4.1), MOI has eschewed the costs of building a new entryway while remaining in dialog with the factory aesthetics of Modernists works, such as Peter Behrens’s AEG Turbine Factory. Furthermore, *La Fábrica* has also reused the existing structural system of the factory, a simple system of steel beams and girders (fig. 4.4-5). Akin to Le Corbusier’s reductive structural cage, as seen in this diagram for the *Maison Dom-ino* (1914-15, fig. 4.6), these small yet sturdy supports, have allowed MOI to open up the modest spaces contained within each unit by reducing the number of walls necessary to ensure structural stability.\(^{195}\)

MOI’s reference to European Modern architecture is not purely an attempt to hearken back to these early twentieth-century European architects. *La Fábrica*’s retained factory façade, the free plan of the housing units, the building’s structural system, and the irregularity of geometric forms in the elevation are reflective of dogma of Early European Modernism. When placed within a discussion of the history of housing in Argentina, however, the selection of these forms becomes saturated with political meaning within the specific discourse of housing production in the region.

Recall that a similar architectural references were evoked in the design for Barrio *Los Perales* in 1949 (fig. 2.18).\(^{196}\) Standing in stark contrast to the California-style neighborhoods developed under the Perón administration at the same time, Barrio *Los Perales* used the Central European workers’ neighborhood as a model. Built on open pavilions, each housing block was made up of a series of simple and repeated geometries. The architects responsible for the design and oversight of the housing built at *Los Perales* were Modernist architects from the Municipal Office of Architecture of the City of Buenos Aires, as well as the


\[^{196}\] Los Perales was also discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Studies of Perón-era housing have been the life work of University of Buenos Aires Professor, Rosa Aboy. For more on Los Perales, see: Rosa Aboy, “‘The Right to a Home’: Public Housing in Post-World-War II Buenos Aires,” *Journal of Urban History* 33 (2007): 493-518.
architects who had collaborated with Le Corbusier in his plan for Buenos Aires who were then working in the city’s planning office.

The contrast in the nature of the two types was illustrative of a major political rift between conservative Catholic organizations and progressive left-wing groups. While Catholic groups feared that the multi-family blocks would aid in the dissemination of revolutionary ideas and breed promiscuity, the defenders of the type were inspired by European socialism of the interwar period, and wished to build communities based on equality and solidarity amongst their members. These two ideologies did not collide under Perón, however, as the president had crafted a political ideology that had satisfied these two diverse visions of social progress to coexist peacefully. With Peronism, the individualism and social mobility based on personal effort, as embodied in the single-family California-style neighborhoods, acted as the counterbalance to the ideals of social equality embedded within the housing blocks at Barrio Los Perales.

MOI’s election to construct low-cost housing within the canon of Early European Modernist architecture, therefore, must be linked to this older debate within the history of housing here in Buenos Aires. Recontextualizing the ideals of post-WWII Peronism into the space of neoliberal Buenos Aires, MOI architects have embedded some of the left-wing progressive idealism behind the construction of Barrio Los Perales in the 1940s into the construction of Cooperative La Fábrica. Yet, MOI has transformed these architectural elements to accommodate the particular demands of the neoliberal city.

The architectural forms of Cooperative La Fábrica are therefore neither a pure endorsement of government-sponsored housing projects in Buenos Aires, nor a faithful continuation of the Early European Modernist dogma. As a revision to previous forms of

197 Ibid, 512.
low-cost housing, Cooperative *La Fábrica* certainly coincides with Habermas’s definition of modernity as an incomplete project. Aside from bearing resemblances to examples of International Style modernist architecture as it had appeared in Buenos Aires previously, however, MOI’s inclusion of these forms has also been convenient to the material and financial means of the organization and its members, and is additionally responsive to the cooperative’s social and physical context within neoliberal Buenos Aires. In fact, it is its predecessors’ attitudes towards the immediate physical context of the city that is the theoretical distinction between MOI cooperatives and its antecedents.

**URBAN**

Modern architects, including Le Corbusier who visited Buenos Aires in 1929 and suggested the superimposition of a Modern metropolis over the existing city, have extended some influence on the architecture and urban planning in the region.\(^{198}\) MOI’s use and re-contextualization of the theories and forms of European Modernist architectural forms fit more closely within the framework of a more recent architectural-theoretical debate: *Modernidad Apropiada* (Appropriate Modernity).\(^{199}\)

According to Argentine theorists Ramón Gutiérrez and Marcos Winograd, architecture in the region should be prudently responsive to international architectural trends, but must primarily be concerned with the particular conditions of locale by including locally produced materials, incorporating traditional architectural forms, and most

---


importantly, accommodating the cultural and social patterns of context. Winograd’s theories were particularly influential on the design of MOI cooperatives as both Jeifetz and Barbagallo were Winograd’s students at in the 1970s. From Winograd’s theory of *Arquitectura Ciudad* (City Architecture), MOI architects have taken on a theoretical ideology which privileges context above any other component of design, wherein an architect’s designs are but small components of a larger, more complex whole: the great organism of the city.200

Within Buenos Aires, MOI cooperatives are situated within formerly industrial areas of the Modern city. As illustrated in Le Corbusier’s *Ville Radieuse*, the Modern city is strictly zoned, with industry, residential and commercial enterprises clearly separated.201 As a Modern City, Buenos Aires had restricted industry to the river and port zones during the early decades of the twentieth century. There, railroad lines would intersect to carry goods to the nation’s interior, and ports would harbor ships to carry goods for export. This system of zoning physically shaped the material environment of Buenos Aires throughout the past century. As discussed more thoroughly in the previous chapter, this physical environment has shifted significantly with the advent of neoliberalization.

MOI architects stress the importance of considering the cooperative’s urban context, and the shifts that have occurred thereto over the course of recent decades, in the designs for the organization’s cooperatives. To MOI, the architectural forms selected for each cooperative must consider not only Winograd’s theories of *arquitectura ciudad* (city architecture), but also allow that understanding of context to extend throughout the


organization’s expressed belief in merecer la ciudad (all citizens’ rights to the city). According to architect José Barbagallo, the most successful integration of architectural form and urban context occurs at the neighborhood level, and offers more than just shelter. Barbagallo, by linking the ideologies of arquitectura ciudad and merecer la ciudad, believes in the cooperative’s role of building identity and community:

Los ámbitos barriales [son] como espacios de reproducción y representación de la vida cotidiana, espacios intensamente vividos y como tales los más conocidos, apropiables y de gran identidad para sus residentes…[El barrio es] Unidad socio-espacial dentro de la cual pueden verificarse una serie de situaciones y relaciones típicas que puede constituirse en parte de un sistema de referencia inmediato para la arquitectura, incluyente de valores históricos, sociales, psicológicos, comportamentales (o de uso), espaciales y morfológicos, apreciados por los residentes, ampliables y, en ciertos aspectos, generalizables.

Barbagallo is critical of both Modern architecture and public housing projects for neglecting urban context.

With Cooperative La Fábrica, Barbagallo and MOI architects planned a building that deliberately strives to integrate the cooperative into its community. Just steps away from Cooperative Yatay, La Fábrica is located within the barrio of Barracas. As described within

---

202 Aside from MOI, many other non-governmental political groups in Buenos Aires take on the slogan “merecer la ciudad.” This slogan is the title of Oscar Oszlak’s book (published in 1991), which was a theoretical argument for the right of the poor to urban space, that was published in the aftermath of the convalescence of the piquetero protest movement. The phrase “merecer la ciudad,” is in itself a historical throw back to the Perón era. When the first national housing policy was first authored under Péron, the president often used the phrase to appeal to the populist sentiments of much of his constituency (and not to mention his wife, Eva Perón, who is even more famous for her intervention in the production of housing in the region). Oscar Oszlak, Merecer la ciudad: Los pobres y el derecho al espacio urbano (Buenos Aires: CEDES, HUMANITAS, 1991).

203 Published in Barbagallo, Arquitectura y ciudad, 78.
Ernesto Sábato’s masterwork, *Sobre Héroes y Tumbas* (1957), this zone was as a buzzing industrial area with a low-density of residences in the 1940s and 50s. Although most of the factories in this neighborhood had been abandoned, or left idle, throughout the neoliberal reforms implemented since 1976, the arrival of Cooperative *Yatay* in 1993 commenced a slow-building renaissance for the neighborhood. With proximity to the city center, and reliable access to public transportation, this part of Barracas since the appearance of Cooperative *Yatay* in the early 1990s had started to attract building developers, who are busy converting old factories into loft apartments and office space, as well as a small community of artists (figs. 3.13-16).

Given the physical and social changes that had occurred in this part of Barracas since MOI’s first appearance in the *barrio*, MOI architects sought to grow the cooperative’s role within its immediate community beyond what was achieved with *Yatay*. Like Cooperative *Yatay*, one of the most important components to the plan for *La Fábrica* is its central courtyard (figs. 4.8-12). Early in the design process for Cooperative *La Fábrica*, the group decided to disassemble the factory’s roof, which covered the former production floor, which is now the site of the courtyard. With an open roof, natural sunlight bathes this central courtyard area and additionally serves to help illuminate the interior spaces of individual housing units.

*La Fábrica’s* courtyard is much larger than its neighbor’s, and is even as big as some of Buenos Aires’s smaller parks. Although this part of Barracas was chosen specifically for its proximity to public transportation and access to existing services and shops, until the appearance of MOI cooperatives, this area had little public park space. Although Cooperative *La Fábrica* owns this property, the cooperative has resolved to leave its central

courtyard open to the public during the daytime. Offering a space for community and cooperative members to interact, a place for children to safely place, and not to mention a locus for the all-important Sunday *asado* (barbecue), this important component of *La Fábrica* is the strongest point of contact between MOI and the existing community.

With a larger space, the cooperative has also decided to include a number of other spaces within *La Fábrica* that were not previously considered for *Yatay* and the other early MOI cooperatives. Specifically, MOI is constructed a series of multi-use halls and a micro-business center into the ground floor of *La Fábrica*. MOI architects and advisors confirm that the inclusion of these spaces are in step with the progress of the organization as it grows, as the scope of MOI’s ambitions has grown to not only include the provision of dignified housing and the integration of cooperative members within their communities, but also in the construction of opportunities for cooperative and community members to learn and grow both socially and professionally. In this respect, within what MOI advisors now call the second stage in their history, the former factories which MOI cooperatives now call home are now the locus of a new kind of production: the production of a new identity for the working poor.

MOI’s contribution to the transformation of the environments immediately surrounding its cooperatives, however small, leads the discussion of neoliberal city beyond those central zones of the city where tall skyscrapers have arrived to house large transnational corporations, replacing those less-wealthy populations that previously occupied the sites of new construction. Most accounts of the aesthetics of neoliberal cities focus on the locations where private corporations have appeared, and transformed urban space through the construction of iconic buildings that change the city landscape, such as Guano’s account of Puerto Madero. These accounts, also including Hackworth’s *Neoliberal City*,
establish the aesthetics of the neoliberal city as a capitalist city, where the most iconic constructions are those temples to commerce. While discussing the emergence of large corporate buildings, these studies emphasize the negative effects of the new corporate building projects upon ever-growing populations of the working poor. While MOI cooperatives have not had the same effects upon the city as have the skyscrapers of Puerto Madero, the structures do fit neatly within other accounts of neoliberal cities, such as that set forth by Robin Visser in his study of postsocialist China:

The neoliberal city is conceptualized first as an entrepreneurial city, directing all its energies to achieving economic successes in competition with other cities for investments, innovations and “creative classes.” Decisions are increasingly driven by cost-benefit calculations rather than missions of service, equity and social welfare… it is a city whose residents are expected to behave responsibly, entrepreneurially and prudentially. They are made responsible for their own successes and failures, with the social obligation to make their expected contribution to the collective economic welfare alongside their hard-working fellow citizens.

