Distinctive culture: Framing flamenco artistry in Polígono Sur: *El arte de Las Tres Mil* by Dominique Abel

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**ABSTRACT**

This article investigates how artistic, cultural and urban distinctiveness is constructed in Dominique Abel’s film *Polígono Sur: El arte de Las Tres Mil*. The article introduces Abel’s film into a wider debate about the potential of flamenco as a factor of cultural promotion for one of Spain’s most notorious and stigmatized urban areas. Using this wider context as a starting point, the essay deploys Pierre Bourdieu’s writings on distinction and taste to analyze how the *polígono* and flamenco artistry become multilayered points of reference that foster the creation and negotiation of distinctions from different perspectives throughout Abel’s film. Firstly, I attend to the film’s treatment of a concert that is organized as a promotional activity for Polígono Sur. Secondly, by attending to nonverbal performances and practices, I discuss how the film stages flamenco as a form of everyday artistry with relevant historical resonances. Thirdly, I show how the *polígono* emerges as a marker of positive distinction that motivates a specific circulation of affects within the artistic community of Polígono Sur. In sum, this article provides different readings of the ways in which distinctive musical qualities interact dialectically with socioeconomic marginality.

**KEYWORDS**

Flamenco; distinction; Pierre Bourdieu; Polígono Sur; marginality

1964 saw the construction of the first houses of an urban project that is now widely known as a breeding ground of delinquency, drug trade and gang violence: Seville’s Polígono Sur. Located on the southern fringes of the Andalusian capital, this agglomeration consists of roughly six different districts – each with a different name and distinctive urban architecture – that were built to house an already marginal population from other parts of the city (Comité René Cassin 13, 23). Murillo is the most notorious district of the Polígono, consisting of roughly 3000 apartments that were built as part of a social housing program in 1974 and that since then have synecdochically endowed the entire zone with its famous nickname Las Tres Mil Viviendas. Synecdoche, indeed, seems to be a common operation in Seville’s urban imaginary. It is by means of synecdochic associations that Polígono Sur has been transformed into Las Tres Mil in a wider regional and national cultural imaginary,
and also that inhabitants of the Polígono are commonly identified as Gitanos originating from Triana and not from other, less emblematic parts of the city.

In recent years, as part of a project financed by the European Regional Development Fund, local policy makers have sought to find strategies both to improve the area’s urban infrastructure and to counter its negative image (Comité René Cassin 34). Flamenco music has played an important role in this regard. For instance, the Instituto Andaluz de Patrimonio Histórico, in its “Ensayo sobre arquitectura, cohesión social e identidad” (2009), proposed to explore if and how the industrial estate of the Hytasa complex, situated at the eastern flank of the Polígono, could be repurposed to house a flamenco school and other cultural institutions that might improve the area’s cohesion and foster its integration into the rest of Seville’s cultural agenda (85). Furthermore, in 2011, two women developed a tourist route through Polígono Sur where visitors could experience local expressions of flamenco (Díaz Pérez). At the time of writing this article, a multiuse cultural center (Factoría Cultural) has just been inaugurated in a quarter named Martínez Montañés, where the transmission of flamenco will also have a prominent role (Comité René Cassin 44).

Certainly, it is undeniable that flamenco and other cultural activities may operate as stimuli for artistic practice, socialization and the transmission of a shared cultural heritage in the area. It is also known that flamenco offers job opportunities for the population; some artists living in Polígono Sur are successful performing artists in both national and international settings (Gil; Nair, “Vocal” 273). Still, there are a number of complexities attached to the deployment of flamenco as a strategy for cultural promotion. Montserrat Rosa, director of the Plan Integral del Polígono Sur since 2004, sums up some of these problems. As she explains, identifications of the polígono with flamenco have given room to romanticist representations of the area as a breeding ground of musical culture. Such representations have been deemed reductionist by those residents who do not identify with flamenco and who sometimes even despise its subaltern connotations (Rosa). Likewise, if this cultural policy is explicitly directed at creating a more positive imaginary, it may simply not work, since it inevitably activates a set of negative connotations. According to Pedro G. Romero, the fact that flamenco has its origins in decidedly marginal zones of Spain makes it easy to reintroduce it into “ese mismo triángulo imaginario de ‘drogas, gitanos y delincuentes’” that is already one of the principal stigmas attached to the polígono (Romero 160).

Timothy Mitchell has addressed the same issue:

It is no small irony that flamenco, a musical style that began among Spain’s lowest classes and was for years associated with alcoholism and prostitution, should one day be instrumentalized in an attempt to dignify gitanos (or indeed any group). (216)

A further topic of discussion concerns the frequent identification of the polígono population with Triana, which is probably the most emblematic of all Andalusian urban quarters associated with the origins of flamenco (Nair, “Vocal” 269). Many Gitano families were expelled from Triana in the 1960s and some of them were relocated in Polígono Sur. During this period of economic expansion, commonly known in Spain as the desarrollo years (Balfour), a new urban policy was designed to assign cheap housing to marginal areas of the city. This strategy of segregated urban planning, or the modelo sectorial (Comité René Cassin 8; Capel 60–63), subsequent to the 1961 creation of the Ministry of
Housing and its Plan Nacional de la Vivienda, led to the inauguration of polígonos de viviendas in the urban outskirts to lower the costs of social housing. This allowed both the city council and private investors to expropriate highly valuable territory in more centrally located areas (Capel 55–65). Triana, an old, central urban quarter, was one such location. Its population consisted largely of Gitano families who lived together in large corrales de vecinos, groups of small apartments with shared patios that were often badly maintained and had scant sanitary facilities (Lenore; Schwab 354). Prior to these years, housing in Triana had already suffered considerable damage due to repeated flooding of the Tamarguillo, a tributary of the river Guadalquivir: first in 1947, then in 1951 and with especially devastating effects in 1961 (Castillo Guerrero; Comité René Cassin 6). Landlords were able take advantage of these natural events: following the Ley de Arrendamientos Urbanos, originally passed in 1946, many of them declared their properties uninhabitable in the 1950s and 1960s, evicting older tenants without being obliged to pay them any compensation, and selling the properties at a higher profit margin.

At present, local policy makers in Seville have operated on the assumption that the community now living in Polígono Sur has been able to safeguard an old expression of flamenco stemming from Triana, as becomes apparent in the following slogan coined for a local cultural program: Flamenco de atrás pa’lante (Rosa). Yet, as Romero goes on to comment, “No es cierto que los gitanos expulsados de Triana hayan llevado el flamenco a las Tres Mil”. In fact, he adds, the majority of the polígono population originates from other areas in southern Spain, such as Extremadura and Levante, whereas the inhabitants of Triana were relocated piecemeal to different parts of Seville (161). From this viewpoint, then, the presence of flamenco in Polígono Sur should be regarded as the result of multiple migratory flows and cultural influences and cannot be reduced to a unidirectional movement from Triana, across the river Guadalquivir, towards Seville’s marginal south.

