RESIST, OCCUPY, and PRODUCE: The Evolution of Autonomous Struggle in Argentina

Author: James Blair

Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/524

This work is posted on eScholarship@BC, Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2007

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.
RESIST, OCCUPY, and PRODUCE:
The Evolution of Autonomous Struggle in Argentina

By

JAMES BLAIR

HONORS THESIS
APRIL 2007
ADVISER: DEBORAH LEVENSON
Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................. iii

INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1

PART I: HISTORY
CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL STRANDS OF LABOR STRUGGLE IN ARGENTINA ............... 7
  1.1 Introduction .......................................................... 7
  1.2 The Roots of Worker Consciousness and Mutual Aid in Argentina 8
  1.3 Beyond Good and Evil, Pueblo y Antipueblo 13
  1.4 The Suppression of Labor during the Dirty War 17
  1.5 Menem’s Right-Wing Renovation of Peronismo 20

CHAPTER 2: POSTMODERN RESISTANCE, THEORY, AND OCCUPATION IN ARGENTINA . . . . 23
  2.1 Introduction .......................................................... 23
  2.2 Ruptures of Rebellion ................................................ 24
  2.3 Empire in Argentina .................................................. 31
  2.4 Piqueteros .............................................................. 36
  2.5 Las Empresas Recuperadas (The Recuperated Businesses Movement) 43

PART II: VOICES
CHAPTER 3: GETTING TO KNOW THREE RECUPERATED BUSINESSES .................... 55
  3.1 Introduction .......................................................... 55
  3.2 Zanon/FaSinPat ......................................................... 56
     3.2.1 Brief History ...................................................... 56
     3.2.2 First Visit to FaSinPat 11/10/2005 59
     3.2.3 Interview with worker representative Raúl Godoy 61
     3.2.4 Second Visit to FaSinPat 11/11/2005 63
     3.2.5 Third Visit to FaSinPat 11/15/2005 64
  3.3 Ex Textil San Remo ..................................................... 66
     3.3.1 Brief History ...................................................... 66
     3.3.2 Visit and Interview with Valeria Mansilla 11/25/2005 67
  3.4 Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado (CUC, Ex Gatic) ................................... 70
     3.4.1 Brief History ...................................................... 70
     3.4.2 Interview with Débora Palomo and Jorge Torres 11/30/2005 71

CHAPTER 4: THE RECUPERATED BUSINESSES AND FAIR TRADE IN ARGENTINA ............ 75
  4.1 Introduction .......................................................... 75
  4.2 The Distribution Chains of the Recuperated Businesses in the Traditional Market 76
  4.3 Impulses of Solidarity with the Community ........................................... 79
     4.3.1 Zanon and the Social Community ................................ 79
  4.4 Productive Linking ...................................................... 80
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all of the people who supported me in the process of this thesis. Thank you to all of my inspirations, including:

-My family: Barbara, Joe, Abigail, and Tom—for always being there;

-Mentors, inspirational figures, and friends: Professors Davarian Baldwin and Paul Breines, Leonard Peltier, Angela Davis, Friedrich Nietzsche, Katixa Aboitiz—for your wisdom, compassion, and help on translations, Bonnie Kaufman—for your toleration of puns and help proofreading, Nic Albert, Nijah Cunningham, Jason Long, Nick Salter, the Fourth Floor of Edmonds, Tom Priebé—MC Gushy aka Spicy Muffin, Riva Bacquet, Erika Larson, Derek Bieringer, Mike Jacobson and all of HXH Crew, and the rest of my compañeros from Sharon, the School for International Training—Southern Cone (SIT), and Boston College;

-Members of organizations and jobs I have proudly been affiliated with: Mark Jacobson and the workers of the Econocorp factory, Dollars & Sense Magazine, the entire staff of No Sweat Apparel, Chris Mackin, and Greg and the brave members of Fuerza Laboral, United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), and Student Labor Action Project (SLAP);

-The voices of the movement, without which this could not have been written: Carlos Acuña, Rodrigo, Eduardo, Raúl Godoy, Jorge, Nicolás, Roberto, Joaquín Campos, Maria, Susana Laiva, and Hugo Méndez of Zanon, Luis Caro of the Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por los Trabajadores (MNFRT), Brendan Martin of The Working World/La Base, Vasco Abelli of the Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas (MNER), Valeria Mansilla and Maria Inez Contreras of Ex San Remo, Harold Picci of Otro Mercado Al Sur, Débora Palomo and Jorge (Coco) Torres of the Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado (CUC), the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, HIJOS, the Movimientos de Trabajadores Desocupados, the editors of Lavaca and Colectivo Situaciones, the workers of Hotel BAUEN, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, and Antonio Negri;

-Academic support on this project: Pablo Morgade and Ana Rita Díaz-Muñoz—for making my semester abroad spectacular, Ariel Carpo—for correcting my Spanish on my original project, Paul Spagnoli—for your guidance and editing during the seminar, and especially my former advisor Carina Balladares—for your dedication, suggestions, knowledge of the movement, contacts, accessibility, and support;

-Most of all, I give a big thank you and warm abrazo to my thesis advisor: Professor Deborah Levenson—for providing excellent ideas and sources, putting up with my tangential reifications of critical theory, and helping me to maintain focus on the real social protagonists.
Introduction

In 2000 I spent a summer in the Amazon region of Brazil blazing trails, painting schools and women’s shelters, and building basketball courts. Throughout the trip I became enamored with a culturally rich land, one which suffered from poverty. This was evident in the metropolitan center Belém, in the smaller city of Santa Rém, and especially in the villages along the tributaries of the Amazon River, juxtaposed with abandoned rubber Ford Motor Company factories. Getting out of my boat and roaming around inside one of the factories made the image strong, but it remained a profoundly vivid mystery because I was only fifteen years old. Years later, realizing the poverty that exists because of and parallel to wealthy United States corporations urged me not just to do service, but to really gain an understanding of this complex.

I never could have imagined how many diverse levels of struggle exist against neoliberalism, which I would find when I spent a semester further south, in Argentina. More powerful than books or lectures about the history of labor strikes and social uprisings of the past, visits to the headquarters of MERCOSUR in Montevideo, or even the moving film “La Toma” (a movie on the recuperated factory movement in Argentina), was the heterogeneous spirit of resistance, which I was able to experience from firsthand encounters with el pueblo (the people). Before even choosing to do field study research on the recuperated factories and Fair Trade or writing a thesis on the lineage of the autonomous struggles, I marched with and embraced the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (the activist mothers of the missing people called the desaparecidos, lost during the military dictatorship) and I spoke with people occupying the street after their family members
died in an infamous fire at the Cromañon concert hall due to a corrupt government misdeed. I met people selling books bound by the *cartoneros’* contributions (people, who roam the streets picking cardboard out of garbage) and I experienced a 46-family cooperative farm from the landless struggle in Brazil. I learned from a recently displaced indigenous community in Paraguay, and I toured the biggest *villa* (shantytown) in Buenos Aires and its community improvement facilities. Most pivotal, though, was when I visited one of the recuperated factories, “19 de diciembre,” which produces auto parts for Ford, among other foreign companies. Remembering the riverside abandoned rubber plants from my trip to the Amazon five years before, I was struck once again by the corporation’s omnipresence in South America. The difference, though, was that this time the factory did not remain empty to rust and to be forgotten because, even though the owners did leave to re-establish elsewhere, the Argentine workers occupied the factory and started to produce on December 19, 2001, the date they named their new self-managed cooperative after, which also happened to be my seventeenth birthday.

The remarkable transformation inspired me to delve further into the phenomenon. For my academic study abroad program, I completed an independent study project, which, once translated into English, revised, and restructured, contributes some of the material for Part II of this thesis. The project was based on tape-recorded formal and informal interviews with workers and leaders of recuperated factories, leaders of the movements, and founders of Fair Trade projects that I have retained in recordings.

Researching for my thesis, I reached deeper into the roots of resistance and then expanded my view of the contemporary actors in a wider panorama to confirm that the
new social protagonists are more autonomous, horizontal, and fragmented than ever. But
the spirits of the anarchists of nineteenth century mutual aid societies, the striking
laborers of the early twentieth century, the workers who took the streets under the banner
of Perón’s Justicialismo, and the rebels of the 1969 Cordobazo are all visible in the
clouds of dust kicked up by the saqueos (mass lootings) and asambleas (assemblies) in
response to economic crisis on December 19th and 20th, 2001. Although some historians,
international intellectuals involved with the movement, Argentine militant media
collectors, autonomous piqueteros (unemployed workers who blockade highways for
dignity and barter among themselves), and many of the recuperated factory workers
disregard the majority of their ancestors’ struggles as outdated, irrelevant, or too reliant
on the unions or the state, without the legendary worker consciousness already imbedded
in the collective memory of the population, the current movements would have had no
momentum with which to begin. The strong working class consciousness of Argentina,
mixed with influence from international trends of radical philosophical thought, produced
a new breed of social rebellion and networking among the diaspora of autonomous
communities. The members of the recuperated factories are constructing support systems
based on producing out of solidarity with their community, with associated movements,
and with Fair Trade Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). They show potential not
only for survival, but also for the creation of an alternate form of globalization from
below.

The primary source messages of popular power I read not only in the accounts of
recent books and journals, but also heard in person, reveal passion in their honest
depiction of the turmoil and its aftermath since the beginning of the twenty-first century. My visits and interviews at three of the recuperated factories—Zanon/FaSinPat, Ex Textil San Remo, and Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado—in particular, introduced me to completely different but united worlds. The ceramics workers of Zanon expressed their strong ties to the community and their adherence to horizontal doctrine, the textile workers of Ex San Remo warmly welcomed my investigation when articulating their focus on survival, and the shoemakers of CUC accounted for their leading role in the struggle. The promoting leaders of the factions of the recuperated factory movement tied together the networks of support, and the representatives from the Fair Trade NGOs gave me their plans for production along with opportunities for my own participation with their projects. Collecting that information and supplementing it with volumes of historical literature and postmodern radical theory was a challenging adventure.

“Part I: History” covers the modern and contemporary history of working class resistance in Argentina. Chapter One traces this lineage from artisan mutual aid societies in the late nineteenth century and the general strikes in 1919, to the rise of trade unions consistent with populist Juan Perón, the harsh suppression of labor during the military dictatorship—also known as the Dirty War, and the not-so-powerful re-emergence of unions during Carlos Menem’s neoliberal golden age. With the historical context as a background for the present moment, Chapter Two tells the story of the chaotic economic crisis in 2001, and its subsequent reactions, involving the interplay of theory with occupying unemployed workers and recuperated factory workers.
With an understanding of the socio-economic and theoretical landscape already provided, “Part II: Voices” lets the voices of popular power describe and expand their movements, themselves. Chapter Three covers the history and makeup of three specific recuperated factories, according to my own journal accounts. Finally, Chapter Four makes clear that I am not working just for the present but also for the future. With a prescriptive tone, it combines the information provided in those visits with the words of promoters and founders of Fair Trade NGOs to explore options for support and what is to come in terms of strengthening production and changing the world from the bottom.
Part I: History

Chapter 1: Historical Strands of Labor Struggle in Argentina

Introduction

I walk where I want. I speak what I feel and I feel good about things, even though economically life is difficult. Compared to the repression, which is the only other system I really know, it is worlds apart.¹

Precursors to the contemporary recuperated factory movement and projects for Fair Trade in Argentina, democratic autonomous movements and mutual aid societies have proved powerful and polymorphous since the mid-nineteenth century. Because of the influx of immigrants in the late nineteenth century, Argentina’s worker consciousness has gathered influence from a myriad of resistant ideas, including those of Paris Commune exiles, Karl Marx, and Mikhail Bakunin in the mid to late nineteenth century, Juan Perón and Leon Trotsky in the mid-twentieth century, and more recent trends, whose originators are David Harvey and Antonio Negri, among others. Thus, the international circulation of ideas has continued to the present moment, marked by sparks of practical labor action. Faced with constantly-shifting political systems, workers have resisted by interweaving threads of thought, whose intellectual currents have been inclusive of anarchist and socialist² general strikes that began early on in *La Protesta Humana* and erupted in *La Semana Trágica* of 1919, as well as state-sponsored autonomy through vertical trade unions during the Perón era and on to the peak of the *Cordobazo* of 1969. Workers survived a stark existence under the harsh repression of the Dirty War

² The influence of Spanish anarchist literature came with anarchist immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century, and their notion of grassroots mutual aid stood in distinction to European socialist theories, which experienced growing power with the state.
(1976-1983) and adapted in the autonomous yet intertwined network of social movement trade unions under Presidents Alfonsín and Menem in the 1980s and 1990s.

As this chapter discusses, the rich history of Argentine labor ideologies and actions is the essential foundation for the contemporary struggle for the right to remain empowered, while still in a wage labor system. Today, suffering from economic depression, Argentine workers have but few options: scavenge garbage cans as a cartonero, resist by blockading the streets as a piquetero, and/or occupy and seize the right to produce as a recuperated factory worker. A strongly-developed worker consciousness in the historical context of Argentina remains one strong hope for the recuperated factory workers after the devastating economic crisis of 2001.

The Roots of Worker Consciousness and Mutual Aid in Argentina

From artesano to metalluricalista, both rural inland and urban coast, an historically specific consciousness of worker autonomy has characterized the early Argentine labor movement. Before the advent of a unique state of trade unions during the Perón era of the mid-twentieth century, labor struggle in Argentina was organized through anarchist and socialist mutual aid societies, political parties, and journals influenced by exiled Paris communards, Marx, and Bakunin.

Meat and wool exports to Europe were the original products, which simultaneously jumpstarted export-oriented agriculture and industry in Argentina, but
they did not initiate the original labor movements in Argentina.\textsuperscript{3} Artisans developed intricate rebellious mutual aid societies in the hidden alleys of the booming city before big industrial trade unions became the most common organizing tool. Immigration from Europe, and especially the 1876 Immigration Law, opened up borders and incidentally shaped the first autonomous artisan \textit{mutuales}. The first evidence of mutual aid artisan communities dates back to May 25, 1857, when the printworkers organized in the Sociedad Tipográfica Bonaërense. Argentine shoemakers and rural day workers set up networks of worker-run societies that educated and functioned through journals. Articles in \textit{El Artesano}, reproduced by branches of Europe’s First International, and in speeches at printworkers’ conferences,\textsuperscript{4} expressed the need for a federation of exploited workers.\textsuperscript{5} Similar organizations of Black and mestizo workers did exist but were suppressed.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{3} James R. Scobie, \textit{Argentina, A City and a Nation}, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 76 and 95.  
\textsuperscript{4} The leaders of resistance societies were Bartolomé Victory y Suárez and José María P. Méndez.  
\textsuperscript{5} Ronaldo Munck, Ricardo Falcón and Bernardo Galitelli, \textit{Argentina from Anarchism to Peronism} (London: Zed Books, 1987), 17.  
\textsuperscript{6} At the same time that the European immigrants developed such artisan chains, the last civil rights struggle based on race flared up and disappeared from the focus of Argentine labor struggles. The \textit{saladero} industry of drying and salting \textit{tasajo} beef not only symbolized the first major modernizing sector of Argentina in Buenos Aires in the early nineteenth century but also signified the last remnants of race struggle in the nation, by literally feeding the slave population of Cuba and Brazil, Munck, Falcón and Galitelli, \textit{Argentina from Anarchism to Peronism}, 12. One must not forget that even Argentina, whose modern positivist historical revisionists have whitened out the past, was built on a dialectic originating in slavery, for “...the meat salting and drying factories of...comb, furniture, and hat factories in Buenos Aires, cowboys on cattle ranches...[and] not only did [Juan Manuel de Rosas] reopen the slave trade between 1831 and 1838, but also his demands on the black population to fight the civil, foreign, and Indian wars...disrupted [B]lack family life,” George Reid Andrews, \textit{Afro-Latin America} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15 and 99. After the colonized indigenous populations of the country had been massacred, the next racially-oppressed members of society, Black and \textit{mestizo} ex-slave workers began to organize by the mid-nineteenth century but were suppressed by being relegated to domestic employment. The Black communities of Buenos Aires defended their position against the petty bourgeois “\textit{la decadencia},” in journals like \textit{La Raza Africana} and the very radical \textit{El Proletario} of the 1850s and 1860s, Ricardo Falcón, \textit{Los Orígenes del Movimiento Obrero (1857-1899)} (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984), 15. This did have effects on the idea of power in Argentina society, for “when movements deploy alternative conceptions of woman, nature, race, economy, democracy, or citizenship that unsettle dominant cultural meanings, they enact a cultural politics,” Sonia E. Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino
According to *El Artesano*, the goal for these efforts was to enable “the men who spend all day in the workplace of their profession, to sustain their family.”

The Fair Trade production chains of the twentieth century have their origin in these localized trade-based organizations.

Through direct involvement with the European First International, the first major flow of immigrants to Argentina reacted to the nation’s establishment as a new axis of capitalist modernization by creating the first actual links to Marx and Engels. Concurrently, in the late nineteenth century Buenos Aires became an industrial city. The European influences of the General Council of the International in London in 1870 and exiled members of the Paris Commune that had governed France for two months in 1871 provided fresh official organization in the construction of the First International of Argentina from 1872 to 1876. They published and circulated a journal, led an uprising in 1874 by General Bartolomé Mitre, and staged anti-clerical demonstrations. All of these actions represent the roots of what would eventually become a legendary worker consciousness.

These intellectual currents among Argentine workers of anarchist mutual aid and socialist affiliations with the European First International combined for major labor federations. The labor movement entered a more concrete stage through anarchist and socialist trade unions and their corresponding strikes to gain the right to collectively

---

9 Munck, Falcón and Galitelli, *Argentina from Anarchism to Peronism*, 22.
bargain from 1877 to 1899. The first strikes and trade unions were constructed based on the foundation that anarchists created with this epoch, known as *La Protesta Humana*. This new labor struggle based on anarchist humanism and socialism spurred strikes by the *aguatero* (water-vendors) of Rosario in 1877, the Unión Tipográfica print-workers with origins in the former *mutuales* in 1878, and La Fraternidad organized footplatesmen in 1887. Former Paris communards created journals, such as the 1875 *Le Révolutionnaire* and *El Descamisado*, which praised this synthesizing school of Argentine thought. Until 1897, the first official Bakunin-influenced anarchist groups, such as the Círculo de Propaganda Obrera, circulated a series of cosmopolitan journals and manifestos in several languages. Socialists from Germany and Italy created the Unión Industrial Argentina (1887) to unite with anarchists in demonstrations of thousands of people on May 1, 1890 in the subsequent revolution against the Juárez Celman regime, and in the general strikes that gained momentum until 1897. Work-place organizing became untenable with 40,000 unemployed citizens, so they had to resort to different strategies than striking. As did the effect of the traditional union strike in the wake of economic crisis a century later, giving way to new social protagonists, like the *piqueteros*, recently-unemployed workers blockading the modes of commerce (the highways, small streets, and plazas) by burning tires in mass numbers. Additionally, like the recuperated factory movement to follow in the early 2000s, immigrant labor organization and resistance would gain precedence again in a few years.

---

10 Munck, Falcón and Galitelli, *Argentina from Anarchism to Peronism*, 34.
11 Munck, Falcón and Galitelli, *Argentina from Anarchism to Peronism*, 35.
Living in the harsh conditions of *conventillo* tenements on the urban coasts of Argentina, workers of trades including tobacco, glass, cloth bags, shoes, laundry, and ironing continued *La Protesta Humana* with a more politicized form.\(^{13}\) Although they were “sorely lack[ing] the education, sanitation, and nutrition to improve their situation,” the urban lower class that made up 80 to 90 percent of the metropolitan population united in the anarchist Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA).\(^{14}\) Through this network, agents organized hundreds of strikes per year, including the general strikes of 1902, 1904, 1905, 1909, and 1910.\(^{15}\) By the 1920s the “radical” administrations of Yrigoyen and Alvear produced dissatisfaction with formal political parties, increasing membership in the rebellious FORA trade union federation. Echoes of these times seem to appear in the organization of workers under “*control obrero*” after they had lost faith in their dependence on the government as a result of the economic crisis of 2001.

