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***"Politics and subjectivity:***

***Pots and pans protests and assemblies in***

***neighborhoods of Buenos Aires"***<sup>1</sup>

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Due to the series of events which began in Argentina at the end of December 2001 and which continue today, individuals from diverse social sectors began to participate in new, different types of protests and demonstrations. The initial reaction of the media, politicians, and intellectuals from different political and/or ideological backgrounds was to attribute these demonstrations to a middle class which was seeking only to recover its bank deposits. This evaluation, however, seems to be limited in its understanding of this phenomenon.

In the beginning, the road block protests were surprising in both their methodology and in their organization, which differed from the protests which had historically characterized Argentine workers. These road block protests led the way for the pots and pans protests, and to the posterior neighborhood assemblies, which also seem to exceed the categories habitually used to classify the protests of average citizens.

In January of 2002, these questions led Course I of Group Theory and Methodology at the School of Psychology (UBA) to create a study group, whose purpose was to carry out a rapid investigation designed to **distinguish some of the spontaneous political imaginaries of these collective expressions.**<sup>2</sup>

The investigators initially gathered information by taking part in different pots and pans protests (local neighborhood protests, that against the Supreme Court, and nationally organized protests), in the first neighborhood assemblies, and in the Inter-Neighborhood Assembly at Parque Centenario (City of Buenos Aires).

At these encounters, investigators utilized general observations and noted the characteristics of the workings of the phenomenon. In addition, interviews were conducted with participants; initially, two questions were asked: *1) Why have you come? and 2) What do you think is going to happen?*, in order to find out how ***participants themselves define these experiences.***

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<sup>2</sup> This ethnographic investigation, carried out almost simultaneously with the “investigated” events, was included in the ongoing investigation: “Socially Vulnerable Groups. Transformations in Social Imaginaries and in Community Activities”. Proyecto UBACyT P/047. Subsidy 2000/2002, directed by Ana María Fernández. A more extensive developments of the ideas presented in points 1 through 5 of this work were published under the title “El mar en una botella”, in collaboration with Sandra Borakievich and Laura Rivera, published in “El campo grupal”. Año 4, n° 32 – March 2002. Buenos Aires; also published in Cuadernos del Sur n° 33, 2002.

The team's investigation then expanded to include continued attendance to assemblies, the relocation of protests in new spaces, sit-ins at factories, etc. in an attempt to determine what these new local times and spaces had in common<sup>3</sup>.

***The potential of the void: "All of them must go... not a single one should remain".***

Without a doubt, this is the most recurring watchword of these events, and perhaps it is also the most emotional. In addition, it counters the opinions of those who believe that the pots and pans protests and the assemblies do not serve any real purpose, "*This won't lead to anything*", "*If all of them go, then what?*". In these cases, the phrase is being interpreted literally. If this phrase is understood as a plan for action, its inconsistency is evident. However, perhaps it can be interpreted in another way: not literally or explicitly, but as a statement with latent meaning. "*All of them must go... not a single one should remain*".

Historically, social protest movements have rallied around different types of phrases, and these have always been strong organizers of programmatic sense and/or action, as well as identity catalyses. In some cases, these phrases are literal, but not always or exclusively. "*Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity*", "*Peace, bread and land*", "*Land for those who work the land*", "*No pasarán*"<sup>5</sup> and "*No Yankees or Marxists – only Peronists*", are some of these phrases.

In other cases, phrases like "*No prohibiting*" or "*Let them return alive*" do not operate as programmatic proposals. The first does not propose an actual abolition of prohibitions, nor do the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo believe that their disappeared children are still alive. **The power of their proclamation lies in what their very impossibility makes apparent.** Their confrontation is based on considering politics as the art of the possible, and they make evident the fact that these forms of politics have been exhausted. In addition, they suggest that there is something radical about the process which must be created collectively. These phrases are confrontational – both for those who chant them and for those who hear them – precisely because they are void

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<sup>3</sup> To date, the team is developing a third stage of the analysis which will include genealogical investigations of neighborhood initiatives. The team is selecting which experiences will be covered, and is designing the techniques which will be employed in this stage.

<sup>4</sup> This statement obviously refers to politicians, even though they are not named.

<sup>5</sup> Translated literally, it means "they will not get by us". It is a revolutionary cry from the Spanish civil war.

of meaning and of possible actions. This serves not only as an accusation, but also as an invitation to invent new meanings, and to inaugurate new plans for action.

The phrase “*All of them must go... not a single one should remain*” must be considered within this category of rallying cries. At the point at which some believe the movement’s weakness lies, its true strength is found. Its importance is not found in the literality of the proposal, but in the **void which remains when one demands something that is not possible. A void of meaning whose necessary errancies – and the reverberation of these errancies – act as the summons for a collective challenge: the inevitable need to invent what is to come.** In this way, it can be said that **the void of significance challenges the instituting dimension of the collective imaginary to invent new universes of meaning and new plans for action.**

## **2. Strength within diversity**

If a single conclusion must be drawn when reflecting on these events, it is that the habitual categories used for classifying social processes are not sufficient to describe this movement. To state that it is a middle-class phenomenon, even from the point of view of descriptive criteria, is not sufficient, given that many sectors both “below” and “above” the middle class are involved.

In the pots and pans protest against the Supreme Court, impoverished families and unemployed workers from towns like Los Polvorines, Carapachay, La Matanza, Zona Sur, Haedo, and Villa 21 (CCC) protested alongside “high” class women from the posh neighborhood of San Isidro. One of these women, when asked, “*Why have you come?*”, responded, “*To support the people.*” It is clear that she does not consider herself to be one of the people – and she is not mistaken-, but something has called her to participate. On the other extreme, we have the testimony of a 53-year-old unemployed woman from the humble provincial town Los Polvorines: “*I am here because there is not enough work, and because we want all of the politicians who have governed us so badly for so many years to leave. We want to feed our children*”.

Social classes thus converge but do not mix, and this is expressed in the placement of groups during the protest: the most underprivileged participants lined up along Lavalle Street, to the left of the Palace of Justice, while the more “affluent”

participants, who came from the northern suburbs, lined up to the right of the Palace. The neighborhood assemblies positioned themselves in the center of these two groups.

It is not common for a protest to include participants from such a wide spectrum of social sectors. Although this is a general characteristic of the pots and pans protests and the assemblies, the specific case of the Supreme Court protest is surprising in the unifying strength of the call to protest. The protesters were demanding the restructuring of the Supreme Court, and participating in the protest implied a more complex understanding and community commitment than the sudden rage which led to other protests. For example, according to many participants, it was an emotional response which led to the spontaneous pots and pans protests on 19 December 2001, following the speech given by former President De la Rúa.