Through the adaptive reuse of otherwise disused spaces in the southern barrios of Buenos Aires, the emergence of MOI cooperatives certainly illustrate the sense of responsibility, entrepreneurship and prudence of MOI advisors and members. Yet, part of their objective in building these structures is to renew, or reestablish, the civic mission of service, equality and social welfare that has gone missing from other parts of the city. These values are repeated throughout the materials the organization publishes and makes available to the public through their website and other publications. More important to this study, however, these values are emphasized through the design of each cooperative, as each structure

205 Hackworth, The Neoliberal City.

provides privileged central space for community building, such as the courtyard at La Fábrica.

FACTORY
Aside from its minimalist geometries and its open courtyard, perhaps the most notable aesthetic quality of Cooperative La Fábrica is its industrial façade (fig. 4.1). While this façade certainly conjures the comparison between European Modernist factory aesthetics, this part of the cooperative—its outward face—also makes important reference to recent political shifts in Buenos Aires, and MOI’s role in the reshaping of the neoliberal city.

As more thoroughly discussed in the previous chapter, since 1976 the Argentine federal government instituted a series of neoliberal policies intended to enhance the nation’s presence within the global economy. Over time, these free-market economic policies privatized public industry and services, and deregulated state engagement in private enterprise. These policies succeeded initially, attracting large corporations to the region and augmenting the participation of Argentine governments within the global economy. Feelings of triumph were fleeting, however, as the shifts eventually precipitated major economic crises in 1989 and 2001, which diminished the middle-class through rapid inflation, tempered wages and increased unemployment.

---


208 These conditions are not dissimilar to the effects of neoliberalization in other countries, including the United States. See: Jason R. Hackworth, The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).
The aftermath of these political and economic shifts instigated changes in the use of, and sentiments towards, urban space. The Argentine government closed many of its factories to encourage private firms to purchase the property and resume production. In the wake of economic crises, many of these properties were abandoned and thousands of Argentines were left without work. This combination of increased unemployment and vacant space quickly resulted in a rise in squatting.

Consequently, image of the factory façade had shifted its meaning. What once was the symbol of economic progress under the Perón administration had fallen into disuse in the aftermath of de-industrialization and neoliberalization. Within the context of the neoliberal city, the image of the factory became the symbol of what the country had lost, and associated with poverty. MOI’s decision to keep the factory façade at Cooperative La Fábrica, as well as other cooperatives such as El Molino, is an effort to once again revise this history. In an interview conducted in May 2009, architect Barbagallo asserted that aside from allowing the cooperative to save precious financial resources, these factory façades are a symbol of a new opportunity for the poor to live legitimately within central zones of Buenos Aires, of a new opportunity to grow and build communities from the ruins of eras past.

While neoliberal political policies did not build La Fábrica, the space and forms of this cooperative are certainly responsive to these political shifts. These sites of illegal occupation, a material environment created by political and economic changes, are the territory into which MOI inserted itself. Aside from recalling the factory aesthetic of Modern architecture, the façade of La Fábrica has maintained both the memory of the building’s

---


210 Interview with Nestor Jeifetz, by author, 28 July 2008.
original function, memories of its more immediate pasts as the site of illegal building occupation, all in effort to appropriate and morph this symbolism to indicate a new future for those associated with the factory. Therefore, the multivalent symbolism of this façade at once asserts an identity for the cooperative as architecturally sophisticated, productive, and upwardly mobile in the wake of adverse economic and political conditions.

Within the cooperative, MOI members and architects have made important decisions to continue the symbolism of the factory. For example, the original factory’s water tower remains in place (fig. 4.12). Marking the skyline of Barracas, this tower stands, as does the cooperative’s façade, as a multivalent symbol of this building’s past, its present and its future.

Although this factory no longer produces the textiles that it had previously, Cooperative La Fábrica is now the site of new sort of production: the production of a new identity for the working poor through the self-construction of new and dignified, affordable housing. For example, in combination with bricks recycled from the original factory and the bricks purchased in collaboration with Cooperative El Molino, MOI is building clean new exterior walls to line the courtyard at La Fábrica (fig. 4.15). Although these walls are more difficult to assemble than the poured concrete blocks that are more common throughout Buenos Aires, they are less expensive to the cooperative. Likewise, MOI has salvaged the steel members that were not structurally necessary for the new apartments and converted them into durable door and window frames (fig. 4.14-15). Therefore, by investing time and ingenuity, rather than money, MOI members have recycled these materials in order to construct homes that are stronger and more durable than alternatives.

Once installed, the rough-hewn surfaces of the brick, steel and plastered housing units bear the mark of the cooperative’s members, who are responsible both for the design
and construction of these dwellings. Through self-construction, MOI members have departed from the machine regularity of European Modernism, and responded to the conditions, limitations and benefits, of recent political shifts towards neoliberalization. Although these larger political shifts had spurred on rocketing unemployment and an increased need for housing, neoliberalization also opened up space in the city center wherein MOI could begin constructing new forms of low-cost housing. Although MOI’s financial resources are scarce, together the group holds a great deal of human capital. And through this human capital, MOI (although slowly) has constructed La Fábrica as a sophisticated and productive space for these working-class Argentines.

HOME
Most importantly, La Fábrica is a home to its fifty member families. While this structure is certainly in dialogue with the formal language of European Modernism, remains in step with important developments in architectural theory generated within the region, and has been responsive to major political shifts and their effects on urban space and industry, its primary purpose is to provide a legitimate and dignified place of residence. Therefore, the architectural forms and spaces of this cooperative also recall regional traditions in residential architecture, particularly other local forms of low-cost housing.

Buenos Aires has experienced a deficit in low-cost housing since the late 1960s that was further exacerbated when Argentina’s Military Junta razed squatter settlements and evacuated occupations between 1976 and 1983. After 1983, policy makers tolerated the

211 Renée Duncowicz, and Eduardo Rey, 90 años de vivienda social en la ciudad de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires: Centro de Estudios de Hábitat y la Vivienda, 2000); and Ramón Gutiérrez, and Margarita Gutman, Vivienda: Ideas y contradicciones, 1916-1956, de las casas baratas a la erradicación de las villas de emergencia (Buenos Aires: Instituto Argentino de Investigaciones de Historia de la Arquitectura y del Urbanismo, 1988).
return and growth of squatter populations, in the forms of *casas tomadas* (occupied buildings) and *villas miserias* (shantytowns, fig. 2.19-20), as this was cheaper than building new public housing through the National Housing Fund (or FONAVI, which was all-but absolved in 1991).\(^{212}\) Today, the government only partially subsidizes boarding houses and renter hotels. Since MOI members were previously *ocupantes* (squatters) and *inquilinos* (living in boarding houses), *La Fábrica* was constructed according to the customs, skills and desires of its members, and thus, is formally comparable to these alternatives in low-cost housing.

For instance, MOI members installed jack-vaulted brick ceilings and walls in a manner similar to the construction methods used within the *villas miserias*.\(^{213}\) Within the *villas*, homeless populations have obtained bricks either from the sites of building demolition or through a small assortment of government slum upgrade programs, and have employed simple brick construction techniques to build rudimentary dwellings. In order to efficiently construct its cooperative, MOI has elected to employ similar construction methods in the design and construction of this home.\(^{214}\)

Likewise, the courtyard at the center of *La Fábrica* is a part of the Argentine vernacular, imported along with Spanish colonizers and later throngs of Italian and Spanish immigrants during the first decades of the twentieth century. The appearance of this form is

\(^{212}\) Powers.


\(^{214}\) Similar observations have been made by scholars studying housing in other nations, including Mexico and Brazil: Janice E. Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio de Janeiro* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); and Teddy Cruz, *Equilibrio dinámico: en busca de un terreno público* (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 2007).
both an expression of regional identity, and a nod to one of the longest-standing traditions in low-cost housing in Buenos Aires, the *conventillo* (tenement, 2.16).\(^{215}\) As more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2, *Conventillos* are a specific type of boarding house, and are located in the former residences of Buenos Aires elite who had fled to higher ground upon the inundation of flooding and the resulting onset of yellow fever epidemics around the turn of the twentieth century. These residences all contain a central courtyard, and as boarding houses, individual rooms are rented out to families for a fee reduced through government subsidy. By retaining the courtyard form, MOI has continued this tradition in Argentine residential architecture and recognized its place among alternatives in low-cost housing while responding to the short falls of this alternative.

For instance, each unit within *La Fábrica* is built for a single, nuclear family, each with its own kitchen and service area. These plans are entirely different from the *conventillo* because within these boarding houses individual rooms contain only a bed and dressing area, and tenants are expected to share kitchen, bathroom and washing facilities. These plans, especially in light of the additional expenses of equipping each individual unit with kitchen and service appliances, indicates a desire amongst MOI members for homes that accommodate the needs of the nuclear family. The individual apartments within *La Fábrica* are therefore more similar to those constructed by the government at sites such as Barrio *Los Perales*. Noting architect Barbagallo’s criticism of government-built housing, MOI’s design of these apartments within a larger structure which strives to integrate, rather than isolate, cooperative members into the surrounding community indicates both a break with and a continuation of the ideology embedded within the earlier government-built housing. In turn,

the plans for these individual apartments reflect a shift in the identity construction of these working poor populations within the city. No longer seeking equality amongst those living within the newly constructed low-cost housing, as achieved at *Los Perales*, Cooperative *La Fábrica* seeks an equality for its inhabitants that radiates beyond the property lines of the former factory.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

MOI cooperatives are a creative alternative for low-cost housing outside of government programs and self-help. Aside from responding to alternatives in low-cost housing, however, MOI cooperatives are the products of overlapping but identifiable systems of values, typological and cultural conventions, institutional forces, and individual actions. The investigation of the forms of *La Fábrica* illuminates how the spatial experience of shifts in urban form, memory, the sense of place, as well as the roles of power and difference in the context of neoliberalizing Buenos Aires have shaped the design of these cooperatives.

This combination of signifiers indicates that if new forms of political and economic governing were motivating factors in shifting attitudes towards urban space, housing and architectural practice, the forms, styles and spaces of MOI cooperatives correspondingly elucidate the nature of new attitudes towards the identity of the working poor within the context of their immediate communities. The simultaneous place references within *La Fábrica*, which employ at once the aesthetics of region, industry, homelessness, and international architectural trends, serve in the identity construction of MOI members as worldly, productive, working-class Argentines. This shift in identity construction is the key distinction between MOI, an organization that incorporates equity and participation as key
components of a housing equation that is both architectural and social, and other alternatives in low-cost housing in the region.

During my first trip to Buenos Aires in July 2008, MOI Advisor and Professor Carla Rodriguez made this distinction all the more lucid by asking me:

Kristin, ¿Podés ver? Hay una diferencia entre vivienda social y casas para los pobres.