Viewing the inter-imperialist World War I as a manifestation of the brutality of their capitalist enemy, FORA V and other anarchists paradoxically stimulated by the Bolshevik victory, exploded in the January, 1919 *La Semana Trágica*. As if orchestrated, and indeed all responded to the same problem, this coincided with the apocalyptic tide of resistance nearly everywhere in the form of race riots in Chicago, general strikes in Sao Paulo, 229 strikes in Chile, radical construction in Havana, revolution in Mexico and Nicaragua, Afghani Independence, and revolt in Egypt. In Argentina’s big *frigorífico* (refrigerators), textile, and metallurgical plants and on its railroads, over 100,000 workers

\(^{13}\) Scobie, *Argentina, A City and a Nation* 199.

\(^{14}\) Scobie, *Argentina, A City and a Nation* 152 and Munck, Falcón and Galitelli, *Argentina from Anarchism to Peronism*, 49.

\(^{15}\) Munck, Falcón and Galitelli, *Argentina from Anarchism to Peronism*, 50-52.
combined for 259 strikes starting in the week of January 7, 1919, and lasting for three months, the highest number of strikes since 1907. The strikes of *La Semana Trágica* were spurred by a bloody police beating of the metallurgical workers in the Vasena plant in Buenos Aires. Whether anarchist or communist, port worker, transport worker, or agricultural worker, resisters used the FORA as a unifying force against imperialist capitalist oppression. Perhaps the legacy of 1919 is found in the cohesive *contra-cumbre* resistance of the Free Trade Area of the Americas during President George W. Bush’s visit in 2006, for which thousands of protesters reclaimed the streets of Mar del Plata.

**Beyond Good and Evil, *Pueblo y Antipueblo***

Argentina must recover the firm pulse of a healthy and clean living youth, Argentina needs the young blood of the working class.

In the 1940s, the “culture of resistance,” which had already shown its face in Argentina during *La Semana Trágica*, defined itself both in defense of and in rejection of the unique concept of *Peronismo*. The pluralist ideology also known as *Justicialismo*, which Juan Perón created and influenced for future avatars to adopt, utilizes populism, democratic socialism, and fascism to embody the mutual but contradictory spirit of the military, the church, elites, and the working class. As Colonel, head of the Department of Labor, Vice President, and Secretary of War from 1943 to 1945, Juan Perón gained support from prominent socialist labor unions like the Confederación General del Trabajo de la República Argentina (CGT). Because conservative opponents within the military

---

16 Munck, Falcón and Galitelli, *Argentina from Anarchism to Peronism*, 85.
forced his resignation and imprisonment in 1945, workers took to the streets, just as they had in the general strikes decades before, to demand his release on the now famous day of October 17, 1945. He was elected President and won the opportunity to serve three official three-year terms, 1946-1952, 1952-1955, and after eighteen years of exile in Paraguay, Panama, and Spain, he returned to power for one year in 1973. The willful ambiguity of Perón’s Justicialismo was not European, nor capitalist, nor communist, but instead sought to work within a third paradigm beyond the restrictive dualism of pueblo y antipueblo. With an idealized “organized community” and realpolitik inspired by Hitler or Mussolini, but also with emphasis on social justice and the labor ideals of his first wife and national heroine Eva “Evita” Perón, Peronismo can be twisted to express a culture of elements from the left and the right. Thus, it has been used to sponsor both the resistance of John William Cooke and the repression of neoliberal President of the 1990s Carlos Menem. Accordingly, labor movements of the mid-twentieth century took on a variety of forms, featuring female meatpacker rebels, frustrated autoworkers, and fed up power and light laborers.

Whether oppressive or empowering, the working class of Argentina did seize the Peronismo ideology and molded it to its concerns. Under the name of Peronismo, labor resistance took the form of centralized industrial unions, independent plant unions, or decentralized unions with great autonomy. Juan Perón connected with and encouraged independent trade unions and their corresponding collective bargaining agreements, while

---

19 John William Cooke was the furthest left Peronist member of Parliament, professor of Economics, and the first organizer of Argentine “foco” guerrilla squads modeled after those that had been successful in Cuba.
Eva Perón promoted subsidized social welfare programs. Thus, according to historian Peter Ranis:

What Perón offered was not the individual consciousness of the unreconstructed liberal, nor the class consciousness that he identified with foreign and alien alternatives, but a unified, communitarian, social consciousness that would assuage class warfare, avoid the contamination of international socialism, and organize society to transcend the old liberal conceptions of the state.20

First and second generation female and male workers led the labor struggles of this epoch, like Doña Maria Roldán of San Martín, who mobilized herself as “a rebel, as an uppity woman, la intrusa, la impulsive, la delegada brava.”21 This, similar to nearly every aspect of the ideology, happened despite an opposing force supported by Perón: domesticity and personalism. In a variety of sectors, involving a wide range of actors, the movements of the Perón era developed a sense of empowerment that took shape in his absence in the coups, chaos, but especially the violent revolts of the 1960s, whose spirits still inspire resistance today.

Because of its ambiguities, by the tumultuous 1960s, Peronismo could allow a large Pro-Cuba wing among its adherents. Leading up to the legendary Cordobazo uprising on May 29-30, 1969, a number of organizations, unions, and strikes took precedence. Similar to the contemporary situation and the driving forces behind the recuperated factory movement, during the exceptionally fraught and desperate time of the 1960s, Argentina embraced pluralism and created a composite rebellion from a variety of imaginative visions. In 1954 and 1955 automobile businesses Fiat and IKA opened

---

20 Ranis, Argentine Workers, Peronism and Contemporary Class Consciousness, 20.
plants in the northern province of Córdoba. The workers of these plants and neighboring unions, frustrated with the state and disillusioned with the previously forced Peronismo of 1946-1955, formed independent verticalista unions like the light and power workers’ Luz y Fuera, the autoworkers’ Sindicato de Mecánicos y Afines del Transporte Automotor (SMATA), and—the true origin of the recuperated factory movement—the metalworkers’ Unión Obrera Metalúrgica (UOM). Leading up to the Cordobazo, independent workers and those associated with metalworkers’ political leader Augusto Vandor gained collective bargaining agreements and drafted manifestos at La Falda in 1957 and Huerta Grande in 1962. Four other unions were formed along with the unusually autonomous Cordoban CGT, all combining for a “great strike” in July of 1965. Like the seemingly dormant labor organization of the late 1980s and 1990s, this was just the calm before the storm, which predated the recuperated factory movement.

Meanwhile, from exile in letters and through leftist disciple John William Cooke, Perón promoted a profound radicalization, eulogizing Ernesto “Che” Guevara (Pan-American but originally from Argentina) and hailing his guerrilla tactics. More important, though, was that other non-Peronist leftist groups asserted themselves as well, such as the Partido Comunista (PC), the Partido Comunista Revolucionario (PCR), and the Partido Obrera Trotskista (forerunner of the contemporary idea of “Bajo Control Obrero” at Zanon ceramics). With numerous ideologies, a pluralist “culture of resistance” empowered itself with strikes and protests, resulting in the first death by the

---

police on May 29, 1969, but also the subsequent occupation of the entire city in flaming riots. It was reported that “as a consequence of the ‘Cordobazo’ the working class of Cordoba produced a rupture with the traditional Peronist syndical culture and it permitted the initiation of a process of substitution by ‘other’ working cultures of the leftist sign, articulated in the practice of syndical democracy.”\textsuperscript{24} Pluralist remnants of \textit{Peronismo} proved briefly triumphant, as “there was a great struggle in which a majority of the population was involved, and so if [they] were hit hard [they] had the sympathy, the support of the whole population.”\textsuperscript{25} This would be the last hurrah for labor until after the military dictatorship of the 1970s, for Perón and his third wife Isabel’s short return would not prove permanently fruitful. The abysmal terror of the late 1970s and early 1980s has proven inimitable in Argentina.

\textbf{The Suppression of Labor during the Dirty War}

Sparked by the death of Perón and his wife’s economically troubled succession, a coup took place in favor of Jorge Rafael Videla (1976-81) and his military dictatorship. This was the beginning of what was considered the Dirty War, in which any threats to the dictatorship were eliminated through kidnappings, disappearances, and torture. This right-influenced militaristic regime was ruthless in its demolishing of unions, strikes, or anything in favor of civil liberties. Trying to become more structured than earlier, this dictatorship embodied modernity’s ruthless model for progress.

\textsuperscript{24} Julio Godio, \textit{El Movimiento Obrero Argentino (1955-1990)} (Buenos Aires: Fundación Fiedrich Ebert, 1990), 207.
Videla and his similar successors, Viola, Galtieri, and Bignone liquidated 10,000 to 30,000 of their citizens, the famous *desaparecidos*. This was justified as a fight against terror. As Videla stated, “A terrorist is not only one who carries a bomb or a pistol, but also one who spreads ideas contrary to Western Christian civilization.”

Somehow, this categorized barbarism was promoted with the intention of transforming the economy, by re-privatizing it. In desperate attempts to reduce inflation and to free capital markets, the regime, through the ideas of José A. Martínez de Hoz, promoted “a drastic rollback of real wages (1976-77), a reduction of the money supply (1977-78), and a modulated exchange rate that produced a revaluation of the currency (1978-81).” The only real result was an increase in foreign debt, domestic poverty, and subsequent death.

A surgical “recuperación nacional” manifested itself during the dictatorship, as a very distinct recuperation from that of the contemporary worker-managed horizontal solution. The embedded notions of labor rights and internal economic progress, which were first brought to the forefront in the 1930’s in Argentina as “an almost total application of the concept of closed economy, with a virtual disappearance of the principles of free economy” would have to be eliminated through the use of power that far-right neoliberals like Martínez de Hoz finally gained in 1976. Thus, through violent military rule, the “disappearance of the principles of free economy” would be replaced by the disappearance of the people, whom the economy was supposed to serve. The administration acted quickly according to the minister’s plan. The military immediately

---

28 Loveman and Davies, Jr., “Military Government and State Terrorism in Argentina,” 82.
interdicted the unions, repressed activists, occupied factories, suppressed collective bargaining negotiations, and banned strikes. These harsh actions against labor caused real wages to fall by 40 percent, while private companies gained profit through foreign investment.29 Accordingly, the once thriving CGT union of the Perón era suffered, for “in early 1976 the CGT was intervened; its funds were blocked, as were its bank accounts and real property. Most critical, the federation’s vast social welfare budget was appropriated by the military.”30 Furthermore, one of the leading groups of the Cordobazo, Luz y Fuera, along with the bank employees’ Asociación Bancária, was not allowed to experiment with new forms of co-management.31 Los desaparecidos, the victims of the vast oppression, extended far beyond the actual resisters to the dictatorship. While the group of victims included explicitly subversive employees, lovers of the movement, autonomous workers, reporters, actors, artists, and even religious figures, who protested, they were mostly skilled workers, students, administrative employees, professionals, and teachers.32 Much of Argentina was fearful but indifferent to the violence after its habituation from the preceding decades of political instability. However, civilians, including priests, Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo (the activist mothers of the missing people called the desaparecidos, lost during the military dictatorship), students, and Nobel Peace Prize Winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, protested the deaths of

30 Ranis, Argentine Workers, Peronism and Contemporary Class Consciousness, 37.
31 Ranis, Argentine Workers, Peronism and Contemporary Class Consciousness, 38.
their peers. The same important leaders still protest weekly in Buenos Aires’ Plaza de Mayo.

**Menem’s Right-Wing Renovation of Peronismo**

Throughout the first years of so-called right-leaning *renovadores*’ Raul Alfonsín-led democracy following the military dictatorship of the 1970s and 80s, unions lost power and political party politics created new guidelines for economics. The CGT led thirteen general strikes in the late 1980s, but it was put on the defense by yet another inflationary administration and labeled as polarizing. Claiming to support the working class but focused on neoliberal reforms, which encourage foreign investment, Carlos Menem’s reinvented pluralist populism dominated the 1990s political scene of Argentina. During his stay in power (1989-1999), Menem tried, paradoxically, to gain international respect by letting his country’s economy become exploited. His administration pegged the nation’s currency, the peso, to the dollar of the United States to halt inflation. As in the Dirty War era, while inflation declined, many workers lost their jobs. Ultimately, the accumulation of foreign debt through loans from the International Monetary Fund led the nation in a nosedive into enormous economic crisis just after his presidencies. This obviously occurred because of Menem’s policies, but because there were months of buffer time after his stay in power, even today Menem maintains support among a wide range of admirers from particular sectors.

---

34 Ranis, *Argentine Workers, Peronism and Contemporary Class Consciousness*, 64.
Although he remains a constant presidential threat because of his handsomeness, charisma, and popularity, Menem’s name is not even whispered among the major agents of contemporary autonomous movements. Activists and workers slyly refer to him under the false name “Méndez” to avoid the bad luck associated with the former leader in their struggle or daily lives. Labor had remained a force during the 1990s, especially under the leadership of hardline negotiator Lorenzo Miguel of the UOM, but the optimism with which the menemistas entranced the public seemed an irresistible new option for Argentina’s dream of “development” and subsequent entrance into the First World.\textsuperscript{35} This economic crisis spurred not only the omnipresence of cartonero recyclers in the streets, but also the revolutionary piquetero movement, and the remarkable innovation of the recuperated factory movement.

Chapter Two:

Postmodern Resistance, Theory, and Occupation in Argentina

Introduction

Just as the anarchists and socialists had their journals, so, today does the autonomous movement of the *piqueteros* and the workers of the *recuperadas*. Today’s social protagonists, however, not only go beyond the storied Argentine labor legacy, they also make new forms of resistance “immanent.”1 Journals and intellectuals, such as *Colectivo Situaciones, Lavaca*, and Antonio Negri, use “immanence” to explicate that the new movements integrate, rather than separate, categories, such as human rights, *horizontalidad*, autonomy, gender, dignity, production, power, and freedom.

My visit to Argentina revealed a varied network of unemployed autonomous protesters and worker-owned cooperatives with completely different views of their own rights to work and property. The contemporary Argentine unemployed organizers make their revaluations2 visible with their creative actions. The new social rebels disclose themselves as part of a diffused network of communities for the rest of the diasporic, oppressed multitude and its militant researchers3 to trace on their postmodern, 4

---

1 “[One of the Postmodern theorists associated with the Argentine autonomous movement,] Antonio Negri desires to retake the philosophy of [Spinoza or Deleuze] ‘to be immanent and given’ that brings it to the ‘unitary nex’ between constitution-production, that which the hegelian-marxist legacy, except for severe posterior corrections, did not permit,” Horacio Gonzales, “Toni Negri, El Argentino,” *Contrapoder: Una Introducción*, unless otherwise indicated, all translations, including this one, are by the author of this thesis (Buenos Aires: De Mano En Mano, 2001), 143. This is further explained in Colectivo Situaciones, 19 y 20: *Apuntes para el Nuevo Protagonismo Social* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones De Mano En Mano, 2002), 70-71.

2 Colectivo Situaciones, 19 y 20, 86.

3 “If we refer to the commitment and the militant character of research, we do it in a precise sense, connected to four conditions: a) the character of the motive that underpins research; b) the practical character of research (elaboration of practical situated hypotheses); c) the value of what is being investigated; the result of research is only to be compared in its totality in situations that share as much the
biopolitical\textsuperscript{5} blueprint. The occupations of the movements of unemployed workers and the recuperated businesses, in particular, map the routes and destinations of autonomous existence.

**Ruptures of Rebellion**

It was incredible, the level of struggle that there was in Argentina, and then came defeat. Well, what does all of this mean? What is the internal history of all this, what are the jumps, the ruptures? It is here that we have to search for, to excavate. Power, hegemony, all you want, but it is there inside that we have to search, no? It appears, for that which you say, that in Argentina there begins a quite high level of struggle.\textsuperscript{6}

---

\textsuperscript{5} Preceding the fresh current of thought, Postmodernism is traced back to the teachings of Nagarjuna and other philosophers or spiritual teachers of Mahayana Buddhism, and, along a similar vein, it was replicated in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Currently, though, a spread of multiple opus magnum comprise the contemporary age of Postmodernity. The most relevant example, which has been interpreted from a Postmodern lens is Carlos Menem's neoliberal transformation of the Argentine national state. According to Colectivo Situaciones, “As the current neoliberalists say, Menem’s management successfully finished the phase of destruction of the capacities of intervention of the national state, but it was not able to construct a competitive state in its place,” Colectivo Situaciones, 19 y 20, 61. One of the main currents to interpret the age is Deconstruction, which was led by Derrida to stray away from the modern logocentric false presence and binary hierarchy suggested by Saussure's speech over writing and Rousseau’s nature over culture. Instead, Derrida argues, there will have always already been de-centered absence and illusions to preserve the pretence of self-possession, power and authorities. There is no more binary logic of either/or, not even both/and because it is neither/nor. Decidable concepts become undecidable traces, archi-writing, trace, supplement, palimpsest, dissemination, erasure, and of course deconstruction. This is not nihilistic but, instead, emancipating of meaning into a play of otherness and alterity, Richard Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 124.

\textsuperscript{6} Another current is Post-structuralism, a fragmented anti-school, which resurrected Nietzsche’s hammer, shattering the traditional modes of thought through Michel Foucault’s interdisciplinary approach and, again, Jacques Derrida’s tearing up of written works. Accordingly, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, among other theorists, saw not just concepts, but words too, in the effort to destroy the fake, reifying institutions of Europe. For further understanding, see Table 2.1: Schematic differences between modernism and postmodernism.

\textsuperscript{5} “And when one speaks of biopolitical, one does not just speak of the rich and the poor, one talks about producing that which is linked to the forms, to the hierarchies,” Toni Negri, “Entrevista a Toni Negri,” *Contrapoder*, 117.

\textsuperscript{6} Negri, “Entrevista a Toni Negri,” *Contrapoder*, 128.
Postmodern theorists suggest that in Argentina the effects of the military dictatorship will have already caused paranoia, especially because the rise of menemismo extinguished the functions of centralized unions like the CGT. But there remains a possible liberating multitude, the immanence of schizophrenic revolution. According to David Harvey, who like Toni Negri, has become enraptured with the social movement in Argentina, was quoted in Sin Patrón, and has even earned a doctorate from Buenos Aires, “The only way open to ‘eliminate the fascism in our heads’ is to explore and build upon the open qualities of human discourse, and thereby intervene in the way knowledge is produced and constituted at the particular sites where a localized power-discourse prevails.” In other words, social change must seep out the cracks of the globe by using and spreading innovative strategies. Many rebels and theorists believe that the contemporary Argentine forms of resistance have caused such fissures in its segment of

---

7 Raúl Zibechi, Genealogía de la Revuelta, Argentina: la sociedad en movimiento (Buenos Aires, Nordan Comunidad, 2003), 121.
8 The Piqueteros in Argentina, the Intifada in Palestine, the Los Angeles riots, the French strikes, the Zapatistas in Chiapas, the Landless Struggle in Brazil, and the Anti-Globalization convergence in Seattle all contribute as causing cracks in perpetual war for democracy without going it alone as the people en masse but as many: the multitude. This includes not just the high modern marginalized agents, which the New Left had promoted, for Postmodernity is attached to a dialectic of postcolonialism as the passageway. So Frantz Fanon’s epidermalization, Paul Gilroy’s diasporic Black Atlantic, and Homi K. Babha’s attack on binary divisions, and Edward Said’s condemnation of the perpetuation of colonial rule, through narratives, all hold importance as sources of discourse against what some postmodernists call Empire.
9 What they call schizophrenic is revolutionary but without a political program, so to cause a real rupture against the sovereign capital socius, the oppressed must draw schizoanalytic dialogue. According to leading postmodernists Deleuze and Guattari, “The actualization of a revolutionary potentiality is explained less by the preconscious state of causality in which it is nonetheless included, than by the efficacy of a libidinal break at a precise moment, a schiz whose sole cause is desire—which is to say the rupture with causality that forces a rewriting of history on a level with a real, and produces this strangely polyvocal moment when everything is possible,” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983), 378. The efficacy of the movements of the unemployed in Argentina “consists in increasing the power of different projects—economic, political, cultural, artistic—among the neighbors of the neighborhood and the families linked to the movements, destined in principle to resolve problems, such as unemployment, nutrition, job-training, but at the same time—and this is an essential benefit—are able to produce social cohesion and multiply the dimensions of the existence (values and feelings), MTD Solano and Colectivo Situaciones, Hipotesis 891, 28-29.
the world. Paula and Gonzalo, members of the human rights collective HIJOS, anticipate Harvey’s articulation because, as they say, “This is not to say that difference doesn’t exist. It does, and we still need to acknowledge that. Knowledge is always power and often, in an assembly, we’re able to use this power in ways that are good.” Indeed, Argentine reactions to their economic crisis are remarkable.