This essay will address the polemic regarding the possible functions and values of flamenco in situations of urban exclusion, as outlined above, through a reading of the film Polígono Sur: El arte de Las Tres Mil (2003) by Dominique Abel. Loosely structured as a narrative about the organization of a flamenco concert in homage to a local poet, the film juxtaposes the lives, practices and conversations of a number of members of Seville’s polígono population, some of whom are well known both within the flamenco community and beyond: Rafael and Diego Amador, singers Juana la del Revuelo and Vareta, guitarist Emilio Caracafé and many others. Abel’s film is a relevant and widely known document among flamenco aficionados, mainly because it registers an array of informal musical performances by a group of acclaimed flamenco artists who had previously never appeared together on screen. Beyond examining its immediate documentary value, however, I set out to read Polígono Sur as a portrait of the area that poses considerable challenges to existing criticism of flamenco as a strategy of cultural dignification. Specifically, I will read Abel’s attention to artistry in the polígono as a way of creating a particular artistic distinctiveness for the zone that opens up perspectives on Seville’s urban history of forced expulsions and on strategies of marginalization. Furthermore, what interests me about the film is the contemporary nature of the problematic that it addresses. After an initial peak in policy making with the assignment of a special commission to the area in 2003 and the creation of the ambitious Plan Integral del Polígono Sur in 2005 and 2006, there has been an ensuing decline in public investment since the start of the economic
crisis in 2008, and many construction and other projects have been temporarily sus-
pended. At any rate, it is clear that Polígono Sur’s outsider status remains virtually
unchanged in present-day Seville, and the question as to how best to improve its
image is still unresolved (Schwab 112–13).

**Art on the urban outskirts**

Abel’s film is part of a cinematic corpus focusing on the presence of artistry in the housing
projects that were created during the years of *desarrollismo*. Towards the end of the Franco
dictatorship, filmmakers started documenting life in several marginal areas across the
Iberian Peninsula with explicit attention to initiatives on the part of neighborhood associ-
ations conceived as critical interventions into local policies. Of these, Tino Calabuig’s *La
ciudad es nuestra* (1974), a film set to a soundtrack of the flamenco singing of Luis
Marín, documents a series of struggles in outlying urban areas of Madrid. Similarly, *Bell-
vitge! Bellvitge!*(1979) by Julián Álvarez combines snatches of flamenco singing with a
series of interviews so as to voice criticism of the inhospitable infrastructure of Bellvitge,
a *polígono* located in L’Hospitalet de Llobregat in Barcelona where many migrant
workers from Andalusia have lived since 1965. In the same vein, Llorenç Soler’s *Gitanos
sin romancero* (1976) registers the experience of a small group of Gitano families that
had led a marginal life in a self-built shantytown before moving to an agglomeration of
prefabricated homes in Pontevedra between 1971 and 1975. While criticizing the local
government’s failure to take the initiative to create an ongoing dialogue with this popu-
lation, Soler’s film also draws attention to the thorny issue of identity, that is, how distinc-
tive images of gypsiness have historically been performed, constructed and appropriated
by artists, intellectuals and Gitano communities themselves.7

Within the specific context of Seville’s Polígono Sur, Ricardo Pachón’s *Triana pura y pura*
is a documentary film that pays attention to the expulsion of Gitano communities from
Triana; it was reissued in 2013 as a film but is based on the documentary series *El Ángel*
that Pachón made for Televisión Española in 1984. Finally, the recent documentary
*Piratas y libélulas* (2013) by Isabel de Ocampo, about a theater group called Los Shespirs,
composed of a group of adolescents from a secondary school in Polígono Sur, offers
another pertinent reflection on the extent to which art may open up a space for the trans-
mission of social values in a context where children are continuously confronted with
crime and murder. This film offers a meditation on the extent to which artistic practices,
such as the performance of a play inspired by Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, may
provide only momentary relief from the hardships and gang violence that will inevitably
continue to impact Polígono Sur’s inhabitants.

Romero, writing in 2011, has made a rather sweeping statement about the role of fla-
menco in cultural productions about Polígono Sur: “Es una invención el traslado de la gita-
nería, de la alegría, la música y el baile desde Triana a las Tres Mil Viviendas y lleva ya veinte
libros y cuatro películas” (138). Romero dismisses a number of unidentified books and
films, since they offer merely romantic and simplified impressions of the presence of fla-
menco artistry in the area.8 Indeed, Abel’s film has received similar criticism for focusing
excessively on festivity and artistry in Polígono Sur and paying insufficient attention to
internal differences and complexities in the zone (Mora; Pallejà). In what follows,
through a close reading of the film, I will argue that it registers and proposes multiple
ways of viewing the dialectic between artistry and marginality – a point that has been overlooked by previous criticism.

**From artistic to urban distinction**

For the theoretical framework of my analysis, I will draw on Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of distinction and explore its potential not only as a marker of aesthetic taste, but also as a concept that makes visible the relations between artistic quality, on the one hand, and situations of socioeconomic and urban exclusion, on the other hand. According to Bourdieu, distinction is a specific property that operates as an indicator of difference (*Distinction* 5). A crucial way in which distinction comes into being in social space is through aesthetic taste.

Taste, according to Bourdieu, fosters intercommunal connections while also setting up borders between different communities. It is anchored in a specific set of conditions of existence that are socially and economically determined and which he famously dubs *habitus* or lifestyle (Mitchell 24–25). However, Bourdieu considers one’s access to refined aesthetic tastes and patterns of aesthetic production and consumption exclusively within a static scheme of class distinctions (Bennett 3). For instance, for Bourdieu the capacity to consume art in a disinterested manner depends on one’s access to spare time or one’s ability to buy one’s way out of labor time. From this viewpoint, an artistic practice such as playing the piano can prosper only if one possesses stable access to “economic means … and spare time” (*Distinction* 75). Thus, while Bourdieu anchors cultural capital in economic capital, a necessary supplement to his theory is a consideration of how positive cultural distinctiveness may come into being precisely due to the absence of capital in the social and economic domain. If a certain community has no real capacity to choose if it wants to engage in artistic practices instead of carrying out other educational or professional activities, then what is its relation to time? Can one, in such case, still speak of spare time, or of a disinterested relation to art? These questions, in other words, are directed at understanding how positive distinctions in one area are dependent on lack in other areas.

