

# Film/Video Review

*Domingo en Plaza Almagro (Sunday in Plaza Almagro)*. 2014. Directed by Jennie Gubner, 11 minutes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfBtK6XcnBA>.

How can you evoke locality, neighbourhoodness, sentimental activism, and musical intimacy “that make them not just abstract ideas but about real people and their real relationships to and through sound?” Filmmaker Jennie Gubner (2022) in her short film *Domingo en Plaza Almagro (Sunday in Plaza Almagro)* proposes this ontological question about the vocabularies of cinema in evoking critical understandings of music as culture. Filmmaking, in this vignette, is applied to integrate both visual and sensory means to invite audiences to *experience* the sentiments in tango culture – a nodal point of the intersection of locality, neighbourhoodness, and urban activism in the contemporary communities of Buenos Aires.

This film, together with three other short films, consists as part of Gubner’s doctoral dissertation about neighbourhood tango culture in Buenos Aires. Situated in the movement of reclaiming and re-localising tango in reaction to the “for-export” tango, which appeals to the colonial gaze and the hypersexualised stereotypicalities of tourists’ imaginations, the series of four explores various local sites ranging from a local bar to an independently organised tango club to show the relationship between tango culture and neighbourhoodness.

*Domingo en Plaza Almagro* shows a grassroots tango festival of Almagro that took place in a symbolic location where many contemporary tango histories begin – the neighbourhood plaza. The festival is independently organised by a group of young musicians and the film focuses on the final day of the event: a Sunday afternoon of tango in a local communal open space.

The film opens with a scene which corresponds to a relatively stereotypical image of tango – couples are dancing with the music; however, the atmosphere is completely different from the “for-export” tango: it is the everyday and mundane. Moving forward, this turns out to be the only dancing scene in the entire film. With the peaceful tango music, the musicians arrive in a van, painted just as the outside of Almagro’s most legendary tango bar *Roberto’s bar*. It is located at a corner of this plaza and is the protagonist of Gubner’s other film in the series – *A Common Place* (2010). With the music intensified, the camera introduces the musicians. We see some familiar faces – they are the group of young people who opened the Almagro Tango Club later in *Los Locos de Almagro (The Crazyies of Almagro)*, 2013). They are all wearing the same top, organised and spirited.

The host announces: “Welcome to the Almagro neighbourhood and to this independently organised tango festival, created by the talent and hard work of great musicians who love this neighbourhood.” Thus, together with references to other films in the series of Almagro, a message has been sent, subtly but firmly, that this event is not just about music, but also about tango’s role in building an urban community.

With song flowing in the background, the film unfolds with still shots depicting life in the neighbourhood on this sunny afternoon at the plaza. Instead of applying the conventional film language of long shot in observational cinema to bring the audiences into the temporality of a moment, Gubner chopped up her footage of the afternoon into short still shots and reordered them to construct the sentiments she experienced that afternoon. Contrary to the stereotypical imaginations around tango, we see the ordinary life scenes: a musician playing with his child while preparing to play, children playing football in the park, men eating ice cream and joyfully chatting, and the musician who was playing with his child is now fully immersed in the music he is playing. All these moments are edited with clean cuts hitting musical cues. The film follows the camera’s step and pace, playfully bringing the audiences to *experience* rather than observe tango’s intimate role in the neighbourhood of Almagro on that Sunday afternoon.

Then the playfulness builds to an apex when Gubner’s role switches to a performing violinist playing alongside local tango legend Osvaldo Peredo. She is not only a filmmaker or an observer of this community, but also a participant in the event, living in the neighbourhood, together with the audiences of the film.

Night is falling and the festival is coming to an end. The musicians / tango activists are cleaning up the plaza. Although situated in the background of the re-localising tango movement, the film does not intentionally discuss the recent politics of Argentina which contributed greatly to the taking place of the festival, nor does it focus on criticising “for-export” tango. Instead, it scatters the dots of activism here and there and blends them together with tango’s role in evoking human connections that reverberate with music. The result is an alternative scene of how tango is lived – an integral part of the everyday life of the neighbourhood.

## References

- Gubner, Jennie. 2022. “*Domingo en Plaza Almagro (Sunday in Plaza Almagro)* and the Filmic Evocation of ‘Neighborhoodness’.” Interview by Frank Gunderson. *Journal of Audiovisual Ethnomusicology* 1 (1). <https://javem.org/1-1-domingo-en-plaza-almagro/>.

YUNZI HAN 

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Yunzi Han received her PhD from SOAS, University of London in 2024 for her thesis “Sexual Politics on Screen: A Comparative Study of Chinese and Iranian Cinema since the 1990s.” She was the editor-in-chief of *SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research* (2020-21). She has also published in the journal *Open Screens* (2021) and in the book *ReFocus: The Films of Rakshān Banietemad* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020). Her research interest lies in South-South Comparative Cinema Studies.