In transversal actions, people from a variety of classes and local histories had no choice but to act. Argentina’s desocupados (unemployed workers), ahorristas (members of the middle class, who were most effected by frozen accounts because the poor had no bank accounts and the rich stored money elsewhere), asambleístas (varied Argentine neighbors converging in massive consensus/horizontal/direct-democracy-run meetings, “helping facilitate barter networks, creating popular kitchens, planting organic gardens, and sometimes taking over buildings—including the highly symbolic take-over of abandoned banks, which they turn into community centers,” and planning cacerolazos—banging of pots and pans in protests—to stay loud and active), and disillusioned individuals of the upper class have participated in heterogeneous

---

11 HIJOS (For Identity and Justice and Against Forgetting and Silence) has added to the post-Dirty War human rights groups Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (the weekly-protesting mothers and grandmothers of the desaparecidos). HIJOS is a group formed by children of the desaparecidos, created in 1995 through the Universidad de Buenos Aires. They often appear at the houses of ex-military generals to confront them with direct actions.
13 Reacting to the same general cause of frustration, subgroups of Argentine society supported a common struggle, sharing elements among each other in intersecting planes of existence. MTD Solano and Colectivo Situaciones, Hipotesis 891, 32.
14 “These occupied spaces can house any number of things, including kitchens, small print shops, day care areas, they may offer after-school help for kids, free internet access and computer usage, and one even has a small movie theater,” Sitrin, Horizontalism, 10. They have since declined due to political party intrusiveness and police and government repression.
struggles. Even though distinct actions still imply the class categories “included” and “excluded”\(^\text{16}\) from capitalist society, they root themselves in general solidarity according to the Encuentro de Organizaciones Sociales (EOS).\(^\text{17}\) This general social movement is united by infrapolitical music from rock chabón and cumbia villera and groupings of publishing collectives and activists like *El Mate*, *La Mariátegui* and *FM La Tribu* (but above all *FM La Colifata*, HIJOS, and the MTDs).\(^\text{18}\) The fragmented collection of those “generational, popular, feminine, suburban, anti-repressive, horizontal”\(^\text{19}\) people affected by—police brutality (see Table 2.2: Gunshot Victims of Police, According to Age), the economic crisis’ *corralito* (the seizing of bank accounts to limit withdrawals out of fear for capital flight after the failed Menem devaluation), and mass unemployment—converged at the sound of the *cacerola* in the movement’s *saqueos* (mass lootings) on December 19 and 20, 2001.

These seemingly spontaneous rallies and the ransacking of supermarkets and electronic stores were actually organized among neighbors. According to one account:

> Once in the street, the barricades and the fire reunited the neighbors. And from there, the movement to see what happened in other close corners. Late to decide to where it went: to the Plaza de Mayo, to the Plaza de los Dos Congresos and, in each neighborhood, to begin to detect objectives more at hand: the house of Videla [the former military dictator], or of Cavallo [the minister of economics under Menem]. The multitude divided, according to neighborhoods and took care of all of the ‘objectives’ at the same time. The more radical spontaneity sustained itself in the organized collective memory. There were

---

\(^{16}\) Colectivo Situaciones, 19 y 20, 177.

\(^{17}\) “…definitions [of EOS]: autonomy from the state, from the political parties and from the central unions; construction of a coordinating body to overcome the fragmentation, socialize experiences, tools, resources, and information; toleration for times of every organization, since each group is both in response to concrete needs; unity in the diversity; not to delegate active participation, democracy, horizontality, and equal access of the information,” Zibechi, *Genealogía de la Revuelta, Argentina*, 108.

\(^{18}\) Zibechi, *Genealogía de la Revuelta, Argentina*, 95.

\(^{19}\) Zibechi, *Genealogía de la Revuelta, Argentina*, 97.
thousands and thousands of people acting with clear and precise ends. A collective intelligence was put into action.\textsuperscript{20}

The events of December 19 and 20, 2001, while controversial, have just as much Argentine working class historical significance as January 7, 1919 (the start of \textit{La Semana Trágica}), October 17, 1945 (when workers forced the release of Perón and his return to power), or May 29-30, 1969 (the \textit{Cordobazo}).\textsuperscript{21} In fact, to the new protagonists against biopower,\textsuperscript{22} the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} marked the symbolic end of what they call the genocide, which began with the Dirty War.\textsuperscript{23} Paloma, an \textit{asambleísta} from the neighborhood Palermo Viejo in Buenos Aires, reflects, “It began with some \textit{cacerolazos}, and I remember…boom! People lost their fear—the fear we had from the military era, when we had to be silent for fear that the government would bring out the tanks.”\textsuperscript{24} Even when I was in Argentina last year, an Abuela de Plaza de Mayo (Grandmother of a \textit{desaparecido}) was brutally beaten by ex-military officers in Córdoba, a region still full of fascists and collaborators of the dictatorship. Despite the repression, committed to the theory of Irish economist and philosopher John Holloway, the rebels sought change but not power. According to feminist and GLTIB collectivist Paula’s accounts:

\begin{quote}
To escape [the violence of police repression at one of the \textit{cacerolazos}], we ran and jumped the fence to the Pink House (government building [equivalent to the White House]) and went inside. I was on television. They said that I was encroaching on the Pink House, that I was taking over the Pink House. I had to laugh. It’s especially funny because at the time, my friend said, ‘We can go in there, but we’re not taking power.’
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{20} Colectivo Situaciones, \textit{19 y 20}, 36.
\textsuperscript{21} Colectivo Situaciones, \textit{19 y 20}, 210.
\textsuperscript{22} See the next section on Empire in Argentina: “In this age capitalists also assert power by trying to make the personal body docile, according to neoliberal agreements, with fascism in our heads instead of in the state apparatus,” author.
\textsuperscript{23} Colectivo Situaciones, \textit{19 y 20}, 9.
\textsuperscript{24} Paloma in Sitrin, \textit{Horizontalism}, 24.
To us, power didn’t exist any more. The concept of taking power is archaic. What does it mean to take power? Power over what? Like the idea of combating “fascism in the head,” the Argentine protagonists interpret power completely differently than their labor struggle predecessors had. They see it as a verb, a constant struggle with a variety of acts and moments.

Regarding power from within, the saqueos seemed organized with assemblies, who arranged buses into the cities of the entire nation, but it remains ambiguous because there is no documentation of a coordinating body. The main clash was between the police and the looters, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, or the asambleístas. According to Norma, a politically disillusioned neighbor of Moreno, “I passed the time crying, looking at how [the police] beat the people, without being able to believe that with a democratically-elected president, they would beat the people, without being able to believe that with a democratically-elected president they would beat the people in this form and that he did nothing.” Whether already irrelevant or not, chanting the auto-affirmative negation of all authority, “que se vayan todos!” (all of them must go!), Argentines forced President Fernando de la Rua to flee and four governments to resign in one week. Another, more involved citizen, Oscar, displayed contrasting sentiments when he got caught in the center of the actions:

The 19th I was in my house eating lunch, and I felt detonations that came from the side of Carrefour [a major supermarket chain], I live 2 blocks away. My 14 year-old kid, was in the street, so I went to search

26 Colectivo Situaciones, 19 y 20, 127.
27 “It speaks to us about the radical change under new modalities that do not despise but don’t embody the inherited revolutionary images, either. Like in the “ya basta” of the zapatistas, the affirmation does not take the form of a promise. It begins with the rejection of the current state of things. But this rejection, well-viewed, is not a mere reaction, as so much as it is a gesture of autoafirmación that permits the exercising of the negation,” Colectivo Situaciones, 19 y 20, 57.
for him. I found him in the corner watching how the people were throwing rocks with the police while the police were shooting…When we were with the oil truck, a little truck with four or five people two meters wide, and backs like that, with broken beer bottles, they wanted all of the remaining oil. They loaded the bottles into the little truck and went. We didn’t even know the guys, they weren’t from the neighborhood. On top of that two or three that walked with them, stopped a car, threatened it with a bottle, loaded three or four boxes of oil and left. After, when we stopped the truck of La Serenisima [a yogurt/milk distributor] we gave out four or five cartons of milk and one of cheese for each one. I did it with a feeling of solidarity, because they were really people that were doing very poorly. But, later everything lost its virtue because they began to stop any sort of truck.28

What was certainly a positive rupture in the system had its weaknesses, as violent looters not only went for the large chains, often with cooperation, but also looted small family-owned stores.

Since the cathartic end of 2001, Argentines have participated in numerous forms of direct action (See Table 2.3: Actions during the stop of May, 29 2002). Cortes de ruta have made a visible legacy of many unemployed piqueteros. The neighborhood asambleas especially gained momentum after a policeman shot three children dead because they were publicly celebrating the December insurrection, which they had seen on television. In response, “The reunited neighbors there began to evaluate the available procedures: lists of demands, festivals, gathering of signatures, and government hearings.”29 Asambleas, which serve as meetings for decision-making, have not only continued their carcelolazos, which follow in the tradition of Argentina in the multi-class banging of pots and pans, but they have also adopted methods of identifying the repressor with escraches, the creative street theatre, mural-painting, and graffiti made famous by the confrontational human rights group HIJOS.

---

28 Colectivo Situaciones, 19 y 20, 129.
29 Colectivo Situaciones, 19 y 20, 174.
According to Argentine intellectual Germán J. Pérez’s interpretation of Jacques Derrida’s hauntological reading of the *Communist Manifesto*, the Argentine *desocupado* (unemployed worker), through each of the aforementioned forms of resistance, will have already conjured up the specter of former struggles:

> It is exactly in the spectral character of the transparent, where we find the possibility of the active exercise of the politic in the device of the simulacra… The *corte de ruta* as a format of protest connotes the impunity to the subsystems power and money to the extent that it interrupts the circulation to manifest a demand; the presence of a live body that reappears in the public scene, beyond the logic of the simulacrum, interrupts the apparently infinite circulation of goods and persons.  

This seemingly “alive ghost” resembles that which was originally said to haunt the Fordist workplace (See Table 2.4: Fordist modernity versus flexible postmodernity, or the interpenetration of opposed tendencies in capitalist society as a whole), but while the new actions are born out of past struggles and some of the new actors still even produce parts for Ford, itself, their “worries expand and they turn heterogeneous simultaneous with the deconstruction of the representations of the world of Fordist work.” A distinctive critique of modern capitalism arises out of the struggles in Argentina.

**Empire in Argentina**

According to both Argentine unemployed workers and their aligned theorists, capital will have always been not just a force behind the invisible hand of the free market; rather, it is the new socius, or social field, a quasi-cause of appropriation of the

---

31 Colectivo Situaciones, 19 y 20, 36.
32 Colectivo Situaciones, 19 y 20, 12.
productive forces. Its hero, the contemporary capitalist, exemplified by Carlos Menem or Luis Zanon (former owner of the largest recuperated factory; see Chapter Three), acts as a joker, whose mimetic power/knowledge grid surpasses all boundaries. Michel Foucault likens this contemporary complex to Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, or more broadly, a carceral archipelago. They not only enforce discipline through everyday institutions, which Foucault studied, such as the prison, the asylum, the hospital, the university, the school, or the psychiatrist’s office, in this age, capitalists also assert power by trying to make the personal body docile, according to neoliberal agreements, with fascism in our heads instead of in the state apparatus. One Argentine asambleísta, Martín K, shares his thoughts, which are consistent with this intellectual trend,

I want to share an anecdote to give a small idea of how to think of power today, how power functions. The other day I was on the subway, and I saw a guy with a tattoo of a series of bars on his back, and it caught my attention—it was like a trademark, a barcode, like identification as a consumer object. I thought about how we live in a consumerist world, and in a sense, that is power—the power the system has to create values based on prestige and individual accumulation. Maybe we’re entering this phase of bio-power, where life is organized, regulated, and produced in market terms. In some ways, power today is

---

33 Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, 227.
34 “This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead—all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism,” Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 197.
35 “We have seen that, in penal justice, the prison transformed the punitive procedure into a penitentiary technique; the carceral archipelago transported this technique from the penal institution to the entire social body,” Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 298. The carceral archipelago of prisons, thus, extends its bleak characteristics, in mirrored reflection, to the ocean that surrounds it.
36 “…the existence in question is no longer the juridical existence of sovereignty; at stake is the biological existence of a population. If genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers, this is not because of a recent return of the ancient right to kill; it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population,” Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 137. This perspective is backed by Colectivo Situaciones in 19 y 20, 24 and 197.
the feeling that life is about shopping, or about talking about how much money you need to live, always something in relation to the market.  

This extraordinary insight on biopower by a local resident illuminates Negri and others’ adaptation of immanence because it shows how categories, such as “intellectual,” disallow how ordinary people describe the world.

Going by what Colectivo Situaciones calls “a Plaza de Mayo post and pre Foucaultian,” power in Argentina is of the mind and the body rather than of the state. One *piquetero* explains:

Thoughts and ideas are not solely the product of cerebral cogitation. Thought must also engage the physical body. Thought emanates from transformative practice. Thought emanates from a practice that creates a radical rupture against that which has been established. We establish the theoretical framework from this place.

According to the editors of *Sin Patrón*, the comprehensive anthology of the recuperated factory movement by Argentine publishing collective *Lavaca*, “If we start, therefore, to understand capitalism not as a system that produces and distributes goods in this or that manner, but as a producer and distributor of identities, every change will be marked by a transformation in the paradigms that modify the perspectives of those identities.” The prominence of neoliberalism in the age of globalization created a postmodern cultural hegemony. Says one Argentine unemployed organizer, “What we are doing in the movement is a very big battle against the hegemonic furor of globalization, that wants to take control of cultural values, and, thus, to takeover the world.”

---

38 Colectivo Situaciones, *19 y 20*, 49.
social rebels and their supportive militant researchers translate Postmodernity in socioeconomic terms into a distinctive, biopolitical, capitalist, hegemonic \(^{42}\) Empire.

Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt call this reign Empire because it has no limits or boundaries for its flexible or fluid work. It is imperial but not imperialist, decentered and deterritorialized. Toni Negri, especially—along with other outsiders John Holloway and the Canadian anti-corporate journalist couple Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis—has gathered empirical evidence from the agents of the autonomous movements of Argentina in equal exchange for their appreciation through continual visits, interviews, and lectures for radical media collectives. Upon first glance, Negri resembles a contemporary Antonio Gramsci, also gaining wide academic acclaim after spending decades in Italian jail for participation in its autonomist movement. However, while Gramsci produced thousands of pages of theory but died immediately after finishing his sentence, Negri wrote *Empire* in jail but finished doing time in 2003 to be able to have direct correspondence with the subjects of its sequel, *Multitude*, such as those in Argentina.

According to Negri’s idea of Empire, sovereignty, typically thought to be exclusive to the nation-state during Modernity, will have already been a characterization of a combination of oppressing corporate forces.\(^{43}\) This is manifest in the emergence of

\(^{42}\) “If one is to speak of hegemony, one has to talk about something else, one has to talk of a power of the multitudes to express themselves, and of a form of law that were adequate, that establishes procedures and that were capable of systematically institutionalizing the relations, the contracts, the institutions that were tied to this power of expression. This is hegemony. If we talk of hegemony in these terms, I am in agreement,” Negri, “Entrevista a Toni Negri,” *Contrapoder*, 125.

\(^{43}\) “Even the most dominant nation-states should no longer be thought of as supreme and sovereign authorities, either outside or even within their own borders. The decline in sovereignty of nation-states, however, does not mean that sovereignty as such has declined...sovereignty has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule. This new global form of sovereignty is what we call Empire,” Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), xi-xii.
the brand, replacing the importance of the product. Similarly, companies market an idea instead of a thing. The complicated chains of production, involving a purposefully tangled web of neoliberal agreements and undisclosed subcontractors, often start at rights-restricting Free Trade Zones and Export Processing Zones. Such phenomena have existed ever since the high modern compression of space through time when corporate heads established the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire in 1944. Since 2005, neoliberals are effectively closing factories with workers’ struggles, by phasing out the job quota system known as the Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA). Consequently, the phase-out has inspired transnational corporations to shift sourcing to Chinese sweatshops, where independent trade unions are illegal. Argentine workers lost all options, when they had to handle the over-accumulation from the terms of Carlos Menem, whose dollar convertibility inadvertently overvalued the peso and sacrificed domestic industrial jobs for reduced inflation rates in an enormous debt crisis. The unemployment rate in Argentina was as high as 20%, with 40% unable to find “adequate employment and 53% under the poverty line in 2001-

---

44 John Ermatinger, president of Levi Strauss Americas division stated, “Our strategic plan in North America is to focus intensely on brand management, marketing and product design as a means to meet the casual clothing wants and needs of consumers. Shifting a significant portion of our manufacturing from the U.S. and Canadian markets to contractors throughout the world will give the company greater flexibility to allocate resources and capital to its brands. These steps are crucial if we are to remain competitive,” Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 2000), 195.

45 “The financial crisis…links the Argentine crisis clearly to the global system and the general instability of the global political body, especially as a result of the neoliberal policies of the IMF. With the currency crisis, Argentina’s foreign debt suddenly became unpayable, and its celebrated middle class was thrust into the common situation of the populations of many of the poor countries in the world: savings became worthless, job security evaporated, unemployment skyrocketed, and all social services broke down. The response of the Argentina population was immediate and creative: industrial workers refused to let their factories close and took over managing the factories themselves [the recuperated businesses], networks of neighborhood and city assemblies were formed to manage political debates and decisions, new forms of money were invented to allow for autonomous exchange, and the *piqueteros*, the movements of unemployed..., experimented with new forms of protest in their conflicts with police and other authorities,” Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 216.
Concurrently, the global effects of the 1994 Tequila Crisis in Mexico and increased dependence on supranational agencies caused a sharp increase in Argentine bankruptcies. Owners of Argentine businesses and factories sourced elsewhere or left, while workers are still owed large salarial debts from former employers for months or even years of labor. However, the effects of Empire have not made the workers of Argentina into docile bodies. With a tire-smoking séance to counter Empire in Argentina, an excluded multitude will have already always seized *contrapoder* in resistance, insurrection, and constituent power. In this context, the new Argentine protagonists reflect on and surpass their modern ancestors’ socialist and anarchist strikes and high modern parents’ *Cordobazo*. Two of the most important factions of the multitude are the unemployed organizations of the *piqueteros* and the workers of the *empresas recuperadas* (recuperated businesses).

**Piqueteros**

What is necessary and possible today is a form of labor organizing that overcomes all the divisions of the old unions and manages to represent the becoming common of labor in all its generality—economically, politically, and socially….One modest proposal that points in this direction, for example, involves opening up trade unions to other segments of society by merging them with the powerful social movements that have emerged in recent years in order to create a form of ‘social-movement unionism.’ A more militant example is provided by the ‘piqueteros,’ the movements of unemployed workers in

---


47 Negri, *Contrapoder*, 83. According to a *piquetero*, “For us [the new social protagonists], *contrapoder* has to do with autonomy… we do not want to substitute anything in this system, we want to construct something new. And that new thing we are thinking of, we are constructing. This is what *contrapoder* is about,” MTD Solano and Colectivo Situaciones, *Hipotesis 891*, 90.