[Kristin, can’t you see? There’s a difference between social housing and houses for poor people.]

This is the difference between MOI cooperatives and Perón-era public housing. MOI cooperatives are not social housing; they are not government housing. MOI cooperatives are legitimate homes, owned, designed and built by the poor. The lived experiences of and interactions between cooperative members, architects, other advisors are the reasons behind the multivalent meanings embedded within these forms. Form that reference much more than neoliberal politics. Therefore, these cooperatives are the medium of the self-construction of a new identity for these populations, an identity that renews and legitimizes the presence of the poor within the urban fabric of downtown Buenos Aires, and creates the spaces and forms of a modest, yet dignified and sophisticated population of working individuals.

The previous chapters served to analyze MOI’s place within the context of the architectural production in Argentina, which is both in theory and practice, conscious of the relationship of new buildings to the history of housing, as well as to physical space of neoliberal Buenos Aires. This investigation of the architectural forms employed at the site of Cooperative *La Fábrica* have served to further expand the manners in which this organization has not only responded to its political and professional antecedents, but also how MOI looks to reshape the identity of the poor in Buenos Aires through architectural
means. Having investigated the role of the history of professional architectural production and architectural theory in the formulation of Cooperative La Fábrica, there remains one last group of actors within MOI that has not been investigated: the member families. Through one final case study, Cooperative El Molino (the mill), the following chapter will investigate how through their involvement with this non-governmental organization, these families have engaged in a process that confronts class politics in Buenos Aires, transforming the poor into working class citizens.
4.1 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica exterior, begun 1999 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)

4.2 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica interior elevation of east-facing apartments, begun 1999, CAD drawing (photo by author)
4.3 MOI, Cooperative *La Fábrica*, interior elevation of west-facing apartments, begun 1999, CAD drawing (photo by author)

4.4 MOI, Cooperative *La Fábrica*, plan of ground floor of individual apartment, begun 1999, CAD drawing with color pencil (photo by author)
4.5 Structural members exposed and preserve through adaptive reuse project MOI, Cooperative *La Fábrica*, exposed structural members kept for adaptive reuse of structure, begun 1999, CAD drawing with color pencil (photo by author)

4.6 Le Corbusier, Maison Domino, 1914-15
4.7 MOI, Cooperative *La Fábrica*, plan of central courtyard and green space, begun 1999, CAD drawing with color pencil (photo by author)

4.8 MOI, three-dimensional rendering of projected interior courtyard at Cooperative La *Fábrica*, Buenos Aires (image courtesy of Marcelo Cataneo)
4.9 MOI, three-dimensional rendering of projected interior courtyard at Cooperative La Fábrica, Buenos Aires (image courtesy of Marcelo Cataneo)

4.10 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica before construction (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)
4.11 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica courtyard, June 2010 (photo by author)
4.12 MOI, Cooperative *La Fábrica*, water tower from original factory, begun 1999 (photo by author)

4.13 MOI, Cooperative *La Fábrica*, bricks retained from structure of old factory, begun 1999 (photo by author)
4.14 Door and window frames produced by MOI, workshop located at Cooperative El Molino, 2008 (photo by author)

4.15 MOI, Cooperative La Fábrica photo illustrating installation of steel door and window frames, as well as brick façade, 2010 (photo by author)
CHAPTER 5: CONSTRUCTION

The Building of Cooperative *El Molino* and the Class Politics of Labor
The Building of Cooperative *El Molino* and the Class Politics of Labor

In *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia* (1990), James Holston examined each phase in the city’s development, beginning with an analysis of Lucio Costa’s plans for the new capital, revealing the realities that spoiled Brasilia’s utopian dreams, and concluding with description of how the city is now inhabited.216 In his book and follow-up article, “Auto-Construction in Working-Class Brazil” (1991) Holston narrated the emergence of “satellite cities,” and other informal settlements of self-constructed homes along the peripheries of the city. These illegal squatter settlements immediately revealed the exclusivity of Costa’s and the Brazilian government’s utopian plans.217 Standing in dramatic contrast to Costa’s gleaming white city, a space constructed by those it excluded, Holston found that through the construction of their own homes, the workers managed to “self-construct images of competence and knowledge that counter and replace those of disrespect and worthlessness that have historically subjugated them to a denigrated sense of their own persons.”218 According to Holston, the self-constructed housing in Brazil, whether legal or illegal, are, “both concrete embodiment and imaginary representations of people’s relations to their conditions of existence.”219 Since MOI cooperatives are also examples of self-constructed low-cost housing, this chapter inquires into whether the same can be said for this new housing type within the space of neoliberal Buenos Aires. Furthermore, if MOI members have self-constructed images of themselves through their new home that counter

---


219 Ibid.
other outside perceptions of the poor in Buenos Aires, what specifically is this new identity they have built?

In her article, “If They Touch One of Us, They Touch All of Us: Cooperativism as Counterlogic to Neoliberal Capitalism” (2008), Karen Ann Faulk investigated the emergence of the BAUEN workers’ cooperative as a case study of the recuperated businesses movement that emerged within the space of neoliberal Buenos Aires in the late 1990s. Through ethnographic research, Faulk found that through their peaceful takeover and subsequent auto-gestión (self-management) of the BAUEN Hotel, the maids, bellhops and other servants have experienced a transformation from poor workers, to valuable, working class citizens of the city. According to Faulk, this transformation was achieved through the cooperative’s ideological opposition to the new neoliberal government, which the workers perceived to be corrupt. Throughout their self-published book, MOI: Movimiento en Movimiento (2007), MOI advisors and authors have public expressed similar attitudes towards the nation’s neoliberal government. Simultaneously, this investigation has found that MOI members also feel as if their involvement in MOI has resulted in their self-transformation from poor to working class citizens, paralleling testimonies of members of the workers’ cooperative.

Karen Ann Faulk, “If They Touch One of Us, They Touch All of Us: Cooperativism as a Counterlogic to Neoliberal Capitalism,” Anthropological Quarterly 81, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 579-614. The recuperated businesses movement is a parallel development in Buenos Aires to the emergence of cooperative housing organizations. As with MOI, workers’ cooperatives such as BAUEN or FaSinPat appropriate the spaces of factories or other businesses that were left abandoned as a result of the government’s privatization program. Rather than transforming the spaces of these factories into homes, however, workers’ cooperatives restore the factories and recommence industrial production. For more on workers’ cooperatives in Buenos Aires in the 1990s, see: Chris Spannos, Real Utopia: Participatory Society for the 21st Century (Oakland, Cali.: AK Press, 2008); Gabriel Fajn, Fábricas y empresas recuperadas: protesta social, auto-gestión y rupturas en la subjectividad (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación, 2003); Osvaldo Battistini, ed., El trabajo frente al espejo: continuidades y rupturas en los procesos de construcción identitaria de los trabajadores (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2004); Lavaca, Cooperativa de trabajo, Sin patron: Fábricas y empresas recuperadas por sus Trabajadores: Una historia, una guía (Guenos Aires: Cooperativa de trabajo, Lavaca, 2004).
In the light of observations made by Holston and Faulk, this chapter investigates the manners in which MOI cooperatives may be analyzed in relation to the organization’s member families. Through the example of MOI’s largest cooperative, *El Molino* (the mill, figs. 5.1-16), this chapter traces the history of this cooperative from its founding, through its design and planning, and concludes with its construction, which is still underway. It is the hypothesis of this chapter that if self-construction and cooperativism have been found to play important roles in the identity transformation of poor populations elsewhere in Buenos Aires, as well as abroad, then it stands to reason that the architectural forms of *El Molino*, a self-constructed housing cooperative, should illustrate the manners in which MOI members have both imagined and/or realized the transformation of their own identity in the context the neoliberal city.

This investigation finds that through each step of the cooperative’s history, the members of *El Molino* have engaged labor and class politics in order to self-construct new images of themselves through the design and construction of their new home that confront negative expectations of the poor within the space of the neoliberal Buenos Aires. Through their role in the founding of the organization, and their collective achievement in establishing a mortgage for the old flour mill in the *barrio* of Constitución, these families emerged as consumers in markets from which they were previously excluded. In the designs for the new apartment blocks, the families built a new visual identity that departed from the unseemly aesthetics associated with squatting while engaging the history of housing in the region. Throughout this process, these families were transformed through education, both in training received to help them to construct the cooperative, as well as throughout the design process. The cooperative has placed high value on education, a value that is reflected in the group’s inclusion of three separate spaces of learning within their plans for the greater
complex of El Molino: a nursery school, an adult education center and a workshop for MOI’s workers’ cooperative. As a result of their dedication to the construction of their own home, and reflected in its architectural forms, the families of El Molino imagine and seek to realize their collective emergence within the space of neoliberal Buenos Aires as consumers and producers, as students and educators, all roles from which the poor are expected more generally expected to be excluded.

**The Founding of El Molino, Counter-logic to Neoliberal Capitalism?**

The members of El Molino first began the process of identity transformation before the cooperative took physical shape. Upon the founding of El Molino in 2003, the poor families who joined the organization engaged the existing politics of labor and class, and joined a growing population of porteños that were discontent with the conditions resulting from the city’s neoliberalization. The analysis of the earliest history of this cooperative, a stage in which MOI members positioned themselves ideologically counter to the dominant political regime, reveals that the organization’s opposition drew a clear contrast between the identity these families hoped to construct for themselves, and the identity of the poor within the neoliberal city, most dramatically represented by the unhygienic and ever-growing villas miseria. MOI cooperatives certainly rely on neoliberal political policies, such as Law 341, in order to construct their new homes. Yet, the group’s philosophical opposition to neoliberalism reaffirms the families’ agency, rather than that of the government, in their own identity transformation through the construction of their new home.

Since its establishment, El Molino has been deeply entwined in the class politics of labor. Founded in May 2003, El Molino was created only after MOI advisors had discovered
an old abandoned flourmill in the *barrio* of Constitución, an ideal site for a large, new cooperative.\(^{221}\) The flourmill occupied the predominant part of a city block, and was a complex of several buildings, including administrative offices at the rear, production floor and storage silo. If the organization wanted to ensure their claim to the old mill, they had to act quickly.

Since the flour mill was far too large for any one of MOI’s current cooperatives to be able to financially and physically handle, the members of two smaller cooperatives—20 de Julio and *Los Invencibles*—agreed to merge and contribute their savings and energies to a new housing cooperative, *El Molino*. In 2003, these two cooperatives were already more than two years old with two important characteristics in common. Both were founded through the *Centro de Trabajadores de la Argentina* (CTA, Center for the Workers of Argentina, fig. 5.2) and were composed of families who had lived in government-subsidized residence hotels that were then under risk of losing their government support.\(^{222}\)

The CTA is the largest workers’ rights organization in Buenos Aires, yet it is not a labor union. Like in Europe, labor unions in Buenos Aires are legally required to be affiliated with a political party. As discussed in Chapter 3, the neoliberal political reforms enacted by the Argentine national government throughout the 1980s and 90s were most disadvantageous to the working class and poor sectors of the population. In the context of two major national economic crises, the politicians who had enacted these policies—and their associated political parties—were increasingly perceived as corrupt amongst working

\(^{221}\) Rodriguez and Barbagallo, *MOI: Movimiento en movimiento*, 147.