In fact, one may pose similar questions with respect to status and prestige. How should one account for the simultaneous absence of socioeconomic prestige and the presence of widespread artistry? When discussing the tastes of the petite bourgeoisie, Bourdieu comments upon a certain in-betweenness that characterizes both the socioeconomic and aesthetic positions of the middle class (*Distinction* 339). According to this approach, there is a strong correlation between social position and artistic capacity. Conversely, when investigating the dynamics of economic and cultural capital within different segments of the bourgeoisie, Bourdieu notes that cultural capital may be acquired through “early, daily contact with rare, ‘distinguished’ things, people, places and shows” (*Distinction* 265). However, distinguished artistic practices do not only manifest themselves in the upper circles of society. Marginal groups, especially when they endow crucial importance to art and music, also set up many distinctions between pure and degenerate art, between authorities and apprentices and, in the specific case of flamenco, between the traditional and the new (Rosa; Steingress 121–122). What is more, the criteria one deploys to evaluate the distinctiveness of the things one has early and daily contact with may vary across different contexts.
For instance, the distinguished character of certain expressions of flamenco music is often not derived from its success in official circles, but precisely from its marginal, unpolished character.\textsuperscript{10}

If aesthetic distinctions are related in complex ways to the amount of economic, educational and cultural capital possessed by specific segments of the population, then we may also relate distinctive artistic qualities to the position that a particular community occupies within the urban landscape. The extent to which social, cultural and artistic distinctions are related to formations of urban segregation (Marom) is an issue that Romero briefly touches upon when indicating that Las Tres Mil Viviendas in Seville represents an “afuera” in both symbolic and material, spatial terms (160). Bourdieu has also considered this topic in a short essay entitled “Site Effects”. In it, he explains that social space is always hierarchically structured by means of symbolic oppositions and distinctions – above, below, between – that materialize in urban space: “Reified social space (that is, physically realized or objectified) appears as the distribution in physical space of different types of goods and services and also of individual agents and of physically situated groups” (124). In his account, Bourdieu maintains a stable opposition between spaces that accrue either positive or negative properties – for instance, the consumerist wealth on New York’s Madison Avenue as opposed to its ghettos (125). However, it is exactly the hybridization of this scheme that is at the heart of Dominique Abel’s portrait of flamenco artistry in Polígono Sur. Indeed, any attempt at cultural promotion for stigmatized urban areas will probably seek to counter a lack of economic social capital by insisting on a community’s exceptional cultural capital. A similar point can be made about identifications of Polígono Sur with Triana. Instead of criticizing such connections as unrealistic, my reading proposes that it is more important to see how these alleged or real ties to artists, bullfighters and important families from Triana function as possible strategies for the creation of artistic and cultural distinctiveness, prestige and cultural identity across different contexts (Nair 272; Schwab 199).\textsuperscript{11} Therefore, it is necessary to revitalize Bourdieu’s theory, with attention to the specific positions and interests of those who construct and negotiate artistic, cultural and urban distinctions.

**Narrative interventions in the polígono**

*Polígono Sur* is a Spanish–French coproduction that received support from several Spanish and French institutions, such as the Casa de Velázquez, the Consejería de Cultura of the Junta de Andalucía and the French Centre National de la Cinématographie and filmmakers association PROCIREP (Lioult). While it was filmed during five weeks in the autumn of 2001, post-production took a year and a half (Belauesteguigoitia). The essay “Cine y flamenco”, published on the director’s website, helps to illuminate some key aspects of her modus operandi during the filmmaking process.

Firstly, many scenes from *Polígono Sur* were filmed with three MiniDV Camcorders – small devices that permitted the filmmaker to easily register flamenco practices in an everyday context. One of Abel’s goals was to capture the precious moments of improvised flamenco, stemming from the idea that the most sublime expressions of this music are often those that are performed off-stage (Abel). However, Abel’s attention to spontaneity is complicated by the fact that she worked with a script. As she indicates,
the use of a script was a strategy to loosely structure the scenes, without necessarily
annulling the actors’ freedom to improvise and modify the written dialogues (Abel).
In addition, Abel explains that she tended to ask her interviewees questions but
delete these questions from the final edit, so as to enhance the idea that people
were spontaneously talking about their lives. This information immediately draws
attention to the complexity of the many conversations and opinions heard throughout
the film. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the DVD leaflet and several critics have
characterized the film as a documentary (Mora; Belaustegui-andoa) and that it has com-
peted in the documentary film section at international festivals such as Tribeca, it would
be much more prudent to consider Polígono Sur a semi-fictionalized account of artistry
in the polígono.

Bill Nichols, discussing different documentary film formats, appropriately coins the term
performative documentary for a variety of film in which “the filmmaker enters into the social
actor’s world through interviews, conversation, provocation, or other forms of encounter
and has the power to alter that world” (157). Rather than functioning as a “window to the
world”, he continues, such films foreground the highly personal and situated quality of all
knowledge, underlining the importance of emotions and embodied experience and freely
intermingling fictional elements with realistic accounts of the historical world (203–11;
Bruzzi 153–80). Abel’s film fits this category, since it pays much attention to musical
expression, family life, everyday conversation and other forms of embodied experience
that are seemingly unconnected to the wider issues affecting the polígono area. Moreover,
Nichols’s category helps draw attention to the ways in which Abel has deliberately plotted
her filmic account of life and artistry in the polígono.

The movie’s most important narrative intervention into Polígono Sur is the concert for
local poet Pepe el Quemao, an event that was specially staged for the film. Abel indicates
that the concert permitted her to create a specific goal for her film and that it functioned
as a strategy to “fictionner Polígono Sur” (fictionalize Polígono Sur) (“Dossier de presse” 5).
From a practical perspective, indeed, this event endows the otherwise rather erratic nar-
rative of Polígono Sur with a fairly clear direction. Abel succeeded in interesting Canal
Plus España in producing a television broadcast of the performance. Thus, towards the
end of the film, we see some of the characters viewing this program on television – a
curious effect of mise en abîme, as the characters that are participating in the movie
are viewing a television program whose broadcast was motivated by that same movie.
What is especially significant about this fact is that it creates a kind of feedback loop
between reality and its filmic representation. Abel introduces a fictional element into
the area that then becomes an integral part of it and is interpreted accordingly by
other actors participating in the cultural initiatives in Polígono Sur. For instance, the anon-
ymous person, probably a government official, whose voice is heard at the beginning of
the concert, states in a rather patronizing fashion that flamenco is one of the “pilares de
salvación de este barrio”. Within this logic, an event that started out mainly as a narrative
tool has now evolved into a vital instrument for the salvation of an area that would other-
wise seem to be collapsing under the weight of its problems.

Such an interpretation corresponds to the concept of asistencialismo that has been
much criticized in debates about Polígono Sur (Cirugeda; Rosa) – that is, a view of
the area as largely dependent on others for its situation and status to change and
improve. This logic, however, does not gain any dominance in Abel’s film. In the final
shot of the film, for instance, we see the showground the day after the concert, with an empty stage and a dusty piece of ground with garbage that still needs to be picked up (it is unclear who is to be in charge of that task). Accompanied by a personal note from the director, who expresses her gratitude to the polígono community (“A todo lo que me ha dado las 3000, hasta lo más inesperado, a Luis”), this image is also a poignant indication of the fact that nothing has really changed the day after the performance. Not only the end of the movie, but also other material, such as DVD footage and several press reviews of the concert, give a rather contradictory impression as to the success of the event. A review from the conservative newspaper ABC de Sevilla depicted it as a highly chaotic scene. The review indicates in a rather condescending tone that children were running around, throwing rocks and breaking furniture (“Rodando”). The then-mayor of Seville, Alfredo Sánchez Monteseirín, arrived before the start of the concert but quickly left, apparently unwilling to participate in the event any longer. The review also mentions a community activist who was present during the concert, protesting about the fact that Murillo tends to be far more negatively stigmatized than other parts of the Polígono, such as Martínez Montañés. Her voice, however, is not heard in the film. In fact, some of the producers who appear on the DVD corroborate the negative impressions given in the ABC review, stating that the children “no eran niños, eran salvajes” and that they stole and broke many of the materials the team had brought to the concert. Crucially, by including these impressions on the DVD, the production team registers the fact that any attempt at overcoming stigmas and stereotypes led, at least for some, to their renewed corroboration. Yet another review paraphrases the words of Ramón Quilate, one of the protagonists, who claims that the film did help to lift at least some barriers: he states that members of the filming team still go to Polígono Sur to have drinks with people from the vicinity (Belausteguiagoitia). It is unclear if the entire production team has maintained contact with the polígono after shooting and producing the movie.