Argentina that have begun to function like activist, politicized unions of the unemployed.\footnote{Hardt and Negri, \textit{Multitude}, 136-137.}

Beyond Marx’s pejorative stance on the lumpen proletariat, the Argentine multitude’s resistance is focused on those without work.\footnote{“For classic Marxism the desocupados are barely the ‘industrial army reserve.’ The old workers’ movement did not conceive of the desocupado as a subject, not even as a member of the class, since it professed a conception of the World that made central a turn of the social relations of production. When these relations lacked, when there was no salarial relation or stable employment, it was not possible to find another alternative, nor create one, for realizing that situation, except the very derogatory label of lumpen proletariat. Take notice that the Marxists never were able to visualize those without work as any form other than as ‘reserve’, as desocupados waiting to find a place in the world of formal employment. Thus, it is as if they lack something, the desocupados,” Zibechi, \textit{Genealogía de la Revuelta, Argentina}, 127.} With its massive amount of unemployed but organized workers, publishing collective \textit{Lavaca} argues that Argentina has experienced the disintegration of capitalism, which Daniel Bell predicted would lead to a post-industrial age, where everything coincides. Whereas Argentina’s original program for action depended on the ideas and actions of its modern European immigrants, who admired legacies such as the Paris Commune and Marx or the Turin workers’ councils and Gramsci, the new Argentine multitude of desocupados have become the contemporary model for choosing the most appropriate method—organizing despite their job loss to directly cut off the flow of Empire and demand planes

\footnote{David Harvey, often cited by the autonomous movement, says in \textit{The Condition of Postmodernity} that there are four methods of response to the postmodern situation. Some are withdrawn into silence, reinforced by deconstruction, e.g. the Paul de Man Deconstruction/National Socialism controversy. Some deny the complexities of the world and are, thus, depthless. Others use “frenetic gibberish” to try to articulate the layers, such as Baudrillard (with a lot of folds and divisions) or Deleuze and Guattari (some Marxists, such as Noam Chomsky, think that this response is too much like intellectual masturbation, and thus not political enough). Because all of those responses seem futile, I feel that the Argentine autonomous movement has taken the only response left. According to Harvey, this response is “…to find an intermediate niche for political and intellectual life which spurns grand narrative but which does cultivate the possibility of limited action. This is the progressive angel to postmodernism which emphasizes community and locality, place and regional resistances, social movements, respect for otherness, and the like. It is an attempt to carve out at least one knowable world from the infinity of possible worlds which are daily shown to us on the television screen. At its best it produces trenchant images of possible other worlds, and even begins to shape the actual world. But it is hard to stop the slide into parochialism, myopia, and self-referentiality in the face of the universalizing force of capital circulation. At worst, it brings us back to narrow and sectarian politics in which respect for others gets mutilated in the fires of competition between the fragments,” Harvey, \textit{The Condition of Postmodernity}, 351.}
de trabajo (paid unemployment subsidies) or at least autonomous dignity. According to Negri, “the unemployed workers were the ones responsible for creating a social technology [...] without making a hierarchy of components, but the totality of the formula.” With the intentions of the echoing saqueos demands “que se vayan todos,” the piqueteros’ tactics originate in the idea of stopping production by picketing outside of factories in strikes, but the design is altered because its bases are now the highways. That is, “the current-day picket, then, is not just a residual sub-product of the class struggles (of the factory plant), as much as a contemporary modality of the class struggles in a postmodern capitalism, that each time does not distinguish more between production

52 “Do we find ourselves in front of a new Paris Commune? As Marx, in the ‘Class Struggle in France’, counterposed the communards to the socialist Synagogue of Luxemburg, today from Argentina comes an example of new constitution of the multitude. The example of the constitution of the multitude (what we have seen and continue seeing is also its internal transformation) has to be seen essentially in the struggles that "Piqueteros" documents. To a radical institutional crisis ("all of them must go!" was a cry that denounced and registered the minority condition to which the traditional political parties were reduced), to a consequent lapse of the legitimation of the representative function (involving generalized public and private corruption), to a political crisis (demonstrated by the incapacity to reproduce customary models of constitutional alliance between social classes and bourgeois hegemony over the system), to a financial crisis (of payment of the debt and of inversion of the flows from the periphery to the center) and finally to a very profound social crisis that destroyed capacities, both productive (extreme unemployment, savage precarization of labor) and reproductive (crisis of public education and health), to all this responded a "multitudinary counterpower" that organized itself in autonomous systems of production, of interchange and political organization, in completely original forms. From workers' self-management of the factories to the generalized occupation of public buildings on the part of the neighborhood assemblies, from the construction of a new currency from below (and a new market and new modalities of exchange) to the revolutionary and legitimate exercise of force on the part of the piquetes, there appears here a capacity of autonomous constitution of the multitudes, that bear an energy of universal conviction and of egalitarian social recomposition. The martyrdom of the generations destroyed by the military dictatorship of '70-'80 and the desperation of peoples that rebelled against neoliberal globalization in the '90s, find here the truth of a new experience of radical social construction,” Toni Negri, “The Ballad of Buenos Aires,” Critique of the Italian Edition of the book “19 and 20. Notes for the new social protagonism,” http://www.nodo50.org/colectivosituaciones/nuestras_publicaciones.htm.  
54 “…to the decline of the traditional strike, of scarce efficacy because only very restricted sectors of workers can practice it, or because of the scarce utility that it has before the toughening of the employers and the growth of unemployment,” Zibechi, Genealogía de la Revuelta, Argentina, 26.
and circulation." These actors are no longer workers in a struggle but excluded people without work, who seek autonomous but multiple unemployed parallel institutions to cover boundless ground.

The first *piqueteros* began their direct actions in the mid-nineties in the Northern Patagonian town of Cutral-Có in the region of Neuquén and have since spread North to Uruguay. Towards the end of 1994, construction workers in Neuquén took to the streets in a popular assembly and general strike, which led to related actions in Buenos Aires (*manzaneras* in 1995) and Córdoba (Declaration of 1996). They organized into multifaceted “*sindicato de desocupados*” (unions of the unemployed) with an initial major convergence of Repsol YPF oil workers, who had recently been laid off. This action declared itself the *Cutralcazo* in May, 1996 in Neuquén with *cortes de ruta* on June 20-26, 1996 (See Document 2.1: Neuquén, May of 1996). By barricading Highway 22, the struggle gained a reputation as the self-proclaimed *piqueteros*. The fragmented movement has grown as grassroots movements have formed according to the specificities of particular neighborhoods, while at the same time remaining in solidarity under the general umbrella of: the Congreso Nacional de Organizaciones Piqueteras, among the Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA—one of the only unions in the 1990s), Leninist Corriente Clasista y Combativa (CCC), Federación de Tierra, Vivienda y Hábitat (FTV), Bloque Piquetero (Polo Obrero, Movimiento Teresa Rodríguez and others) and, most importantly, La Coordinadora Aníbal Verón—named after a protesting

---

bus driver, who was murdered in 2000 [Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados (MTD) and Coordinadora de Trabajadores Desocupados (CTD)]. Even though the network Aníbal Verón no longer really exists, some of the fragments relate through the Frente Dario Santillan, named after another young piquetero killed by the police at a corte de ruta. Indeed, most consider themselves members of factions of the MTDs, especially represented in the villas (shantytowns) in the surrounding neighborhoods of Buenos Aires.

As with the saqueos, while they may appear spontaneous, the diverse and very frequently disseminated cortes de ruta—that block bridges, highways, government buildings, and supermarkets—are well-organized to let the voices of the jobless be heard. They designate responsibilities among areas concerned with the press, production, economy, capacity and popular education, security, administration, marketing, land, and institutional relations. While the initial goal was to gain subsidies, a compañera from MTD Solano explains, “We started getting some money from the state with these protests, but in the assemblies we discussed fighting for more than the tiny amount of subsidies they threw at us. Together we decided that we had to fight for something much larger, and that’s where the whole idea of fighting for dignity emerged. Fighting for freedom. Fighting with horizontalidad.” They do not simply cover their faces and occupy the streets with sticks and stones; behind the pickets the piqueteros have developed barter systems, small-scale food production and distribution, and sewing

---

58 Sitrin, Horizontalism, 7.
59 MTD Solano and Colectivo Situaciones, Hipotesis 891, 50.
60 Compañera in Sitrin, Horizontalism, 100.
workshops, among other intercommunal survival programs. On a global perspective, some of the MTDs consider themselves as loosely-related but autonomous urban extensions of the indigenous movements Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in Chiapas, México or the Brazilian Movimento Dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Struggle).  

A matriarchal family of neighbors committed to daily action comprises this movement. Most of the *piqueteros* are actually *piqueteras* because as Argentine scholar Raúl Zibechi says:

- the woman is the permanent figure in social sectors in which the predominance of the nuclear family has made way for the extended family… She is now, more than ever, the central organizer of the family and of the home;
- the woman assumes the role of bread-winner for the children and for the home;
- the woman is the *aglutinadora* (one who brings in) the intrafamily relations and the representative of the whole family;
- the extended family with feminine centrality is a productive unit in that which, differing from the traditional family, there is no exterior relation between the work and the family life and therefore the family and labor daily lifestyles are not burned. In the MTDs the majority of the productive workshops function within the dwellings of the integrants of the movements, who give up land or part of their land;
- the woman is the chain of integration between the house and the neighborhood.  

---

61 Many *piqueteros* are inspired by the suggestions of social rebellion by Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos, and they claim to have learned directly from the horizontal structure, direct democracy, and autonomy of the 25-year struggle of MST, but the Argentine movement is more secular. So, they act in solidarity with these “strong references,” but with an understanding that their history is different, MTD Solano and Colectivo Situaciones, *Hipotesis* 891, 80, 86, 88, 96, and 101. When I went to a 46-family MST cooperative farm, near Porto Alegre, I asked the spokespeople if they had any sort of alliance with the movements of the *desocupados* or the *recuperadas* (the movement described in the next section) in Argentina, and they had never heard of them. Nevertheless, many scholars have grouped all the movements under the idea of *autogestión* (self-management), for example, comparing the *recuperadas* to the *autogeridas*—the Brazilian worker-owned businesses and factories, which began to have prominence in 1994 with their organization Associação Nacional dos Trabalhadores de Empresas de Autogestão (ANTEAG).

Indeed, because of their defensive, horizontal orientation without the desire for power, the movements are considered “feminine.” Most of the organizations, though, are led by men, and the movement has had some setbacks, including the internal disputes about the importance of a horizontal structure, direct democracy, or the use of the government, for example between members of MTD Solano in Buenos Aires and General Mosconi in the Northern Province of Salta. The barter systems, which many people relied on to eat, experienced setbacks because people counterfeited thousands of the tickets used to represent exchange-value. Some speculate it was the government. The family of *piqueteros* has also faced tragedy, such as kidnappings and house-burnings by the police, and most infamously the event on June 26, 2002, when two *compañeros*, Darío Santillán and Maximiliano Kosteki, died during protests in the Pueyrredón Bridge in Buenos Aires. Nevertheless, the *piqueteros* continue to struggle for “trabajo, dignidad y cambio social” (“work, dignity, and social change”).

From the words of a member of MTD de Solano:

> I believe that the pickets destroyed the apathy but in another alternative manner. We shook the country of the sweet dreams that Menem sold and all that politic, and we went as the explosive coming of a new light. Together with other struggles we made the country wake up from the sweet dreams of Postmodernity. *Piqueteros* was the name that they gave us, and for us it was the form that we had to talk to the entire society, telling them that there were other forms of struggle, of fueling our fire and our dignity.

In the same vein of dignifying by re-conceptualizing and re-naming, some of the *piqueteros* prefer “*Trabajadores Autónomos*” (Autonomous Workers) to “*Trabajadores*”

---

63 Zibechi, *Genealogía de la Revuelta, Argentina*, 169.
Desocupados,” thus emphasizing what they are, not what they are not. There are now links with the recuperated factories but not the state.\textsuperscript{68} What started as an innovative movement of excluded desocupados found another home, included, in the movement of fábricas ocupadas (occupied factories).

**Las Empresas Recuperadas (The Recuperated Businesses Movement)**

We’re the present and the future. To resist and occupy. The factory will not be closed. Resist and occupy. With our banners high, we’ll lift the country up. We are the present and the future. To resist and occupy.\textsuperscript{69}  

Hung out to dry in the age of liquid modernity, the businesses and factories abandoned in response to their owners’ frauds and bankruptcies are the no-place bases of the multitude. The prominence of the Recuperated Factory Movement proves that these interpretative communities will have already always become the necessary patches, whose local determinism involves a concern with otherness. As the anthem of the Recuperated Factory Movement goes, “Repeat to me: the power is not just a place, but a capacity.”\textsuperscript{70} During the 1980s and 1990s, workers from all over Argentina began a new form of struggle for their right to a just job in a democratic setting.\textsuperscript{71} After their employers left their businesses bankrupt and their factories closed in the context of the neoliberal crisis, which Menem had enabled, Argentine workers started a large-scale social movement to take over their own factories. They stood by the right to work, which the Argentine constitution, revised in 1994, explicitly guaranteed:

\textsuperscript{68} MTD Solano and Colectivo Situaciones, *Hipotesis 891*, 247.  
\textsuperscript{69} A hymn of the recuperated businesses, sung by Candido of Chilavert in Sitrin, *Horizontalism*, 73.  
\textsuperscript{70} Editors of Lavaca, influenced by intellectual Zygmunt Bauman, “Nuestra Mirada: Trabajadores de Otra Clase,” *Sin Patrón*, 21.  
\textsuperscript{71} “Most workers interpreted democracy—as guaranteeing a sphere of practical autonomy,” Ranis, *Argentine Workers, Peronism and Contemporary Class Consciousness*, 198.
All the inhabitants of the Nation are entitled to the following rights: to work and perform any lawful industry...Labor in its several forms shall be protected by law, which shall ensure to workers: dignified and equitable working conditions; limited working hours; paid rest and vacations; fair remuneration; minimum vital and adjustable wage; equal pay for equal work; participation in the profits of enterprises, with control of production and collaboration in the management; protection against arbitrary dismissal.  

In the initial stages there were some workers who unsuccessfully attempted to reclaim their right to work and private property by recuperating businesses. However, a struggle was born out of their ashes, which reflected strongly developed worker praxis.

In the area of Quilmes in the province of Buenos Aires, a section of UOM, the same union which had led the Cordobazo and which bloomed into “the largest and most powerful industrial labor union in Argentina,” initiated this fresh process. In this era, workers formed associations, creating fifteen to twenty cooperatives that manifested the ideologies of the left to recapture their businesses when their owners’ debt had caused management to flee. The takeovers of Yaguané, a refrigerator factory in La Matanza in 1996, and also of IMPA, an aluminum factory in the capital of Buenos Aires, in 1998, opened the door as antecedents and as examples to follow, for a great tide of takeovers after the crisis of December 2001. According to Table 2.6: Recuperated Businesses (ERT) per year of occupation, before 2001, 14 attempts at recuperating had occurred. During 2001, 24 took place. Throughout 2002 workers seized 22 more, leading to a sharp increase of 40 more in 2003 and 2004; only half of them ever had to be taken

---

73 Ranis, Argentine Workers, Peronism and Contemporary Class Consciousness, 78.
74 Julián Rebón, Desobedeciendo al desempleo (Buenos Aires: La Rosa Blindada y PICASO, 2004), 30.
75 “El Partido de la Matanza” in the province of Buenos Aires is one of the most populated but rapidly de-industrializing places in the country.
through illegal occupation. Some workers have experienced large conflicts with former owners regarding property rights, such as the ceramics workers of Zanon/FaSinPat or the suit-making women of 18 de diciembre/Brukman, whose massive fight against eviction lasted months and involved large protests in the streets. Candido of Chilavert graphics tells how important the links with other movements were in such struggles:

In Chilavert, you could pick up your foot, and someone from a movement would come out from under it. They were everywhere. It was amazing, the support we got from everyone. People that didn’t even know us were there, on the front lines, being clubbed. Everyone fought to be on the front line. It’s really emotional (eyes tearing). Today, it’s a little calmer. Now we talk about the day-to-day running of the print shop. But when you struggle for something... it’s your obligation to fight for what you want, and that moves you. People you don’t even know—who you’ve never seen before in your life—are fighting for you (Starts to cry.) No, look, I can’t explain it to you…

The drama with which Candido narrates illuminates the degree to which the common bond of the movement was perceived among strangers. Candido continues by narrating the sequence of events to which he refers:

When they came to evict us for real, they came with eight assault vehicles, eight patrol cars, everything in eights because they knew that there were eight of us. They brought two ambulances and police with dogs. The repression was intense for just eight workers. They started with the assault vehicles, the ambulances, everything with the determination that they were going to remove us. We had already predicted all of this, and had advised the Pompeya neighborhood assembly, which is around the corner, who mobilized, and the IMPA [the aforementioned recuperated metal shop] assembly, who defended the factory by standing in front of it, linking arms to make a chain… I never expected to see so many people. There were an impressive number of people. There were members of the Parque Centenario and Parque Avellaneda neighborhood assemblies, everyone from *asambleístas*, and people from other recuperated factories. We were inside during all of this. We were even printing.

---

77 Candido in Sitrin, *Horizontalism*, 70.
As passionately militant as he may feel, not all recuperated factories were as confrontational as Chilavert. Others, such as Ex Textil San Remo, which I visited, have reached peaceful agreements with or have even been supported by their former employers.

While workers primarily wanted to maintain the possibility of producing as a means of survival, they also required for the factories to be worker-managed cooperatives. As scholar Julio Godio put it:

> The question of the participation of the workers in the management of the business should not be understood only as a form of democratization of the economy, but as a style of politics that permits workers to advance in the understanding that they have the right to be in the center of the system of economic and political power in order to be in the center of the productive process.78

The collective spirit of the movement was backed by the 1990s bankruptcy law of Argentina, “Article 187,” which states that:

> In all bankruptcy... the sindico79 should inform the judge... about the exceptional possibility of continuing the exploitation of the businesses... in the continuity of the business [s/he] will take into consideration the formal request of the workers... of continuity under the formation of a workers cooperative.80

This is decided on a case by case basis, but BAUEN Hotel, Chilavert, and Zanon/FaSinPat, have pushed for a national government expropriation law. Additionally, these agents developed links with other social movements and orchestrated social and

---

79 In Argentine bankruptcy proceedings the *sindico* is a judge-appointed official, whose role is to oversee the proceedings and keep surveillance of the debtor’s finances to avoid fraud. However, *sindicatos* have commonly been swayed by bribes, Rogers, *Financial Resources for Recuperated Businesses in Argentina*, 11.
cultural projects (industrial parks, cultural centers, education, nurseries, and assistance, among other initiatives).