\(^{222}\) Since the 1990s, the Argentine government has privatized most, although not all, of its residence hotels (known in Buenos Aires as *hoteles familiares*). For more on these hotels, see: Rubén Gazzoli, *Inquilinatos y hoteles de Capital Federal y Dock Sud: Establecimientos, población y condiciones de vida* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1989); and Ernesto Pastrana, *Vivir en un cuarto: Inquilinatos y hoteles en el Buenos Aires actual* (Buenos Aires: Instituto Interacional de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo, 1995).
class populations. The CTA was founded as an alternative to the abundant, yet perceivably corrupt, labor unions of Buenos Aires. Since then, the CTA has carried out many of the same tasks as a labor union, staging public demonstrations, lobbying legislators on workers’ rights issues and providing its members with resources to improve the quality, stability and safety of employment.

MOI is a member organization of the CTA, which has played an important role in the history of the housing organization. In 2000, the CTA and MOI together lobbied and protested the Buenos Aires city legislature for the enactment of Law 341. In 1998, MOI officially changed its membership procedure to require those interested in forming a cooperative to file their requests through the CTA. Prior to this decision, MOI had been approaching populations of families who had been illegally occupying abandoned property. After a series of frustrating setbacks amongst the early membership, MOI decided to change this procedure in order to better identify those families most dedicated, and to otherwise expedite the early stages of the founding the cooperative. Since all new members now must approach MOI through the CTA, an organization that was founded upon its opposition to neoliberalism, MOI’s later cooperatives a more vociferous in their distaste for the government.

That both MOI and the CTA have grown considerably in the context of neoliberal reforms is evidence of an interest amongst the working class and poor populations of Buenos Aires in engaging in activities outside of government programs. As discussed earlier, Karen Ann Faulk has observed in her study of workers’ cooperatives in Buenos Aires that the “logic of cooperativism relies upon a discourse of corruption to delegitimize the cultural

\[223\] Law 341 is more fully discussed in chapter 3, full text and translation of this legislation can be found in Appendix 1.
conceptions implicit in neoliberalism as applied in Argentina.”[224] Importantly, Faulk’s article concluded that the shift towards disbelief in public programs “opens a space for the emergence of new and revitalized conceptions of work and the citizen.”[225] The shift away from the pseudo-Keynesian public industry and housing of the Perón era in favor of a neoliberal system that privileges the individual and private enterprise has caused a significant shift in the class politics of labor in Buenos Aires. In previous decades, the government furnished class identity through work and housing. With the mass privatizations that occurred since the 1990s, identity construction amongst the working class has changed to privilege the individual.[226]

MOI cooperatives, however, are a collective solution to the low-cost housing shortage initiated through neoliberal political reforms. As a resistance movement, MOI proposes that while neoliberal politics have left families to locate, or create, housing on their own, the solution to Buenos Aires’ housing problems can be achieved through collective means. On one hand, the collective entity of the cooperative exhibits many of the fundamental ideological tenets of neoliberalism: entrepreneurialism and interaction with the free markets. On the other hand, MOI relies upon, and perpetuates, a disdain of a neoliberal government that has, in fact, left many families without adequate shelter, in order to provide animus to their cause. The expansion of the villas miserias remains a symbol of neoliberalism’s negative effects upon the city’s poor. It is this stark contrast—between the inadequate living conditions of the informal settlements, largely considered a symptom of neoliberalism, and

[224] Faulk, 579.

[225] Ibid.

[226] Neoliberalism’s privileging of the individual has been theoretically explored within Harvey: A Brief History of Neoliberalism; Laura Tedesco, Democracy in Argentina: Hope and Disillusion (London: frank Cass, 1999); and Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnson, eds., Neoliberalism, A Critical Reader (London: Pluto Press, 2005).
MOI’s new housing cooperatives as imagined counter-logic to the political ideology—MOI members have relied upon when designing and building their new home.

**Design-Build: Education and Self-Construction at *El Molino***

The architectural forms, construction processes and the materials used in the building of *El Molino* rely on the contrast between the ever-growing *villas misería* and other occupations of buildings in Buenos Aires. Through their collective purchase of the old flour mill, the families emerged as consumers within an environment from which they were previously excluded. Joining middle- and upper-class property owners, the cooperative established a legitimate, legal presence in the *barrio* of Constitución, which immediately established the group as different from other poor families in the city.

This contrast was continued through the design of their new home, which aesthetically presented an identity of the cooperative as more similar to the individual apartments of the working and middle classes, a strategy previously used in the construction of public housing in Buenos Aires. Although visually different from squatter settlements and building occupations, the self-construction of *El Molino* required building processes only similar to the *villas*. In order to reduce building costs, *El Molino* relied on both self-construction and recycling, two activities closely associated with the building of informal settlements. In order to carry out these activities, however, the families relied on MOI advisors to educate the group, providing training in construction, materials processing, as well as design and management. This education is the process through which the poor families that joined *El Molino* were transformed from the poor to the ranks of the working class. The cooperative’s value of education is strongly reflected in the plans for *El Molino*, as
well as throughout the design and constructions processes, which resemble the university architectural model of the design/build studio.

Since the property in Constitución had already been selected for the new cooperative, the first task the group had to manage was their application for a government-endorsed, collective home loan. Thanks largely to MOI’s advisory team, which had already helped Cooperative La Fábrica to do the same previously, and real estate prices that had plummeted after the 2001-02 economic crisis, the loan was approved and the property signed over to the cooperative with few complications. The first stage in the establishment of El Molino was complete, and thanks to the expedience of the cooperative’s founding and purchase the families had completed the first step in their transformation from the poor.

With the old flour mill in possession of the cooperative, architect Sergio Molina led the families through the process of designing the new home. Throughout this process, Molina led weekly meetings with the families and other MOI advisors. At these meetings, families voiced concerns and preferences as the architect and his students from the University of Buenos Aires made adjustments to the scheme. Rather than being organized as a sort of architect-client consultation, these meetings more closely resembled a design-build studio in the university setting. Molina was the professor. He explained to the families why (or why not) certain decisions had to be made. All of the families learned about the limitations of finances, building materials and construction methods, and for the most part, considered Molina’s lessons when making suggestions.

---

227 I observed these meetings periodically throughout 2009. By the time I had arrived, the plans for all four stages of construction at the site of El Molino were completed, but nearly each week brought a new set of changes to both the building and the cooperative’s plans. Even when I left Buenos Aires in June 2010, Molina was still leading his weekly design meetings as work continued at the site.
As is the case with all MOI cooperatives, minimizing building expenses was a priority for *El Molino*. Finances weren’t the only limitation with which Cooperative *El Molino* was forced to cope. Although the purchase of the old factory was a relatively smooth process, since 2003 the cooperative experienced one setback after another. For example, government backing for subsequent loans to help pay for building materials had been stalled for most of 2006 and 2007. Government building inspectors expecting bribes placed holds on construction activities periodically throughout 2008, 2009 and 2010. Regardless of limitations, however, each of the members in attendance at design meetings appeared to take an active role in the process of planning the design and construction of the new home. Some wanted to help Molina and the architecture students with the drawings (figs. 5.3-4), while others took charge of planning material deliveries or work schedules. Since they all were required to be involved throughout the construction of the massive new cooperative, the families were most concerned about the building processes the designs would require.

The interest in construction processes was not an interest in making construction as simple as possible for the sake of accommodating a group of unskilled laborers, however. The group certainly wanted to be sure to put to use the speediest construction processes available, in order to allow the families to move into their new homes more quickly. The urgency the families voiced for speedy construction was tempered, however, by the group’s desire to build a new cooperative that visually reflected the identity transformation the families had imagined for themselves. If the aesthetic qualities of the new designs required the families to learn a more sophisticated building technique, then they were willing to invest the time and effort in order to do so.

Looking to the elevations of apartments built along *El Molino*’s central courtyard (figs. 5.1 and 5.3), the more sophisticated building techniques that the families elected to
learn to build can be viewed in their inclusion of cantilevered balconies. A simpler form of balcony would have simply recessed the apartment’s exterior wall. Yet, a such a recessed balcony would not have been exposed to the natural light of afternoon sun in the same way as these extended cantilevers are now. Thanks to the instruction of Sergio Molina and his students from the University of Buenos Aires, as well as other MOI advisors who work with *El Molino’s* workers cooperative, the families who built the balconies had to learn the engineering principals that allowed for the extension of a cantilever in order to appropriately construct this space. Although a luxury which could have been discarded, the cooperative agreed that the natural light and outdoor space provided by the balconies would make the apartments more pleasant residences. Although they lacked financial capital to hire specialists to come and install these architectural elements, the families invested both time and effort in order to enhance the comfort afforded to them through their new home.

The elevations of these apartments likewise reflect the manners in which these families imagined their identity transformation from urban poor populations having to cope with the cramped and rundown living conditions of government residence hotels to working class citizens through the self-construction of their new home. Similar to the other cooperatives examined throughout this dissertation, the architectural forms of *El Molino* are a patchwork of references to other housing types specific to Buenos Aires. Like public housing, as well as other apartment dwellings throughout the city, the individual units of each apartment accommodate a single, nuclear family, and unlike their former dwellings in the *boteles inquilinatos*, each are equipped with a bathroom, a kitchen, a living/dining room, as well as one, two or three dormitories. Like the *conventillos*, the central courtyard is appropriate to the Buenos Aires climate, and continues the vernacular of the region. Not unlike the manner in which the courtyard was strategically
included in the plans for Cooperative *Yatay*, this courtyard, allows for surveillance of activities amongst neighbors. Additionally similar to Cooperative *La Fábrica*, the families of *El Molino* have elected leave certain reminders of the building’s industrial past. At *El Molino*, this souvenir is in the form of the old chimney.

Aesthetically, none of the architectural elements of *El Molino* resemble those of the *villas miseria*. Yet, in the self-construction of their dwelling these families engage in the same tactics used in the *villas* to limit building costs. Augmented by training gained from MOI architects and advisors, the space of *El Molino* is the symbol of a new entrepreneurialism in Buenos Aires. Although self-construction certainly draws close ties between the *villas* and the cooperative, it is the additional education that these families receive that distinguishes this building type from the informal settlement, which in turn serves in the transformation of these poor families into working class citizens.

This penchant for education has shown through in the final plans for the entire cooperative. Aside from the one hundred apartments included within the plan for *El Molino*, the group made the important decision and had agreed to take the financial responsibility for the construction of a workshop to house the MOI workers’ cooperative, a nursery school and an adult education center which provides training for other self-managed initiatives (figs. 5.5-8). The nursery school and workshop were the first two spaces to be completed in 2008. With childcare and workshop equipment installed, MOI members were better able to gain valuable training through the construction of their new home. Likewise, both the workshop and the nursery school offered small work opportunities to the members, as the services provided, and materials produced within these spaces were made available to the outside community.
The families’ interest in not only designing and building a new home, but in taking on the burden of additionally including these additional educational spaces indicates a deepened shift in class politics. Not only have these poor families shifted attitudes towards government programs, but also they are now investing time, money and energy in learning. These three education centers serve three diverse groups of students: young children, workers, and undereducated adults. In order to build these spaces, the families of El Molino must be good students. After the construction at El Molino is completed, however, they will become teachers. Through the construction of these peripheral spaces, they manifest their transformation of identity, from poor to working class, from students to teachers, from helpless to helpful, in both physical and social terms.