Independent of the position adopted when evaluating the concert’s immediate success, the fact remains that the government official who attaches such great value to the event represents only one of many viewpoints in the film. For example, we should recall that Martín el Revuelo, Quilate and other characters in the film refer to the concert exclusively as el homenaje. From their perspective, then, the concert could also be framed as an activity incumbent only on the neighbors of the polígono area, wishing to express their gratitude to a fellow community member without being preoccupied about its wider cultural impact. Thus, one might infer that the rehearsals that make up a large body of scenes in the film are motivated mostly by the wish to contribute to a homage glorifying a spokesman for the community. This purpose, serving to affirm the status of a leader, would be a mainly intracommunal one, as it does not seek any specific interaction with a broader audience or with other segments of Seville’s population.

However, to complicate things further, there is often no clear-cut connection between rehearsal and performance in the film. The short fragments of the concert that are shown at the end do not coincide with the songs that many characters are continuously rehearsing throughout the movie. Here, it is also relevant that the songs appearing on the official soundtrack were recorded for that specific medium but do not appear anywhere in Polígono Sur. What is perhaps most striking is that the movie characters hardly ever
mention the concert as such. While viewing the movie, it is often not easy to appreciate to what extent this musical event gives purpose to their numerous, disciplined rehearsals. For instance, the flamenco dancer and percussionist Bobote helps his younger colleague el Torombo with a few steps but is also shown alongside his fellow palmero (percussionist) el Eléctrico coaching two young girls who practice a tango. The men conclude: “Está regular, hay que ensayar más porque el concepto no funciona”. At the end, however, the girls are not shown performing their piece onstage. In fact, none of the rehearsals that are shown in the film culminate in a final performance in front of an audience. It is therefore fair to say that Abel’s attention to musical rehearsals is stimulated to a great extent by an interest in these people’s intrinsic motivation to transmit musical values and improve their performance skills. In one illustrative scene, we see how the Revuelo family utters some severe criticisms during a family lunch of their grandson’s singing. In spite of their disapproval at the beginning, they generously celebrate the child’s improvement on his next attempt. Martín el Revuelo, the family patriarch, poignantly expresses the importance of singing and dancing if one wants to earn a seat at the table during a family dinner: “El que no canta o no baila, no come”. This statement is perhaps not so much an indication of the instrumental values of music, as a means to earn a living, but rather of the dominant family values in the community, where private musical performance and education seem to be significant components of any informal gathering.

Revuelo’s comment has an entirely different meaning from the words spoken by the government official who announces the concert at the end of Abel’s film. The words of the latter are clearly informed by the assumption that the polígono can only be saved if its members engage in flamenco practices, so as to secure a sense of future for themselves and their families. However, as becomes apparent in other scenes, the community’s distinctive character is irreducible to the specific ability of its members to perform flamenco onstage. Rather, such a capacity for staged performance needs to be considered alongside the other embodied experiences and moments of musical transmission that appear throughout Polígono Sur. As I will argue in the remainder of this essay, the distinctiveness of the area also becomes apparent through informal practices that cannot be adequately translated to a concert stage or other institutionalized settings. The concert, then, is merely a small sequence within an unending chain of musical rehearsals and artistic practices. As a factor of organization, of plotting, it permits Abel to register a series of rehearsals and performances that then start to diversify the functions and meanings of art in the area. It is precisely this diversity that matters in the film.

**Distinction, the quotidian nature of arte and memory**

Abel’s attention to spontaneity, everydayness and coincidental musical encounters in the streets of Polígono Sur seems to indicate that she does not merely envision an instrumental, teleological function for art. Indeed, while Polígono Sur accumulates multifaceted impressions of life in the urban outskirts, the topic of artistry in a more quotidian sense migrates through almost all the scenes. In the course of the film, characters may initially be found walking around alone, preparing for the day or going about their daily activities in isolation, when they are suddenly stopped for a short chat by neighbors or decide to introduce themselves in collective conversation. In this way, Abel’s film stages human contact as a force of connection and mobilization even within a community plagued by
numerous social issues. The opening scene of the movie contains a significant example of this scheme. In it, we see several panorama shots of the polígono area, with images of the anonymous, worn-out, flat buildings intermingled with auditory and visual impressions of life in the streets. A soleá is sung somewhere, resonating in the entire area. At a certain point, we hear the voice-over of a man who expresses laughing that, when he first arrived in the neighborhood, he was struck by the “arte” of a Gitano who had brought his donkey up to a fourth-floor apartment. What is relevant here is that arte, in the exact meaning used by the voice-over, does not so much refer to a field of artistic practice that is partially separated from everyday life, but rather to a form of everyday wit and creativity. It reminds one of the expression qué arte that is commonly used in southern Spain to refer to a phrase or action that is funny and ingenious. Likewise, the old owner of the donkey possesses arte thanks to his capacity to creatively translate his former living conditions to a new context, bringing his animal into an urban construction normally not equipped for such a purpose. This coincides with Michel de Certeau’s description of art as a peculiar “way of making”, a concept that refers to an inventive and unforeseeable mode of consumption that may renegotiate dominant representations and prescriptions in a quotidian context (xv). With a perspective similar to Certeau’s, recent scholarship has defined flamenco as the product of the particular way of life of Gitanos and other marginal communities in Spain that, throughout history, have constantly needed to adapt themselves to new and often inhospitable living conditions (Ribalta et al. 245). Another characteristic of this particular lifestyle is that it preserves certain premodern elements of communal, nomadic life as a centrifugal force, even within communities that have been forced to move to standardized family homes under capitalist modernity (Cirugeda).

From this perspective, the opening scene of Polígono Sur becomes readable as a sequence within a larger historical trajectory in which artistry operates as a form of creative adaptation. In the movie, this way of life, this propensity for arte, cannot be located unilaterally on the side of the actors, nor is it to be seen as a romanticist strategy of representation imposed on the area by the film director. Instead, artistry is simultaneously a preconceived object of representation and something that comes into view spontaneously in front of the camera. For instance, on the DVD, one can appreciate how several men hold the donkey so that its head reaches farther out of the apartment window and may be seen more clearly from the street. The film crew similarly creates the conditions for the emergence of a new sense of artistry in the following scene, when we see Luis Fernández de los Santos walking around on his own while singing a fragment from Camarón de la Isla’s “Dios de la nada”, a melancholy bulería about solitude. After finishing the verse, he engages in a witty dialogue with el Indio, a rather extravagant character who walks around the neighborhood dressed up like a Native American and who, in consonance with the stereotype he performs, praises the mystical beauty of the donkey’s face that contemplates them from the apartment building as “la cara más flamenca que hay”.