Currently, there is not only one ideology nor simply one organization of recuperated businesses. The figures change often, but there are now about 180 recuperated businesses in Argentina. They consist of different cooperatives with particular points of view for conjoining among themselves or for constructing a new social economy. Additionally, they are diverse in size, technology, ideas, and methods of action. Their products and services cover many sectors of the economy, including food, auto parts, shoes and clothing, construction, cosmetics, education, electricity, gastronomy, graphics, hydrocarbons, hotels, information, laundry, woodworking, mechanics, metal mechanics, metallurgy, mining, furniture, naval, stationers, journalism, painting, plastics, chemistry, health, sanitation, building services, textiles, transportation, and glass work.81

Some leaders have leftist perspectives, but less politically-oriented leaders also influence the movement in an encompassing and consistent “Política Afectiva” (Affective Politics).82 As in the past, employees and laborers described themselves as varying in ideology and class identifications, according to differences in age, gender, and education.83 Some, like the Trotskyites of Zanon/FaSinPat, do not consider themselves cooperatives. They prefer to remain under “control obrero” (“worker control,” similar to

81 Lavaca, Sin Patrón, 109-112.
82 “One way people in the movements describe the territory they are creating is through the idea of política afectiva, or affective politics. They are affective in the sense of creating affection, creating a base that is loving and supportive, the only base from which one can create politics. It is a politics of social relationships and love. To translate this term as ‘love-based politics’ would miss many of the social relationships it implies,” Sitrin, Horizontalism, vii.
83 Ranis, Argentine Workers, Peronism and Contemporary Class Consciousness, 144.
the idea of autogestión or self-management), a loosely Trotskyite system more radical than an independent trade union, or even a cooperative. Furthermore, there are various definitions of “cooperatives.” As shown in Table 2.5: Distribution of wages by percentage of Recuperated Businesses, according to legal figures, some propose equal salaries for all, while others have a hierarchy of roles and wages. In addition, among the cooperatives, equality in terms of number of hours has declined and 44% have differences in salaries, while 56% distribute salaries equally. Some use consensus and others decide based on majority vote.

Of course, credit is hard to come by for this autonomous movement of cooperatives, which banks do not often trust and which buyers cannot finance through shares. But, again, all of this was enabled by the law, which guaranteed the right to work if employers leave. Specifically, the law usually gives two years, wherein,

The recovery process usually begins when an enterprise is sued by its creditors, when the Department of Justice declares it bankrupt, or when its owners, unable to pay their debts, simply abandon the firm. Then the workers take over the plant, put up the wages or severance pay owed to them, and, with the agreement of the authorities or the owners themselves, rent the premises and machinery.

The handling of funds or questions related to the law of expropriation generates differing opinions. Ernesto González of the recuperated Chilavert graphics company said in 2005, “We have to return the money to the government some time…It may take five to six years to fully implement the expropriation and then we will probably have twenty to thirty years to repay—who knows? We haven’t actually had to start paying anything yet.

But it’s not a communist confiscation!”  

While there are some cooperatives who are involved in the non-profit The Working World/La Base project, most use capitalist credit by working with a subcontractor—who provides primary materials or financing in exchange for marked-down products—called *trabajo a façon*, while others only depend on their own production (starting slowly by selling leftover cardboard boxes to eventually mass-produce ice-cream at the Ghelco factory, for example). Additionally, while many do not, some factories do accept subsidies from the Ministry of Labor’s program of self-managed labor and the Banco Credicoop, the largest result of the Dirty War’s amalgamation of credit unions into Cooperative Banks (See Table 2.7: Sources of Capital for *Empresas Recuperadas* in Argentina).

Simultaneously, a variety of organizations, movements, factions, and sub-movements have been formed. Because administrators have often left with the employers, the recuperated businesses use the help of certain *promotores*, which have led organized factions of the movement, similar to but different from unions, to represent themselves among each other in united decision-making and training. They also appeal

---

87 Embracing democracy and transparency in an innovative way of lending to cooperatives, the non-profit called The Working World requires all workers to sign their contract, provides funding for short-term projects, does not seek repayment besides the loan if the project fails, and books all transactions online. “*La Base* [the fund]’s resources are currently used as fair loans to individuals to help them pursue their economic independence in democratic collectives. Loan repayments go back to the common fund to be used by others,” http://www.labase.org/?action=about5. They currently have AR$553,374 in their transparent permanent fund.
88 “[*Façon*] is one of the strategies that workers have most commonly utilized to capitalize and climb from the precarious situation during the initial movements, that is, selling the processed industrial service to clients that provide the primary material and distributing the product for commercialization or further transformation,” Gabriel Fajn. *Fábricas y Empresas Recuperadas, Protesta social, Autogestión y rupturas en la Subjetividad* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos, 2003), 58-59.
89 Luis Caro (president of MNFRT), personal interview, November 22, 2005.
to Nestor Kirchner’s populist government in hopes of obtaining subsidized loans.

According to Argentine intellectual Julián Rebón, this is the history:

The National Movement of Recuperated Businesses (MNER) began its representation in 2001, after a meeting. It acquired a rapid growth that, together, formed the first nucleus, at least until 2003, when it suffered a significant rupture…Another component is the Quilmes faction of the UOM, the protagonist of the recuperated businesses of the 1980s….Another component is the group of cooperatives in Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, and Córdoba led by José Abelli. He is considered a Peronist. In between 1989 and 1990 he led the unity of cooperatives of the unemployed in Rosario…MNER does not have a hierarchical and organized structure, it is really a confederation of different groups of two or three that hold strong influence over those that reside in driving seat of power.90

MNER is a non-hierarchical organization of businesses that perpetuates the idea of forming cultural centers in the factories (as in IMPA, Chilavert graphics, and CUC shoes). Drama and infighting have plagued the potential use of these organizations. MNER suffered its first rupture when Luis Caro, a Catholic lawyer, left with 16 businesses to form the Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por los Trabajadores (MNFRT) in 2003.91 Although Caro is a former political candidate, this movement claims to be against political affairs. In May of 2005 MNER experienced another fracture in two parts, one commanded by Eduardo (el Vasco) Murua and the other by José (el Vasco also) Abelli. Both fragments of the groupings of recuperated businesses dispute the use of the label MNER. Despite the fresh character of their multitudinous militants, each of the movements’ promoters still consider themselves as part of either Peron’s Justicialista tradition or a pro-capitalist Christian Democracy. This

90 Rebón, Desobedeciendo al desempleo, 146-149.
91 Abelli explains that in the MNER “There is no president. There is a national table with secretaries and delegates from every region,” San Juan, Mendoza, etc. They participate in politics but not as a party (this is the difference between them and the MNFRT), Vasco Abelli (Secretary of MNER), personal interview, November 24, 2005.
has led some workers to be reluctant to give too much power to the promoters, especially because of past betrayals by Peronist punteros, the local neighborhood Party bureaucrats or brokers whose “clientelism” stripped people of their autonomy.92

The other promoters are the leftist parties, the Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS) and the Partido Obrero (PO), which have had great influence in two of the most important recuperated factories, 18 de diciembre/Brükman for textiles (still a member of the MNFRT to gain expropriation rights of machinery and land property) and Zanon/FaSinPat for ceramics.93 In the words of Zanon’s famed leader, Raúl Godoy, “the representatives of the factory are workers, different from the representatives of both MNER and MNFRT that are lawyers and politicians (Caro and Abelli)… here everyone can have his idea, everyone can have his party, every one can have his decision.”94 They concentrate on providing services to the community and use a more Marxist or Trotskyite system under control obrero.95 They resemble—perhaps more than the original mutual aid societies, the FORA, the CGT, or even the UOM—the original Argentine Trotskyite groups associated with the Fourth International, which had been overshadowed by Peronist legend in ideology and fame. These include the Grupo Obrero Revolucionario (GOR, 1939), the international Liga Obrera Social (LOS, 1940), the Partido Obrero de la Revolución Socialista (PORS, 1942 of Nahuel Moreno, and the Grupo Obrero Marxista (GOM, 1943).96

---

92 Sitrin, Horizontalism, 5.
93 Rebón, Desobedeciendo al desempleo, 143-160.
94 Raúl Godoy (Representative from Zanon), personal interview, November 10, 2005.
95 See Chapter Three: Zanon/FaSinPat.
The recuperated business movement is still young. It has experienced internal ruptures, but it is also obvious that there is a common solidarity among all of the autonomous workers. As has always been the case, “the workers of Argentina do not see themselves in homogeneous or monolithic terms but rather as heterodox among themselves and conciliatory toward other social sectors of society.”\(^97\) Despite their fragmented visions, everyone converges at the pivotal intersection of Callao and Corrientes streets in Buenos Aires at the Hotel BAUEN.\(^98\) At this symbolic nodal point, which was occupied in 2002, and whose workers are still in the midst of struggle for its expropriation, workers often gather for conferences. Although the city still refuses to grant the workers expropriation, my mother and I stayed at the hotel for numerous days. At this unofficial headquarters of the movement, I interviewed promoters and workers at the bar/restaurant, collecting knowledge at its associated publishing collective’s intellectuals’ radical bookstore/infoshop, and even buying a pair of shoes from the part of its foyer rented to another recuperated footwear factory (CUC). Throughout its winding halls, within its seven conference and banquet halls (the largest one holds 800 people) and theater, mini-asambleas of workers translate their daily street chants into art, music, and performance inside the occupied hotel. Similar to the symbolic microcosm Hotel

\(^97\) Ranis, *Argentine Workers, Peronism and Contemporary Class Consciousness*, 181.

\(^98\) “On a local level, BAUEN Hotel has become a prime example of coalition building and development of a broad mutual support network. In the midst of legal struggles and successfully running a prominent hotel, the cooperative’s members haven’t forgotten their roots. BAUEN has become a political center for worker organizations. Subway workers along with public health employees, public school teachers, telecommunications workers, train workers, and unemployed worker organizations have formed a coalition of grassroots worker organizations in what is known as The Inter-Sindical Clasista (Classist Union Coalition). The Classist Union Coalition regularly meets at the BAUEN Hotel and has proposed forming a union school inside the hotel. These types of actions have helped to form a broad network of support for the recuperated enterprises,” Trigona, “Recuperated Enterprises in Argentina: Reversing the Logic of Capitalism.”
BAUEN, the workers of three factories in Patagonia and Buenos Aires (see Chapter Three) present themselves as particularly important cases for imagining creative possibilities for change in Argentina. Besides the new and unique forms of resistance, occupation, organization, and cultural consciousness, the members of Argentina’s contemporary unemployed movements are involving themselves with Fair Trade production lines, which directly link them to international trends of economic change.
Introduction

To truly understand the everyday lived experience of the self-managed laborers of Argentina’s autonomous movements, one must visit the recuperated factories and create relationships. In this chapter, I present a first-person recollection based on the field notes from my visits to three recuperated factories, which I conducted during a semester spent in Argentina. My visits and intentions were mediated by my interest in the process of production’s potential for linkage with Fair Trade, a term I interpreted loosely to include a variety of impulses of solidarity in the exchange of goods for the local community, with other partners in the autonomous movements, and for distribution in the Global North. In the words of the factory workers, Fair Trade also meant the future.

Initially, I was inspired to visit the particular factories whose struggles had been most critically celebrated by activists and journalists for their passionate protests: Zanon, the biggest recuperated factory of all in the province of Neuquén in Northern Patagonia, which produces ceramic tiles, and Brukman, a small textile factory in the heart of urban Buenos Aires. I traveled to Neuquén to begin my investigations and was overcome by the sense of community at the ceramics factory. Grounded in leftist ideology but geared toward active production, Zanon appeared selflessly focused on providing for its surrounding, community. However, I came to realize that however meaningful, pervasive, and influential its activities were within the movement, Zanon lacked the direct involvement with Fair Trade that I sought to analyze. Therefore, I shifted my
attention from recuperated factories or businesses with the most storied struggles, such as Brukman, to those few that had recently developed relevant ties to Fair Trade projects. Ex San Remo Textile and Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado (CUC), both in the greater Buenos Aires area, disclosed themselves as phenomena, which were active in Fair Trade projects. They varied in ideology, political association, struggle, and size. The communal spirit of Zanon, the radical welcome of Ex San Remo, and the significance of CUC combined, upon reflection to create fruitful personal connection.

A. Zanon/FaSinPat

Brief History

Zanon/FaSinPat, the famous ceramics and porcelain factory in Neuquén, has stood strong, resistant, and proud within the movement of the recuperated businesses. The factory’s potentialities for production, its workers’ dedication in a well-known struggle, and their continual reinforcement of its radical ideology have made FaSinPat truly unique.

FaSinPat is currently the biggest recuperated factory in both size and capacity for production. It has 470 working members (30 female and 440 male) and can produce one million meters of ceramic squares per month, completing all of the steps of the production of its goods within its walls, converting dusty primary material into polished tile. This vertically-integrated production system “is the only one that encompasses

---

1 *Fábrica Sin Patrón* or Factory Without a Boss.
everything: from the primary material until the finished product.” Its size and proximity, to both primary materials and energy, have made FaSinPat the most ideal ceramics factory in all of Argentina for production.

The struggle has been difficult, but the “social movement union” has taken bold steps to have created a unique network of solidarity among its many compañeros. Conflicts with the owner, Luis Zanón, began in 1998 due to a change in the focus of production from traditional ceramics to porcelain. In 2000 Daniel Ferrás, a 20 year-old worker, died from cardiac arrest. The disaster occurred because Zanón did not provide medical insurance, sparking heated resistance. According to a worker named Carlos G.:

I think that once the internal commission won the leadership of the union and the company couldn’t fire anyone else, it began to look for other ways to attack us. The way they opted to do it was these crisis prevention measures. These measures made all of us nervous, mostly scared about being fired. One of the compañeros, Daniel, was so stressed out because of all of this that he had a heart attack one day while walking into work. Compañeros brought him here, to the clinic, to the nurse, but the personnel that were here at the time weren’t trained for that type of situation. Our compañero, Daniel started to deteriorate rapidly. The conditions in the clinic were so bad that we discovered—right when Daniel was dying and needed it—that the clinic’s oxygen tanks were empty. Daniel was dying, and his compañeros were trying everything to keep him alive, but the ambulance from Neuquén takes twenty minutes to get here, and while we were waiting for it, the compañero had a cardio-respiratory failure and died. This was at the beginning of the [successful] nine-day strike. Daniel’s death made everything come together—[at first focused on] fighting against the crisis measures and fighting for improvements in health and safety.

After the initial strike, the workers of Zanon struck repeatedly and eventually blockaded the bridge to town, to which the owner responded by not paying salaries and clearing the factory out. He turned off the ovens and took away transportation, the clinic, and the cafeteria. The workers had already let the factory embody Daniel’s spirit, for as

---

2 Lavaca, Sin Patrón, 136.
3 Lavaca, Sin Patrón, 136.
4 Sitrin, Horizontalism, 89.
Carlos G. says, “When they turned off the ovens, it was like a dying man’s heart stopping and his being put on life support.” The workers did not quit though; in fact, they became the life support by occupying the factory in October of 2001. They won legal battles in the first ruling, the appeals court of the Superior Court of Justice, and the Supreme Court, which granted them the right to protect the factory with a workers guard, and the right to 40% of the stock to sell and cover owed wages. Since then, the workers of Zanon have marched to congress (December 30, 2001), reached agreements on wages and safety in assemblies (February of 2002), began to produce bajo control obrero (March 2, 2002), united with the Mapuche indigenous communities and the piqueteros (May and August of 2002), and even traveled to Italy, France, England, Brazil, and Venezuela. Workers survived invasions by the police and the mafia into the houses of their militants (2003) and then serious repression with rubber bullets and teargas. Nevertheless, after selling the remainder of the finished tiles to its supportive community, they started producing again and signed a constitution (August of 2004) and the social statute of the union (September 8, 2005). Regardless of its giant strides, FaSinPat has still appeared to face repression. In fact, just a week after my visit, the police authorities brutally beat two of its workers in town. The struggle continues in search of a definitive law of expropriation.

FaSinPat has more than just a passionate history. It has been perhaps more well-known for its horizontal ideology. Zanon is not a member of the organizations that

---

5 Sitrin, _Horizontalism_, 89.
6 Under worker control.
politically bind the autonomous movement’s components because the factory’s Trotskyite leaders prefer to remain self-managed even without the political bureaucracy, which nearly all of the other businesses adhere to. It has had a system of consensus, which is horizontal, wherein every worker of every sector has a voice and the same wage, except for those who are too old and, accordingly, earn a pension. Discussions with workers of various sectors of the factory confirmed that Zanon was firmly planted in its unique nature.

First Visit to FaSinPat 11/10/2005

My trip to Neuquén was also my first trip by myself in Argentina. No longer lost in the smoky hustle and bustle of urban Buenos Aires, I embarked on my field study research after the twenty-hour bus ride through the Pampas. Besides just fields of countless cows, the bus had to pass slowly through the burnt tires and billowing smoke of a *piquete*, freshly extinguished and broken up by flashing police cars in the highway. This was an appropriate entrance into a leftist workers’ utopia that I could only have imagined. I got acquainted with the small Patagonian city, which has a University, a few restaurants and bars along its main strip, and is close to the Mapuche indigenous communities. During the particular week in which I arrived, every inch of the city was packed with craft workers for the annual national gathering and artisan *feria*. After examining some of the art, I took a cab ride to Zanon. Upon arrival at Zanon, I had expected to see men with slingshots on the roof and at the entrance, as book descriptions characterized the militant occupation. Instead, there were banners and signs with the
slogan “¡Zanon, la Lucha es del Pueblo!” (“Zanon, the struggle is of the people!”) above a welcome booth. There was a metal detector next to the check in, but it was obvious that a more tranquil atmosphere exists during post-occupation production.

I met Carlos Acuña, a worker/representative of the press for Zanon, with whom I had spoken over the phone. He brought me to their headquarter offices and we prepared yerba maté in the press office, where two workers sat and a few others stood around exchanging news about the movement. Speaking with Eduardo—a student a bit older than myself, who has overseen the Zanon newswire—I accounted for my own history working in a Massachusetts factory and my involvement with Boston labor activism to generate trust from the workers. He warmly welcomed me with genuine inquisitiveness and respect. A jovial worker named Rodrigo took me on a tour of the factory. In conversation, I came to discover that every worker I would encounter, including Rodrigo, grew up in Neuquén. This made the factory particularly community-rooted.

Rodrigo explained the functions of the factory to me in great detail. Its immense machines towered over its numerous sectors: selection, primary materials, press, painting, and packaging (whose specific equipment was strikingly similar to some of the packaging machines I built in Massachusetts). After the long tour (Zanon is gigantic), I interviewed Raul Godoy, a famous leader, about whose beatings by the police I had already read in books and articles. We spoke in a small room in the press office, plastered with photographs and posters that promoted activism in relevant campaigns, such as “Killer Coke” against Coca-Cola’s deadly union-busting in Colombia, radical recuperated
siblings Brukman and CUC, and the contra cumbre against the recent visit of President Bush to Mar del Plata.

**Interview with worker representative Raúl Godoy**

First oriented towards social action through the leadership of his childhood Catholic Church, Godoy later became a militant under the influence of Trotskyite friends in high school, and eventually a delegate at the recuperated Zanon factory. He is also the secretary of the craft-wide union of ceramics workers. He told me he had always wanted to apply his ideology to active participation.

We discussed the takeover and the process of occupation. The agreement in 2004 was the defining moment, he said. During the fight there were people from all over, struggling in varied forms and at different paces. According to Godoy, there were three planes on which the struggle has taken place: “One: We say, a judicial plane, the democratic one. Two: In another place, also the political, which consists of the authorities, the police, the municipality, the integration, and the government. And three: the other, that of the community, the people, el pueblo (university students, professors, piqueteros, the Mapuche community—the Mapuche Coordinator fights for their rights against the powerful oil companies of Neuquén)…[Because of Zanon’s strong standing in the community,) the authorities would never just be judging us; they must consider the entire community.” Indeed, the workers already had a strong relationship with the community, which they utilized in their strike. There were certainly things lacking for Zanon and its community in order to improve economically, but it had already begun to
recuperate, and since then, there were less accidents (under a boss there was one every three days), less oppression, and more consistently dependent medical services.

Raúl Godoy spoke at length about the lack of capital. He told me that they use “triangulation…it is not façón, façón es patrón” (depending on a façón is the same as having a boss). He described the connections that had already been constructed with other businesses. When I asked him how he would imagine their average consumer, he explained to me that the consumer, at first, expressed solidarity; by the time of my visit, though, the majority of their consumers were outside the niche of the autonomous and local communities.