Rebuilding: Recycling and Adaptive Reuse
The process of taking the old derelict factory, physically dismantling its components and up-cycling it into a large, new housing cooperative mirrors the manner in which MOI’s construction processes have participated in a shifting of class politics in the Buenos Aires. By providing new resources for poor families who had been left in stagnant situations of poverty, MOI has created a new opportunity for these families to deconstruct their former class identities, making improvements using a set of newly acquired skills, to ultimately construct a new identity as a part of a new, collective, entrepreneurial working class.

Even before the plans for El Molino were finalized, the cooperative began its first task in the construction of their new apartment blocks: the demolition of the old factory. To reduce building costs, the plans for the new apartments have incorporated as much of the original factory as possible. The original chimney and façade remain as symbols of the
building’s past and the original steel supports will remain intact (figs. 5.9-10). Rather than constructing new exterior walls for the apartments facing the cooperative’s courtyard, the organization cut new windows into existing walls, which were reinforced, repaired and resurfaced with plaster. The cooperative extended existing interior spaces to the outdoors through cantilevered balconies. Materials stripped from the original building were either saved, recycled, or sold for scrap (figs. 5.11-13).

The recycling of spaces and materials at the site of *El Molino* symbolizes a significant shift in class politics in Buenos Aires. In this city, neither the government nor any other waste management company offers recycling services to the city’s residents. With households throwing away materials such as aluminum, plastic and cardboard in the garbage—raw materials that scrap yards and material production industries will purchase by the kilogram—a population of the city’s poor come out at night to dig through garbage bags and collect recyclables to sell. This is a dirty job, and these *cartoneros* (cardpaper people) are the visible public face of recycling in the city. As a result of this practice, which only began after the neoliberal reforms of Carlos Menem of the 1990s and the economic crisis of 2001-02, recycling is now socially associated with extreme poverty and filth.

The recycling that has been carried out at *El Molino* is not entirely different from that which is conducted nightly by the *cartoneros*. Like their nocturnal counterparts, MOI members collect, sort and process the materials for either reuse or sale. Also like the

---

*cartoneros*, who also keep bits of materials found in garbage bags to use to build their ramshackle dwellings in the *villas miserias* (squatter settlements), MOI uses these materials for the purpose of the self-construction of their own homes.

What sets MOI apart from the *cartoneros*, however, is class mobility. As illegitimate squatters living in the *villas*, the cartoneros have little access to hygiene and education and rely on recycled materials for mere survival. As the collective owners of the property in Constitución, however, Cooperative *El Molino* have taken their values of hard work and home building and established a legitimate presence within their community. This legitimacy, and with the assistance of MOI advisors, has opened up greater opportunities for these families to create and access support networks, education and vocational training. This training has given the families the ability to not simply recycle the materials and spaces of the old flourmill, but to up-cycle the old into new again.

Due to its association with the *cartoneros*, the word *reciclaje* (recycling) is not often purported as a valuable practice within the polluted city center of Buenos Aires. For example, than encouraging families to waste less, the city’s waste management company appeals to soccer fanatics with the slogan, “*juga limpia*” (play clean). Conversely, MOI has re-appropriated the word and up-cycled it within the materials its advisors has published, including its book edited by María Carla Rodríguez and published in 2004.

The final step in this process is the physical construction of the cooperative (figs. 5.14-18). Frustratingly, bureaucratic hiccups and government confusion have delayed the completion of *El Molino*. However slowly progress is made at the building site, the work and training conducted at *El Molino* are the two most powerful catalysts to the shifts in class politics that are being instigated through MOI.
Due to its size, the construction of *El Molino* was divided into four phases. The construction process at *El Molino* is no different from that carried out at other sites, including Cooperatives *Yatey, Perú* and *La Fábrica*. For general labor, including tasks such as demolition, pouring new concrete foundations, surface treatments and clean-up, cooperative families all contribute sixteen hours per week. Specialized labor, such as electric and plumbing, is performed by the MOI workers’ cooperative also housed within *El Molino*. The workers’ cooperative is made up of both members of MOI’s various housing cooperatives, as well as others who joined through the CTA. Since the workers’ cooperative is a training program, their services are less expensive than alternatives, but *El Molino* does pay for these specialized services. Through the incorporation of vocational training for members of both cooperatives, and real employment for members of the housing employment, MOI has augmented the educational component of the cooperative-building process to include experience that serves members to obtain employment in the formal market.

To this end, the members of *El Molino* had both the will and access to the resources necessary to create an employment relationship, with members participating in work based on the grounds that this was an opportunity for them to gain valuable formal labor experience. Therefore, this became good training towards incorporating them into the work culture beyond the walls of the cooperative, and to ultimately allow them to become working class.

Their new home, once completed, both affirms and ensures the continuation of the shift in class politics initiated through MOI. Neoliberal political policies, which privilege the individual, initially assumed the best solution to low-cost housing shortages would be achieved through the independent actions of citizens or individual families. Yet, MOI cooperatives make an argument for the value of collective effort within this system. Thus,
MOI has served to reshape the physical environment of the neoliberal city through the construction of its cooperatives, while simultaneously reshaping the ideological space therein by illustrating how collective action can be more effective than that of the individual. The collective ownership of the property ensures that the families will have a legitimate place to reside within the city. As examined throughout previous chapters, the architectural forms of this home serve to formally establish this group as a part of the working class. The community fostered through the collective purchase, design, demolition and construction of El Molino likewise provides to sustain individual cooperative members and families as important components to the success of the group as a whole. Furthermore, the educational, employment and leadership opportunities offered through the workshop, adult education center and nursery school strive to offer these opportunities to the outside community.

MOI’s impact on the whole of Buenos Aires is demonstrably small, however. El Molino is one of only ten cooperatives. As of June 2010, only 5 of those ten had begun construction, and only one completed. Each cooperative takes at least a decade to complete, if not longer, leaving families to live in transitory housing at MOI’s home base, at construction sites or in other buildings that MOI has rented from the government for temporary housing.

These delays are typically the result of complications having to do with government. At some point in time, city building inspectors expecting a bribe have halted construction activities at all five of MOI’s building sites. Additionally, MOI relies on the government’s endorsement of loans for the purchase of building materials and property. Complications in the processing of loan applications, as well as the transfer of money from the banks to the cooperative have additionally cost the cooperatives valuable time. At times, cooperative members have caused significant delays in construction efforts themselves. For instance, in
May 2010 one of the families living in Cooperative Perú took pity on another homeless family and invited them to stay a night of two in a part of the building being prepared for demolition to get them out of the cold. After spending just a few days in the cooperative, the families refused to leave. City laws left police helpless to remove the family who were not threatening danger to any one in the cooperative. The alien family remained for two weeks, postponing all construction activities throughout their stay.

As a builder of new low-cost housing, MOI has not single-handedly instigated this recent shift in class politics in Buenos Aires. Through their role in the establishment of Law 341, however, the impact of this organization has been much more wide reaching. Thanks to this legislation, a new movement in the establishment of cooperative organizations has gained momentum over the course of the past twenty years. Aside from initiatives in housing, Law 341 has allowed groups like the Fábrica sin Patrones (Factory without Bosses, or FaSinPat) to purchase old factories to start new cooperative industrial enterprises.

Interestingly, other social organizations in Buenos Aires, such as the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo have also gotten involved in the construction of new housing cooperatives, as well.229 As a movement, consisting of a series of non-governmental organizations and the membership of each, the shift in class politics initiated through such groups is much more widespread.

As such this study of MOI is a case study in the manners in which these non-governmental organizations in Buenos Aires are influencing notable shifts in the class politics of labor through their interventions with the existing built environment of Buenos Aires...

229 The Madres are a group of mothers whose children went missing during Argentina’s Dirty War (1976-83). Their organization was originally founded to expose the genocidal atrocities of the Dirty War and to find the children stolen throughout the time. The recent interest of such social organizations in the production of low-cost housing was recently investigated within: Mariano Scheinsohn and Cecilia Cabrera, “Social Movements and the Production of Housing in Buenos Aires: When Policies are Effective,” Environment and Urbanization 21 (2009): 115.
Aires. In essence, the involvement of poor families throughout the founding, planning and
collection of new cooperative homes and newly functioning factories has not only
changed the shape of the neoliberal city, but has transitioned portions of the poor
population to join the ranks of the working class. The history behind these five cooperatives
tells the tale of an extraordinary struggle for the 200 families of MOI’s five cooperatives
under construction. Yet, the end goal is an existence that may only be categorized as
ordinary: a humble home, a working-class job and access to public education, health services
and transportation.
5.1 MOI, Cooperative El Molino north wing (stage 1 construction) elevation and future adult education center, 2008 (photo by author)
No rendirse
Darle duro por el derecho al techo, al trabajo. No aceptar la marginalidad, la expulsión. Nunca. Nunca. Es la respuesta del MOI-CTA. Martín Fedele cuenta como es eso de ser un no rendido.

Encuentro por la Constituyente Social en Córdoba
Autonomía y construcción de poder popular. La cita será en Jujuy el 24 y 25 de octubre. Así se consagra la voluntad manifestada en dos Congresos Nacionales de la CTA.

Vivir en la calle
5.3 MOI, presentation panel displaying plans for Cooperative El Molino, Buenos Aires (image courtesy of José Barbagallo)
5.4 MOI, Cooperative El Molino elevation for adult education center (stage 4 of construction), Buenos Aires (image courtesy of José Barbagallo)

5.5 Equipment inside MOI workers’ cooperative workshop, Cooperative El Molino, Buenos Aires, 2008 (photo by author)
5.6 Equipment inside MOI workers’ cooperative workshop, Cooperative El Molino, Buenos Aires, 2008 (photo by author)

5.7 MOI, Cooperative *El Molino Jardín de Infantes* (nursery school), 2008 (photo by author)
5.8 MOI, Cooperative *El Molino Jardín de Infantes* (nursery school), 2008 (photo by author)

5.9 (left) MOI, Cooperative *El Molino* exterior elevation (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)
5.10 (right) MOI, Cooperative *El Molino* original chimney from flour mill (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)
5.11 MOI, Cooperative El Molino southern wing (phase 3 of construction) photo showing sorted piles of raw building materials for recycling and sale, 2009 (photo by author)

5.12 MOI, Cooperative El Molino, exposed steel supports preserved for use in construction of new apartments, 2008 (photo by Kristin Dean)
5.13 MOI, Cooperative El Molino southern wing (phase 3 of construction) photo showing sorted piles of raw building materials for recycling and sale, 2009 (photo by author)

5.14 The pouring of the foundations of El Molino, 2004 (photo courtesy of José Barbagallo)
5.15 Construction at El Molino, 2008 (photo courtesy of the CTA)

5.16 Construction at El Molino, 2008 (photo courtesy of the CTA)
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

MOI Cooperatives, Extraordinarily Ordinary
MOI Cooperatives, Extraordinarily Ordinary

Una fábrica es símbolo y sinónimo de historia obrera. En una realidad donde las fábricas fueron, desde hace varias décadas, cerrando una a una, nuestro proyecto de El Molino es no solo un orgullo, sino también una continuidad en la lucha y resistencia que, en diferentes épocas y de muy distintas formas, va tejiendo otra historia, nuestra historia.