In addition to the diverse social sectors which participate in pots and pans protests and assemblies, another noteworthy element is the wide age difference in participants, who range from adolescents to the elderly. The elderly participants are fighters; they are creative, angry, and fun. Several have trouble walking. However, in the movement of the elderly, the retiree movement served as an important precedent to the current protests.

Gender is another factor which must be taken into account; men do not dominate either the decisions or the actions taken. Housewives contribute their organizational skills and also guarantee “the security” of the assemblies (they know all of the neighbors). These women stop traffic, argue with police, and gather community funds to purchase bulk food or to feed the indigent children in the neighborhood.

In the fieldwork of this investigation, the phrase “*I have nothing to lose*” was a frequent response to the question “*Why have you come?*”. “*All of them must go... not a single one should remain*” and “*I have nothing to lose*” are the most repeated phrases to date. At this point, those who have nothing to lose belong to very diverse social sectors. The movement thus surpasses social barriers and **is strengthened by its transverse nature.**

Historically, those “who have nothing to lose” have been the individuals capable of taking to the streets to change the status quo. Since the Marxist movement, they have

been synonymous with “working class” and “proletariat”; and since the Peronist movement, they have been synonymous with “the people” and “*los descamisados*”<sup>6</sup>.

Given the ferocity of the crisis, Argentines who no longer have anything to lose cannot be included in the usual theoretical categories. This movement of **many** could include far more than those who historically have nothing to lose: from those with the lowest salaries in society to those who **suddenly lost everything they had** – salary, employment, social security, savings, company, residence, and profession, as well as their future and dignity. “*I am here to defend the future of my children*” is another common statement. Thus a **unique social convergence is produced by the participation of individuals pertaining to different traditional class categories**. One neighbor states: “*Although I myself do not have any personal problems... I am employed... I am here to show solidarity for the people who do have problems. Besides, these are problems which I could have at some point*” (neighborhood assembly held on the corner of avenues Scalabrini Ortiz and Santa Fe).

The statement shows a pragmatism which reflects somber expectations of more poverty in the future. Those who have nothing today unite with those who expect to have nothing in the future, and together they attempt to swim against the social current. “*Working together is the only way to get anywhere. Individually, nothing can be accomplished.*”<sup>7</sup>. There is a unique fusion of those who have always been poor, with the “nouveau” poor, and the future poor. As individuals, they experience varying degrees of material poverty, and various degrees of social decline; however, all have lost their symbolic assets, all are facing a future without prospects, and all have been forced to sacrifice their dreams.

This protest, then, is not about the demands of a single class, gender, or organization: multiple components, reasons, and demands all converge. This is a rhizomatic movement, not a vertical one, and **the strength of the protest is found in its diverse:**

-- Demands: financial restrictions, unemployment, a future for one’s children, health, education, mortgage credits, defense of hemophiliacs, justice for the boys from Floresta (assassinated on 12/20/2001), rejection of the FTAA, defense of SADAIC (the

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<sup>6</sup> “*Los descamisados*” was the phrase coined by Evita to refer to Perón’s poorest, most humble followers. Translated literally, it means *those without shirts* (Translator’s note).

<sup>7</sup> Assembly participant in San Telmo, cited in Página/12, “Las Doce” section, 22-02-02.

Argentine Union of Authors and Composers), the anniversary of the death of Cabezas (journalist assassinated on 1/25/1997), etc.

- Forms of expression: pots and pans, keys<sup>8</sup>, pot covers, bells, drums, maracas, trumpets, allegorical effigies of all different sizes, handwritten signs: “Justice Soup of the day: Supreme Court á la Pots and Pans”, “Rip-Off Artists”, “To live tomorrow, we must fight today”, “Sorry for the trouble, we are protesting for you”, etc.
- Age of participants.
- Emotional reactions: anger, insults, happiness, sadness, anguish, enthusiasm, euphoria.
- Levels of participation: one neighbor sent an e-mail to the Colegiales assembly: “*I watch the assembly from my window every week. I still have not worked up the courage to come down*”. Another member filled with emotion admits, “*I am 57 years old and it is the first time I participate in an assembly*”, alongside experienced protesters who are participating with renewed enthusiasm.
- Knowledge: neighborhood professionals like doctors, architects, and lawyers contribute their professional services to resolve issues like how to obtain medicine, projects for housing construction, legal demands, etc. Neighbors who have participated in protests in the past draw up the plans in order to assure a safe march of their group to the Plaza de Mayo. Housewives offer domestic solutions to a variety of organizations issues. Young participants bring their experiences from the football stadiums. A neighbor from Almagro-Balvanera reflects: “***We must share our knowledge... The young participants have experience in the stadium. In the last march, I saw them in the Plaza... there was a line of boys confronting the police. They are so quick to come up with songs!... One told me, “I’ve been going to the River stadium for the past five years!”... The police hit them with batons and gas them in the stadium... They’ve seen it all!!!***”.
- Strategies to face the government: petition signing, demands, protests in front of the residences of former military leaders, welfare requests, subsidies, employment plans, judicial protection orders, budgeting, etc.

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<sup>8</sup> Those whose demands are related to mortgage credits protest by shaking their keys. This group has thus attempted to identify, and differentiate, its protests from the others.

- Strategies which offer substitutes to government solutions: alternatives to government procedures and/or self-management, bulk purchases for the community, organized barter clubs, census of unemployed neighbors, job boards, soup kitchens, free psychology consultations within the neighborhood, etc.
- Strategies which confront traditional government procedures: there is a simultaneous recognition and rejection of representative democracy. Proposal include options like elections now, representative assemblies which agree that “all (leaders) are corrupt”, “all of them must go”, etc.
- Direct democracy, which does not contract the aforementioned items. Certain neighborhood assemblies work specifically to guarantee free decision making.
- Forms of organization: the assemblies are diverse in terms of the types of commissions that have formed within the assemblies, and the levels of production of these commissions to date. In addition, assemblies differ in the methods which each has adopted to protect the assembly and its individuals.

### *3. Neighborhoods.*

The neighborhood has historically been used to define one’s location within the city, although some of these neighborhoods are either a direct or indirect symbol of status. These neighborhoods, the majority of which are located in the center of the city of Buenos Aires, **have begun to be distinguished by new characteristics beyond those which simply identify the social status of their inhabitants.**

The corner of any two streets is a meeting point for protests. Assemblies and working commissions also meet on corners to debate. Now **inhabitants begin to belong** to the neighborhood in which they live.

Within the assemblies, women speak freely. Their level of participation in assemblies is higher than in the political realm (political parties, unions, student centers). Perhaps this is due to the fact that the neighborhoods have always been a familiar, comfortable space for them.

One way or another, taking to the streets is no longer an exclusively male activity (see documentaries from the 1940s or 1950s), nor is it exclusive to youth (1970s). It is not exclusive to organizations (unions, political parties, student centers), nor to random individuals (last few anniversaries of the coup d’etat).