Like the concept of arte, the adjective flamenco refers to a form of artistry that may be discovered in music, living beings and material objects. This quotidian nature of flamenco and arte is relevant to the film as a whole insofar as it expands the meaning of its subtitle. El arte de Las Tres Mil, then, points not only to the specific ability to deliver musical performance onstage, but also to other distinctive qualities, such as attentive ways of looking at and listening to one’s environment and inventive modes of using an urban
dwelling. Curiously, as outlined at the beginning of this article, this is exactly the aspect of Abel’s film that has received most criticism: her optimistic framing of the beauty of Polígono Sur has been seen as uncritical and rather simplistic. I would claim that these criticisms are themselves inattentive to the historical background of artistry that resonates throughout the entire movie. Perhaps a foregrounding of this historical context first requires a shift of perspective – to one capable of accounting dialectically for the ways in which festivity and artistry interact with broader historical, economic and social conditions. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu considers the ways in which necessity distinguishes the tastes of the working class from those of the dominant class. He observes the following about “the art of living” of the former:

There is, of course, everything which belongs to the art of living, a wisdom taught by necessity, suffering and humiliation and deposited in an inherited language, dense even in its stereotypes, a sense of revelry and festivity, of self-expression and practical solidarity with others (evoked by the adjective “bon vivant” with which the working classes identify), in short, everything that is engendered by the realistic (but not resigned) hedonism and sceptical (but not cynical) materialism which constitute both a form of adaptation to the conditions of existence and a defence against them. (394–95)

Bourdieu pertinently elucidates that a festive lifestyle may operate as a defense mechanism that reacts to backwardness in social or economic terms. Indeed, festivity is what Bourdieu calls a disposition linked to a trajectory (*Distinction* 358): for instance, one’s inclinations to act in a festive way, or one’s expectations on the job market, are intricately related to a wider history of relations of production. Clearly, the availability of leisure time is not only a privilege of the aristocracy, but also a rather crude reality in an area such as Polígono Sur, with an unemployment rate of forty percent and where more than fifty percent of the population has no high school diploma (Comité René Cassin 52–57). Everyday artistry, then, inevitably depends on the availability of people marginal to common structures of economic production and exchange, a condition that has historically forced them to carry out their art in spontaneous, quotidian and nonofficial ways.

In one of the most critical scenes of the entire film, Abel pays attention to the historical underpinnings of the contemporary lifestyle of some of the members in the community. In a dialogue between Pepe Montoya, el Poeta, and the parents of the Amador brothers, the film explicitly addresses the ways in which festivity, spontaneous encounters and artistry are values charged with historical meaning: they pertain to an old lifestyle that comes from Triana and that has been partly lost in the present. In this regard, Rosa observes that in Triana, solidarity, amusement and festivity were cultural values associated with security. Gitano communities would live with open doors, as they were well aware of the people that did and did not belong to their communities. As Rosa explains, the relocation of these families to different parts of Seville – including Polígono Sur – was carried out hastily and with no attention to the cultural differences existing among different families. Moreover, these changes were accompanied by significant modifications in housing infrastructure. After moving away from the large *corrales de vecinos*, where it was easier to gather together a significant number of people, many families were relocated into much smaller apartments (Lenore; Rosa). As a consequence, spontaneous celebrations and large musical gatherings had to be channeled in new ways or given up. Pepe Montoya, in *Polígono Sur*, confirms this idea stating that his community was forced to move to the *polígono*, in spite of being happy in Triana where “no teníamos pa’ jallar [to eat], pa’ comer, pero vivíamos en la gracia”.


It would be too farfetched to state that *Polígono Sur* delves explicitly into the particulars of this important episode in Spain’s ongoing history of urban speculation and housing evictions. Still, it is fair to say that the film helps us appreciate the impact that evictions in a more distant past – the *desarrollo* years – still have on processes of identity and community formation in contemporary southern Spain. The interlocutors in the above-mentioned scene continue their conversation by mourning the fact that those glorious times belong to the past, in part as a consequence of the drug addiction suffered by so many juvenile members of the community. Their perspective becomes relevant to the film as a whole, since it provides an explanation of the importance of different historical circumstances in explaining the problems currently affecting the community.

Indeed, I would claim that the historical processes of forced adaptation to new neighborhoods and the consumption of hard drugs in marginal districts do not only help explain the most difficult side of life in the *polígono*, but can also be read in intimate relation with its artistry. There are some highly significant moments in the film that allow for a reading of contemporary flamenco practices as embodied memories (Taylor 16–27) of the forced separation from Triana of some of the families now living in the *polígono*. Richard Elliott, in his study of Portuguese *fado*, examines several ways in which popular music may perform longing for lost or mystified urban places – through songs that perform walks through those locations or by using recorded sounds from street life in Lisbon (65). Similarly, memories of Triana are present in multiple ways throughout *Polígono Sur*. At one point, an old singer called Juan el Camas who does not live in Polígono Sur but in Triana, sings a *bulería* that mentions the urban route that many of his friends were forced to embark on in the past:

De Triana a las Tres Mil  
en un barrio muy bonito  
cada mitad la han mandado para aquí  
ay Tres Mil, Tres Mil  
eres el barrio más lindo  
donde me gusta vivir.

The *bulería* is a flamenco style that tends to deploy irony as a means of coming to terms with suffering and loss. Sung, in this case, in a major key, the lyrics ironically cast *las Tres Mil* as a beautiful neighborhood where one can lead a happy life. In spite of the irony, the lyrics represent a poignant contrast with the opinions of Pepe Montoya and the Amador family, who had stated in a previous conversation that the community from Polígono Sur is currently living the worst phase in the entire history of Gitanos.

In another fragment, we see a group of friends sitting outside a bar. Suddenly, they hear the singing of Enrique Jiménez, el Vareta, who walks into the scene with a glass in his hand. The friends finish his song with him, and Vareta then explains that he just arrived from Triana, where he had a few drinks with some other friends. From a cinematographic perspective, this scene is particularly complex, in that it conceals the material distance between both neighborhoods, introducing Vareta into the scene as if he just walked from Triana to Polígono Sur. The glass in his hand triggers a subtle bleeding of meaning, suggesting that there is a temporal nearness between the current scene and the drinks he was previously having in Triana. The physical activity of walking, however, is not shown. The invisibility of his trajectory across town, then, could well be seen as symbolizing the nearness of both areas in the imaginary of many locals. Through narrative, and
the particular mise-en-scène of Vareta’s character, the movie creates a metaphorical nearness between distant spaces. Vareta’s body literally brings festivity and cante from Triana to Polígono Sur.