[A factory is a symbol of, and a synonym for the history of workers. In a reality where the factories have been closed, one by one, over the course of several decades, our project at El Molino is not only a source of pride, a continuation of the fight, which in different eras and very distinct forms, but also is beginning to give shape to another history, our history.]

-Néstor Jeifetz, MOI President, speaking on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of Cooperative El Molino (18 November 2007).

This statement by Néstor Jeifetz illustrates the organization’s cognizance of its emergence from the symptoms of neoliberal political policies, including the closing of factories throughout Buenos Aires. This statement does not laud the organization for making great contributions in terms of architectural style, or for achieving great feats of engineering. In fact, this statement only refers to the structure of El Molino in its original form, a factory, an ordinary and otherwise commonplace architectural type. Rather, Jeifetz draws attention to the extraordinary fight through which MOI members constructed their new home. Jeifetz’s words indicate that by emerging within the context of the neoliberal city, MOI advisors and members feel a sense of pride in believing that these cooperatives have contributed to a new history, wherein the poor emerge as figures capable of enacting meaningful changes upon the built environment.

This dissertation has sought to analyze MOI cooperatives as a subject within the broader history of architecture, both within Buenos Aires and in the context of similar shifts elsewhere. By analyzing the forms, styles and spaces of MOI cooperatives within the context of neoliberal Buenos Aires, this dissertation has identified the manners in which new forms

230 Rodríguez and Barbagallo, MOI: Movimiento en movimiento, 146.
of political and economic governing were motivating factors in shifting attitudes towards low-cost housing, urban space, the architectural profession, and how these changes have correspondingly elucidated new attitudes towards the identity of the working poor. Revealing an admittedly smaller, yet cogent alternative response to the conditions resulting from the appearance of neoliberal political policies, this investigation has served to broaden the definition of the neoliberal city to include the spaces and forms generated by MOI advisors and members.

Chapter 2 placed MOI cooperatives within the historical context of housing production in Buenos Aires through the comparison of Cooperative Perú and three examples of low-cost housing in the region: tenement dwellings, public housing and squatter settlements. This comparison revealed that MOI Cooperatives, in fact, are a patchwork amalgam of elements from each of the three antecedents studied. Like the casa chorizo, Cooperative Perú has inherited the long, narrow footprint of its predecessor. The new cooperative likewise takes on the spirit of collaboration and multi-family dwelling from tenement dwelling, while avoiding the unhygienic and crowded living conditions of the older type. Similar to the public housing constructed under the administration of Juan Perón, Cooperative Perú is a multi-family dwelling, composed of individual apartments equipped to accommodate the nuclear family. Unlike public housing, however, MOI carefully selected its current location in the barrio of San Telmo, nearer to the city center, and with better access to public transportation, health services and education. Perhaps surprisingly, this cooperative is additionally like the precarious dwellings of the villas misería as both types are constructed by their residents. Self-construction is an entrepreneurial activity, through which the homeless are transformed into the housed, and poor MOI families are transformed into the working poor.
Similar to Nancy Stieber’s study of the early history of public housing in Amsterdam, this chapter noted that throughout the history of housing in Buenos Aires, a series of actors have played varying roles in the formulation of low-cost housing: government, architects and citizens. The interactions of these three distinct groups reveal evolving attitudes towards low-cost housing as reflections of concepts of a public good, and the perceived roles of government, architects and citizens in formulating an appropriate solution to both real and perceived social ills. The comparison of Cooperative Perú to these antecedents served to reveal that the history of low-cost housing in Buenos Aires has been a revisionist history, with successive housing types seeking to correct the shortfalls of antecedents. Through the identification of how these housing types have been placed within the city, this chapter further identified how the class politics so closely aligned with low-cost housing production manifested in spatial terms. The comparative analyses presented throughout Chapter 2 have amended the existing grand narrative surrounding the history of housing in Buenos Aires, specifically, and worldwide, in general terms, to include more recent developments within the field of low-cost housing production in the context of world governments’ withdraw from public housing programs.

Having established how MOI cooperatives can be understood as a revision to the conditions and limitations of previous examples of low-cost housing, Chapter 3 identified why this particular housing type, the self-built housing cooperative, emerged when it did. This investigation argued that MOI cooperatives are both a product of, and a mediator for, transformations to the urban landscape of Buenos Aires after the emergence of neoliberal political policies beginning in the 1970s. While the neoliberal policies enacted in Argentina sought to grow Argentina’s presence within world markets, policies which tampered with the nation’s currency value and the government’s privatization of state-run industry resulted in
the abandonment of industrial space in southern parts of Buenos Aires, stimulated rural-to-urban migration and immigration from neighboring countries, while increasing the unemployment rate and decreasing average earnings. These conditions led to a low-cost housing shortage in the city and an even more visible presence of growing poor populations within the city.

Through the example of Cooperative Yatay, Chapter 3 illustrated how the design for this new home emerged as a product of the conditions resulting from these neoliberal policies. Located in the industrial barrio of Barracas, this cooperative was built from an old casa chorizo that was abandoned in the wake of Argentina’s privatization program. Through its architectural form, Cooperative Yatay sought to confront conditions that negatively affected the city’s poor population by integrating cooperative members into the building’s immediate community. For instance, the individual apartments of Cooperative Yatay line a central courtyard that opens to the street. This arrangement engenders surveillance, where community members can easily view the activities of the cooperative within, and cooperative members can view the activities of other cooperative members as well as neighbors from their windows.

The tactics through which Cooperative Yatay confronted the growing poverty of Buenos Aires within the neoliberal city differed greatly from those employed in other concurrent transformations to the built environment in Buenos Aires. For example, the shopping mall was a new building type that emerged beginning in 1990. The architectural forms of these capitalist citadels confronted the city’s increasing poverty through exclusion by limiting entrance portals and positioning hired security guards near each. By comparing Cooperative Yatay to other building types that appeared within the space of the city at the same time, Chapter 3 argued that while changes all shared a common consciousness of the
city’s growing impoverishment, the strategies employed to address these concerns differed greatly according to the economic class of those the spaces were built to serve. By interjecting MOI cooperatives into the discussion of Buenos Aires, this chapter effectively broadened the definition of the neoliberal city.

Studies of the effects of neoliberalism upon urban space, including Jason Hackworth’s study of cities in the United States, Robin Visser’s investigation of urban centers in China and Manish Chalana’s analysis of proposals for new building projects in Mumbai, characterize the neoliberal city as a space that over time has opened up further space to massive corporate structures while disadvantaging previous poor populations. In Buenos Aires, Emanuela Guano observed that the same form of urban transformation—in the form of the towering skyscraper that large transnational corporations built in the barrio of Puerto Madero—has, in fact, occurred within the space of neoliberal Buenos Aires. Amending the existing history of neoliberal cities, this dissertation has identified the small-scale construction of MOI cooperatives as a second, yet notable, building type that has emerged within this space.

Throughout the twentieth century, governments and architects worked together to produce public housing for the poor. Within the neoliberal city, however, governments have elected to withdraw from previous roles in the production of low-cost housing, opting for the role of mediator rather than provider. Yet, as seen throughout this study of MOI, within this same context of the neoliberal city architects have freely elected to remain actors within this field, but this time working directly with housing recipients.

---


Chapter 4 looked into the history of architecture and architectural theory in the region, asserting that MOI Cooperative La Fábrica stands as physical evidence of shifts in attitudes towards, and within the architectural profession. This investigation identified architectural theories written by Latin American architects, Marcos Winograd’s *Arquitectura ciudad* (1969) and Ramón Guttierez’s *Modernidad apropiada*, which have inspired not only the forms of this cooperative, but also the architects’ involvement within MOI. For example, Marcos Winograd argued that architecture must recognize its role as an integral part of the environment of the city. According to Winograd, architects must maintain a sense of reverence towards the city, and its specific history, because architecture can either accommodate or interrupt the daily tasks of city dwellers. Chapter 4 illustrated how MOI architects integrated a series of architectural references into designs for La Fábrica, ranging from the retained factory façade to the courtyard taken from the Argentine vernacular for domestic residences to the single-family apartment dwellings of public housing, in effort to create a space that can be recognized as a home, while simultaneously referring to the site’s history as a space of industrial production. This chapter brings attention to these more recent Argentine architectural theories, which are rarely mentioned in architectural historical texts, while illustrating how these theories have served to influence form and production in the region.

Chapter 5 analyzed how Cooperative *El Molino* provides evidence of the manners in which MOI members are transformed from poor squatters to working class consumers and producers through their participation throughout MOI’s design and construction processes. Tracing the history of *El Molino*, this chapter asserted that each stage in the construction of this cooperative engaged the existing class politics of neoliberal Buenos Aires, seeking to transform the identity construction of MOI members along each step. For instance, with the
members’ dedication to the cooperative’s mortgage, the families of *El Molino* entered the Argentine financial markets as consumers, an activity from which individual families would have been excluded if attempted alone. Looking to the plans of *El Molino*, this chapter found that the families not only designed housing that visually communicated their intended shift in class identity, but also integrated facilities—such as a nursery school, an adult education center, and a workshop for MOI’s workers’ cooperative—which would ensure the continuation of this transformation of class identity for both cooperative members and other members of the surrounding community. Through the construction of their own home, these families learned new trades, which for some have led to employment opportunities beyond the cooperative. This work, in essence, transformed these poor families into working class.

This dissertation sheds an optimistic light on MOI cooperatives within the otherwise grim space of the neoliberal city. While MOI cooperatives emerge as a creative alternative in low-cost housing, the work of this organization certainly has its limits. In a city where hundreds of thousands of families live in the slums, the relative impact of MOI cooperatives as a correction to the existing housing shortage is small, to say the least. Since MOI’s processes rely entirely on the active involvement of its members, the self-constructed housing cooperative is not an appealing option for everyone. Yet another limitation of this organization is that MOI relies on the contribution of architects and other professionals who receive little (if any) compensation for their work. The public-private partnerships engendered by Law 341 have opened new avenues for MOI cooperatives, and other housing organizations, to better help those in need of housing. Yet the government bureaucracy, particularly within a developing nation, slows construction to a snails pace, leaving families living in transitory housing for years.
This dissertation does not argue that MOI cooperatives are the penultimate solution for low-cost housing. Like its antecedents, this housing type comes along with its own set of shortfalls and limitations. This dissertation does offer an amendment to the standing body of literature discussing the effects of neoliberalism on the built environment. Texts ranging from David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* and Jason Hackworth’s *The Neoliberal City* were published at moments much nearer to the emergence of the political ideology. These authors, among others are critical of neoliberalism for the manners in which it unevenly presents advantages to the wealthy while deepening disadvantages to the poor. This dissertation acts as counterbalance to this literature. With the perspective of a few more years, this investigation has found that, at least in Buenos Aires, neoliberal political policies have come to consider manners in which the neoliberal faith in entrepreneurialism can negotiate the need for governments to accommodate the public good. Through the example of MOI cooperatives, this dissertation illustrates what I have called a third stage in the history of neoliberalism. These cooperatives stand as physical evidence of this third stage, wherein governments emerge as mediators in the production of low-cost housing by creating a public-private partnership with non-governmental organizations. As a result some of the assertions made in criticism of neoliberalism, even those criticisms made by MOI architects themselves, ought to be reconsidered in a new light. This dissertation has attempted to do just that.
Map 1, The Barrios of Buenos Aires, 2010 (map courtesy of Gobierno de Ciudad de Buenos Aires)
Map 2 – The barrios of Buenos Aires, indicating the location of MOI cooperatives (map by author using UMapper and Google Maps technologies)

Key:
1. Cooperative *La Unión*
2. Cooperative *Perú*
3. Cooperative *Yatay*
4. Cooperative *La Fábrica*
5. Cooperative *El Molino*
6. Cooperative *La Fortaleza* (currently in stages of demolition)

Map 3, MOI Cooperatives in San Telmo, 2010 (map by author using UMapper)
Blue markers indicate MOI cooperatives *Perú* (left) and *La Unión* (right). The pink marker added to this map indicates the location of Ex-PADELAI.
Map 4 – Map of Buenos Aires illustrating railroad lines converging at the docks in Buenos Aires built between 1873-1909 (from Scobie, *Buenos Aires, From Plaza to Suburb*)
Map 5 - Informal settlements in the Province of Buenos Aires (map courtesy of Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires)
APPENDIX B – LAW 341

Ley 341 de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires año 2000 y su modificación del año 2003, Ley 964.