In the pots and pans protest against the Supreme Court, a woman identified herself as “*unemployed – business owner*”. She identifies herself (she constructs an identity) not by her social group (entrepreneur) but by the characteristic of being **unemployed**. She does not say that she is a “former business owner” which would place her in the category of “business executives without a business”, but as “*unemployed – business owner*”, thus establishing an **identifying link to the characteristic** of being unemployed, which has affected many different social sectors transversally. At the end of an inter-neighborhood assembly, a young man introduces himself as “*an assembly member*”.

In both cases, **the participation in collective action introduces new identity references** which reflect **the recognition of others – of a new others – within their self-perceptions**.

“The neighborhood” does not replace or undermine other forms of social institutions: on the contrary, it **creates** – and perhaps even interweaves – a sense of belonging and affiliation amongst individuals. **These identities, this sense of belonging, and these affiliations are instituted by their very incorporation within a network of practices and self-perceptions, while, at the same time, the practices and self-perceptions of many others are simultaneously transformed by this incorporation.** This is a case of **among-many**.

#### ***4. A radical immediacy.***

Investigators have traditionally judged the capacity for transformation of a social revolt by taking into account, among other factors, how radical the proposed utopia is. However, this consideration does not seem to be pertinent when studying these particular events. In expressions like “*If I pay my taxes, I won’t have enough money to eat,*” and “*we are dying of hunger*”, **what can be considered radical is the strong sense of immediacy.**

These manifestations do not have a utopian narrative, but they are brutally clear on how the country has been plundered; “the State” and “politicians” do not generate any hopes for the future. In the first pots and pans protest in the Plaza de Mayo after Eduardo Duhalde assumed the presidency, one neighbor, when asked about the issue of elections, remarked: “*I don’t know whether Duhalde should go. It’s really the same one*”

*way or the other. Maybe he should stay and try to fix things, since he was part of this whole disaster. If someone replaced him, it would be exactly the same. We need to get organized and to control these politicians so that they can't steal from us any longer."*

Representative democracy, leftist parties, militaries who establish order, violence, charismatic leaders, and social welfare programs – Argentina's historical options – seem to have worn out their universes of meaning.

If representation, charismatic leaders, the "vanguard", and authoritarianism are no longer the ways to confront the protests, then what is the solution?

Within the stormy sea of protests, nothing allows us to predict what course of action will be taken. The familiar political answers seem to have lost their meanings<sup>9</sup>, but they can still be found in their most traditional forms. Perhaps this is exactly where the power of the movement lies – in its unpredictable course; this could be another factor which makes way for the simultaneous wonder and horror of social unrest.

In the void of meaning which circulates in the pots and pans protests and assemblies, there is indignation and weariness, but the neighbors are neither overwhelmed nor paralyzed; they have much to accomplish. **Within the diverse "many", there seems to be an overwhelming "we" which empowers and produces meaning.** Will there be enough time?

It is difficult to evaluate social phenomena which change so quickly. From the non-verbal pots and pans protests to the noise and anger without discourse of the first manifestations, neighborhood associations are advancing from week to week in their level of organization and in their methods of reflecting on and comprehending what has happened. In addition, they are moving forward with the tasks which must be completed.

It is difficult to believe that these neighborhood assemblies, which arose spontaneously from the first pots and pans protests, have been functioning for such a short time. Many neighbors have quickly learned about the methods of participation and the coordination of decision making. These individuals join with the others – who bring their experience in assemblies from student and/or union groups – and various levels of both new and old experiences assist the groups in constructing their own democratic policies.

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<sup>9</sup> Fernández, A. M. y Col. *Instituciones Estalladas*, Ed. Eudeba, Buenos Aires, 1999.

It is also interesting to observe the rapid improvement in the kind of proposals presented. What began with anger, complaints, and the anguished testimony of individuals, has flowered into proposals which – in certain cases – are surprisingly original.

The creativity is overwhelming in the types of alternative solutions which emerge: bulk purchases for the community, job boards, neighborhood census of unemployment, small community enterprises, soup kitchens for children who live in squatter buildings, commissions formed to analyze decrees (“*There are new decrees every day...*”), judicial protection orders. There is the production of generic medicine brands to supply the neighborhood hospital, barter clubs, and incipient projects of autonomous coops. Neighbors are incorporated within the advising councils of local hospitals, and they are active in debates over participative budgeting, etc.

It is relevant to note the fact that **this intensity of activity has its precedence**. It is based on previous neighborhood experiences, some of which have an important trajectory, but which had not won recognition from the media, and were thus unheard of. Nonetheless, the neighborhood experiences of the past have now been transformed into something new.

The diversity and the intensity of these protests have obeyed one invariable rule: the force of protests is based in their **pacific nature**. The groups take into account security issues related to individuals who might provoke violence and/or police repression. “*To be violent is to lie*”. The pots and pans protesters who enter banks do not seize the bank; they simply bang their pots and pans. This is not always necessarily an expression of rage; often protesters dance to the tune of the rhythm. “Protest Carnivals” are organized in the neighborhood of Liniers.

The personal implications of these experiences has also been transcendental. Many state that the group work has helped them out of their desperation. Those who work at the suicide hotline centers comment that on the days of pots and pans protests, the frequency of suicide calls diminishes significantly.

What is also transcendental is the transformation of beliefs or prejudices against certain groups particularly hit by the crisis, like the road block protesters. Following the Inter-Neighborhood Assembly on 1/26/02, a young man told us that in the beginning, he did not agree that the road block protesters should be incorporated into the

neighborhood assemblies. “*You know, because the unions are involved in the decision making of the road block protesters...*” During his time at the assembly, however, the young man changed his mind. Particularly noteworthy is his argument as to why he decided to go support the road block protesters in Liniers: “*It was like I was living inside this glass jar, and they were out there taking the street, how could I not go?...*”

This demonstrates an production of subjectivity in the act itself, a closure of meaning which is possible thanks to a mechanism (the assembly and its particular methods of organization) which creates a **many** which is neither morally unified nor divisive. The assembly distrusts established forms of power, and it distances itself from the state in order to resolve what is urgent; however, it does not ignore the state, in that it postulates control over the state. This “many” is not *the nation’s people*, even though “*Argentina, Argentina*” is often chanted enthusiastically.