Historical memory is also articulated and embodied by the curious figure of El Indio, who appears out of nowhere on different occasions and also participates in the concert at the end, stating that he wants to give voice to “la libertad y los niños, que no pueden ni hablar”. El Indio is the only character who is really identifiable as an actor. We clearly recognize his differences from the other community members from his stereotypical way of dressing and speaking. At the same time, he seems to perform an uncanny double of the others, reminding us continuously of an observation made at one point by Pepe el Quemaño about the fact that the entire community is treated by local governments like a group of “indígenas sin derechos”. In fact, this is a stigma that also circulates in the local press: some journalists, both in reviews of Abel’s film and in other articles, have called Polígono Sur “Territorio Comanche” (Pereira; “Rodando”). El Indio certainly becomes an ironic corroboration of this term. It is therefore not coincidental that he plays a prominent role in the promotional material (posters and DVD leaflet) for the film, together with the donkey – precisely the two elements in the work that, strictly speaking, have least to do with the concert or with the performance of flamenco music in general. Both figures demonstrate that the film provides a theatricalized performance of life in an excluded neighborhood. But the variegated forms of artistry that Abel finds in the streets and homes of Polígono Sur do not cease to have profound historical meaning. While the donkey’s face, staring at us from an apartment, symbolizes the community’s forced but inventive adaptation to a new urban environment, El Indio recalls the fact that Indian reservations are still a historical reference that fuel the construction of sociocultural stigmas in the present, as well as their ironic contestation.

**Distinction, the polígono as a marker of musical surplus**

In this final section, I examine two different moments of informal musical performance that construct a positive distinctiveness for the inhabitants of Polígono Sur in a context of marginality and lack. In the first example, Abel’s attention to the exceptional abilities of the community in performing flamenco music is dependent on her previous foregrounding of the very same community’s problematic position within the realm of speech. The second example concerns the movie’s most illustrative account of the dialectic between the occupation of a marginal position in an urban context and the possession of distinctive musical qualities.

There are several sequences in the film that register the local population’s conversations about the ways in which artistic practice may reinforce a sense of agency, social status and cohesion. One scene at the beginning shows a heated debate in a bar between two men: Pepe el Quemaño, a local poet who is also a community activist, and a proud old Gitano named Tío Adolfo. When Adolfo comes in, he starts defending a series of rather mystifying views about the force of the Gitano community, whose members, as he states, are “personas originales” and “semillas lindas y bellas”. As a pessimistic counterpoint to Adolfo’s perspective, Pepe expresses his thoughts on the unequal treatment of the community by the local government. Pepe’s authority as a man of letters becomes apparent through his knowledge of recent developments in local policy making – for instance, he refers to a policy document
promising decent housing to community members. This information is not shared by Adolfo, who is manifestly unable to engage with the point made by his interlocutor.\textsuperscript{14} Interestingly, the role of the other clients, who are positioned on a second plane within the space of the bar, is limited to rather ambivalent laughter. They seem to be mocking Pepe’s gloom as well as Adolfo’s inability to clearly express his ideas. In spite of this, Pepe and Adolfo, who do take the conversation seriously, seem to achieve a certain amount of mutual understanding: Adolfo states with irony that in spite of his limited age and his romantic vision of life, he has reached certain “conclusiones” about their neighborhood, the poet adding that these conclusions are “exactas, además”. However, Adolfo is then unable to correctly pronounce the word \textit{autobús} and the other bar customers break into laughter – one assumes because of Adolfo’s linguistic error. Something similar happens when Adolfo states that it is a pity that so many Gitanos die: he fails two times to pronounce the word \textit{lamentablemente}. In this way, the scene becomes a rather uncomfortable illustration of the limits of verbal agency. That is, dialogue is clearly insufficient as a means of communication to improve mutual understanding among community members. A cinematographic aspect that makes the scene more complex is a visual cut after Adolfo’s words, immediately followed by a shot that registers how the other bar customers break into laughter. In this way, the specific target of their laughter remains unidentifiable, or ambiguous at least, for the viewers.

It is interesting to see how differences emerge among the community members, who appear to be unable to express a common message about the ways in which they would like to see their neighborhood improved. Following Judith Butler’s reasoning, perhaps we should even interrogate the extent to which those included in the bar scene are able to communicate at all, and if, beyond a mere exchange of words, a conversation is really taking place (352). Butler claims that power structures and hierarchical differences shape and limit all dialogic possibilities. In this sense, Butler’s perspective dovetails with Bourdieu’s writings on power relations in language (in \textit{Language and Symbolic Power}) and distinctions in political and artistic judgments. Bourdieu interrogates not only the differences in rhetorical skill that may affect the judgments expressed by different groups in society, but also the extent to which a certain community possesses the power and capacity to \textit{produce} a political opinion (\textit{Distinction} 398). I would claim that many of those who are present in the bar scene in \textit{Polígono Sur} are perfectly aware of this problematic, and that their laughter throughout the scene has significant overtones of a rather melancholy form of self-mockery; that is, a crude but sincere expression of the limits of both Adolfo’s and their own political competence. The fragment also illustrates how such competence is socially distributed within the community. The poet Pepe el Quemao, on the one hand, clearly embodies reason and social engagement. In fact, he constitutes a fundamental patriarchal authority within the film’s narrative, given that the concert at the end of the film, as we have seen, is defined by some as a tribute to his literary work and social efforts for the community. By contrast, Adolfo is mocked, apparently because the statements he emits are not validated by his social position. Clearly, the others do not perceive him as an intellectual figure capable of producing a pertinent opinion. By exposing Tío Adolfo to the ambivalent laughter of the others, the fragment even performs a certain amount of symbolic violence, exposing his limited capacity to express a relevant political judgment.

What, then, might be the narrative function of this rather frustrating, unsatisfactory scene that seems to erect intracommunal barriers instead of lifting them? The truth is
that it constitutes an effective background for a subsequent restitution of harmony through music. In the middle of the conversation, some of the customers suddenly start clapping and singing. The camera carefully registers the impact of this music on the main figures; with a close-up shot of Adolfo, we see how his worried and somewhat insulted facial expression breaks into a smile and he starts dancing to the *bulería* sung by Luis. After this scene of musical catharsis, the initial barrier between protagonists and audience is successfully broken, and Luis concludes euphorically that “no hay quien pueda” – literally, the expression is incomplete, but it is translated as “we are the best” in the DVD subtitles.