Law 341 of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, year 2000 and its modification of the year 2003, Law 964

Buenos Aires, 24 de febrero de 2000

Buenos Aires, 24 February 2000

La Legislatura de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires sanciona con fuerza de Ley

The Legislature of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires sanctions with force of Law

Artículo 1°.- El Poder Ejecutivo, a través de la Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, instrumentará políticas de acceso a vivienda para uso exclusivo y permanente de hogares de escasos recursos en situación crítica habitacional, asumidos como destinatarios individuales o incorporadas en procesos de organización colectiva verificables, a través de cooperativas, mutuales o asociaciones civiles sin fines de lucro, mediante subsidios o créditos con garantía hipotecaria.

Article 1 – The Executive power, through the Municipal Housing Commission, will implement policies of access to housing for exclusive and permanent use of households with limited resources in critical housing situations, who will take on the role of individual or incorporated recipients in processes of verifiable collective organization, through the means of cooperatives, mutual groups, or non-profit civil institutions, by means of subsidies or loans with mortgage guarantees.

Artículo 2°.- Se considerará "hogar" al grupo de personas, parientes o no, que vivan bajo un mismo techo, de acuerdo con un régimen familiar, compartiendo gastos de alimentación. Quienes viven solos constituyen un hogar.

Article 2 – A household will be considered a group of persons, related or not, that live below the same roof, in accordance with a daily familial routine, sharing expenses of food. Those who live alone constitute a household.

Artículo 2° bis.- Los beneficiarios deben presentar Documento Nacional de Identidad y acreditar residencia en la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires con una antigüedad no inferior a los 2 (dos) años. (Incorporado por Art. 5° de la Ley N° 964, BOCBA 1606 del 10/01/2003)

Article 2B – The beneficiaries must present their Document of National Identity and proof of residency in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires over the course of a minimum of 2 previous years. (Incorporated in article 5 of Law 964, BOCBA 1606 of January 10, 2003).

Artículo 3°.- Los créditos podrán ser solicitados por:
a. Personas Físicas, para cada hogar.

b. Personas Jurídicas, para cooperativas, mutuales y organizaciones civiles sin fines de lucro, creadas por familias enmarcadas en procesos de organización colectiva verificables, a los efectos de satisfacer la necesidad de vivienda de sus miembros. El financiamiento deberá garantizarse con escritura hipotecaria a favor de la Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda.

c. Integrantes del servicio activo de las Entidades de Bomberos Voluntarios o que hayan logrado el subsidio mensual y vitalicio descripto en el Artículo 14º de la Ley Nº 1240. (incorporado por Art. 18 de la Ley Nº 1240, BOCBA 1863)

Article 3 – Credits can be solicited by:

a. Physical persons, for each household.

b. Juridicial persons (legal representatives), for cooperatives, mutual groups or non-profit civil organizations, created by families involved in processes of verifiable collective organization, to the effects of satisfying its members’ necessity for housing. Financing must be guaranteed with the mortgage deed on behalf of the Municipal Housing Commission.

c. Members of the active service of the Volunteer Firemen Association o that have attained the life-long monthly subsidy and described in Article 14 of Law 1240 (incorporated in article 18 of law 1240, BOCBA 1863)

Artículo 4°.- Los créditos con garantía hipotecaria estarán destinados a financiar total o parcialmente, las siguientes operaciones:

a. compra o construcción de viviendas económica unifamiliar o multifamiliar.

b. compra de vivienda económica unifamiliar o multifamiliar y obras destinadas a ampliación o refacción.

c. obra destinada a ampliación o refacción.

d. compra de edificio y obras destinadas a su rehabilitación.

Article 4 – Credits with mortgage guarantee will be destined to finance totally or partially the following operations:

a. Purchase or construction of low-cost, single- or multi-family housing

b. Purchase of low-cost single- or multi-family housing and works dedicated to the expansion or refurbishment.

c. Work intended for expansion of refurbishment.

d. Building purchase and works associated with its rehabilitation.

Artículo 4° bis.- A todos los efectos, las viviendas que se construyan o refaccionen en el marco de la operatoria dispuesta por la presente Ley deben tener el mismo tratamiento fiscal y arancelario que la operatoria más beneficiosa que desarrolla la Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda a la fecha de sanción de la presente Ley. (Incorporado por Art. 6° de la Ley Nº 964, BOCBA 1606 del 10/01/2003)
Article 4B – To all effects, the housing that is constructed or refurbished under the mark of this present law must have the same fiscal treatment and taxation that most benefits the work at hand as developed by the Municipal Housing Commission at the date of the sanction of the present law (incorporated as article 6 of law 964, BOCBA 1606 of January 10, 2003).

Artículo 5°.- Son beneficiarios de la presente ley, aquellos hogares que hallándose en algunas de las situaciones previstas en el Artículo 1° de la presente, cumplan, los siguientes Requisitos:

a. no sean propietarios de inmuebles aptos ara vivienda.

b. acrediten, mediante los mecanismos que el Poder Ejecutivo determine, no haber recibido indemnización originada en la expropiación por causa de utilidad pública.

c. no hayan sido adjudicatarios de créditos o subsidios para la compra o construcción de vivienda en forma individual o mancomunada en los últimos diez años.

d. No encontrarse el solicitante inhibido para contraer crédito.

Article 5 – Those benefiting from the present law, those households that find themselves in some of the situations described in article 1 of the present, fulfill the following requisites:

a. They are not owners of properties adequate for housing.

b. They prove, through the mechanisms that the Executive Power determines, to not have received compensation originated in the expropriation for the purpose of public utility.

c. They have not been awardees of credits or subsidies for the purchase or construction of housing in individual or jointly held form in the last 10 years.

d. The applicant does not find him/herself inhibited from obtaining credit.

Artículo 6°.- Tendrán prioridad para acceder a los beneficios dispuestos por la presente, los hogares que se encuentren en algunas de las siguientes circunstancias:

a) Pérdida de vivienda a causa de siniestro.

b) Desalojo con sentencia judicial debidamente documentado.

c) Estado de salud de uno de los integrantes del grupo familiar que requiera el cambio de las características de la vivienda.

d) Situaciones de violencia familiar comprobada que pusieren en riesgo la integridad de alguno de los componentes.

e) Habiten inmuebles afectados a obra pública.

f) Familias enmarcadas en procesos de organización colectiva verificables.

g) grupo familiar monoparental con hijos menores de edad.
b) Pareja joven unida por lazos matrimoniales o consensuales con una edad promedio que no supere los 30 años.

i) Ex soldados conscriptos que acrediten su condición de combatientes en el teatro de operaciones de las Islas Malvinas y Atlántico Sur.

j) Integrantes del servicio activo de las Entidades de Bomberos Voluntarios o que hayan logrado el subsidio mensual y vitalicio descripto en el Artículo 14° de la Ley N° 1240. (Inciso jj) incorporado por Art. 18 de la Ley N° 1240, BOCBA 1863)

Article 6 – Households which find themselves in the following circumstances will have priority to access the benefits of the present:

a. Loss of housing as a result of natural disaster.

b. Dislocated as the result of documented judicial mandate.

c. The state of health of one of the family members requires a change in the characteristics of housing.

d. Situations of proven family violence that puts at risk any of the members.

e. Living in buildings affected by public works.

f. Families registered in processes of verifiable collective organization

g. Single-parent families with young children.

h. Young couples united by links of matrimony or mutual consent with an average age of no more than 20 years.

i. Veterans that served in the operations in the Malvinas Islands and South Atlantic.

j. Members in active service of the Voluntary Firemens’ Association that have attained life-long monthly subsidy described in Article 14 of Law 1240 (incorporated in Article 18 of Law 1240, BOCBA 1863)

Artículo 7°.- El monto de los créditos a otorgar no podrá superar la suma de pesos cuarenta y dos mil ($ 42.000) por grupo familiar destinados a financiar desde el 80% hasta el 100% de las operatorias previstas en el Art. 4°. La tasación oficial del bien a adquirir es suministrada por el Banco de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. Facúltase a la autoridad de aplicación de la presente Ley a incrementar el límite establecido en este artículo en aquellos casos en que la variación de la situación económica general o modificaciones a las normativas edilicias vigentes así lo ameriten. (Conforme texto Art. 1° de la Ley Nº 964, BOCBA 1606 del 10/01/2003)

Article 7 – The sum of the authorized credits cannot exceed the sum of forty-two thousand pesos per familial group destined to finance between 80-100% of the works described in Article 4. The official appraisal of the good to be acquired is the responsibility of the Bank of the City of Buenos Aires. In the authority of the application of the present Law, the bank may increase the established limit in this article in those cases in which the variation of the general economic situation or modification to the norms

Artículo 7° bis.- Al momento de reglamentar las condiciones de financiación el Poder Ejecutivo debe adoptar la matriz financiera que obra como Anexo I. Las cuotas cancelatorias de los créditos no deben superar el veinte por ciento (20%) del ingreso total del hogar. (Incorporado por Art. 7° de la Ley Nº 964, BOCBA 1606 del 10/01/2003)
**Article 7B** – At the moment of the regulation of the conditions of financing, the Executive Power must adopt the mastercopy of the financing agreement that works like Anex I. The payments of the debt must not exceed twenty percent (20%) of the total income of the household (Incorporated as Article 7 of Law 964, BOCBA 1606 OF JANUARY 10, 2003)

**Artículo 8°**.- En el marco de las operaciones implementadas por procesos de organización colectiva verificables, a través de cooperativas, mutuales o asociaciones civiles sin fines de lucro, las organizaciones solicitantes deberán acreditar la contratación de los equipos profesionales y/o técnicos interdisciplinarios correspondientes, integrados por profesionales y/o técnicos de las áreas social, contable, jurídica, de la construcción y de cualquier otra área que haga a los fines de la presente Ley. Las solicitudes presentadas para el financiamiento de las operaciones previstas en el Art. 4° incluirán el programa de asistencia técnica interdisciplinaria con definición de metas cuyo cumplimiento en tiempo oportuno será condición necesaria a los fines de las certificaciones correspondientes. (Conforme texto Art. 2° de la Ley N° 964, BOCBA 1606 del 10/01/2003)

**Article 8** - In the operational guidelines implemented by processes of collective, verifiable organization, by mean of cooperatives, mutual groups or non-profit civil associations, soliciting organizations must accredit the contracting of professional teams and/or technical interdisciplinary correspondents, integrated with professionals and/or technicians of the areas of social, accounting, law, construction, and of whatever other area that meets the ends of the present law. The presented solicitations for financing of the works predicted in Article 4 will include the program of interdisciplinary technical assistance with definition of goals which complete in opportune time will be a necessary condition to the ends of corresponding certifications.