Perhaps it is no longer just a protest. Perhaps there is a process of an instituting collective imaginary which distrusts the state is being born; an imaginary which simultaneously makes demands of the states and attempts to “control it”. This imaginary distrusts the state as the guarantee of common good, but at the same time, demands this of the state. This is a process which functions autonomously, but tries to control the state. It does not propose a transfer of power; **there is no attempt to transform the movement into a government, and the process combines a radical immediacy with timeless strategies utilized in the construction of citizen empowerment.**

It is important to take into account how the **diversity** (of class, age, gender, motivations, implications, forms of organization, and knowledge) is combined with the **commotion** (of the events, of the organizational achievements, of the alternative proposals, of the personal implications, of the changes in understanding of what is occurring, of the perception which individuals have of themselves and of others within the framework of what needs to be accomplished). **Diversity and commotion produce the unique powers which this collective invention is constructing from day to day.** There is a **many** who are no longer afraid of the chaos, nor do they fear the anarchy which seems to have overtaken the meanings and actions of political representation and social welfare.

These are times marked by other forms of collective empowerment. There is no guarantee as to what path these movements will take. The limits of established meanings are exhausted; they have exploded. “*This isn’t working*”, but no one can say for sure whether or not they will be re-adopted. What is worse is that there is no guarantee that the actors of this movement will not be put down or ferociously repressed. **It is the task of every member to participate in the construction of the liberties of the future.**

Many have taken to the streets of Argentina. It is an easier task, perhaps, to recount where they have come from than where they are going. It is still not clear whether these collective spaces and movements will triumph: they seem to draw strength, however, from the different brutalities to which they have been subjected, but also from the awareness of their voids of meaning.

There is no longer a time or place for naivety. It is impossible to guess whether or not the newly-instituting collective imaginary will be capable of producing new universes of meaning and new plans for action; however, the attempt is being made. Often the attempts are frustrated, or awkward, but every day on corners and in plazas, they are gaining clarity and accuracy.

These groups seem to draw power from their endless diversities, and this is what leads to the attempt – not only from the leftists, but from participants across the political spectrum – to *catch the sea in a bottle*. They gather strength from their transversal nature; thanks to their new additions, they include many. Many who have suddenly lost all – or most – of what they had: these losses have allowed them to view those who never had anything at all from a new perspective. This new perspective is still distanced, but this idea of among-many seems to lead to new senses of belonging and affiliations that create hesitant new identifiers. These would have been unthinkable only a short time ago, and they combine unique combinations of practices and perceptions of oneself in conjunction with those of many others.

The multiple and diverse plundering has created an urgency that could lead to the construction of a radical, transforming movement. There are many experiences so intense that it is likely that no one will ever be the same. Intensity and urgency seem to find a voice, to turn their diverse factors into collective power.

There is something singular about this form of taking to the streets; from its very beginnings, it seems to reflect the anguish of the intensity of what has occurred, combined with the growing collective, historical experiences, and with timeless strategies. There is both haste and pressure at work within this crazy notion of inventing common goals during the most difficult of times.

### **6. Assembly rhizomes?.**

In summary, then, there are four marked characteristics of assembly “vibes”<sup>10</sup>.

1. The power of the void: as stated earlier, the power of proclaiming “*All of them must go... not a single one should remain*” lies in what its very impossibility makes apparent. It is from this impossibility that the need to invent new universes of meaning and new plans for action arises. This is the beginning of the inevitable collective challenge of inventing what is to come.<sup>11</sup>
2. The strength of its diversity: its heterogeneous composition of class, gender, age, multiple forms of expression, demands, organization of implemented actions, forms and procedures followed, and experiences, in addition to the diverse strategies which coexist in the ways in which each assembly confronts its own unique problems. This is where the principal strength of the assembly “vibe” lies.
3. A radical urgency: the classic ways of understanding radical political proposals for transformation is based on the guarantee of their utopias, which promise equality and liberty for their participants. In this case, however, we are confronting another kind of radical proposal, one based on actions more than words, one based on an immediate now – in addition to possible mechanisms to collectively invent what-is-to-come, as opposed to a previously designed, promised future.

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<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to classify the activities of these assemblies. The term “*movement*” is avoided, since it is often linked to the idea of “*social movements*”. The difficulty of finding words to explain the methods of these assemblies is one of the issues of this article and one of the themes confronting the investigative team which is studying the assemblies.

<sup>11</sup> This is based on Derrida’s distinction between the future and what is to come. Derrida, J. *Los espectros de Marx*. Ed. Trotta. Madrid. 1995.

4. The brutal intensity: the situation which has led to “the collapse of Argentina”<sup>12</sup> generates a unique synergy in the times and spaces of the assembly. This synergy quickly transforms complaints, pain, and helplessness into collective resistance to the social downslide. It combines accelerated times of concrete, immediate action with an update of collective experiences accumulated from timeless strategies.

Distinct combinations, movements, changes, additions and withdraws, and attempts and outcomes of the aforementioned categories have characterized the times and spaces of the assemblies during these brief, intense eight months. Given the multiple forms and rhythms of these assemblies, it is still difficult to describe them; by identifying certain recurring characteristics, there is a risk of excessive generalizations.

In the urban context, the various methods and rhythms of decision-making and work of the assemblies seems to spread in a rhizomatic way<sup>13</sup>. This expression refers to the fact that they multiply by extending in all directions. In this sense they are “*superficial*”, that is, any point of the assembly rhizome can connect with others. Thus constant or ephemeral connections are made between various points of the assembly times and spaces; this is the point where experiences are fixed and/or escape routes are established. These are moments of intense actions or of decline, either simultaneously or successively.

Even in the first groups and gatherings, rhizomatic methods can be noted in the way in which actions were taken. For example, during the very first pots and pans protests, it was very interesting to note the movements of the neighbors who gathered on the corner. At 8PM, the first neighbors arrived, with signs from the neighborhood, and a few pots and pans. Neighbors continued to gather. They marked their territory: when more arrived, they began to stop traffic, and on some corners, they burned bags of garbage.

A neighbor from Colegiales recounts how they began burning trash on her corner. On the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup>, the first neighbors reached the corner with their pots and pans. The neighbors did not know one another; no one really knew what to do. The garbage truck passed by, and one of the operators winked his eye and threw two or three

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<sup>12</sup> Cohen, M. – Gutman, M. (Editores) *¿Argentina en colapso?. América Debate*, Instituto Internacional de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo-América Latina. Buenos Aires, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Deleuze, G. – Guattari, F. *Mil Mesetas*. Ed. Pre-Textos. Valencia. 1988.

trash bags into the middle of the street. Since then, the trash collectors have helped them mark their territory every time a pots and pans protest takes place. What is interesting is how a gesture, which until that moment had been identified only with the road block protesters, was transformed. It is a gesture that flows, a gesture that is an act in itself. It denotes geography, but also social class. It closes meanings and creates connections. It is not a discourse; it speaks without words. It is a gesture that, when adopted, updates many inherited histories of resistance, many experiences from other streets and other plazas. In contrast, when the issue of whether or not to coordinate events with the road block protesters was debated in assemblies (a month or so later), the arguments were long and difficult.