In his eyes, the future was not clear. In fact, it was doubtful, but he had a lot of hope. It was difficult because to protect themselves from being evicted, they had to pay the annual debt. He said, “Depending only on el pueblo together with us…the judge must inform the chief of police of Neuquén that we cannot export [outside of Argentina].” When I asked him what the ideal chain of distribution would be, Godoy told me that there were differing opinions, but small, perfectly ethical chains—ones in which every facet of production is part of a cooperative from the autonomous movement—would not be the solutions. He told me that he thought there were more enemies every day. As he explained, “If we don’t change the [larger] system together, we cannot make change in the form of an isolated ethical chain of production. We can create small chains that are limited to the recuperated businesses…but that is not the solution…we are a small minority.” In other words, he did not see that one can make
adjustments within capitalism. The magnitude of this generous man matched his inspiring words, as he kindly gave me a ride back to my hotel in the center of Neuquén.

**Second Visit to FaSinPat 11/11/2005**

On my second visit I got a better feel for the everyday life of the factory and its people. Like in every other factory, the machines were covered with photographs of nude women. However, everyone was excited about the arrival of matching uniforms—beige pants, with a matching shirt and hat—each with the name “FaSinPat” and the slogan “Zanon es del pueblo” (Zanon is of the people) sewn on, and the press office had no nude but only radical, images. As everywhere in Argentina there was always a stove on which to heat water for yerba mate.

There had been a press conference that day for the presentation of a mural at the local high school, for which the factory donated ceramics tiles. In preparation, Raúl, Carlos, and others huddled around the two computers and telephone/fax machine. They asked me to speak on the weekly radio show the next day, but I had tickets to go to Bariloche for the weekend, so I regretfully declined. I walked with union representative Jorge, who showed me the rest of the factory, including a cafeteria, a hospital (which the police filled with teargas not long ago), and a sector where artists design intricate graphics for the ceramic tiles. Along the walls of the outside of the factory, workers painted “Unidad de los Trabajadores” (Unity of the Workers) in about twelve foot-high multi-colored letters. The letters lined the large area for rock concerts and assemblies, which had served as fundraisers for the factory, reinforcing its community support. I was
particularly impressed with the gardens and greens of the plant, something the factory I had worked at lacked. To me, it was all fascinating.

**Third Visit to FaSinPat 11/15/2005**

I realized that there was a code in greeting by shaking hands in the traditional “dap” style, whose origin I presumed to be the Black urban communities of the United States. I, proudly, was considered “compañero o amigo de EE.UU.” (comrade or friend of the United States). Quickly humbled, I realized that all were “compañeros” there. This no doubt lent to the peaceful atmosphere of the factory from 2000 to 2003.

I spoke with Nicolás (22) and Roberto (25), both new workers in the production sector, eager to participate in any and all functions of the factory. They joined the team after the takeover because they had family members in the factory. This showed the effects of the social geography of Neuquén. They too helped to fight against the former bosses after attending a presentation in their high school, and then became involved in the union. They also told me that after 2004 the statute made it necessary to determine a leader but, in fact, leadership was of the people. According to them, the future would be the people.

In search of any involvement with Fair Trade, I asked about their chain of distribution. The two young workers told me that the trucks they used travel among Zanon and three other places. They also gave me information about the vendors. Nicolás and Roberto brought me to where the trucks sat, ready for the shipment of tiles. I interviewed a truck driver named Joaquín Campos to gain a better understanding of a
complicated link for possible future ethical supply chains. He did not work for Zanon, and, thus, was neither a member nor co-owner. He was 60 years old, from Mendoza, and had driven trucks for thirty years. All of the trucks had been owned by different businesses. His truck belonged to an entrepreneur from Mendoza named Joaquín Martín, who has three to five trucks. He transported their products to many different places, including Mendoza, Rosario, Santa Fe, and San Luis. He also transported different products from other businesses, such as wine, construction parts, cement, and vegetables.

I interviewed two women who operated the reception area with three other workers. The separated mother of four children, Susana Laiva, also of the neighborhood, had worked at FaSinPat for two years. She also had family members there for more than a decade. Her job had been to call the distributors to arrange shipments. All of this changed after the takeover because after the takeover, she told me, a computer had been bought. Eighteen year-old Marina, the second woman, had worked in Zanon for one year. She told me that as a young woman, it had been more difficult for her to integrate with other workers. This reminded me of the photographs glued to the machines, and the suggested gender roles enforced. Indeed, she told me she had engaged compañeros in numerous arguments over these pictures, but she preferred not to talk about their specificities. Chauvinism was not accepted by the women of this recuperated factory.

Finally, I interviewed Hugo Méndez, who had worked for Zanon for nine years in its selection sector, and was one of the most important organizers of the recuperated factory. He had recently gone to the massive summit of the recuperated businesses in Venezuela, which he told me included representatives of all of the cooperatives of South
America. Thus, it enabled him to gain a more direct understanding that the process of each business in its particular region is unique. We passed most of our time in a discourse on radical theory and practice, particularly in Venezuela. He did not want a top-down Chavez paradigm, favoring a model from the base at Zanon. He went on to discuss Zanon’s goals: recuperate, form unions and institutions, and maintain solidarity among the sectors of the autonomous struggle and the community. In this manner, he articulated an interesting perception of the movement of recuperated factories.

Zanon was one of the most amazing places I had ever visited. The historic struggle there, the charismatic workers’ commitment to ideology, and their creative vision overwhelmed me. Although I did not learn much in terms of Fair Trade production, the importance of the relationship between factory struggle and the community became clear.

**B. Ex Textil San Remo**

**Brief History**

The recuperation of Textil San Remo involved twenty-five workers, but it has great importance in the textile industry of Argentina. Unlike many struggles to recuperate factories, that of Ex San Remo did not entail much of a fight with the owner for the control of the factory. However, it was initially difficult to survive or to provide enough money for the workers. After five years of poverty, because of the dismal economic situation of the entire country since 1995, it fell apart in 2000, when the
workers were forced to close it for a year. Unlike those of many other recuperated factories, the workers of Ex Textil San Remo remained friendly with the ex-owners. They signed their constitution on May 23, 2001, and, since then, their wage distribution system has been egalitarian. Their expropriation, however, was still been pending at the time of my visit. In the words of the secretary, “We are twenty-five partners, twenty-five, who cover everything equally.” They also make decisions based on consensus. The cooperative is formally a part of the movement led by Catholic politician Luis Caro, but it has remained independent in its decision-making.

Ex San Remo produces T-shirts, collared shirts, pullovers, and knit jumpers. They use the lending system of façón and have had business with many brands, for whom they produced before their recuperation, including Wolsey, Courrege, Dufour, McTaylor, Aramis, Yatchesman, Newman, Rodier, and their primary brand, Yves Saint Laurent. Furthermore, since its takeover, it has added Cacharel, Christian Dior, Yagmour, Ginotex, Jess Victoria and, indirectly, Ayres, Clara Ibarguren, Zara, Rapsodia, Jazmín Chebar, and Awada, among others.

The objective of Ex Textil San Remo is “to construct a better Argentina with work and dedication.” This attitude is evident in every sector: straight, circular, and full fashion knitting, washing and drying, cutting, tailoring, borders, ironing, and final revision. It has now even begun to produce its own garments and T-shirts for the Fair Trade market in Italy.

---

8 Lavaca. Sin Patrón, 179.

10 Nueva San Remo pamphlet.
Visit and Interview with Valeria Mansilla, administrative secretary 11/25/2005

The factory in Lanus was a hidden warehouse. Only a small plaque placed to the side of the door, naming the spot as the self-managed cooperative revealed its revolutionary interior. I rang the bell and was left to wait for confirmation of my visit. They appeared to be cautious, out of fear for its rough neighborhood and, perhaps more importantly, for the authorities, as was natural for any member of the movement. However, once I entered, I was greeted with hugs, kisses, and excitement for focusing my academic attention on their factory, which, as in the neighborhood, had not stood out in the movement as a particularly interesting one. I had a feeling, though, that this small textile factory would be an important source of information, based on what I had heard of their willing involvement with Fair Trade production.

The walls held posters with fashion models wearing Yves Saint Laurent products. Inside the door there was a waiting area and a storage room for sweaters and T-shirts. Valeria told me there were eighteen to twenty-five workers with contracts, fifteen women and ten men. They had to buy much more equipment and machinery, but they covered everyone with equal wages. It had been a cooperative for three years. Brown boxes of clothes were stacked high on worktables that sat parallel to long, complicated machines. The workers sewing and fixing material behind the tables were all sweet and asked to take pictures with me. The president was María Ines Contreras, a woman whom I had recently met at the Ghelco ice-cream factory where I interviewed Luis Caro—the leader of the Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por los Trabajadores (MNFRT).
She explained to me that there had never been much of a struggle for their self-empowerment. In fact, the former owners were close friends! But that does not mean it had been hard for the workers to survive. They were miserable because nobody could eat or maintain for their families. At first they only earned one peso per week; after that it increased to fifty pesos, and recently they had gained a steady wage.

After the recuperation, no administration was left. The cooperative became a member of the MNFRT to legally obtain their rights. The president informed me, “We are with the movement of Caro (only in legal terms), but we are truly independent.” At the time I visited, they had expropriation rights, and only one year remaining to pay off their credit. After the takeover, she told me the atmosphere had become much calmer, and the workers were more united, as they had to be self-reliant.

They were focused on surviving by distributing to whomever, but the workers especially sought to maintain a trustworthy reputation with their former clients. When I asked about possibilities for future ethical supply chains, Mansilla told me, “We always work with first line brands,” the majority of which, such as Kimpo, Tarco, Dufour, and especially Yves Saint Laurent, were not cooperatives. According to the president of the cooperative, “[Ex San Remo] does not sell to cooperatives. We have façon. [She made a point to tell me that Fair Trade] is not a goal, [their minds are] open, but we have strong

---

11 María Inez Contreras (President of the textile cooperative Nuevo San Remo), personal interview, November 25, 2005.
12 Valeria Mansilla (Secretary of the textile cooperative Nuevo San Remo), personal interview, November 25, 2005.
connections with our old clients.”

Ex Textil San Remo wanted to maintain its connections with first line brands.

The hopeful confidence inside this factory was more than apparent. As Valeria brought me through the showroom, she said, “My expectations are to continue growing year after year… Nothing is impossible [proven by their survival of debt thus far].” For them, the complex goal of Fair Trade as a tool to initiate change was not as important as paying off their debt as quickly as they could. She explained, “We need to grow now within the lending terms of the façón with our old connections of clients.” However, I would later find out that they would be central for Fair Trade distribution to Italy. Overall, my visit to Ex San Remo was reassuring, as a heartwarming testament of the potential positive effects of the movement.

C. Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado (CUC, Ex Gatic)

Brief History

The struggle of Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado (CUC) is one of the most historically significant of the leading factories of the recuperated business movement. One of the four former Gatic plants (owned by the elite Argentine Bakchellian family), CUC produces shoes, whose rather flexible soles match the factory’s weathered past and countless opportunities for innovative collaborative or Fair Trade projects. There are other Ex Gatic recuperadas, such as its sibling Pigüé. As of my visit, though, CUC was the only one that produced the final product of shoes and garments.

13 Contreras (President of the textile cooperative Nuevo San Remo), personal interview.
Deemed legendary by scholars, the struggle against Bakchellian lasted ten months after the 2001 crisis. Bakchellian received nine million pesos from the Duhalde government (January 1, 2002 – May 25, 2003) to reclaim the factory, but the workers “formed the cooperative, mobilized, and mounted a tent at the door of the business.”14 Stubbornly rooting themselves within the factory, they took over its functions and grew, in hope of re-establishing its prominent position as the most equipped shoe factory in all of South America.

When I visited, there were 110 to 150 members of the cooperative, who ran a cultural center with a computer room, schools, and even a large nursery for children of the factory workers and the neighborhood. Initially, production remained stagnant at only twenty or thirty pairs per week, but numbers eventually increased to 1,000 pairs per day and 300 garments per week.15 According to their 2002 constitution, CUC does not pay equal wages to its workers, but with its profits and the help of the government, its administration distributes enough money to cover the costs of transportation and food. Although known to be plagued by internal quarrelling, CUC has emerged as a leader amidst a fragmented movement.

Visit and Interview with Débora Palomo, Secretary of the Cooperative and Director of the Nursery with Jorge (Coco) Torres, President of the Cooperative 11/30/2005

My visit to CUC made the movement’s profound effect on the community obvious. Only upon reflection with a fresh lens could I come to appreciate that what I did

14 Lavaca, Sin Patrón, 132.
15 Lavaca, Sin Patrón, 132.
not originally anticipate was sometimes what I had to be the most aware of. This was crystallized because something I had originally interpreted as a distracting nuisance—my taxi driver—I have now illuminated as an example of solidarity. The interview was altered by my the driver, who insisted on accompanying me into the winding halls of the plant’s offices, sitting in for my interview, and relating each piece of new information to his own nostalgic glory days as a shoemaker through momentary interruptions. Not only was it difficult for me to gather the information I sought during the interview, but, more importantly, the complex position of CUC in the autonomous struggle intensified my uneasiness. Without pre-approved authorization for a visit, the driver threatened the necessary level of trust. However, although this situation was purely annoying to me at the time, I came to realize that it was actually a manifestation of the política afectiva I had heard about to describe the anonymous support of this multi-faceted struggle. The love that the taxi driver expressed in his persistently insightful interest in the struggle and the production at CUC was only made evident by the welcoming response of the workers of the cooperative.

Coco, the tough, tattooed president, who had sacrificed a healthy family life for a dedicated commitment to the movement, explained his goals with glaring images and often impudent assertions. CUC’s major problems, according to Coco, were the machines and production, but his overpowering nature, juxtaposed with my previous warm interactions at FaSinPat and Ex San Remo, forced me to question its hierarchy, too.

According to Coco, it had not been a particularly politically-minded cooperative and, indeed, wanted cooperation from the government. In 2000 and 2001 the factory
closed. As an immediate remedy, they wanted to be the provider for the state to redistribute to the people. Coco told me that they do not all have the same wages and that there was an agreement, which rules everyone equally. In terms of decision-making, though, Coco explained that “The people do not want consensus, they are not accustomed to it.” When they earned money, Coco managed the profits to divide among the rest. The most recognizable members of CUC, among the actors of greater struggle, were many of its militant female workers. During my tour of the factory, when I asked one of them if they liked working there, she could not definitively say so. According to Coco, it was neither oriented to the left nor to the right. He said the foci were simply “jobs, goods, and capital.” But, as I witnessed on the signs and banners and in the tour of the well-decorated nursery, its message was one of solidarity with the local and autonomous communities. For credit, CUC, like Ex San Remo, had used façón because the workers simply wanted to survive. Coco told me he was a fighter and a politician (even though the factory was not politically-minded). He said he was only doing it for his family (although I later found out this was his personal loss as a result of the struggle, anyway).

We spoke about CUC’s chain of distribution, its providers, and its vendors. Its providers were from all over and were not completely structured as cooperatives (except for their associate, Pigüé). For example, CUC was using rubber from large corporations based in Brazil.

The process of recuperation had been structured for everyone’s benefit. From what I have been told, it had been much calmer in the other main recuperated shoe factories—Pigüé (whose leader “Manteca” had been known to maintain a much more
horizontal ideology), Corrientes, San Luis, and La Rioja. Coco, though, assured to me, “We are all cousins, or brothers. At CUC we fight and agitate to carry the flag for all.” It had its own brand, but CUC’s other vendors at the time were Reef, LA Gear, and Exición.

The cooperative had developed plans to create an industrial park and a united fund. Additionally, to integrate into the movement, there was a new project to make safety boots for other recuperated businesses.

I found out a few days later that on the day of my visit someone had had a heart attack in the attached CUC retail shop, so, besides the uneasy nature of my interview, there was an unusually irritable air and a chaotic presence everywhere. In addition, at the time of my tour, many of the workers were absent because of a break. Like the other recuperated workplaces, CUC has had hope, but conflicts have plagued this very important factory.

The information collected from my visits to Zanon, Ex San Remo, and CUC helped me to think more about which products are feasible for ethical supply chains and exactly which roles specific plants can have in the process. In the next chapter, I will interpret this primary information, along with interviews of the major political leaders and Fair Trade representatives, by coupling the factory’s business for former clients with an analysis of the success of solidarity relations and Fair Trade production with the community, other factories, and new distributors, worldwide.
Chapter Four:

The Recuperated Businesses and Fair Trade in Argentina

Introduction

The emergence of the concept of Fair Trade has inspired a new form of supply-determination by socially conscious consumers. Since it began official certification, Fair Trade has served as a tool to curb the exploitation of labor.¹ It has also promoted direct connections between vendors and producers, organized participatory democracy, continuity in trade relations, respect for the environment, movement toward equal status between genders, and living wages for workers. According to the non-profit organization called Transfair’s 2002 annual report, small family farmers produce over 51 percent of coffee in the world, and 90 percent of the world’s cocoa. The possibilities for worker-owned recuperated factories of Argentina getting involved with the production of Fair Trade footwear and apparel have made way for unprecedented global networks of cooperatives.

Factories require more complicated chains of supply (primary materials, numerous factories for production, contractors, transportation, warehouses, and retail) than do primary materials like coffee. So it is difficult, in the age of neoliberalism, to shift the focus of Fair Trade to apparel or to shoes. The recuperated factories in Argentina may provide clues to what roles members of the autonomous movement could have in the complex chain of a sweatshop-free market. Can chains of production and

¹ In 1988 the Dutch certification initiative called Max Havelaar began to push for certification, which by 1997 gained momentum under the larger umbrella of the Fair Trade Labeling Organizations (FLO). Since 1999 one of the groups under the umbrella, Transfair, has strongly established certification of coffee and other products, “History,” Fair Trade Certified, http://www.transfairusa.org/content/about/history.php.
distribution of complex Fair Trade certified or sweatshop-free products, using recuperated factories in Argentina, serve as an economic alternative for manufactured Fair Trade products? Despite the initial goals of simply surviving, Zanon/FaSinPat’s connection with its community and national and international support networks of metalworkers, graphics publishers, hotel workers, shoe makers, and NGOs, are actualizing the potential for an alternate globalization.

**The Distribution Chains of the Recuperated Businesses in the Traditional Market**

The primary purpose of the recuperated business movement is to provide work to the unemployed after the crisis. Lacking primary materials, specialized workers, work capital, and adequate machinery, among other things, the members of the recuperated businesses seek to utilize whatever sources available in order to maintain production. Thus, all of the recuperated businesses maintain relations with clients outside of the autonomous communities in order to survive in their respective markets.

The primary materials are provided by different capitalist businesses and the workers are concerned with costs and quality. As Godoy of Zanon explains, “the businesses that provide materials, machines, and capital are not cooperatives.” They cannot choose their providers. In the case of Zanon, “capital does not exist, this is the problem...other primary materials (than those of Neuquén) come from Brazil, Chile, and some machinery is from Italy.” The providers of primary materials from these countries are not cooperatives. As a student analysis has clarified, the recuperated businesses, in

---

3 Godoy (Representative of Zanon), personal interview.
general, make products for intermediate consumption (43% in 2004) or final consumption (76% in 2004), while only 4% produce primary materials.\textsuperscript{4} For this reason, the recuperated businesses need primary materials from outside the movement.\textsuperscript{5} Indeed, the vast majority of the providers are monopolies in the sector or other huge businesses. Therefore, they do not have many options for buying primary materials from recuperated businesses.

The vendors of the products that the recuperated businesses make are businesses outside the movement. According to Table 4.2: Recuperated Businesses’ selling of production by type of client, many of the vendors are big businesses (25%) and only 1.5% of them are recuperated businesses. Once again, the small minority of these are social businesses or recuperated businesses. Even one of the most militant of the recuperated factories, Zanon, does not want to interfere with the vendors because if they are not cooperatives, they are 35% cheaper.\textsuperscript{6} Transportation is also provided by any brand. When I interviewed Joaquín, the truck driver from Mendoza, he told me that all of the trucks that these factories use to ship products are owned by hierarchical businesses.