If previous criticism of *Polígono Sur* has stated that the movie paints a simplified picture of the area, then this is an adequate point to engage with that criticism and push it a little further. In my view, a problematic gesture of the bar scene outlined above is its introduction of artistic distinctiveness at the expense of verbal agency. Verbal agency is not so much ignored in the film, as Pallejà has claimed; instead, it becomes a crucial element that needs to be set against what appears to be a much more powerful form of agency: music. Here we can take issue once more with Bourdieu’s writings. If distinction is a marker of difference, then we should also be asking what qualities and values need to be sacrificed so that differences and contrasts may become visible. Bourdieu engages with the ways in which a positive form of distinctiveness, such as possessing the adequate perspective to contemplate a work of art, is always tacitly dependent on a negative conception of the opposing viewpoint:

> It can be seen that it is not so easy to describe the “pure” gaze without also describing the naive gaze which it defines itself against, and vice versa; and that there is no neutral, impartial, “pure” description of either of these opposing visions. (*Distinction* 32)

I would add that this dialectic does not only operate to mark differences between opposing groups or individuals – those who understand and those who do not – but that it also may become a way to create contrasts between separate qualities that exist within that same group. Some are highlighted, while others are minimized. Therefore, in the context of *Polígono Sur*, it appears that the cathartic heights of the musical explosion become an alternative to verbal agency, compensating for the void left by a frustrated conversation. Crucially, the complexity of the matter is enhanced by Abel’s cinematographic perspective: she has chosen to create a script, but also to leave room for improvisation and not to interfere in the dialogue with any comments of her own. It is therefore ambiguous to what extent, and with what possible motives, the bar customers are choosing to interrupt the conversation in order to finish the scene with a moment of musical performance.

A very different relation between artistry and marginality appears in one of the film’s most interesting subplots. This is the story of Pelayo, a local singer who is unanimously placed at the highest level of the musical hierarchy, but who is also difficult to get hold of in the underworld of southern Seville. Due to this difficulty, it becomes particularly challenging for the community to secure his participation in the concert. Halfway through the film, Luis – the only one, as his friends proclaim, who could possibly find Pelayo – sets out on a quest that is dubbed by one of them *Operación Pelayo*. In this way, the search for Pelayo almost becomes a test case for Luis’s exceptional ability to move through Seville’s dangerous outskirts, as affirmed by the many close-up shots of his face as he embarks on his journey. Acting
like a true Sevillian *pícaro*, Luis talks to people in the streets, driving by day and by night. In one of the final episodes, Luis and Pelayo suddenly turn up together at night at an outdoor party. We now learn that the quest has been completed and that it has taken several days.

Certainly, Pelayo’s arrival is not only one of the film’s culminating moments but also a surprising one, since his previous encounter with Luis is not shown. Similar to the phenomenon of picnolepsy, described by William Viestenz in his analysis of José Luis Guerín’s film *En construcción*, both characters and spectators may feel hijacked from their spatiotemporal framework and suddenly transposed from one scene to another (539–544). In a sense, this aesthetic choice contributes to the exultation felt by the artists – and spectators – when their lost friend is suddenly there. Abel explains that she kept Pelayo in a car for several hours, so as to make the reencounter more cathartic: “Lo acogen con los brazos abiertos y le homenajean cantándole y escuchándole cantar, acompañándole, y es la celebración íntima de ese reencuentro que influye sobre lo que tocan y cantan y cómo lo hacen”.

Indeed, once Pelayo starts singing, his friends engage in *jaleos* that underline Pelayo’s pure artistry, his musical *salvajismo* and the raw (rancio) edge of his voice. Crucially, Bobote expresses some heartfelt *jaleo*, mumbling “polígono, polígono” to celebrate the exceptional purity and savagery of Pelayo’s singing. We should not overlook the important resonances of these *jaleos*. As one of flamenco’s most idiosyncratic musical characteristics, *jaleos* are affective flows of sound that are constituted in intimate relation with what happens in the here and now of performance. They may assist the other musicians in performing rhythmic explosions and conclusions (*remates*), they may operate as verbalizations of the authority of a singer or they may verbally verify the quality of what has been sung, played or danced moments before. Thus, they contain highly relevant information about the symbolic power possessed by the performers and about the ways in which musical values are constructed in the present, ephemeral moment of performance. Accordingly, Pelayo’s singing motivates a specific circulation of affect (Ahmed) – materializing in facial expressions, in *jaleo*, in grunts and looks reflecting enjoyment, approval and admiration – that is highly dependent on the singer’s exceptional status within the community. In other words, the marginality and exclusivity of the *polígono* find a material expression in the way in which the community evaluates Pelayo’s singing. Therefore, this fragment is one of the most crucial examples in the entire movie where the *polígono* comes to stand out as a marker of a distinctive musical quality that is partially derived from marginality and exclusion.

However, according to the film’s press dossier, some Spanish flamenco aficionados criticized Pelayo’s presence in the film, since they saw him as representing a raw, marginal modality of flamenco that stems from the *gitanos canasteros*, an itinerant group of Gitanos who traditionally made their living as basket weavers (“Dossier de presse” 10; Cebrián Abellán 25; “El flamenco según Mercé”). This negative opinion is a poignant illustration of the fact that flamenco culture is not a homogeneous field with consensus about artistic values and classifications (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 6), but rather a battleground where struggles over taste, dignity, inclusion and exclusion are undertaken by many different actors. To put it schematically, in Pelayo’s story such conflict revolves around the highly ambivalent notion of *savagery*, a descriptive term used by various actors and viewers for Pelayo’s unpollished and noncommercialized way of singing. Yet, while savagery is a highly positive artistic value for Pelayo’s friends, it is less so for some aficionados who saw him perform in the film. As indicated by the negative reception of Pelayo’s singing
by these viewers, savagery is also part of a certain ethnographic profile attributed to itinerant Gitanos whose lifestyle has remained entirely unadapted to a sedentary existence in a fixed apartment. The crucial point is, of course, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to clearly separate these aesthetic and sociocultural senses of savagery, whether one is using the term as a positive or negative marker of distinction. Pelayo’s singing and its reception, then, offer a highly pertinent indication of the ways in which aesthetic, sociocultural and urban distinctions are intertwined.

A further complexity inherent in the phenomenon of savagery is that it may be hard to retain in situations of social and economic prosperity. One of the final fragments of the film clearly illustrates this point. In it, four men express the desire for an institution that would allow them to safeguard and transmit flamenco to younger generations. However, these musicians are well aware that their integration into the culture industry may entail confrontations not only with other musical languages but also with institutionalized systems of annotation they are currently not familiar with and that may affect the purity of their expression. In this regard, Emilio Caracafé recalls how on one occasion he was able to master an orchestral piece that he participated in without being able to read the score. While lamenting the fact that he never received any theoretical musical education, he and the others are clearly aware of the purity that comes with this musical illiteracy. This distinctive combination of purity and musical illiteracy is called salvajismo by one of the interlocutors. This shows how community members self-consciously negotiate and judge the value of their artistic performance. In their view, savagery is a crucial artistic value that might not be easy to incorporate within contexts of institutionalized musical education. In that sense, their conversation is not only about future goals, to be achieved with institutional help, but also about the potential losses that come with an institutionalization of flamenco culture.