In the pots and pans protests which have followed, the “*habitués*” of the neighborhood assembly greet one another: there is a festive, friendly atmosphere. They await the arrival of other neighborhood assemblies, located further down the avenue on which they meet. At around 10PM, many head for Plaza de Mayo; a few stay on the corner. Other protesters arrive to take the post of those who left; again there are many, and they stay on the corner until late into the night. From time to time, when groups from other neighborhoods arrive, another expedition leaves for the plaza. They come from the neighborhoods of Nuñez and Belgrano, down Santa Fe Avenue. They come from Liniers and Flores, down Rivadavia Avenue. Sometimes the group is dispersed, but soon new protesters arrive to crowd the corner again. This goes on until very late in the evening. The same thing occurs in Plaza de Mayo where, on some occasions, the columns of the most faraway neighborhoods get to the plaza around midnight, when those who arrived early are just beginning to leave. These are gatherings of many people, who seem to come in waves. They are massive forms of expression and participation very different from protest groups which form lines and columns, but they are just as powerful. No one leads these successive gatherings and formations, but they seem to have an internal order. They were not previously planned, nor do they lack leadership: they are politically spontaneous.

Today some of these assemblies have disbanded, while others have been revitalized over the past few months. Some which remain seem to have maintained a level of activity, a “plateau” of energy which has led to the organization of events and inaugurations of new spaces: soup kitchens and/or neighborhood meals, community



gardens, cultural events, centers for medical assistance, psychological attention in plazas, micro enterprises. A sector of one assembly forms a “*school of arts and crafts*” which functions autonomously from the assembly, while another inaugurates a local bread shop in an abandoned storefront, but both continue participating in their respective assemblies. In some neighborhoods, groups collaborate with sit-ins in local factories, etc. One characteristic of the methods of the assembly rhizome which can be confirmed is that each assembly carries out multiple tasks simultaneously. Networks are also formed, and the connections of these networks spark new creations.

These new times and spaces are not strictly “cathartic groups” as some have claimed. The workings of the assemblies should not be considered forums to debate specific issues or ideas, nor as group mechanisms devised by specialists. The assembly meetings, as most neighbors agree, are not always pleasant experiences: they are often wrought with tension. Sometimes there is conflict between participants; there is no agreement on which proposal to support, and conclusions are not always reached. However, taking into account the ups and downs, they are experiences which maintain a unique timing in the pluralistic construction<sup>14</sup> of their autonomies.

It is also incorrect to say that these assemblies are a *social protest movement*. Although they manifest shared discontent, they act more than they protest. One of their principal, unique characteristics is the diverse solutions which their neighborhoods enterprises offer. These obviously cannot be termed an *insurrectional movement*, since they do not focus on undermining the government, nor do they propose taking over the state.

However, they have a little of each of these groups. They establish new modes of sociability between neighbors which end isolation, helplessness, and loneliness. They also participate in diverse collective protests, and within their micro experiences, they subvert the known forms of production, market, property, culture, and politics, taking control of the void of meaning of a State which supposedly serves as a guarantee to its citizens. In this sense, they are times and spaces which produce new ways of existing; they take it upon themselves to carry out necessary tasks, and they thus offer new dimensions to politics.

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<sup>14</sup> Pittaluga, R. *Invitación a una nueva imagen política* in the publication “El Rodaballo” Buenos Aires. Año VIII, n° 14, Winter 2002.

What has been presented here should not lead to an idealization of neighborhood assemblies. It is essential for assemblies to maintain their horizontal structure; consensus is often reached at the cost of participants. Members must debate their diverse positions without aggression: a non-violent dialogue is still not a constant. The reaction to those who have different beliefs, and the difficulty of listening to other points of view are not easy to resolve. In the process, many neighbors have ceased to participate.

The “*assembly invention*” is suffering from difficult, complex tensions. In order for their diversity (of class, gender, generations, ideological and political positions, interest, etc.) to become their potential (and not their weakness), the assemblies have confronted many problems. As a result, some assemblies have simply disbanded.

The tensions which these assemblies face are doubtlessly many. When these assemblies face dilemmas in which positions must be taken, they create not only confrontation between their participants, but also the risk of sterilizing the debate and paralyzing the course of action. The tension between the assemblies and political parties, like the tension between the assemblies and the State – to cite two of the most recurring – are present during every debate, and during every task which must be carried out. Resolving these tensions in a given situation does not guarantee that they have been resolved permanently. In any case, there has been an accumulation of experiences which must be taken into account. One of the most illustrative examples is that of the debate of assemblies in the city of Buenos Aires regarding the request made by the City Government for their collaboration on participative budgeting.

The assemblies which have utilized strategies based on a *logic of diversity* seem to be those which have created the greatest collective power for plans for action, for advancing on political debate, and carrying out their autonomous enterprises.

### **7. “Los juguetes rabiosos”<sup>15</sup> de los neiborhood.**

Given these mutant spaces and times, it seems that some assemblies have inaugurated experiences of collective-individual space-time methods of *machinic assemblage* (agencement)<sup>16</sup>. To consider the assemblies *machines or installations*<sup>17</sup> –

<sup>15</sup> *El juguete rabioso*, by Roberto Arlt, is a classic novel in Argentina literature. It is a coming-of-age story of an adolescent in the city of Buenos Aires.

<sup>16</sup> Deleuze, G. – Guattari, F. *Ob. Cit.*

and not possible institutions (committees, unions, NGOs churches)- suggests various simultaneous factors.

- Their power of action could be a unique result of the distinct combinations of the four aforementioned characteristics.
- The assembly machine-installations multiply, but they do not copy one another.
- They are molecular synergies, and thus resist unity and unification in all of their actions.
- Instead of producing new political narratives on which to base their actions, they multiply machines-installations which produce the neighborhoods' singular and diverse times and spaces.
- They are existential, and in this sense, they invent the conditions for possible new forms of subjectivity.
- They produce diagrams for action, not arguments.

What, then, does the neighborhood machine produce? It does not produce an institution, *it sets up a situation*: soup kitchens, gardens, micro enterprises, sit-ins, events, etc. It could be stated that the neighborhood assemblies have produced the “**juguetes rabiosos**” of their respective neighborhoods. *Rabiosos* (literally: enraged) not because these are violent acts, but because there is a rage which contributes to the invention of alternatives to a community's destruction. *Juguetes* (toys) does not suggest leisure and fun, but places in which to experiment new methods of economic, symbolic, and organizational productivity, which at the same time, creates novel modes of subjectivity.

They no longer simply protest. They act. They no longer simply resist: they *invent, construct, and set up new processes*. This is a transversal, mutating process; if certain *juguetes rabiosos* are used up, these are transformed in others. If they work, they are replicated, but never repeated. They are not seeking unification, but they do form networks.