As mentioned, Ex Textil San Remo maintains business with Wolsey, Courrèges, Dufour, McTaylor, Aramis, Yachtsman, Newman, Rodier, and Yves Saint Laurent. Furthermore, since its takeover, it has added Cacharel, Christian Dior, Yagmour, Ginotex, Jess Victoria, and indirectly, Ayres, Clara Ibarguren, Zara, Rapsodia, Jazmín Chebar, and Awada, among others. “We always work with first line brands, the majority,

\textsuperscript{4} See Table 4.1: Recuperated Businesses’ buying of supplies by type of provider.
\textsuperscript{5} Ruggeri, Las Empresas Recuperadas en la Argentina, 47.
\textsuperscript{6} Nicolás and Roberto (New members of Zanon), personal interview, November 15, 2005.
like Kimpo, Tarco, Dufour, and especially Yves Saint Laurent, which are not cooperatives.”

According to the president of the cooperative, “[Ex Textil San Remo] does not sell to cooperatives. We have façon. It is not a goal, it is open, but we have strong connections with our old clients.”

Ex Textil San Remo wants to maintain whatever connection to survive.

In the case of Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado (CUC), whether or not to maintain loyalty to pre-occupation vendors is not as relevant. Although CUC has its own brand instead of its client Adidas, the brand “CUC” needs much more advertising than their small capital provides in order to gain success in a broader market. Reef, LA Gear, and Exición still source from CUC, but not heavily.

As Vasco Abelli of MNER explains, the recuperated businesses only want to maintain their wages, through any business. He says that “[they] have to compete, because it is possible to generate riches without exploiting but instead dividing up equilaterally.”

Luis Caro of MNFRT also says that the distribution chains with old clients are the best function for the moment. Without a big web of providers, the recuperated businesses cannot survive by buying and selling exclusively with other recuperadas. Sustaining is the only goal of this first epoch of the movement.

---

7 Mansilla (Secretary of the textile cooperative Nuevo San Remo), personal interview.
8 Contreras (President of the textile cooperative Nuevo San Remo), personal interview.
9 Abelli (Secretary of MNER), personal interview.
10 Caro (President of MNFRT), personal interview.
Impulses of Solidarity with the Community

**Zanon and the Social Community**

“Zanon es del pueblo,” (loosely translated as “Zanon is of the people”) is what the workers say at the large ceramics factory in Neuquén. The factory of workers without bosses is also a factory of workers without traditional boundaries, because it has a very unique system of integrating with the community. This is the plan that, according to Godoy, constitutes a central part of their struggle, “to go to the community, to the people, to the town (in the Universidad de Neuquén, with students, professors, *piqueteros*, and the Mapuche indigenous community, whose coordinator is fighting for their rights against the petroleum businesses of the province). The judge must consider the entire community, [when he tries to evict us].”\(^{11}\) The whole town participated in the struggle against the eviction of Zanon’s workers. In response, Zanon’s workers put on rock recitals in its large open area to the side of the plant. They also give donations; every month, *compañeros* bring 200 to 300 square meters of ceramics to schools, hospitals, eateries, and other places. Poems by the Argentine writer Juan Gelman, which describe the struggle, are written on tiles of the factory. Those same tiles are now in Hotel BAUEN in Buenos Aires. Godoy explains, “we want to cover all the wages, [but more importantly] all the production has a social end (more than just a cooperative, more for the community).”\(^{12}\) The relationship is one of solidarity.

Zanon has a system that creates special chains between the factory and its associated social movements. They define their priorities for such links as preferring to

---

11 Godoy (Representative from Zanon), personal interview.
12 Godoy (Representative from Zanon), personal interview.
incorporate: 1. *Piqueteros* and other social organizers –“los desocupados luchando,” 2. Mapuche, students or the University, 3. Family members, and 4. Specialists.\(^\text{13}\) Workers with whom I spoke, Nicolas, Roberto, and Susana, all had family members in the factory before the recuperation, but to first search for workers among other movements is an expression of the truth that this particular recuperated business is fighting together with other assemblies and movements in different autonomous communities.

**Productive Linking**

**Metalwork**

Based on the solidarity it ultimately holds with other autonomous movements, the Argentine recuperated business movement is beginning to construct some inner chains for distributing products or services among its own factories. According to Vasco Abelli of MNER, “the first inter-recuperada experience is that of three metalworking businesses of the province of Rosario.”\(^\text{14}\) Metalúrgica Las Varillas/Zanello, “the only tractor factory that is completely Argentine” has 180 members and is a leader of the movement.\(^\text{15}\) It gained thirty million dollars every year and has workers “whose minimum wages are 1,900 pesos every month.”\(^\text{16}\) Zanello is searching to buy equipment by financing collectively with three cooperatives: Cimetal/Ruedas Rosario (40 members), Fader (50 members), and Herramientas Unión (8 members). Ruedas Rosario, which specializes in the fabrication of wheels, already “rented three warehouses-some 800 square meters with

---

\(^{13}\) Godoy (Representative from Zanon), personal interview.

\(^{14}\) Abelli (Secretary of MNER), personal interview.

\(^{15}\) Lavaca, *Sin Patrón*, 164.

\(^{16}\) Abelli (Secretary of MNER), personal interview.
the cooperatives Herramientas Unión and Fader. Fader, a factory for refrigeration compressors, is trying to compete with the Brazilians in sharing “a project of fabrication of devices for textile machines and agriculture, together with the cooperatives Ruedas Rosario and Herramientas Unión.” For this reason, Herramientas Unión is going to move physically closer to the others. In 2002-2003, the state provided 500,000 pesos to these factories, through MNER, for a pantograph and a center of mechanization, which the municipal government rented to them for two years. In 2006 they all grouped together to create a fund called Centro de Mecanizado Rosario (Center of Mechanization in Rosario or CMR), also to produce auto parts at Zanello for tractors. “We are looking for finance, but we are beginning to build an industrial park,” says Abelli. The industrial park is 200 hectares large, where there would be eight recuperated businesses, including metallurgical, food, and shoes, and more than sixty small and medium-sized businesses of the region. This conjunction of recuperated businesses is the beginning of the construction of a growing network for the next era of the autonomous movement.

Graphics

Other recuperated businesses are united to support chains of solidarity with collaboration to cover debt. All the new recuperated graphics companies have a plan to buy investments together in order to reduce costs; they want to share and integrate. Famous for its aforementioned protests in the streets of the federal capital, Chilavert,
which now has 10 members, is the leader of this project. It has a relationship with the community that is similar to that of Zanon. Chilavert has a cultural center, a library, an archive about recuperated factories, and “an agreement with the Secretary of Education for secondary school students to have apprenticeships and learn how to bind things.” 21

The others are Cefomar (9 members), Campichuelo (47 members), Compagraf/Ex Gatica (20 members), Gráficos Asociados (12 members), Gráfico-16 members, Gráfica del Sol (21 members), Gráfica Mercatalli (10-24 members) and Gráfica Patricios (28 members). The recuperated graphics companies can increase their position in the market with the same wages, but so far, this is only a plan for the future.

**Hotels**

Recuperated hotel workers are constructing a similar project. Run by 47 members, BAUEN is a center for all workers for conventions, meetings, etc. in the center of the federal capital. According to Abelli, “BAUEN is working with the recuperated hotels in Mar del Plata (City Hotel) or other places for tourist work to sell packets and leaflets.” 22 The other recuperated hotels, Cacique Pismanta (30 members) in Las Flores, San Juan, and Marsur (30 members) in Mar Chiquita, like the graphics companies can benefit with the help of hotel BAUEN.

---

22 Abelli (Secretary of MNER), personal interview.
Safety Boots

A project of the Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado is also a manifestation of the unity of the recuperated businesses. The workers of CUC want to produce some eighty thousand pairs of safety boots for all of the recuperated businesses that need them and, once successful, for other clients. It is a project supported by the recuperated factories Ex Gatic, as well as by the rest of the factories. However, Coco, the president of CUC, affirms that they are not looking into Fair Trade. They want to extend their production to the police and the military.²³ Coco made a point to say that after this, they will always consider it more important to offer support to the movement.

Fair Trade: Relations between the Recuperated Businesses and Other Groups

The Working World/La Base

Inspired by the movie La Toma (filmed by Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein), Brendan Martin and Avi Lewis started The Working World. It is a group of Argentines, North Americans, and Europeans that is “applying the principles of micro-finance to the sphere of the cooperatives of Argentina.”²⁴ From its transparent fund—La Base—it finances diverse projects of production, working with 50% recuperadas and the rest consisting of cooperatives. It provides for eleven cooperatives, five of which are recuperated businesses. For example, it lent CUC 30,000 pesos in private donations and institutional money. The Working World can do this because it has “charitable status,” similar to 501

²³ Jorge (Coco) Torres (President of the Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado), personal interview, November, 30, 2005.
C3 in the United States.²⁵ Using the lessons of Paolo Freire,²⁶ the members of The Working World insist that they are with the people. If the cooperatives do not have success in what their projects require, they liquidate the debt. Thus, La Base bears the responsibility.

The group awards loans and organizes small projects, whose interest rate is consistently near the rate of inflation—10%. La Base has financial projects for half of the private donations, which go to The Working World, the profits of which go to the foundation. La Base also has interest in constructing and integrating productive chains for the recuperated businesses. They say that there are many distinct branches of activity and that the recuperated businesses produce a diaspora of final products. One idea is to strengthen social networks that already exist. Generally, one cooperative knows others and introduces these to The Working World to obtain financing. The Working World sells products from its clients online at http://www.theworkingworld.org/. These include footwear, buttoned shirts, glassware, and balloons. Members of The Working World have been thinking of producing their own cross-trainer sneakers. This, among other connections, has led to their involvement with No Sweat Apparel.

No Sweat

No Sweat, the first “open source” company ever,²⁷ is developing a project with the recuperated businesses. Based in Boston, No Sweat is a distributor of just products,
with which I worked, as publicist, in 2006. To choose its sources, this small business begins by requiring that the workers have already secured a collective bargaining agreement. Specifically, No Sweat prefers sources that pay 25% to 50% more than the minimum wage. The problem for growth is that they have no big advertisements. According to CEO Adam Neiman,

There are two significant differences between No Sweat and that of the big brands. The first is the importance of collective bargaining, which empowers workers to monitor and defend their own working conditions. The second is our near total reliance on word of mouth advertising. We can pay a living wage. We can sell competitively-priced, good quality garments. We can even turn a fair profit. What we can’t do is carpet-bomb consumers with high price advertising and celebrity endorsements. Of necessity we have engaged our consumers as active promoters of our company, its products and vision. Sometimes it’s word of mouth, sometimes it’s word of mouse (forwarded emails-our URL by the way is www.nosweatshop.com). But we’re getting a growing number of voluntary, unsolicited celebrity endorsements from indy bands, comedians, independent film makers, you name it.28

No Sweat’s success is measured by the fact that it has grown 50% in the last year, arriving at nearly one million dollars, and is expected to grow to four million dollars this year. No Sweat differs from other vendors of just products, which have tried to create their own factory (Sweat X), or others who have pledged to end sweatshops by keeping production within the United States or Canada. Founder Adam Neiman says that it is “important to use textile factories that are developing all over the world.”29 The five staff members of No Sweat have shares in the company and participate in weekly consensus-based meetings, but Neiman and his partner ultimately make the executive decisions.

28 Adam Neiman (CEO of No Sweat), personal interview, Summer 2006.
29 Martin (Founding member of The Working World), personal interview.
No Sweat got in touch with CUC through La Base. No Sweat began plans to sell two thousand pairs of boots, but for a long time it was just a vocal agreement. La Base hosted Jeff Balinger of No Sweat to confirm that the labor conditions are better in CUC than at other textile factories. No Sweat eventually lost interest in the hiking boots project, but still seeks to source from the recuperated businesses. With the help of acting agent La Base, they have switched from CUC to another Ex-Gatic further North, Pígüe. Instead of hiking boots, No Sweat flirted with the idea of selling cross-trainers, but ultimately they settled on what they have always produced—more canvas sneakers. These self-proclaimed Chuck Taylor rip-offs, which an Indonesian factory has always produced for No Sweat, are important for the company’s survival because they provide 50% of revenue. In addition, because of uncertainties about the Indonesian plant, the Argentine recuperated factories appear to be saviors for this Fair Trade apparel and shoe distributor. Agreements have been made and templates have been sent, but the lack of proper vulcanizing technology at Pígüe has stalled the production of samples. Potentially, this project would be an important step for the integration of the recuperated businesses of Argentina with global Fair Trade.

**Otro Mercado Al Sur**

Otro Mercado al Sur is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), run by seven staff members with ten partner founders—all are volunteers who share the idea of a non-profit NGO to bring together an organization for Fair Trade and cooperatives. They need

---

30 Torres (President of the Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado), personal interview.
31 Martin (Founding member of The Working World), personal interview.
a center of distribution. They use consensus because of their small size. Although it is a small project, “Cadena Productiva Textil Justa y Solidaria” is its pilot, which has great potential for combining the movement of the recuperated businesses with Fair Trade. It is a construction of distribution chains of just products from the primary material to the vendor, which would consist entirely of cooperative links. The objective is to offer T-shirts, jumpers, and sneakers on a wider scale starting in 2006. These products would be sold in Fair Trade stores in Italy.

Otro Mercado Al Sur agreed with CUC to produce 320 pairs of sneakers and another with Ex San Remo to produce T-shirts and pullovers. Founder Harold Picci says that “with San Remo… [we have created] a pilot to arm a supportive textile chain, in which we incorporate factors from the primary production we are a little bit more behind.” Indeed the innovative attempt of Otro Mercado Al Sur at a perfectly ethical supply chain benefits many fragments of the multitude:

- 252 families dedicated to the production of cotton as members of the Asociación Civil Unión Campesina, Pampa del Indio, Province of Chaco;
- 25 workers of the cooperative Nueva San Remo: Lanús, Province of Buenos Aires;
- 150 worker-associates of the Coop. Unidos por el Calzado, San Martín, Province of Buenos Aires;
- 180 worker-associates of the Coop. Textil Pigüé, Pigüé, Province of Buenos Aires;
- 25 members of the textile shop of the cooperative La Juanita of the Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados de la Matanza – MTD; Laerrere, Province of Buenos Aires

---

32 Harold Picci (Founder of Otro Mercado Al Sur), personal interview, November 28, 2005. This is different from the philosophy of No Sweat CEO Adam Neiman, who says, “Sweat-free only focuses on the last link in the supply chain. That’s the one we think is the place to start. Most of the fair trade movement tries to make sure that every link on the supply chain is perfect. My concern is that perfect will prove to be the enemy of the good,” Adam Neiman (CEO of No Sweat), personal interview.
-the Association Otro Mercado al Sur and the other actors of the networks of Fair Trade in Argentina and Italy, where the products are sold.\textsuperscript{33}

The process is oriented in order to use the Unión Campesina Indígenas in Chaco for the cotton, the transformation of fabric with Ex San Remo, Pigüé for shoes but not for production, and an organization of desocupados called Cooperativa La Juanita pertaining to the MTD of La Matanza. Afterwards, CUC makes the shoes.

It is a project associated with the importing of Fair Trade products—cooperative (federation) Italian CTM AltroMercato to sell them. According to Picci, “They are 130 cooperatives associated with consortiums.”\textsuperscript{34} AltroMercato wants to integrate participants of every sector of the social economy. Additionally, it uses the cooperative of Chico Méndez in Milan (a partner of AltroMercato), where Harold Picci, one of the founders, began to work. In his case, he has original relation to this through involvement with the store Arte y Esperanza in Buenos Aires (an NGO), which works for the development of indigenous communities. It has a shop that sells artisan products made by the indigenous. The organization Otro Mercado Al Sur is also partnered with a cooperative for rubber in the Amazons—also under the name Chico Méndez—which will contribute to the development of the soles of the sneakers.

Harold Picci is concentrated on local business, because international Fair Trade is not a solution, but rather a tool for change. Picci explains, “Instead of just exporting the cotton at just prices, the idea occurred to us that we could widen this with the use of the

\textsuperscript{34} Picci (Founder of Otro Mercado Al Sur), personal interview.
recovered businesses.” This is very important because it implicates work with products that have major aggregate value. Harold Picci, therefore, tries to consider the place (Argentina) and its possibilities (the recuperated factories). For example, says Picci, India does not have many cooperatives, but there is a possibility of association with many primary materials. Another challenge is the varying sentiments of the autonomous factories. For example, in Ex San Remo they only want to work; it is not important to them whether or not they use a just production chain, but they will help anyway. There are other textile factories like Pigüé, which want to change to become more consistent with this philosophy and its compromise because they have a more politically-oriented perspective. In 2006 they established another contract for three years after success with the pilot.

All have verbal agreements. Pigüé and CUC need more money to buy machines. For this project, “the textile chain is the strongest chain, the most important, and the final objective is Fair Trade, nothing more.” Marcela, another member of Otro Mercado Al Sur came up with another pilot, which is centered around a family of bakers, who will work with small groups of farmers from Chaco or Corrientes to obtain primary materials like sugar and honey. Later they will continue with a “transformation in the streets of Buenos Aires and baking in the neighborhoods.” Although they are just pilots, “Cadena Productiva Textil Justa y Solidaria” and the other projects of Otro Mercado Al Sur demonstrate the opportunities that the movement of the recuperated businesses have to construct a totally just chain.

35 Picci (Founder of Otro Mercado Al Sur), personal interview.
36 Picci (Founder of Otro Mercado Al Sur), personal interview.
Libertierra and CADI

There are still more indications that Fair Trade is a strong theme for the future of the movement of the recuperated factories. Vasco Abelli of MNER says that “in the first phase we just needed to sustain work inside the factories.” But for the next stage, 2006-2011, its goal consists in forming networks of distribution of just products. MNER is in touch with other autonomous communities to resist neoliberalism in supportive networks of cooperatives, including Alianza Cooperativa Internacional, Mondragón, LegaCoop Italia, and others in Venezuela and Brazil. More specifically, Abelli says, “we met in Colonia in the past week at a conference called ‘El Movimiento de Fábricas Sin Fronteras.’ Libertierra, a cooperative from Palermo, and a cooperative from Bolonia, Italy gave funds for ecological inquiries. The products of Libertierra are for sale to the people of Argentina. We invented a global web of recuperated businesses for the construction of an alternative because in México, India, Italy, and Spain there are also recuperated businesses.” The recuperated businesses of the entire world could integrate among each other in the next stage.

Another similar international project consists of three Italian cooperatives and three Argentine recuperated shoe businesses. It is called CADI (Calzado Argentino Diseño Italiano or Argentinean Shoes, Italian Designs). Some of the recuperated businesses involved are Pigüé and CUC (the Ex Gatics), while the Italian businesses are Gomus, Donna Futura and Calzatureoficio. The agreement enables an exchange of

---

37 Abelli (secretary of MNER), personal interview.
38 Abelli (secretary of MNER), personal interview.
39 Abelli (secretary of MNER), personal interview.
plastic and rubber for circulation in new foreign markets. Eventually, the hope is that Gomus and Pigüé will develop a joint venture for a rubber plant. It is yet another sign that the Ex Gatics have an important place in the future of the incorporation of Fair Trade in the recuperated businesses.