Conclusion

In this article, I have engaged with certain critics who claim that Polígono Sur does not attend to the internal diversity of community that is commonly associated with flamenco practices and that it fails to put the connections between everyday life and artistic practice on Seville’s fringes in a meaningful social and historical perspective. However, a more careful reading of the film reveals that Abel’s film is not an uncritical celebration of life in the polígono. In my reading, the film possesses a significant amount of open-endedness and polyphony. It gives visibility to a variety of voices that endow flamenco, art, savagery and other values with different meanings that are anchored not only in artistic practice, but also in an urban history of forced migration and a longer historical process of creative adaptation to new living conditions. Therefore, it poses significant alternatives to existing depictions of flamenco – some of which are present in the movie – as a possible means of departure from the hardships and suffering in the polígono. In Abel’s work, the notion of the polígono itself is part of a complex “group fantasy” (Mitchell 63) that provides the community with a cultural surplus and helps these musicians make sense of their distinctive artistic qualities. From this viewpoint, flamenco offers not so much an uncritical alternative for the negative image that continues to affect the area, but rather it leads us continuously back to the polígono. A critical task I have sought to address, then, is not to ask to what extent we might understand this population as extremely talented and worthy of
better living conditions – it is undeniable that they are both – but rather to try to understand how life in the polígono operates as a multidimensional point of reference that helps different actors give meaning to their particular ways of practicing and performing flamenco.

While it might initially seem that the film’s erratic narrative fails to direct our attention towards these dialectical relations between art and exclusion, perhaps it is by rehearsing new ways of viewing and listening to flamenco practices that we can start to better appreciate the historical backgrounds of this music. The encounter with Pelayo, carefully prepared and staged for the camera, is one such moment in which what is to be seen and heard moves dialectically between the past and present, between the unique conditions of performance shaped in in the here and now and a longer historical process of marginalization. A Bourdieusian lens may certainly help us to envision similar dialectics between festivity and defensiveness, between exceptionally disciplined artistic practice and social marginality, in cultural imaginaries relating to other marginalized sectors of Spain’s urban population.

Notes

1. Following Lou Charnon-Deutsch, I will use Gitanos with a capital G as a “racialized designation that refers to any number of ethnic groups as they are imagined by nonmembers of those groups” (12). As a discursive category that is used exclusively for Spanish Romani groups (its international equivalent being Gypsies), the term Gitanos acknowledges the importance of stereotypical projections onto the subjects that from an academic point of view are often designated as Roma or Romani (13). At the same time, it is more specific than the term “gypsies”, which is more commonly used as a romantic stereotype and does not take into account any geographical or ethnic characteristics (12).

2. These operations remind one of Certeau’s tropological analysis of urban walking practices, which, as he asserts, have the capacity to expand, condense, select or skip aspects of urban space through specific movements (101–102).

3. Nair develops a similar argument regarding the semantic triangle gitano/prison/flamenco (“Elusive” 41).

4. As shown in an opinion poll included in the book project Sevilla imaginada, Polígono Sur is most commonly associated with the words “marginal” and “drugs” by Seville’s population (Romero xlv).

5. Other films about flamenco by the same director are Agujetas, cantaor (1999) and En el nombre del padre (2000).

6. The dynamic I analyze is somewhat different from the one examined by Nair in her article on flamenco as a means of rehabilitation for a group of convicts in a Córdoba prison (“Elusive”). In Nair’s article, artistry is a new element that needs to be constructed and added to the prisoners’ existing socioethnic identity. On the contrary, in Abel’s film, flamenco is practiced by a non-prison community, for whom artistic expression is nothing new but rather at the heart of their daily lives. The extent to which flamenco may become a useful tool in the process of building a positive image of a stigmatized community, is of course a concern I share with Nair.

7. I thank the investigators of pieflamenco.com for first bringing these films to my attention. Further titles that may be added to this list are Carlos Saura’s flamenco-scored Deprisa, deprisa (1981) about a group of petty thieves in Madrid; the film Camelamos Naquerrar (1976) by Miguel Alcobendas, based on a theater piece by flamenco dancer Mario Maya (Campos Fernández) and Tony Gatlif’s Latcho Drom (1993) about the musical cultures of persecuted Gypsies around the world. In literature, one might certainly also consider Manuel Vázquez Montalbán’s acclaimed detective novel, Los mares del Sur (1979), that sheds light on urban speculation in Barcelona during the desarrollo years.

8. Romero does not identify the titles of any of these books or films.
9. For an overview of previous criticism of Bourdieu’s *Distinction* from a wide range of perspectives, see Bennett 9–23.

10. For other scholarship on flamenco that has been inspired by Bourdieu’s work, see Aix Gracia and Mitchell. García Gómez’s study of flamenco in the Andalusian mining areas, while not explicitly motivated by Bourdieu, is also extremely helpful, as she pays detailed attention to the “retroalimentación” (44) between popular and intellectual tastes, as well as to the highly diverse socio-economic backgrounds in which different singing styles emerged.

11. As Bourdieu also points out: “Every group tends to set up the means of perpetuating itself beyond the finite individuals in whom it is incarnated” (*Distinction* 72).

12. In a press document published on the website of the production company Epicentre Films, Abel claims that after the film the community did receive the musical institution it demanded, and that the movie, though not purposely, may have contributed to this achievement. However, she also recognizes that nothing has changed in the underlying problem (“Dossier de presse” 5).

13. Labrador Méndez provides a detailed account of the historical trajectory of hard-drug consumption during the Spanish Transition to Democracy (63–146). In some conspiracy theories that circulated during those years, the distribution of heroin among Spanish youth was interpreted as a veiled campaign to neutralize the latter’s political aspirations. Labrador Méndez also indicates that, in the Transition, middle-class adolescents who went to university tended to become addicted for ludic or aesthetic reasons, whereas it will be in Spain’s most marginal neighborhoods “donde la heroína se instale con más fuerza y genere su verdadero problema” (113; emphasis in original).

14. Romero, in his narrative description of a walk through the *polígono* and a visit to a local bar, describes a very similar conversation (160).

15. Something very similar happens in Tony Gatlif’s flamenco movie *Vengo* (2000), where some of the same characters (Caracafé, Quilate, Bobote and others) perform the song “Arrincónamela”, inaugurated by the very same Bobote who shouts “Tres Mil, Tres Mil”.

16. Ahmed asserts that affect does not reside in any specific body, object or sign, but rather comes into being through a process of circulation between subjects and objects (50). This process of circulation – what Ahmed calls, by means of an analogy with Marx’s analysis of capital, “affective economies” – endows affect with both a material and social character. In this regard, I also find Massumi’s analysis of soccer stadium audiences and their way of adding “auditory elements to the mix that directly contribute to modulating the intensity of the field of potential” very instructive (80).

17. In Seville, moreover, a sharp distinction can be drawn between the errant *canasteros* and the *gitanos de Triana*, who are sedentary and incorporated into the urban economy as a result of the proto-industrial professions they practice (Cebrián Abellán 74; Lenore).

18. This preoccupation with the possible loss of savagery, as a consequence of institutionalized forms of musical education, may be compared with Bourdieu’s questions about his own personal and professional trajectory, as expressed in an interview with Terry Eagleton: he is interested in “qué significa tener una mente académica, cómo llega a conformarse y, simultáneamente, qué se pierde al adquirirla” (Bourdieu and Eagleton).

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