All of these assemblies comes in contact with most, if not all, of the day-to-day places of a neighborhood, and thus with the people who inhabit these spaces. An assembly can be simultaneously organizing soup kitchens, collaborating with a local hospital, intervening to keep a kinder garden open, negotiating tariff increases or debts

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<sup>17</sup> “*Machines*” and “*Installations*” are an attempt at a definition.

with privatized service companies, collaborating with factory sit-ins, setting up new enterprises in abandoned storefronts, etc.

Traditional neighborhood spaces take on new meanings. The plaza is no longer just the plaza – it is also the meeting place for the assembly, the barter club, or a cultural event; it is the medical consultation center on Sunday, or the place for psychological consultations. In winter, neighborhood clubs hosts the assemblies. What is interesting is the way in which certain assemblies maintained the open-air meetings until the cold weather made them impossible. Another noteworthy question is how the assemblies chose which enclosed space was most appropriate to replace the corner or the plaza.

The abandoned spaces of the zone are renewed. When a group decides to occupy a bank – for example, a branch of the Banco Mayo – there is something politically correct in the event. The occupation returns dignity to the neighbors, and inscribes the event within a political imaginary quite different from that of disobedience or the usurpation of private property.

This goes beyond specific actions taken by neighbors. As a whole, the State's inability to meet its obligations is exposed; by autonomously handling issues related to health, education, culture, and services, these groups create new spaces, new logic, and new modes of production and consumption. The forms of production, market, and politics which were common until now are thus being questioned.<sup>18</sup>

Factories which have been “*emptied*” begin to function again, administrated by their own workers<sup>19</sup>. These factories produce, design new products, pay salaries, and some have even been able to pay some of the debts which the original owners had accumulated. Banks which have been “*emptied*” are transformed into neighborhood soup kitchens and/or cultural centers. Neighbors offer snacks and information regarding recycling to *cartoneros*<sup>20</sup>; in return, the *cartoneros* offer their organizational experience.

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<sup>18</sup> Fernández, Ana María - Borakievich, Sandra – Rivera, Laura *Movimiento Asambleario y Producción de subjetividad*, Ponencia IX Jornadas de Investigación of the School of Psychology, U.B.A. August, 2002. Ongoing investigating: “Socially Vulnerable Groups. Transformations in Social Imaginaries and Community Activities”. Project UBACyT P/047. Subsidy 2000/2002, directed by Ana María Fernández.

<sup>19</sup> López, M. Imaz, X. Ojám, E. Calloway, C., *Bruckman: de la espera en vacío al proyecto autogestivo*, ponencia IX Jornadas de Investigación of the School of Psychology, U.B.A. August, 2002. Ongoing investigating: “Socially Vulnerable Groups. Transformations in Social Imaginaries and Community Activities”. Project UBACyT P/047. Subsidy 2000/2002, directed by Ana María Fernández.

<sup>20</sup> *Cartoneros* is a word which has recently been included in the vocabulary of Argentines. It refers to individuals who go through the trash in search of recyclables and/or food (Translator's note).

Knowledge and experience are no longer exclusive; there is a need to quickly share any knowledge and experience which one has accumulated. Know-how from other times and spaces is recycled and used to construct mud ovens or to get community gardens productive. Professional skills are taught, but so is chess. Know-how is thus within the reach of all.

To take control over land which runs parallel to the railroads, or an abandoned municipal lot, and begin a community garden is a difficult, tiring task, especially for urbanites; however, those who have witnessed how these gardens have sprung up in the capital city of Buenos Aires testify to the festive, celebratory atmosphere created when these spaces are “*taken over*”. The same can be said of the challenge of transforming an empty, dirty storefront into a soup kitchen. These cheerful adoptions point to a collective satisfaction which is political in itself.

What does this cheerful dimension to tasks carried out by assemblies reveal? This common labor is productive, but the classic ideas of exploitation associated with work are missing. The political joy of community working relationships is created in the moment in which the among-many adds playful elements to laborious tasks. When these tasks are carried out within the logic of appropriation, they do not make participants weary, resentful, or depressed.

Work is not the only activity which takes on a new meaning. The established meanings of many of our social practices are also questioned. This surprising turn towards neighbors participating in collective enterprises upsets<sup>21</sup> “order” in its micro-politics. The delegations of political representation are deconstructed, and the instituted forms of production and property are questioned; isolation and loneliness are also relieved.

It is difficult to understand a radical form of politics which has molecular, not molar, workings, and which is constructed outside the realm of insurrectional imaginaries and methodologies of violence. This form of politics does not construct eloquent narratives to legitimize its processes, nor does it attempt to take control of the State. On the contrary, it constructs its own times and spaces, on the frontier, on the margin, in between, and outside instituted powers.

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<sup>21</sup> “*One who is now upset, confused or out of joint, one who is now dislocated...*” from Derrida, J. *Los espectros de Marx*. Ob. Cit.

This is not to say that these groups are not interested in power; however, it seems that other priorities and dimensions are at play. Until now, it seems that *they are interested in constructing collective empowerment, and not an apparatus of domination.*

### **8. Neither private nor public.**

There are four characteristics which can be distinguished throughout different experiences. These characteristics denote a method of inventing and innovating within the imaginary production of neighborhoods.

- **The appropriation of what belongs to the State:** State storefronts and properties which are not being used are taken over. This includes empty lots, and even small pieces of land parallel to the train tracks<sup>22</sup>. These are generally joyful procedures of taking over what the State has abandoned. The inauguration of these new spaces are truly neighborhood celebrations; there is an excitement in installing the latest *juguete rabioso* with collective enthusiasm. These are empowering moments, advances in the work of the neighbors, who surround the new space without a discourse. They are making a statement with their actions. These actions themselves function as a question – they *speak* when deciding which space to occupy, they *speak* when they decide how to utilize this space. They *speak* when they re-invent the space according to a specific plan.
- **Neighborhood self-management,** based on assembly deliberation and the decision-making of its commissions. This management is sustained in the implementation, administration, management, and collective control over tasks carried out by the assembly. The construction of autonomy is collective; most assemblies have preferred to maintain horizontal structures since their beginnings. Many make determinations based on consensus, and not on popular vote.
- **Inventions of the imagination in action:** there is a collective imagination which begins to work in concrete circumstances, and which focuses the enthusiasm of participants. Although time is allowed for deliberation, decisions are also based on their immediacy. Although their most pressing issue could be the question of hunger,

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<sup>22</sup> These spaces are not always state property. There have also been cases of taking over banks or clubs which have declared bankruptcy or closed due to fraudulent management.

imagination in action can be noted in the poorest neighborhoods, where often a cultural project is as important to neighbors as plans to confront the issue of hunger.

- **A network of new forms of solidarity and sociability:** a new territorial situation is created both politically and subjectively: the *neighborhood*. Community tasks are accomplished among-some, among-many. The others – *the other neighbors*- are no longer threatening or untrustworthy; they are mutually supportive. Among many, new forms of *socius* are *woven*<sup>23</sup>.