The First Latin American Meeting of Recuperated Businesses

Not only their products, but the model of these recuperated businesses has sparked autonomous occupations in Brazil, Uruguay, and Venezuela. In fact, 30,000 workers are employed at such cooperatives.40 The relationship of Argentine recuperated businesses with those of Venezuela, connected by Vasco Murua of MNER, is an opportunity for international webs among recuperated businesses. A leader of Zanon, Hugo Méndez went to the summit there on October 28 and 29, 2005 and said (distracted by Chávez intrusions) that the state gives demands, not the workers, who would offer a spectrum of opinions. The difference, as discussed earlier, is that Zanon wants power to originate in the base, without government involvement. Venezuela and Cuba cannot currently work with Zanon, but they seek to do so in the future. These countries and Zanon could exchange ceramics for other machines, but before that actualization, Zanon would have to gain more businesses to lift production, re-locate, and re-model two lines more to enter a process of growth. At the meeting, which sought to develop a tighter network among the 263 businesses and factories from the eight different Latin American countries represented, Chávez signed a decree guaranteeing support for expropriation, but

40 Trigona, “Recuperated Enterprises in Argentina: Reversing the Logic of Capitalism.”
his support has since disappeared. Méndez of Zanon does not trust any relationship with any government, but he says:

If the chain of distribution of the primary materials and products with other countries is actually possible, it is already happening... [in] Argentina, Venezuela, etc. Anyway, generally these agreements are practically made with governments and similar processes. This type of management, anyway, is convenient for some sectors; and it serves for the growth of factories, anyway, and you have to accept it.

In the summit, Méndez learned that the idea of a congress could develop chains of distribution among factories as if it were a MERCOSUR of the workers.

Representatives met with other recuperated factories and initiated relationships with all autonomous groups. They all differ in political views: commercial interchanging and politics against the government, among other things. Other recuperated businesses that went to the meeting were CUC and 19 de diciembre (which was actually the first one I visited). It is a good idea to internationalize this movement and Méndez also says that “you gotta analyze the future form of closing deals not just with other countries but also making a chain of distribution among factories of the same country. This is much more profound because you’ve got to search for some political alternative that involves the working class, and this is a long path for working.”

Along with the rest of the projects for integrating the movement of the recuperated businesses with Fair Trade, the development of a uniting congress is an expectation for the coming stage.

---

41 Hugo Méndez (Worker and organizer from Zanon), personal interview, November 15, 2005.
42 Méndez (Worker and organizer from Zanon), personal interview.
The Future of Recuperated Businesses and Fair Trade

The integration of the recuperated factory movement of Argentina and the movement for Fair Trade is growing. The Integration among the movements, however, is going to progress slowly because of the high level of complexity required for financing and commerciality, in an intermediate level among factories and other links. Clearly, there are projects for inter-cooperative support, such as the metalwork of Rosario, the graphics, the hotels, and the safety boots. Furthermore, there are projects that seek to involve many movements, like the Cadena Productiva Textil Justa y Solidaria.

External and internal factors have become obstacles to the growth of these chains. Lack of credit inevitably creates desperation in the recuperated businesses, which seek to connect any distribution chain that would be economically viable. Internally, ideological divisions and political movements within the recuperated businesses could inhibit unity. However, a strong spirit of solidarity is evident, both in relation to the social community and to supportive partners. Organizations like The Working World, No Sweat, and Otro Mercado Al Sur, facilitate the grouping of chains of just products. Therefore, a very young movement stands before us with potential for world economic change. As a tool, the projects for linking the recuperated businesses generate hope for the next phase of the struggle.
Conclusion

The new forms of Argentine resistance that led to the occupation of bridges and buildings, and the formation of networks for supportive production, are significant. Their collective partial escape from the effects of neoliberalism let them grow to stand alone out of the fissures they initially created. Although the communities of desocupados, or the workers of the recuperated factories, welcome and campaign for government subsidies, legal expropriation, or the business of capitalist creditors and clients, they occupied and constructed their own visions without waiting for the legitimizing words of any official authority. In fact, the messengers of the owners and the judge’s court orders—the police—were often the most difficult obstacles to surviving for convivial self-sufficiency, according to countless tails of brutal repression. But are the assemblies, communities, and self-managed workplaces really autonomous?

As I have traced, lines and lines of interesting theory back the movements, but the protagonists, themselves, are often better at explaining their plight. A visionary asambleísta named Emilio says,

If you start to think about what constitutes autonomy, and you then start to discuss the notions of autogestión, self-sufficiency, web-like articulations, noncommercial exchange of goods, horizontal organizing, and direct democracy, you eventually end up asking yourself, ‘If we achieve all of these things, will we then be autonomous?’ Autonomous from what? No. If one day we achieve true autonomy, we won’t be autonomists or autonomous, but will, in fact, be free…on the day when it’s possible for us to be autonomous, there will be nothing from which to declare ourselves autonomous… Through autonomy, we can create zones that aren’t governed by the logic of capitalism. This isn’t the same as claiming that the capitalist system isn’t the dominant social order. For now, capitalism is everywhere and it will be the prevailing order until it ceases to exist altogether.1

1 Asambleista Emilio in Sitrin, Horizontalism, 115.
Thus, the autonomous “zones” and their interconnected Fair Trade networks partially thwart the potential threat of invasion of Export Processing Zones in a possible Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement. But as Harold Picci, the founder of NGO Otro Mercado Al Sur explained to me, resisting, occupying, and producing in this manner only uses the movements as tools to initiate immediate, and small steps of change. There are setbacks. Many of the piqueteros sit in jail for months waiting for a court date, and a large number of the recuperated businesses still do not have protective laws of expropriation. In fact, a series of warehouses have recently been unveiled as clandestine slave sweatshops for top Argentine clothing lines in Buenos Aires, filled with undocumented Bolivian textile migrant workers. This reflects the complexities of the fragmented multitude. Most of the new social protagonists envision themselves as rebels fighting for life beyond work, not as revolutionaries fighting for state power, but some of them have redefined power, itself.

While the neighborhood assemblies may become fewer and fewer, the spirit and structure of their horizontalidad lives on. Just as they once conjured up the specters of the FORA strikes or the Cordobazo, desocupados will continue to blockade and barter until people dignify them with respect, and the members of the recuperadas will continue to produce in order to survive. For every act of police repression or factory abandonment, the movement develops new ways of connecting with the local community and agreements for supportive funding and distribution projects. Not surprisingly, a new movement is being built behind the undocumented Bolivian workers, who propose the

---

takeover of the now infamous warehouses to initiate an autonomous cooperative network (but there is not yet an official alliance with the Argentine movements of the recuperated businesses).³

Argentina’s history is rich with layers of multifaceted conscious struggle. Even if more Free Trade agreements pass, Menem takes office again, or a recession hits the economy hard, there will be people ready to chant “que se vayan todos,” finding a way to resist, occupy, and produce.

Appendix

Chapter Two

Table 2.1: Schematic differences between modernism and postmodernism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>modernism</th>
<th>postmodernism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>romanticism/Symbolism</td>
<td>paraphysics/Dadaism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>form (conjunctive, closed)</td>
<td>antiform (disjunctive, open)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purpose</td>
<td>play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>design</td>
<td>chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hierarchy</td>
<td>anarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mastery/logos</td>
<td>exhaustion/silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>art object/finished work</td>
<td>process/performance/happening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distance</td>
<td>participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creation/totalization/synthesis</td>
<td>decréation/deconstruction/antithesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presence</td>
<td>absence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>centring</td>
<td>dispersal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genre/boundary</td>
<td>text/intertext</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>semantics</td>
<td>rhetoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paradigm</td>
<td>syntagm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hypotaxis</td>
<td>parataxis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metaphor</td>
<td>metonymy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selection</td>
<td>combination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>root/depth</td>
<td>rhizome/surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interpretation/reading</td>
<td>against interpretation/misreading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>signified</td>
<td>signifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lisible (readerly)</td>
<td>scriptable (writerly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narrative/grande histoire</td>
<td>anti-narrative/petite histoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>master code</td>
<td>idiolect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>symptom</td>
<td>desire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>type</td>
<td>mutant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genital/phallic</td>
<td>polymorphous/androgynous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paranoia</td>
<td>schizophrenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>origin/cause</td>
<td>difference-difference/trace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God the Father</td>
<td>The Holy Ghost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metaphysics</td>
<td>irony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>determinacy</td>
<td>indeterminacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transcendence</td>
<td>immanence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

1 Hassan (1985, 123-4) from Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 43.
Table 1.2: Gunshot Victims of Police, According to Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Edades (ages)</th>
<th>Muertos (deaths)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Menos de 15 (younger than 15)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-25</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Más de 36 (older than 36)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Zibechi, *Genealogía de la Revuelta*, 103.
Table 2.2: Actions during the stop of May 29, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of action</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cortes de ruta</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actos</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marchas</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ollas populares</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clases públicas</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocupaciones de plantas</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cacerolazos</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abrazos a edificios públicos</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asambleas</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escraches</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>606</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Zibechi, *Genealogía de la Revuelta*, 190.
Table 2.3: Fordist modernity versus flexible postmodernity, or the interpenetration of opposed tendencies in capitalist society as a whole

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Fordist modernity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Flexible postmodernity</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>economies of scale/master code/hierarchy homogeneity/detail division of labour</td>
<td>economies of scope/idioloc/tanarchy diversity/social division of labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paranoia/alienation/symptom public housing/monopoly capital</td>
<td>schizophrenia/decentering/desire homelessness/entrepreneurialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purpose/design/mastery/determinacy production capital/universalism</td>
<td>play/chance/exhaustion/indeterminacy fictitious capital/localism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>state power/trade unions state welfarism/metropolis</td>
<td>financial power/individualism neo-conservativism/counterurbanization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethics/money commodity God the Father/materiality</td>
<td>aesthetics/moneys of account The Holy Ghost/immateriality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>production/originality/authoriy blue collar/avant-gardism interest group politics/semantics</td>
<td>reproduction/pastiche/eclecticism white collar/commercialism charismatic politics/rhetoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>centralization/totalization synthesis/collective bargaining</td>
<td>decentralization/deconstruction antithesis/local contracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>operational management/master code phallic/single task/origin</td>
<td>strategic management/idioloc androgynous/multiple tasks/trace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metatheory/narrative/depth mass production/class politics technical-scientific rationality</td>
<td>language games/image/surface small-batch production/social movements/pluralistic otherness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utopia/redemptive art/concentration specialized work/collective consumption</td>
<td>heterotopias/spectacle/dispersal flexible worker/symbolic capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>function/representation/signified industry/protestant work ethic mechanical reproduction</td>
<td>fiction/self-reference/signifier services/temporary contract electronic reproduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>becoming/epistemology/regulation urban renewal/relative space</td>
<td>being/ontology/deregulation urban revitalization/place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>state interventionism/industrialization internationalism/permanence/time</td>
<td>laissez-faire/deindustrialization geopolitics/ephemerality/place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

El Encuentro de Trabajadores Desocupados resuelve instituir una mesa vincial con la participación de las distintas co…

-Llevar adelante un empadronamiento en todo el ámbito provincial de trabajadores desocupados mayores de 16 años.
-No a la rebaja y el inmediato pago de los 200 pesos a los beneficiarios de la ley 2128 y el pago retroactivo de la rebaja.
-Pasa a la planta de todos aquellos beneficiarios de los distintos programas que emplean mano de obra desocupada, que estén desarrollando tareas ya sea en el Estado como en la actividad privada.
-Inmediata apertura del Registro de la ley 2128, para incorporar sin discriminación alguna a los miles de desocupados que quedaron fuera de la misma.
-Reconocimiento de las cargas familiares, seguro por accidente, licencia por enfermedad, obra social, jubilación, ropa y herramienta de trabajo, etc., en todos los planes en que se tome mano de obra desocupada.
-Declara la emergencia ocupacional.
-Trabajo para todos o Seguro al desocupado mínimo de 500 pesos.
-Colonización de tierras para que sean puestas en producción por los desocupados, tal cual lo prevé la Constitución Provincial.
-Plan de Obras Públicas por administración y ejecución sin empresas intermediarias.
-No a los despidos. Repart de las horas de trabajo sin disminuir el salario.
Nos expresamos por la unidad de la lucha de los trabajadores ocupados y desocupados, represiones y el proceso judicial.
El Encuentro de Trabajadores Desocupados resuelve solicitar una urgente entrevista con el gobernador de la provincia, a fin de discutir la crítica situación y las soluciones propuestas.

Neuquén, 24 de mayo de 1996

---

Table 2.5: Distribution of wages by percentage of Recuperated Businesses, according to legal figures. 94% are worker-owned cooperatives, 1% are worker-managed bajo control obrero, 1% are other types of cooperatives, 3% are none of these, and 1% has no specific structure for wage distribution.\footnote{Ruggeri, Las Empresas Recuperadas en la Argentina, 67.}
Table 2.6: Recuperated Businesses (ERT) per year of occupation. There were 14 before 2001, 24 in 2001, 22 in 2002, and 40 in 2003-2004.7

Table 2.7: Sources of Capital for ERs in Argentina8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 de Mayo</td>
<td>Subsidy of 4,000 pesos from the Municipal of Quilmes to pay their electricity debt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 de Julio</td>
<td>Unspecified loan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina Nueva Era</td>
<td>Received credit from an undisclosed source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brukman</td>
<td>Soft loan from unspecified source with a year of grace and low interest for investing in primary materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cañadense</td>
<td>Receive support from the Ministry of Labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cerámicos Marabó</td>
<td>Signed an agreement of assistance with the Superior Institute of Technical Formation of General Rodriguez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coceramics</td>
<td>Assumed the debts and received the facilities and machines in exchange for back pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confecciones Gaiman</td>
<td>Credit from the Ministry of Production of Chubut Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confecciones Gaiman</td>
<td>Computerized machines bought by the Municipality and given to the workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confortable</td>
<td>Informal work elsewhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fénix</td>
<td>Obtained a loan of some parts to begin production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fénix</td>
<td>Primary material left in the factory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishback</td>
<td>Forgave the debt they were owed in exchange for the building for 10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 Ruggeri, Las Empresas Recuperadas en la Argentina, 51.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gráfica Mercatalli</td>
<td>Inherited the debt from the former owners and arranged the principal with Banco Sudameris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gráfica Patricios</td>
<td>50% of their work is <em>trabajo a façón</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPA (Industrias Metalúrgicas y Plásticas Argentina)</td>
<td>Gave 22,000 m² of unused space in the plant to create a cultural center that offers courses, theatrical performances, expositions and other activities. The cultural center helped IMPA to avoid being charged with the debt of the former owners (6 million dollars).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Histórica</td>
<td>Received a credit of 50,000 pesos from the Province of La Pampa and raised another 57,000 personally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Histórica</td>
<td>Used their houses as collateral for loans to the cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Nueva Esperanza</td>
<td>Received a loan from the Assembly of Palermo of 200 pesos to begin production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Prensa/ Comercio y Justicia</td>
<td>Bought the newspaper for 1,120,000 pesos- consisting of 700,000 pesos of back salaries owed to the workers and a loan of 420,000 pesos. On this loan, they must make monthly payments of 20,000 pesos until the end of 2005, when they will be debt-free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Unión</td>
<td>Worked as <em>cartoneros</em> to raise money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Unión</td>
<td>Received loans and subsidies from the Municipal of Isidro Cassanova, and the province of Buenos Aires to buy the majority of the machines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Constituyentes</td>
<td>90% of production is <em>trabajo a façón</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal Varela</td>
<td>A symbolic agreement to rent the building from the former owners. They do not pay anything due to the size of the outstanding debt in wages owed to them (70,000 pesos to 23 employees).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metamecánica</td>
<td>Received 20,000 pesos and primary materials from the Province of La Pampa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newen</td>
<td>Received a loan from the cooperative Chilavert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obreros VDB</td>
<td>Received a subsidy of 56,000 pesos from the National Ministry of Social Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posadas</td>
<td>Selling of members cars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinil-plast</td>
<td>Loan from UOM de Quilmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinil-plast</td>
<td>Loan from IMPA (another recuperated factory)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viniplast</td>
<td>Subsidy of 200 pesos per worker for six months from the City of Buenos Aires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitrofin</td>
<td>Credit from the Nation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Three

Figure 3.1: Photograph of Nicolás, Roberto, and two other Zanon compañeros with the author

9 Author photo.
Figure 3.2: Photograph of Raúl, Eduardo, Carlos, and two other Zanon compañeros\textsuperscript{10}

Figure 3.3: Photograph of a truck Zanon uses to transport its ceramics\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} Author photo.
\textsuperscript{11} Author photo.
Figure 3.4: Photograph of the plaque outside the door of Ex San Remo

"El Trabajo dignifica al Hombre"

LOS TRABAJADORES DE LA

COOPERATIVA EX-TEXTIL SAN REMO

A NUESTRO INTENDENTE MUNICIPAL

DON MANUEL QUINDIMIL

EN AGRADECIMIENTO A SU GESTIÓN

Y APOYO PARA EL RESTABLECIMIENTO DE

NUESTRA FUENTE DE TRABAJO.

24 – 7 – 2002

12 Author photo.
Figure 3.5: Photograph of Valeria Mansilla of San Remo with the author\textsuperscript{13}

Figure 3.6: Photograph of shoes at CUC\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Author photo.
\textsuperscript{14} Author photo.
Figure 3.7: Photograph of Coco Torres and Débora Palomo of CUC, student Eliza Rogers with the author\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15} Author photo (taken by the ex-shoemaker-cab driver).
Chapter Four

Table 4.1: Recuperated Businesses’ buying of supplies by type of provider. 31.6% of suppliers are monopolies of their particular sector, 34.7% are other big businesses, 22.1% are small businesses, 9.5% are others, 1.1% are other recuperated businesses, and 1.1% are social enterprises.\(^16\)

Table 4.2: Recuperated Businesses’ selling of production by type of client.\(^17\)

\(^{16}\) Ruggeri, *Las Empresas Recuperadas en la Argentina*, 75.

\(^{17}\) Ruggeri, *Las Empresas Recuperadas en la Argentina*, 75.
Figure 4.1: Photograph of sign above the entrance to Zanon, saying “Zanon es del Pueblo”\textsuperscript{18}

Figure 4.2: Photograph of a safety boot from CUC\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} Author photo.

\textsuperscript{19} Author photo.
Figure 4.3: Photograph of a prototype shoe from CUC to No Sweat\textsuperscript{20}

![Prototype Shoe]

Figure 4.4: Symbol of NGO The Working World’s fund called \textit{La Base}\textsuperscript{21}

![La Base Symbol]

Figure 4.5: Symbol of NGO \textit{Otro Mercado Al Sur}\textsuperscript{22}

![Otro Mercado Al Sur Symbol]

\textsuperscript{20} http://cuc.labase.org/?page_id=10.
\textsuperscript{21} http://www.labase.org/.
\textsuperscript{22} Personal Email with Harold Picci.
### Table 4.3: Process of production for pilot project by *Otro Mercado Al Sur*[^24]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eslabón</th>
<th>Actividades/Eslabón</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Producción algodón</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Desmote e hilado*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tejido</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Confección</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Venta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Redistribución del ingreso</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[^23]: Personal Email with Harold Picci.
[^24]: Personal Email with Harold Picci.
Figure 4.7: Banner from the first Latin American meeting of recuperated businesses in Venezuela

25 Author photo.
Bibliography

Abelli, Vasco (Secretary of MNER). Personal Interview. November 24, 2005.

Acuña, Carlos (Representative of the press for Zanon), Personal Interview, November 10, 2005.


Caro, Luis. Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por los Trabajadores, Documento que explica el proceso de recuperación de fábricas por parte de los trabajadores. Boletín N°2.


Contreras, María Inez (President of the textile cooperative Nuevo San Remo). Personal Interview. November 25, 2005.


Fernández Álvarez, María Inés. “Proceso de trabajo y fábricas recuperadas: algunas reflexiones a partir de un caso de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires.” Personal Email from a Digital Archive.


Mansilla, Valeria (Secretary of the textile cooperative *Nuevo San Remo*). Personal Interview. November 25, 2005.


*Nueva San Remo* pamphlet.


Palomo, Débora (Secretary of Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado). Personal Interview. November 30, 2005.


Torres, Jorge (Coco) (President of the *Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado*). Personal Interview. November, 30, 2005.