**Artículo 8° bis**.- Créase en el ámbito de la autoridad de aplicación el Registro de profesionales y equipos técnicos interdisciplinarios. Todos los profesionales y/o técnicos interesados en asesorar a las diferentes organizaciones, a solicitud de las mismas o por iniciativa propia, deben inscribirse en el presente Registro el cual debe ser de carácter público. La elección de dichos equipos interdisciplinarios es atribución exclusiva de las entidades solicitantes. (Incorporado por Art. 8° de la Ley N° 964, BOCBA 1606 del 10/01/2003)

**Article 8B** - Within the power of the space of the authority of application the Register of professionals and technical interdisciplinary teams. All of the professionals and/or technicians interested in joining the different organizations, at the request of the same or through their own initiative, must inscribe themselves in the present Register which must be available to the public. The selection of said interdisciplinary teams is the exclusive responsibility of the soliciting entitites.”

**Artículos 8° ter.-** La Autoridad de aplicación debe verificar la idoneidad de los profesionales y/o técnicos considerando únicamente sus antecedentes profesionales. Los honorarios correspondientes a los mismos deben ser incluidos en la financiación de la operatoria y no podrán superar en conjunto el 10 % del monto total del crédito destinado a obra. (Incorporado por Art. 9° de la Ley N° 964, BOCBA 1606 del 10/01/2003)

**Article 8C** - The Authority of application must verify the suitability of the professionals and/or technicians considering only their previous professions. The corresponding professional fees must be included in the financing of the work and cannot exceed altogether 10% of the total sum of the credit destined for the work.

**Artículo 9°.-** La Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda aplicará los siguientes criterios en la definición de la solución habitacional para los diferentes beneficiarios: a) Cuando los beneficiarios perciban ingresos mensuales por debajo de la línea de la pobreza, se promoverá la ampliación o refacción de vivienda propia, la compra, construcción u rehabilitación edilicia de vivienda económica en forma colectiva. Podrán disponerse
subsidios cuando fuera indispensable para completar la cuota mensual correspondiente. b) Cuando los beneficiarios percibieran ingresos mensuales y superiores a la línea de pobreza, podrán acceder a los distintos programas considerados en el Art. 4° de la presente Ley.

Article 9 – The Municipal Housing Commission will apply the following criteria in the definition of the housing solution for the different beneficiaries: a) when the beneficiaries perceived monthly income is below the poverty line, the expansion or refurbishment of their own housing, or the purchase, construction or building rehabilitation of low-cost housing in collective form will be promoted. Subsidies can put into place when outside of indispensable in order to complete the corresponding monthly payment. b) When the beneficiaries' perceived monthly income is above the poverty line, they can access those distinct programs considered in Article 4 of the present Law.

Artículo 10º.- Créase en el ámbito de la autoridad de aplicación, la Comisión de Control, Evaluación y Seguimiento de la Operatoria instrumentada por la presente Ley. El Poder Ejecutivo en las disposiciones reglamentarias de la presente norma garantizará la participación de las organizaciones, sólo en calidad de observadoras, en la mencionada Comisión. La misma tendrá por funciones:

a. llevar el registro de quienes reciban o pretendan recibir un subsidio o crédito destinado a financiar el acceso a la vivienda.

b. confeccionar un padrón de antecedentes de los beneficiarios según lo dispuesto en el artículo 2° de la presente Ley.

c. disponer las tasaciones de los inmuebles a través del Banco de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires.

d. disponer el asesoramiento técnico y social a los beneficiarios que así lo requieran.

e. supervisar el cumplimiento del otorgamiento del crédito.

f. establecer las situaciones de prioridad establecidas en el artículo 6° de la presente Ley (Conforme texto Art. 4° de la Ley N° 964, BOCBA 1606 del 10/01/2003)

Article 10 - Within the space of the authority of the application, the Commission of Control, Evaluation and Execution of Production instrumentalized by the present law. The Executive Power in the regulatory disposal of the current rule will guarantee the participation of organization, only in the role of observers, in the mentioned commission. The same will be for the functions:

a. to carry the register of who receives or aspire to receive a subsidy or credit to finance access to housing.

b. to prepare a census of antecedes of the benefits according to that set out in article 2 of the present law.

c. to arrange the appraisal of the properties through the Bank of the City of Buenos Aires.

d. to arrange the technical and social advice to the benefactors as required.

e. to supervise the completion of the authorization of credit.

f. to establish situations of priority established in article 6 of the present law.
**Artículo 11º.**– La autoridad de aplicación debe establecer dentro de los sesenta (60) días de sancionada la presente Ley el conjunto de procedimientos a desarrollarse en el marco de la operatoría estableciendo claramente los plazos máximos de duración de cada etapa. (Conforme texto Art. 3° de la Ley Nº 964, BOCBA 1606 del 10/01/2003)

**Article 11 –** The authority of application must be established within sixty (60) days of the sanctioned present law, the meeting of the procedures of developing in the frame of the work establishing clearly the maximum durations for the periods of each stage.

**Artículo 11° bis.**– La CMV o el organismo que la reemplace debe efectuar anticipos financieros a favor de las entidades previstas en el artículo 3° Inc. b, siempre que el monto total de los mismos no supere el 15% del total determinado para la obra. Los anticipos financieros podrán ser desembolsados a solicitud de la entidad, previéndose su desacopio en forma proporcional a la certificación del cumplimiento de las distintas etapas de obra, conforme plan de trabajos y curva de inversión aprobados. Las mencionadas etapas objeto de certificación comprenderán no sólo el avance físico, sino también la conformidad de las mismas a la normativa edilicia vigente, así como el cumplimiento de las metas sociales comprometidas en el proyecto. (Incorporado por Art. 10º de la Ley Nº 964, BOCBA 1606 del 10/01/2003)

**Article 11B –** The Municipal Housing Authority, or the organization that replaces it, must carry out financing in advance in favor of the entities indicated in article 3, including b, always, with the total sum of the same not exceeding 15% of the total determined for the work. The advance financiers could be paid out at the solicitation of the entity, provided that

**Artículo 11° ter.**– En caso que existiesen incumplimientos por parte de las entidades en la ejecución de los anticipos, el organismo de aplicación debe dar intervención a la Comisión de Control, Evaluación y Seguimiento, la que analizará las causas que produjeron los mismos, así como las alternativas que permitan continuar con el proyecto por parte de la entidad, considerando el principio de conservación del emprendimiento y continuidad de la obra. La autoridad de aplicación establecerá las normas de procedimiento aplicables en los supuestos incumplimientos, en la reglamentación correspondiente. (Incorporado por Art. 11 de la Ley Nº 964, BOCBA 1606 del 10/01/2003)

**Article 11C –** The case incompletions exist on the part of the entities in the execution of the anticipated projects, the organism of application must allow the Commission of Control, Evaluation and Continuation to intervene in the project on the part of the entity, considering first the conservation of the business and continuity of the work. The authority of application will establish the applicable procedural norms in the incomplete supuestos, in the corresponding regulation.

**Artículo 12º.**– En caso de que el grupo familiar se viera afectado por la pérdida temporal de trabajo podrá ser beneficiado con un plazo de gracia de hasta seis meses. Las cuotas que se devengaren en su transcurso, con sus intereses, serán satisfechas a la conclusión del término original, también en cuotas cuyo importe no supere el de la última abonada.

**Article 12 –** In the case that the familial group does not become affected by the loss of time of work, it can be benefited with a forgiveness of up to six months. The share that __, in their transcourse with interests, will be satisfied at the conclusion of the original term, also en payments which do not exceed the last payment.
Artículo 13º.- En los casos de desalojos o pérdidas de la vivienda por desastre natural, el beneficiario tendrá derecho a una solución habitacional transitoria subsidiada total o parcialmente por el Gobierno de la Ciudad, hasta tanto se brinde asistencia financiera destinada a la vivienda definitiva. Este hábitat transitorio será provisto, en tanto existan vacantes, por asociaciones sin fines de lucro dedicadas a la prestación de este tipo de servicios. Dicha situación podrá extenderse por un plazo no mayor a seis (6) meses. Artículo 14º.- Anualmente el Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires deberá fijar en la Ley de Presupuesto la partida correspondiente, a los fines de financiar el cumplimiento de la presente ley.

ANEXO I

Deciles de Ingreso 10 años 15 años 20 años 25 años 30 años

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>10 años</th>
<th>15 años</th>
<th>20 años</th>
<th>25 años</th>
<th>30 años</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexto</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinto</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuarto</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tercero</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segundo</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Conforme texto Art. 7º de la Ley N° 964, BOCBA 1606 del 10/01/2003)


ANEXO I
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Faulk, Karen Ann. “If They Touch One of Us, They Touch All of Us: Cooperativism as a Counterlogic to Neoliberal Capitalism.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 579-614.


Ramírez, Mari Carmen Marcelo Eduardo Pacheco and Adrea Guinta. *Cantos paralelos: La parodia plástica en el arge argentine contemporáneo*. Austin: Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin.


EDUCATION
PhD in Art History, The Pennsylvania State University May 2011
Master of Arts in Art History, University of Oregon June 2006
Bachelor of Arts in Art History, University of Oregon June 2004

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Instructor, The Pennsylvania State University May-August 2008
Teaching Assistant, The Pennsylvania State University August 2006-May 2009
Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon September 2004-June 2006

RECENT AWARDS
January 2010 Susan and Thomas Schwartz Dissertation Fellowship, Pennsylvania State University
August 2009 Department of Art History Dissertation Fellowship, Pennsylvania State University
April 2009 Department of Art History Creative Achievement Award, Pennsylvania State University
December 2008 Waddell Biggart Graduate Fellowship, The Graduate School, Pennsylvania State University
May 2008 Francis E. Hyslop Fellowship, Pennsylvania State University
April 2007 Conference Travel Grant Department of Art History, Pennsylvania State University
September 2006 Graduate School Fellowship for Outstanding Women Scholars, Pennsylvania State University
June 2006 Christine L. Sundt Student Award for Outstanding Service and Leadership, University of Oregon
March 2006 Marion C. Donnelly Graduate Travel Award, Department of Art History, University of Oregon
January 2005 Marion C. Donnelly Conference Travel Grant, Department of Art History, University of Oregon
June 2004 Ina McClung Award for Academic Excellence in Art History, University of Oregon

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS AND LECTURES
“Modern. Factory. Home.: Architectural Form and the Shifting Politics of Poverty with the Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos in Buenos Aires”
“Modern. Factory. Home.: Architectural Form and the Shifting Politics of Poverty with the Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos in Buenos Aires”
   Pennsylvania State University Art History Graduate Symposium, December 2, 2008 [conference honors]
“Yayoi Kusama: Inside Out” University of Oregon Art History Association Symposium, April 21, 2007
“Gordon Matta-Clark: Absence and Presence, Time and Space”
   Pennsylvania State University Art History Graduate Symposium, November 3, 2006.