In the workings of these enterprises, there is another constant: there is no sense of social welfare present. If a soup kitchen is opened, for example, it will be a space which will offer tasks for the unemployed. A strong sense of solidarity has appeared among diverse neighbors. These among-many are constantly inventing diverse ways to aid those who are facing serious problems. In general, these individuals do not fit the criteria for social welfare, or for aid from well-known charity organizations. It is as if the neighbors always understood that charity implies a stigmatization, and that it places those who receive the charity in a state of dependency and passivity in relation to their benefactor. It is as if the neighbors always knew that exclusion is a long process in which not only material things are left behind; a social network, and emotional ties are also lost.<sup>24</sup> When assemblies establish a program to “feed” the neighbors, all work in the enterprise. Even those who come to the soup kitchen from other neighborhoods are invited to participate in the soup kitchen’s activities or in the neighborhood assembly. The “*needy*” contribute different types of experiences to the assemblies. There is no one who does not have something to contribute. There is no one who has lost everything.<sup>25</sup>

These activities often lead to unique *existential* experiences. For example, assembly members from the Buenos Aires middle class travel to José León Suárez to

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<sup>23</sup> Weave (*tramar*) is a verb frequently used by assembly members (Román Mazzilli, assembly member in Colegiales, personal communication). In May of this year, the Palermo Viejo assembly organized a mega-cultural event called “*El tramado*”. (See Bozzolo, R. “La asamblea de Palermo Viejo mostró la trama” in the publication *El Campo Grupal*, Año 4 n° 35, Buenos Aires, 2002). This insistence is noteworthy. The terms *weave* and *tapestry* seem more adequate than the term *interaction* to describe the ways in which the rhizomatic movements create connections within the times and spaces of the assemblies.

<sup>24</sup> Castel, R. *Metamorfosis de la Cuestión Social. Un crónica del salariado*. Ed. Paidós. Buenos Aires. 1997.

<sup>25</sup> In one of the assemblies close to Plaza Once, a homeless man from the plaza always participates. He considers that this is his neighborhood, and the assembly members agree.

show their support for the *cartoneros*. Companies and the State try to prohibit or create obstacles for the *cartoneros* – the support for these individuals goes beyond “solidarity” or “political advocacy”. These are life-changing experiences in which individuals from diverse social and culture backgrounds share an experience in which prejudice, barriers, and resentments are transformed into surprising social connections. It is a social tapestry; working against the flow, they produce subjectivity.

Although some assemblies have utilized more traditional forms of organization for their directive commissions, the most frequent organization is based on resisting “excessive” organization, which seems to be linked to the distrust of the bureaucratic system. When some type of leadership is necessary, the assembly members rotate; leaders are chosen to resolve specific issues which arise, etc.

An anecdote which demonstrates this minimal organizational criteria could be observed on the night of 19 December in the Plaza de Mayo. Someone wrote “At 11PM, let’s sing the national anthem” on a little piece of paper and began to pass it around. At exactly 11PM, the entire plaza began to sing.

Spontaneous without being naïve, this criteria of minimal organization updates traditional political experiences in this among-many which abandons the delegation and takes the moment to come *in its hands*<sup>26</sup>. Community power is at work in the concrete actions designed to resolve urgent neighborhood needs: the production necessary for food, soup kitchens, employment, professional training, etc. Thanks to the self-management of these assemblies, they construct collective-individual autonomies and empowerment.

There is a spiral movement in which the assembly imagination, by creating new spaces within the neighborhood, produces collective empowerment<sup>27</sup> of the group in question. The power which is at play increases the production capacity of the assembly.

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<sup>26</sup> Ouviaña, H. “Las asambleas barriales: Apuntes a modo de hipótesis de trabajo”. In *Revista Theomai*, Winter 2002. Buenos Aires. 2002.

<sup>27</sup> *Empowerment* is a word wrought with complications. It can be interpreted as it usually is in so-called Political Science, in which a State tries to “empower” the poor, generally through training for micro enterprises. Here, however, it is an empowerment which is produced by neighborhood self-management. The term *network* is another difficult word, although, like empowerment, it is frequently utilized in this work. “*Social networks*” are usually organizations which the NGOs and/or government agencies offer humble sectors in order for these to optimize their resources. The assembly networks mentioned in this piece, however, have been invented by the neighbors themselves. The fact that the method utilized is self-management makes the difference in both cases.



At the same time, the power proves that the group is able to produce and manage these new spaces, generating a collective and individual empowerment.

Much of what is created by this new meaning of autonomy-empowerment is unquestionably linked to what is abandoned. The illusion of a state which provides, regulates, protects and guarantees is abandoned. When the imaginary of the *State Guarantee* was proved unviable, many types of material and subjective vulnerabilities were revealed to the population. Following 20 December, when the cry “*All of them must go*” was first heard, the break or interruption of this expectation became evident. When the neighborhood machinery and installations began to produce their “*juguetes rabiosos*”, they took the need to solve their problems into their own hands. Thus their *vulnerability* is transformed into *empowerment-autonomy*. Again, self-management and autonomy – and their resulting synergies – pay tribute to one another.

The strength of the rallying cry “*All of them must go, not a one should remain*” has been misinterpreted by many. It is not a call to literally remove governors and legislators; it refers to creating the conditions for the self-construction of multiple neighborhood machines and installations. Thus a new space which is neither **private or public**<sup>28</sup> has been created.

Categories like public and private, individual and social, have exploded. The times and spaces of the assemblies demonstrate that things which was clearly separate – and able to be defined – have blended into a synergy which makes it difficult to determine where the individual experience begins and ends.

What is private is no longer that which is not public; nor is it simply what is personal. It is also what deprives<sup>29</sup>. At the same time, what is public no longer belongs necessarily to the State. New dimensions of what is public are created and *established*. These neighborhood enterprises have created times and spaces which are *neither private nor state-run*; they belong to the neighborhood and community. These new times and spaces, as mentioned above, are celebratory: participants combat their loneliness by working and being in contact with their neighbors. This should not be confused with a nostalgic sort of pre-capitalism. Nor is it the anticipated expression of a future void of a

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<sup>28</sup> Fairlie, S. – Hildyard, L. – Lohmann, L. – Sexton, S. *Ni privado ni estatal. Un futuro común... ¿Para quién?*. Ed. Nordan Comunidad. Montevideo. 1998.

<sup>29</sup> Fernández, A. M. – De Brasi, J. C. *Tiempo histórico y campo grupal. Grupos, masas e instituciones*. Ed. Nueva Visión. Buenos Aires. 1993.

State. For now, they are simply *juguetes rabiosos*, desperate and active, and perhaps rehearsals for what is to come.

They work against opinions prevalent in the media, which considers that these expressions are a thing of the past. These molecular methods of work have begun to distrust more showy political manifestations – marches and protests – and are insisting on the rhizomatic possibilities within each neighborhood. They distrust, but do not abandon, encompassing modes (molars), which follow the examples of the large manifestations. What seems to be the most noteworthy factor today is the convenience offered by not switching between micro and macro spaces, between “a part” and “the whole”. When there is need, *all* unite, to construct molarities, but they establish another type of relationship between a part and the whole. There is no longer a whole which controls the parts, but a whole alongside its parts.

### **9. Situational logic.**

As mentioned above, the rhizomatic, changing elements of neighborhood machinery contains a logic of political action which is difficult to measure in classic parameters. They do not operate with an **institutional logic** but with a **situational logic**<sup>30</sup>. They do not construct hierarchies, and they avoid organizations which guarantee efficiency by repetition. They prefer the simplest organizational forms, ones which are flexible and adaptable to different circumstances. They distrust political leadership and processes, because these trap collective power and initiatives, generating dependency and poverty on all levels. In neighborhood assemblies, both logics coexist in complex, difficult tension. Among the multiple scenarios in which these logics affect the times and spaces of the assemblies, two of the most frequent are the relationships with political parties, and with the State.

From the point of view of “*institutional logic*”, the objective of politics is the execution, accumulation, and centralized distribution of a power of dominion (*potestad*). Politics needs roots to legitimize itself, and it is repetitive in order to produce territorial dominions. Thus it institutionalizes political modes of subjecting individuals, in a normative and disciplinary way.

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<sup>30</sup> Colombo, E. “El Estado como paradigma del poder”, in *El lenguaje libertario*, Part I. Ch. Ferrer (Comp.) Ed. Nordan Comunidad. Montevideo, 1990.

From the point of view of “*situational logic*”, however, politics is stretched onto various surfaces. It installs itself and it is installed; it searches for power as collective and individual potential (*potentia*), and – in this sense – it rehearses and in these processes, it produces subjectivity within situational experiences.

The assembly machine-installations, then, constitute their times and spaces without adopting the forms of political parties or unions; nor do they appear to derive their experiences from these institutions. They are exploring a distinct new territorial method of *being – acting - inhabiting*<sup>31</sup>. They pave the way for existential, political fields which inhabit other forms of *socius* and other modes of subjectivity. They are *experience-rendering*.

Even the category of *political subject* needs revision. We are not witnessing the action of citizens; in this category, votes and taxes are the axes of the political workings of delegation in relation to civil society. Political workings include the State and political parties, which have founded a category known as *the people*, which is inseparable from the Nation-State. This is a State which used up the meanings of its role as regulator of inequalities. This is a people who, although they continue to identify with national symbols, have taken away from the State its “monopoly of political decision,” to use the phrase of Hobbes.<sup>32</sup>

These assemblies cannot be considered within the category of insurrectional proposals of the people, workers and/or rural workers; this category is another way of understanding the execution of one’s citizenship.

Both versions of the political subject are articulated within the *logic of identity*; that is, molar, and transcendental. This would inevitably place them in the realm of the State, either to support the state or to confront it. From this perspective, a subject is viewed as One, as identical; some have termed this the subjected subject. If one is not

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<sup>31</sup> One has to be present. In the first days of the pots and pans protests, neighbors from Floresta had to confront an unexpected aggression. Three young men watching television were shot at a gas station bar by a security guard; the young men had expressed their joy when the news program reported on the events of 19 and 20 December. The neighbors spontaneously surrounded the police station. They debated; the friends of the victims remained silent until one of them – according to the tale told in *Colectivo Situaciones* – took the megaphone and yelled “Assembly debates don’t interest me much. What we have to do here is to be present!, I don’t know how, but we have to be here every day”. In “19 y 20. Apuntes para el nuevo protagonismo social. !”. *Colectivo Situaciones*. Ed. De mano en mano. Buenos Aires, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Virno, Paolo, *Reflexiones sobre el concepto de multitud*. Revista “La C F” n° 52. Buenos Aires. Invierno 2002.

an identical subject, is one necessarily a different subject? Or, to put it another way: is the assembly *vibe* thus a social movement? The Black Power, feminist, and gay movements, all defined a politically different subject in the struggle over a specific dynamic of prejudice and exclusion. Although they questioned the molar aspect of “*class*” or of “*the people*”, they remained within the binary logic of identity-difference, in which political actions which combat exclusion often win their inclusion at the expense of producing normalized differences.<sup>33</sup>

The machines and installations of the neighborhood assemblies seem to be working on immanence. Instead of focusing on who they are, they are interested in being present. “*You have to be there*”. To be there, and to do something. Although they carry out organized tasks, they distrust molar constructions. They resist the One, they multiply without repeating; they take their strength from their diversity, and thus reject attempts at homogenization. They do not institutionalize their accomplishments; they change them, exchanging certain times and spaces for others, and thus they grow. They are not subject to a disciplinary framework; instead – when carrying out the management of their machinery – *the among-many, the among-some invent ways of existing*. In this sense, their rhizomatic characteristics seems to complicate any idea of a subject.

The protagonists of these acts of collective imagination-action are the *among-many*; they release pluralities that persist as such even in the public arena. They resist obedience without being insubordinate; they create multiplicities without political unity, and they do not propose to become the government.<sup>34</sup> However, during these investigations, it was still too early to use the term *multitude*, even though some of the characteristics which apply to the multitude can be applied to the times and spaces of the assemblies. These neighborhoods also operate with a group synergy, in which the affectations of the *among-many* have a strong, distinguishable characteristic in the face-to-face relationships which are established *among-some*. The subjective connections present in all collective weaving take on specific characteristics in the production of subjectivity; this occurs when a group is not simply a crowd. These collectives are constituted by a *countable number of individuals*. This does not have to do only with

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<sup>33</sup> “Los movimientos sociales: entre el fraude y la ilusión”. *Revista SIC*, Barcelona, March 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Virno, Paolo, Ob. Cit. On the idea of the multitude, one can also consult Hardt, M. - Negri, A. *Imperio*, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2002.

the quantity of participants: the fact that the group can be counted means that *the physical presence of the others is discernible*.<sup>35</sup>

The permanent invention of political, economic, cultural, and subjective novelties has allowed neighborhood assemblies to become the protagonist of interesting and uncertain events. The path these assemblies will take cannot be predicted. Many questions have arisen from this investigation. Although this work has attempted to conceptualize some of these, there are three queries which must remain:

What kind of power do they institute?

Do they constitute a new political subject?

Where is politics constructed? *How and by whom?*

Ana M. Fernández

Buenos Aires, October 2002.

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<sup>35</sup> Fernández, A. M. “El Campo Grupal. Notas para una genealogía”. Ed. Nueva Visión. Buenos Aires. 1989.